Chinese Activists Today ◆ Book Banning ◆ '70s Radicalism in Auto

#218 • MAY/JUNE 2022 • $5

A SOCIALIST JOURNAL

AGAINST THE CURRENT

Stand with Ukraine! No to Putin's Invasion!

A statement by the editors on the war and global chaos

"No to War" graffiti, St. Petersburg, Russia

Feminism(s) in Mexico

◆ MARGARA MILLÁN

E-Carceration & Mass Imprisonment

◆ JAMES KILGORE, EFRÉN PAREDES, JR.

Collecting Rosa Luxemburg's Works

◆ WILLIAM SMALDONE INTERVIEWS PETER HUDIS

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A Letter from the Editors

Out of the Imperial Order: Chaos

THE DESTRUCTION OF cities, civilian deaths and mass refugee flights in Ukraine under the murderous, unjustifiable and rapidly spreading Russian invasion — fueled by Vladimir Putin's intention to eliminate Ukraine's independent existence — has not yet touched the full depths of its terrorist barbarism. Bucha's massacre is only a curtain-raiser. The success of Ukraine's defensive struggle for self-determination and survival is an urgent necessity today, not only in Europe but in the world.

(The National Committee of Solidarity, the socialist organization that sponsors *Against the Current*, has issued a position posted at https://solidarity-us.org/russia-out-of-ukraine-solidarity-with-ukraines-people-no-to-nato-now-or-ever/. As the crisis develops, further analyses and updates are posted on that website and at https://againstthecurrent.org/. An "Internationalist Manifesto Against the War" also appears at https://solidarity-us.org/internationalist-manifesto-against-the-war/.)

Without overlooking the centrality of Ukraine's struggle, however, this statement will focus on a wider crisis and its roots. Even amidst the present death and displacement in what's called "the heart of Europe" — which was supposedly exempt from such things — it's essential to grasp the broader chaos in which it's occurring. That will include cutting through pretensions from Washington and western capitals about defending "values" and "democracy against autocracy."

Ukrainian president Zelensky remarked bitterly that the pledge in the wake of the Nazi holocaust, "Never Again," has turned out to be "a lie." Actually, it always has been: the fate of Syria and Iraq, Yemen and Ethiopia, the Rohingya people of Myanmar, and others has come to Ukraine.

That's not to "relativize" or normalize any of these tragedies against each other. But in the global context of wars and ethnic cleansings, floods and droughts, and other disasters of the "rules-based international order" have brought the estimated numbers of refugees and displaced close to 90 million.

The full menace of Vladimir Putin's — lies that Ukraine "is not a real country" and its population must be "de-nazified" — has become all too clear. There are other lies afoot too. That "rules-based order" touted by U.S. ideologies and government agencies has always meant, "we make the rules and we give the orders." When Joe Biden in Poland went off-script bellowing "for God's sake, this man can't remain in power," did he mean "our" strategic ally, the murderous crown prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) of Saudi Arabia? Does that say something about the "values" of the "rules-based" order?

Global Consequences

We've said previously, in crises like the Afghan and Iraq tragedies, that imperialism creates problems that it can't solve. The spinoffs from the Ukraine war are grimly illustrative.

It would be a silver lining in the Ukraine war if global warming had voluntarily suspended itself for the war's duration — oops, not. First among other consequences, the cutoff of wheat as well as fertilizers from Ukraine and Russia magnify the worsening impact of climate-driven droughts and floods on many agricultural nations.

Especially in the global South, dangerous food shortages already loom. That doesn't even count 95% of the population of Afghanistan suffering hunger — not from food shortages in that country, but because they don't have jobs or money after the United States has frozen $14 billion Afghan reserve funds held in U.S. banks.

Whatever the military-political outcome of the Ukraine tragedy, for this discussion we'll assume that it won't escalate to the ultimate worst case of an all-Europe or world war with nuclear potential. But apart from such an apocalyptic scenario, this war is accelerating a second global consequence, a new phase of inter-imperialist rivalries.

The United States defends its king-of-the-hill number-one superpower status against the challenge of number-two China, with Russia poised to fall from third-and-a-half to fifth-rate status under Western economic sanctions in the wake of Putin's murderous blunder.

The manufacturers and merchants of the Permanent War Economy are grinning from ear to ear, along with their blood brothers of the fossil-fuel extraction industry.

Before the war there was hopeful, if somewhat naïve, talk of the neutrality or "Finlandization" of Ukraine. Instead we'll now witness the "NATO-ization" of Finland, and Sweden too — whether as formal members or closer NATO partners.

After years of wobbly unity, the United States and its NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) alliance are emerging with reinvigorated purpose and enhanced military budgets. Gone are the days when German trainees might be filmed marching with broomsticks for lack of rifles, or Canada relying on 1970s-era warplanes for its Arctic defense.

None of this is a good thing. Indeed it plants the seeds of future disasters, even if one can surely understand the desire of European populations close to Russia's border for a collective sense of "security." NATO's triumphal and destabilizing expansion after 1991 has greatly contributed to its now being seen as essential for "stability," however illusory that might ultimately be.

Third, consider the spectacle of Joe Biden and Boris Johnson, among other "statesmen," rushing to *appeal to Saudi Arabia*, of all petrostates, to ramp up oil production in place of Russian exports. Hold up a mirror to the rules-based global order, along with a checklist, and behold the visage of MBS alongside Vladimir Putin.

Mass murder and destruction of a neighboring country? Check. The main difference is that Saudi Arabia is destroying Yemen with U.S.-supplied weaponry. Brutal repression of independent media voices? Murder of dissenters and critics, both at home and internationally? Check and check — the latter difference, such as it is, being Saudi Arabia's practice of wholesale executions.

The post-World War II "peace and prosperity" of Europe was purchased at the expense of war and misery in the global South. Now we can see how the disasters feed back into each other, despite the general indifference of imperial

continued on the inside back cover

AGAINST THE CURRENT
May / June 2022 — Volume XXXVII, Number 2

Front Cover: "No to War" graffiti, St. Petersburg, Russia. Instagram/@my_picture
Above: Moscow antiwar protests, Pushkin Square. Emin Dzhafarov/Kommersant
Back Cover: "Nationtime": (left to right) Mayor Richard Hatcher, Amiri Baraka & Jesse Jackson at the 1972 Black Political Convention.

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.

 (ISSN 0739-4853) Published bimonthly by the Center for Changes, 7012 Michigan Avenue, Detroit, MI 48210. Phone (313) 841-0160. Email: cfc@igc.org; web page address: https://againstthecurrent.org. Periodicals postage paid at Detroit, MI. Postmaster: Send address changes to ATC, 7012 Michigan Avenue, Detroit, MI 48210. Subscriptions $30 a year; $50 for two years; $35 a year supporting subscription, $35 a year institutional. Against the Current is indexed by the Alternative Press Index. Manuscripts are welcome; please send articles in text format to our email address. To become a distributor of ATC, tell us how many copies to send you. We give a 40% discount on standing orders of 3 or more copies.

"Nationtime": 50th Anniversary

The Black Political Convention

By Malik Miah

FIFTY YEARS AGO, the steel mill city of Gary, Indiana hosted an unprecedented event: over 8,000 Black people gathered in a three-day National Black Political Convention, March 10-12, 1972.

The meeting discussed a Black Agenda that raised the proposal of political independence from the two major parties and whether an independent Black political party could be forged.

This writer participated in the convention, one of dozens of young socialists who had been involved in the civil rights and anti-police violence struggles, as well as the antiwar movement that had broad support among African Americans.

I had organized protests in my home city of Detroit in high school and college. I came to Gary as both a revolutionary socialist and militant Black nationalist. My organizations — the Young Socialist Alliance and Socialist Workers Party — expected "the coming American socialist revolution" to be a combined struggle of the working class for power and for national liberation of the oppressed Black nationality.

Power of the Moment

Despite political and ideological differences, participants were united in frustration with the Democratic and Republican parties whose national conventions loomed on the horizon. We wrestled with one major question: Should Black people build within, or from outside, the system?

As part of the Black Agenda, the Gary Declaration issued by the convention stated that the political system was failing Black people and the only way to address this problem was a transition to independent Black politics.

The concept of self-determination for an oppressed nation within an imperialist state like the United States means first, organizing independently of the mainstream political structures and posing openly: Should we demand our own nation?

"A schism had developed among those who wanted to work within the system versus Black nationalists who were basically saying it needed to be torn down," said Leonard Moore, a history professor at the University of Texas-Austin and author of a book about the event.

"But there was a collective feeling that 'We need to come together, because we're all over the place.' Organizers wanted to get all these Black voices around the table." (Quoted in *USA Today*, February 1, 2022)

The context was important. There were few Black elected officials anywhere and there was a powerful anti-Vietnam war movement that most civil rights and Black nationalists supported.

Martin Luther King, Jr. had spoken out in 1967, one year before his assassination. His voice then was a minority among the Black liberal establishment. That changed afterwards.

The historic gathering was arranged by Gary Mayor Richard Gordon Hatcher, one of the first Black mayors at the time, poet and prominent Pan Africanist Amiri Baraka, and Democratic U.S. Rep. Charles Diggs of Detroit, Michigan, chair of the newly formed Congressional Black Caucus.

There were young activists and entertainers like Harry Belafonte and Dick Gregory, socialists, and Pan-Africanists.

Rev. Jesse Jackson of Operation PUSH stirred up the crowd with a forceful call-and-response speech declaring it was: "Nationtime."

"I don't want to be the gray shadow of a white elephant or the gray shadow of a white donkey," Jackson told the audience. "I am a Black man, and I want a Black party."

He asked: "For Black Democrats, Black Republicans, Black Panthers, Black Muslims, Black independents, Black business owners, Black professionals, Black mothers on welfare – what time is it?"

"Nationtime!" the crowd cried.

(A documentary unearthed in a Pittsburgh warehouse in 2018, narrated by Sidney Poitier and Harry Belafonte, "Nationtime" presents a dynamic and powerful look at the three-day Gary convention. Go to Indiewire.com for the film trailer.)

Why the Convention Happened

The national Black community was still shaken by the King assassination four years earlier, and by police brutality and worsening conditions in the urban "ghettos."

In 1972, crisis plagued Black America. Heroin ravaged inner cities, Black soldiers were dying in Vietnam and unrest from Chicago, Newark, and Detroit to Los Angeles had instilled a realization that legal civil rights were inadequate without addressing Black poverty and unemployment.

With the Black Power movement at an elevated level, and the formation of the Congressional Black Caucus in 1971, two growing camps — nationalists and integrationists — found themselves at odds.

"Black people were increasingly the margin of difference for Democratic candidates," said Ron Daniels, a member of Ohio's convention delegation and now president of the Institute of the Black World 21st Century, a Black empowerment organization. "But the feeling was they were not getting rewards proportionate to their support."

Hatcher, who represented the establishment but also identified with Baraka's nationalist views, approached leaders of potential sites such as New York, Chicago and Atlanta, but found them hesitant to host such an event, fearing chaos and violence.

Instead, he offered up Gary — specifically West Side High, since the city of 175,000 had no hotel large enough to accommodate such a large gathering.

The so-called Steel City, 40 miles east of Chicago, seemed an unlikely place for a political insurgency. But Hatcher was one of the country's first elected Black mayors, and with a Black police chief, the city represented what Black people could do at a local level.

Hatcher had Gary's City Hall draped in red, black, and green banners.

"Mayor Hatcher was a visionary," said Vernon Smith, an Indiana state representative of 32 years who attended the event as a newly elected Gary city council member. "He saw the strength that could be amassed if we brought everyone together."

Historic Importance

The three-day event would ultimately form a National Black Political Assembly to implement its 68-page agenda. But it would be eight years later that a National Black Independent Political Party (NBIPP) was created.

The euphoria of wide unity evident at

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Imamu Baraka, Mayor Richard Hatcher and Jesse Jackson, National Black Political Convention, March, 1972. Ebony Collection

the gathering would be short-lived. The most radical pro-Black party wing lost, and the establishment figures became elected officials, businesspeople and academics.

Socialists saw the gathering as historic in the moment no matter what later happened, showing that militant Black nationalism is a byproduct of systemic racism and capitalism.

Our belief is that the nationally oppressed can win self-determination only with the overthrow of the capitalist system. The fight for democratic freedom and equality is the road to do so.

My views were reflected in an article by Derrick Morrison, in *The Militant* (April 14, 1972):

"Despite a muted discussion and bureaucratic organization, the National Black Political Convention held March 10-12 in Gary, Ind. reflected a new stage in the developing nationalist consciousness of Black people. Up to now, the most vigorous examples of the organization of Black people as an oppressed nationality had been provided by Black students, Black GIs, Black prisoners, in some cases Black workers, and in a few cases Black women.

"But now even the Black Democratic politicians are reflecting the deepening discontent and nationalist sentiments of the Black community. Only a few years ago they denounced as racism in reverse all efforts at organizing Black people as a people; now they are legitimizing this concept on new levels."

The Movement for Black Lives in 2020 cited the historic gathering as a model for its 2020 virtual convention, and this April 2022, Mayor Ras Baraka of Newark, New Jersey, is continuing his late father's legacy by convening a 50th anniversary event in Newark along with Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba of Jackson, Mississippi.

This year's gathering, Baraka said, marks a chance for the community to harness the resolve and pledges made in the wake of George Floyd's murder and the Black Lives Matter movement to forge an agenda around which to politically organize — the same goal sought in 1972.

"It's more than just a festive occasion," Lumumba added. "We are coming in with a real desire to push forward Black America's agenda. We may have more Black leadership nationwide, but we still have rampant poverty, failing infrastructure in our communities and issues of equity and justice. All of those need to be addressed with our collective genius."

A Period of Upheavals

The year 1972 was a period of rising class struggle and resistance to racism, national oppression, sexism and other issues.

The Black Liberation movement had led the way since the 1960s and inspired other social groups. In the Southwest, Mexican American and Chicano communities raised similar democratic demands for La Raza.

Puerto Ricans in New York City, Chicago and other urban areas demanded self-determination for Puerto Rico. Militant activists organized the Young Lords (inspired by the Black Panther Party) in Chicago and the Bronx, New York in fighting for community control.

The year was also a key period for the women's rights movement. The central issue during this second wave of feminism was abortion rights, the fight to control their own bodies. The Supreme Court had not yet ruled in favor of that basic human right, which today's Court plans to overturn.

The Gay and Lesbian rights movement was also on the rise across the country, not just in San Francisco and New York City.

The first Earth Day occurred in 1970 and the Environmental movement pressured the Nixon administration to set up the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) in 1970.

Labor unions were fighting back, especially Black workers who were placed in the worse jobs and historically excluded from the skilled trades such as mechanics and pilots.

In basic industries including coal and iron ore mining, steel production and auto manufacturing, union workers were winning stakes and internal democratic reforms. Miners for Democracy threw out the Tony Boyle gangster union bureaucracy. Steelworkers Fight Back was challenging the entrenched leadership.

In the auto workers union, reform and radical groups like the League of Revolutionary Black Workers was an important force for militant activism. Public sector union militancy was also emerging among teachers and heath care workers.

The biggest social movement in 1972 was the antiwar movement against the U.S. war on the Vietnamese people. The final U.S. defeat was still three years away.

African liberation struggles were advancing. As an activist in the Pan Africanist movement, I joined in protests in support of the armed national liberation movements in the Portuguese colonies of Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde Islands.

The fall of Portugal's authoritarian dictatorship did not occur until April, 1974 when left wing officers took power. The Portuguese African colonies soon won their independence.

White rulers in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and South Africa were still in power. Nelson Mandela was still in prison and apartheid did not fall until 1994.

The events of 1972 thus were part of other major social political changes that rocked the United States and world. Some led to freedom as in the African colonies; others led to the deep incorporation of the Black political leadership into the Democratic Party and capitalist institutions.

Many young people went Left and became more committed to revolutionary change. Gary reflected all these elements — liberalism and revolutionary nationalism — at a moment when it was unclear what the future would become.

Seeking Political Leverage

Long before the Gary convention, political gatherings of Black people had taken place periodically since the 1820s in cities such as Cincinnati, Philadelphia, Chicago and New Orleans.

Organizers of the 1972 event at minimum aimed to inspire more Black people to pursue political office.

Black Congresspeople hoped to leverage the resulting agenda to extract concessions

from both parties at the upcoming conventions. At the time there were fewer than 1000 Black elected officeholders across the country, from local and state to federal levels. Today there are thousands (including Black Republicans).

The event also involved Coretta Scott King and Betty Shabazz, the widows of King and Malcolm X, as well as James Brown, Isaac Hayes, Muhammad Ali and Richard Roundtree, star of the 1971 film "Shaft."

Delegates gathered around signs designating their home states, taking notes on the proceedings.

The gathering was not without rancor. Shirley Chisholm of New York, the first Black person to seek a major party's presidential nomination and the first woman to seek the Democratic Party nomination, boycotted the convention when organizers failed to endorse her, a rejection she saw as sexist. Instead Chisholm traveled to Florida to stump for votes.

NAACP leaders objected to what they felt was the "separatist" nature of calls for a third party reflected in the Gary Declaration, which read: "By now we must know that the American political system, like all other white institutions in America, was designed to operate for the benefit of the white race: It was never meant to do anything else."

The document called for radical change. "Such responsibility is ours," it said, "because it is our people who are most deeply hurt and ravaged by the present systems of society."

Mayor Hatcher advocated giving Democrats one last chance, but declared in his keynote address that if the parties failed the community again, they would suffer the consequences. That included the threat of a third party that he claimed would siphon away support from other communities of color, as well as "the best of white America."

"We shall take with us many a white youth nauseated by the corrupt values rotting the innards of this society," Hatcher said.

"Nationtime," Unity and Decline

Bobby Seale, who along with Huey Newton founded the Black Panthers in 1966, was among those at the convention emphasizing political involvement, frustrated by what he saw as time wasted debating cultural nationalism.

"It's not about that," he said he recalled thinking. "It's about political power. They're the ones who manage the money."

Then came Jesse Jackson's rousing "Nationtime" oration.

"You could hear it reverberating Marcus Garvey," recalled former NAACP executive director Ben Chavis, then a North Carolina delegate, in a 1989 interview conducted for PBS: "Eyes on the Prize II."

"You could hear it reverberating all those prize struggles from the '20s, and the '30s, and the '50s and the '60s. I mean, it came to be fulfilled in that moment, of crying that it's Nationtime, now — not next year, not next century, but now. In 1972. In Gary, Indiana."

Convention discussion Eyes on the Prize

Within months of the convention, however, the cohesion had begun to dissipate as mainstream Black leaders withdrew support for the Agenda, citing contentious issues like reparations and its support for Palestinian liberation.

The final Agenda was considered overly broad, alienating many while trying to please all. "They willy-nilly adopted everything," one delegate said. "This led to conflicts that would lead to dissolution of the whole thing. There was no way those fundamental differences could come to any compromise."

In 1974, a second Black convention would follow in Little Rock, Arkansas, with other gatherings taking place only sporadically afterward.

The National Black Political Assembly, which had been formed as a compromise to those calling for a third party, eventually fizzled, victim of an ill-defined infrastructure.

For convention organizers, simply pulling off the gathering was itself a victory, and it succeeded where they intended — at the ballot box.

"If you're looking for 100% unison, it was doomed going in," an organizer said. "The true value of the convention wasn't necessarily the agenda or the position papers. It was that immediately after the convention Black people went home and ran for office. It ushered in a new Black political culture. By the end of the '70s, you had several thousand Black elected officials."

In 1973, Atlanta and Los Angeles elected Black mayors in Maynard Jackson and Tom Bradley. "Black folks came off the sidelines and decided that Black politics mattered," Daniels said.

With the focus on elected officials, the Black Power movement began to decline. Meanwhile, the Congressional Black Caucus took on the community's umbrella leadership role.

The convention laid the groundwork not just for Jesse Jackson's 1984 presidential campaign — but likely Barack Obama's presidential campaign and victory as well as Kamala Harris's vice-presidential run.

Political Incorporation

Of course, more Black faces as part of the ruling parties and state structures did not benefit everyone. In the wake of successive recessions, deindustrialization, the 2008 financial crash and Covid, the majority of working class African Americans are less well off than in the 1970s.

Some 12 years later in 1984 and again in 1988, Jesse Jackson ran for the Democratic Party presidential nomination. Under a radical democratic platform echoing the Black Assembly, his 1988 Rainbow Coalition created an unprecedented multiethnic support network even winning some state primaries. Yet we were no closer to "Nationtime" or a Black independent party.

The fundamental political error made at those conventions, beginning with Gary, was the pursuit of a strategy of working in or with the Democratic Party and looking towards its politicians for leadership.

Instead of an independent course, the result was incorporation into the system.

The NBIPP Effort

Eight years after Gary, it became clear that the strategy of working within the political system was a failure. The Black party should have been formed out of the 1972 convention, even if only by the most left wing sectors of the Black movement.

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Rising Up at Amazon

By Dianne Feeley

HAVING SPENT $4.3 million last year hiring union-busters, Amazon was unable to prevent workers at the 8,000 strong JFK8 warehouse on Staten Island from voting to form a union.

Already Amazon's lawyers are hard at work, filing 25 objections about how the vote was conducted. But claiming that the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) favored the union or that the union organizers bought votes by supplying pizzas and weed will do little more than slow down the certification process. Of course, that's just what it's intended to do at this stage of the game.

While Amazon seeks to delay certification and prevent the Amazon Labor Union (ALU) from securing a decent contract, the JFK8 workforce has wind in its sails after winning by more than 500 votes. The ALU Workers Committee won because of its one-by-one organizing model, then following up to ask those who joined to reach out and talk to their coworker friends and relatives.

The diversity of the organizers then consciously built those constantly expanding networks and supported their cultures. This enabled them to reach African American, Latinx, recent immigrants and differently-abled workers. While management operated by intimidating and humiliating workers, the committee welcomed their coworkers.

Young Worker-Organizers

Against the company's attempt to portray the union as a "third party," the committee was able to build a diverse group of young worker-organizers (average age: 26).

Many came from unionized households, including ALU president Christian Smalls, whose mother is an AFSCME member, and ALU workers' committee chair Angela Maldonado, whose mother is a member of 1199. Others worked at unionized jobs before hiring in at Amazon.

The ALU made some bold moves to organize and win an election within a year. Its members busted into captive audience meetings and refused to leave even when the general manager reprimanded them. They spoke up when management misrepresented workers' rights and showed how it was possible to stand up against Amazon's intimidating tactics.

February 2021: Chris Smalls and two other ALU organizers were arrested by police for being on Amazon property. Amazon Labor Union

The worker-organizers were sure to be present everywhere — in the break room and on the public sidewalk by the bus stop. They maintained a presence 24/7. The union also took a gamble in filing for an election as soon as 30% of the workers signed up. Given Amazon's yearly turnover rate of 150%, they decided waiting longer would result in losing their momentum.

In a crucial victory for all U.S. Amazon workers — currently numbering 750,000 — the NLRB reached an agreement just last December with Amazon. This settlement resulted from half a dozen complaints filed by Amazon workers in Chicago and Staten Island. Complaintants pushed back against Amazon's intimidating tactics.

Before the agreement, workers were to leave the facility within 15 minutes of when their shift ended. They could not remain in the break room or parking lot to speak to their co-workers.

From the moment the decision was announced, the ALU set up a table in the break room and made sure it was staffed. This enabled the ALU organizers to hang out and talk union even on their days off.

Further, Amazon agreed to inform its work force that it would not discipline those engaged in union activity in non-work areas during their time off the clock, nor would they call the police. Everyone realized Amazon had been forced into the settlement. That also meant that if Amazon broke its agreement, the NLRB could bypass an administrative hearing and directly seek a court order.

Next Steps for ALU and Labor

Now that this worker-led union won the vote, the next stage is maintaining their boldness and acting as the union. That means drawing in the constant flow of new hires as well as those who feared that voting for the union would lead to being fired.

Amazon is the second largest U.S. employer, a fiercely anti-union corporation that takes in almost $400 billion in annual revenues. The average amount of time between a union's certification and winning its first contract is three years. Amazon will use its power to delay. It may try various bribes and force a revote in a year, but this time hoping to defeat the union.

The stakes are high! The U.S. labor movement must back the ALU with resources that can cut through all the objections and sweet talking Amazon musters. At the same time, they need to help workers in the other 109 U.S. Amazon facilities utilize the relationship-building model ALU used.

Both the Communication Workers of America and Teamsters have indicated they are backing the ALU. Meanwhile, the ALU is actively organizing in a second, and much smaller, Amazon facility on Staten Island. Their election is scheduled for April 25.

According to Luis Feliz Leon's *Labor Notes* article, "'They're Playing Really Dirty': Amazon Lashes Back in Staten Island Warehouses," one of Amazon's tactics is blaming an ALU organizer for the suicide of a coworker.

At the same time, the re-vote at Amazon's Bessemer, Alabama facility is still up in the air, with 875 workers voting for the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU), 993 against and 400 contested ballots.

Clearly Amazon hopes to stamp out or wait out this upsurge. Let's make sure they can't! ■

Dianne Feeley is a retired autoworker, Detroit activist and an editor of Against the Current.

Today's Campaigns and Lives of the Young: *Book Banning Past and Present*

By Harvey J. Graff

TODAY'S CAMPAIGNS BY the radical right wing to ban books in schools across the United States are unprecedented, unconstitutional, inhumane, nationally organized, and well-funded.

Unlike their predecessors, they are blatantly ignorant of the very texts they wish to erase and cancel — sometimes burn. These campaigns also have no understanding of "The People," "The American Public" and "Public Interest;" children's development, paths of maturation and the roles of reading; and the U.S. and state constitutions, or in example after example, the formal guidelines of school and local libraries.

Whether organized and provided with written scripts or acting in isolation in response to viral social media posts, book banners are a small, undemocratic minority of Americans. They speak for very few, but loudly because of their dishonest manipulation of racist, xenophobic, sexist, transphobic and white supremacist fears and grievances.

Sadly, one of them may speak more loudly at school board meetings than twenty calm, informed voices.

Those who challenge books do not always have children attending the schools whose libraries they ransack. One of Texas' loudest, most dishonest banners proclaims her commitment to "protect her children." But her two children graduated from high school before her campaign and attended school while the challenged books sat unquestioned on library shelves.

Among the dishonest tactics of the banners: Whether before a library committee, school board meeting, media or social media, or letter to the editor or opinion essay, they begin by referring to the slippery slope of "age appropriateness" of a text. Within moments, without acknowledgement, they shift to "appropriateness" without qualification.

From a deeply rooted fear of loss of power, these banners assault the human dignity, human rights, and legal rights especially of the young. These forces of reaction and resentment grow alongside the movement toward racial equality and integration for three-quarters of a century.

I write as a historian of literacy — reading and writing. I write from almost a half-century's classroom teaching and close relationships with young people and their intellectual, social, cultural, and emotional development as they become young citizens.

Power and Intimidation

What we see across the United States is not spontaneous parental concern. Book banning is driven by social media, conservative websites, and well-funded, right-wing political organizations that direct followers to target specific books. These organizations provide scripts for activists to follow; they remain ignorant of the content of the very books they seek to ban.

These actions are prompted and promoted by right-wing (not conservative) organizations like Moms for Liberty and No Left Turn in Education. Attacking books that school professionals carefully evaluate is deeply hypocritical. The same people who assert that teens can handle guns and have babies also claim that teens must be protected from award-winning books carefully written for young people.

The targeted books are visual and material symbols, proxies in a "culture war" where the real objective is obtaining greater political power and asserting the supremacy of a specific world view that is held by a small minority. Denying access to books destroys children's basic right to knowledge, growth and maturation.

Banning books is inseparably interrelated to the many other bans that today's anti-democratic and unconstitutional right-wing ideologues promote: attacks on abortion rights and women's rights to control their own bodies; obstruction of LGBTQ and same-sex couples' rights; abridgment of First Amendment rights to free speech; refusal of transgender athletes' rights to participate in school sports and access gender-affirming medical care; and egregious restriction of voting rights.

Then and Now

Today's attacks are unprecedented historically in magnitude and ferocity. Efforts to restrict, remove, ban and destroy materials, first written and then printed, aren't new. There have been destructive but failing efforts before and since the advent of modern printing (movable typography). They all failed.

In banning campaigns, including the 15th- and 16th-century Roman Catholic Counter Reformation against both emerging Protestants and radical Catholics, the papal authorities and their allies *read* the offending texts before attempting to ban or occasionally burn them.

Even the late-19th-century book banners, led by U.S. Postmaster General Anthony Comstock and his New York City-based Committee for the Suppression of Vice, read the written and printed material they sought to restrict. Calling it pornography, their primary targets were instructions and supplies for birth control.

Those now-humorous-in-hindsight, limited campaigns to "Ban (Books) in Boston" pale in comparison with today. Aspirational banners in the past actually *read* the books and proudly used their literacy. They did not obsess over the reading audience — especially about children — and targeted white male authors and characters much more often than women and Blacks.

Their targets included the now-classic novels *Uncle Tom's Cabin, The Call of the Wild, The Grapes of Wrath, Of Mice and Men, To Kill a Mockingbird, 1984, Catcher in the Rye, Catch 22,* as well as *The Color Purple, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, and *Beloved*, authored by Black women.

Current bans extend historical assaults on the rights of marginalized people. In the United States, periodic efforts broke out to ban books and means of access to them, including access to reading itself.

Sometimes centered on gender, more often on race, the attacks unfolded always in the context of politics, religion, society, culture and economics.

White girls and women gained almost

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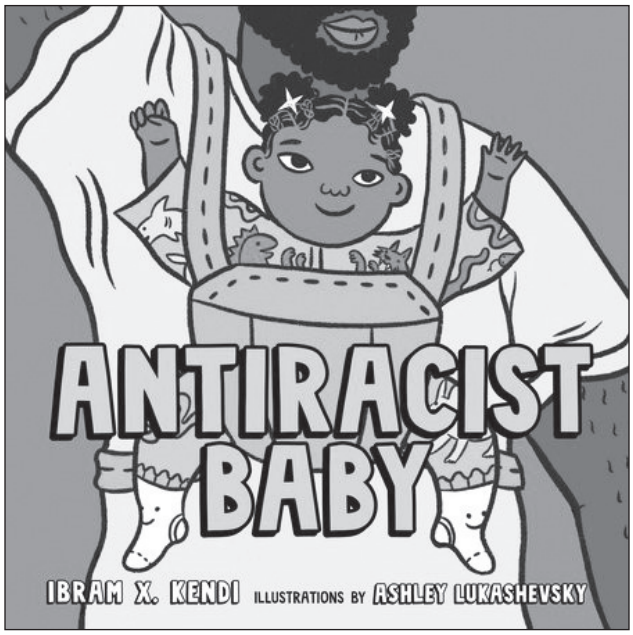
equal access to elementary schooling by the mid-19th century, and secondary education more slowly. Women's education was long justified in terms of their roles as future mothers and educators — not restrictors or censors — of their children.

Most egregious and long-lasting — and threatened again today — is both access to literacy and the right to read of minority populations: Black, brown, Indigenous, LGBTQ and differently abled. Basic literacy was long withheld, often by law and force, from enslaved people, free Blacks, and Native Peoples.

That is why *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass* is among the most powerful and triumphant testimonies in American literary history. It is on many lists of targeted titles.



Antiracist Baby, *a target of book banning and attacked by Ted Cruz at Katenji Brown Jackson confirmation hearing.*

Resisting the New Illiteracy

Participating in what I consider the "new illiteracy," the book banners refuse to read the books they wish to remove.

Removing stories that reveal painful aspects of human experience does not, cannot, protect the young. That is a dangerous myth. Instead, removals impoverish learners by depriving them of a socially and culturally safe way to examine, learn from, and mature from confronting difficult issues.

Reading and learning are gateways for engaging young minds and supporting their understanding of diverse and conflicting human experiences. Generations of young people and adults confirm this basic phenomenon.

School boards at all levels, and state leadership must follow established, constitutional policies. They must discuss with parents the diversity of experiences that students bring to schools and the ways in which library materials meet the needs of a wide range of young people, not just those who share the identities, experiences and values of a particular group of parents.

They must resist pressure to allow the demand for "parental freedom" that is actually an attempt to trample the rights of other parents with differing views and of the learners whom schools are obligated to put first.

To contradict these accepted intellectual and community standards elevates extreme and narrow views of a small minority over the professional discretion and training of librarians and educators who focus on meeting the needs of the young.

Ceding control of the educational process to individuals unwilling even to read the books they challenge amounts to a public endorsement of the disenfranchisement of marginalized students, their families and communities — and an unconscionable disservice to the interests of the public.

No Book "Appropriate" for All

Among the greatest threats posed by attacks on youth's access to books is their deeply chilling effect. Will a librarian in a community beleaguered by book banners still order the next teen sexual health guide or other books that might be "controversial" to a few fringe parents, even when they are highly recommended by library professional guides and other experts?

Reports of "soft censorship" multiply; they are as harmful as public attacks on literature. When book bans succeed, officially and unofficially, young learners lose the fundamental literature and information they need to become thoughtful readers and capable citizens.

Today's book banners claim to be worried that "children" will be harmed by difficult themes. Trauma experts, survivors, and the young themselves refute these claims.

Research, therapists and personal testimony confirm that literature provides spaces for readers to recognize and name injuries that they otherwise struggle to identify in their own lives. Most of the condemned books focus on young people struggling for dignity and joy amid the racism and sexism that surround the characters.

In opposition to constitutional standards, banners object to books on the basis of their personal values; for example, insisting that a book like *I Am Jazz* be removed because it suggests that a child can be born with a girl's brain and a boy's body. In contrast, transgender activists point to the scientific consensus behind that perspective.

High school students are not "children." They are maturing young adults, sometimes only months away from military service, fulltime jobs or job training, relationships with people from other communities, and university classes.

Supreme Court cases affirm that their First Amendment rights to open access to information, books, and other resources must not be restricted or removed on the basis of any one set of values or viewpoints. The unconstitutional banners do not know, and their national sponsors reject, this established standard.

Bans also redirect students away from materials that educational professionals have approved, just as content that is not evaluated remains instantly available through the internet. These facts amount to direct assaults on children and youth legally unable to defend themselves. Surprisingly, or not, banners ignore young people's instantaneous access to unchecked content via smart phones and tablets.

Will a librarian in a community beleaguered by book banners still order the next teen sexual health guide or other books that might be "controversial" to a few fringe parents, even when they are highly recommended by library professional guides and other experts?

Do They Really Care?

Perhaps in their self-justifying and fraudulent slogans about "parental rights" and "protecting children" by severely limiting their ability to grow up, learn, and mature, banners don't care about children. Their lies and distortions strongly suggest exactly that.

Talented authors write books that address a wide range of youth experiences allowing the young to see themselves, and others, in their full humanity. We need more of these books widely available. Most parents, and almost all teachers, librarians, child development experts, counselors and therapists confirm this understanding.

Those of us who genuinely care about children focus on real harm and injustice — ignorance, unequal education, racism, child abuse, sexual assault, gender discrimination and homophobia — that are dangers in young people's lives. We must also constructively help parents talk to their children about the ubiquitous portal to deeply objectionable material: the smart phone. ■

Punishing the Criminalized Sector of the Working Class: E-Carceration By James Kilgore

AFTER SIX AND a half years in Federal and state prisons in California, in May of 2009 I paroled to Illinois to be with my family. On my second day home, a bubbly white woman from the Department of Corrections showed up and strapped a black plastic band to my ankle — a GPS monitor.

I wasn't worried about that plastic band. Surveillance was nothing new to me. I had spent 27 years as a fugitive with my wanted posters on post office walls. In prison, authorities watched my every move, either through cameras, the guard towers, or their spies in the incarcerated population.

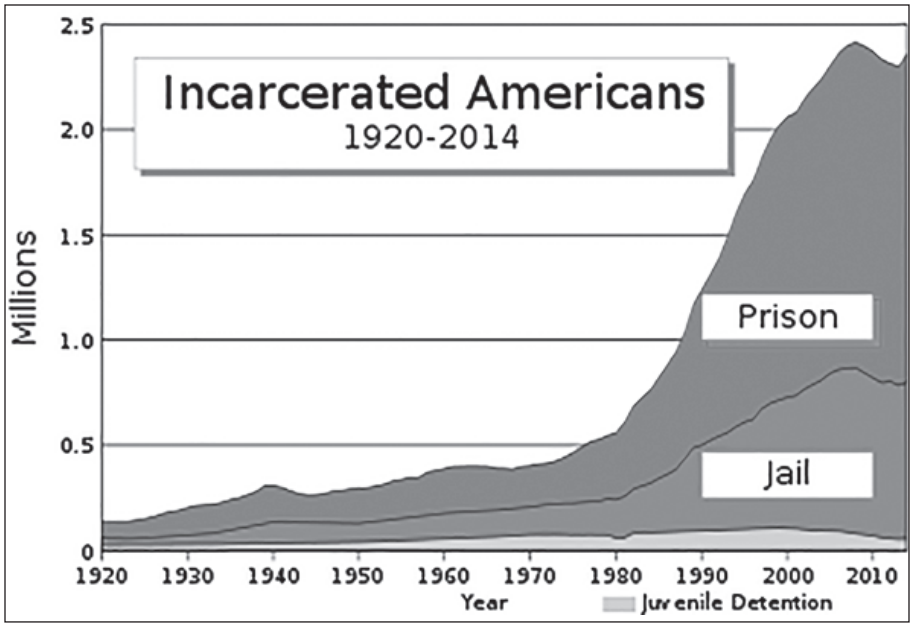
The band would be no different. It wasn't a cage. I was free.

The next day my parole agent phoned, "You'll only be allowed out of the house Monday through Friday from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m." Those visions I had of freedom while lying on my prison bunk vanished. He had turned my safe space into a carceral space and made my loved ones into prison staff.

From that moment on, I took on the project of researching electronic monitoring. *Who made up the rules for these devices? Who was making money from them?*

Eventually I connected a lot of those dots. Through gathering the stories of other folks who had been on the monitor, and doing research as the director of the Challenging E-Carceration campaign at MediaJustice, I developed a much richer understanding of a technology that I now refer to as an ankle shackle, part of the realm of e-carceration.

While I've been doing this research, these technologies have marched onwards. Today, a little more than a decade later, the vast majority of the population has a smart phone with a GPS tracking device that they leave turned on. They download apps like Google Maps and The Weather Channel which rely on tracking to provide data to the user.



Being tracked has become normalized. People born after the year 2000 may have never experienced a moment in their lives when they were not being digitally tracked.

Many people refer to this as a surveillance state. Some refer to it as mass supervision. I choose the term e-carceration to emphasize how all these technologies actually perform the basic function of incarceration — depriving us of our liberty.

In the excerpt below from my book, I briefly describe e-carceration and how it differs from brick and mortar incarceration. I also describe a few of the technologies involved.

Dynamics of E-carceration

For socialists and anti-capitalists of all stripes, understanding the dynamics of e-carceration, or whatever you may choose to call it, is important for at least three reasons.

First, they center the driving forces of monopoly capitalism of this era.

In early industrialization, we had the robber barons of oil and steel leading the way, accompanied by imperialist resource plunderers like the British East India Company and Compagnie du Congo Belge.

The new robber barons Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates, Sundar Pichai, Tim Cook come out of what is popularly known as Big Tech. They are not just wealthy computers nerds. They are building major portions of infrastructure within which capitalism operates.

Like classical colonialists they have "discovered" uninhabited, unused space, the digital world, and claimed it as their own. They determine the frameworks of the space, the rules of the space, and they find more and more ways to extract profit from the space.

A significant source of that profit comes from data that we own — data derived from surveilling our daily activities usually without our permission, often without our knowledge. We all play on their internet playing field, using their software and hardware.

We may benefit and improve parts of our lives by playing this game, but at the same time we feed our own destruction, contributing to our own deprivation of liberty via the data we surrender.

Like labor power, that data belongs to us but is appropriated by profiteers. Ultimately it can be weaponized through algorithms and risk assessments to block us from access to housing, employment, health care.

Just as in all capitalist configurations, but especially in a colonial setting, weaponization is selective. The marginalized sectors of the working class and the rural poor are

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always the primary targets for exploitation, e-carceration and exclusion.

We often think of the forces behind the technologies of e-carceration as inhabiting a digital world detached from a material reality, the brick and mortar, concrete and steel of the industrial revolution. But as much as they try to hide it, the purveyors of e-carceration, the owners of tech capital rely on the exploitation of labor and land — from young boys digging for coltan in the Congo, to the setting aside of land to host cloud server campuses, to the millions of workers delivering and servicing their operations.

Amazon has 1.468 million workers along with 33% of the $180 billion-a-year, cloud-computing sector. Their digital world cannot exist without the exploitation of labor.

Alternative Possibilities

Second, the evolution of technology as driven by the contemporary robber barons offers a constant reminder of what this technology could do if driven by popular not profit-making interests. Those of us who operate out of the paradigm of abolition, as well as being socialists, recognize that abolition is not simply about tearing down the existing system but imagining something new.

Just as enslaved people in the United States in the 1860s imagined an end to plantation exploitation, so too did they imagine themselves as landowners and decision-makers. The abolitionist imaginary cannot simply be a fluffy vision of peace. Rather, that reality can only be the culmination of a long political struggle led by those I refer to in my book as the criminalized sector of the working class, that disproportionately Black, brown, Indigenous and LGBTQ+ population.

We need to spend just as much time imagining the struggle to capture the means of digital production, and the type of organization needed to carry out that struggle, as we spend imagining the post-Bezos world.

Understanding and Action

(The following is an excerpt from Understanding E-Carceration *by James Kilgore, The New Press, 2022. It is reproduced below with the permission of the author.)*

"Many of the current reform efforts contain the seeds of the next generation of racial and social control, a system of 'e-carceration' that may prove more dangerous and more difficult to challenge than the one we hope to leave behind. . . . Some insist that [this system] is 'a step in the right direction.' But where are we going with this?" —Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow*.[1]

Black Liberation organizer and media justice visionary Malkia Devich-Cyril introduced the term "e-carceration" in 2015. Devich-Cyril defines e-carceration as mass incarceration blended with the technology of electronic surveillance and punishment.[2]

Since Devich-Cyril introduced this term, three important things have happened. First, e-carceration has become equated largely with only electronic ankle monitors, narrowing our vision and capacity to assess the challenges we face from these technologies of oppression. Second, the emergence of new technologies and rapid expansion of what existed in 2015 has dramatically changed the scale of the e-carceration Devich-Cyril first defined.

Third, the technologies of e-carceration are becoming normalized within our contemporary political economy. Today we can think of e-carceration more broadly as the application of a network of punitive technologies to social problems.

Ultimately, these technologies deprive people of their liberty. They do this through confinement, tracking, and recording a range of movements, activities, and even bodily functions. Sometimes, this extends to entire communities or social movements.

The most well-known form of e-carceration is house arrest with an ankle monitor, but new technologies of e-carceration are emerging every day. They include facial recognition software, license plate readers, closed-circuit TV (CCTV) cameras, drones, and social media monitors.

Of central importance among these technologies are risk assessment tools, which are mathematically based formulas often used by the criminal legal system and other government agencies to determine whether or not a person should be incarcerated or surveilled.[3]

Although many of these technologies at first glance may appear to be neutral and not punitive or harmful, when applied in conjunction with criminal legal and repressive immigration policies within a neoliberal economic framework, they inevitably contribute to deprivation of liberty.

How E-carceration is Different

E-carceration deprives people of their freedom but not through physical confinement as applied in places like prisons, jails, immigration detention "centers," and lockup mental health facilities.

Four main differences distinguish e-carceration. First, e-carceration often may deprive a person of their liberty by denying them access to resources such as employment, housing, medical treatment, therapy, or the opportunity to spend time with their loved ones.

This deprivation of liberty often occurs through the weaponization of data. This involves using a range of information stored in various databases to create a profile that rates a person's eligibility to access certain social services.

These ratings can even determine whether or not a person should be imprisoned. The eligibility rating may be deeply influenced by several factors including a person's race, age, gender/gender identity, disability, religion, immigration status, and national origin.

Second, the punishment of e-carceration is not always time bound by a sentence or period of carceral control such as parole or probation. If it involves the collection and storage of data, the punishment or harm done by this technology may have no time boundaries.

This particularly applies when e-carceration involves medical interventions such as what researcher Erick Fabris refers to as "tranquil prisons" that involve forced treatment orders and mandatory medication.[4]

Fabris, who is a survivor of the psychiatric punishment system and a co-founder of Psychiatric Survivor Pride Day, emphasizes how medications may deprive people of their liberty by reducing their cognition or ability to communicate.

Third, in some instances, the technology of e-carceration is administered without a person's explicit knowledge or permission. While an individual definitely knows if they are in a jail cell or on an ankle monitor, they may not be aware when they are subject to e-carceration technologies such as facial recognition and drones.

Among other things, these technologies have the capacity to select and target individuals in a crowd. For example, during the early 19 days of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, Chinese authorities introduced drones with facial recognition capacity to identify people who weren't wearing masks.

Police in U.S. cities have used facial recognition to identify and arrest protesters who they allege have broken the law. One of the most publicized incidents occurred in 2020 when Donald Trump cleared the streets to stage a photo op of him holding a Bible in front St. John's Episcopal Church in Washington, DC.

Michael Peterson, who was taking part in a Black Lives Matter protest near the church at the time, was later arrested after being photographed in a scuffle with police during the street clearing. To match Peterson's face, police used a national database called National Capital Region Facial Recognition Investigative Leads System, then scoured Twitter to track him down.[5]

New York BLM leader Derrick Ingram was arrested on an assault charge after facial recognition supposedly identified him as the person who shouted into the ear of a police officer with a bullhorn. Facial recognition also featured in the identification of those involved in the coup attempt of January 6, 2021.[6]

Fourth, people may be directly complicit in the intensification of their e-carceration. They may do this by adding data and

information to databases used to predict behavior and authorize official responses or by not protecting themselves from such data captures.

The simple act of providing personal details for an online purchase or downloading the many apps that have location tracking capacity exemplify this sort of unconscious complicity. The popular Weather Channel app, which informs users they are gathering location data, has faced lawsuits for selling that data to private companies.

Even Muslim prayer apps such as Salaat First (which has more than 10 million downloads) and Muslim Pro have been discovered to be tracking location.[7]

Pressures for Reform

The expansion of e-carceration is the result of two forces in tension: popular mobilization against mass incarceration, and the drive for profitability.

The late 2000s saw the emergence of a wide range of critiques of and organized opposition to mass incarceration. Much of this focused on the War on Drugs. Civil rights lawyer Michelle Alexander's 2010 book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness,* spent more than 250 weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list.

This work highlighted measures that led to the rise of the prison population, including drug policies that disproportionately impacted Black people, and the enduring consequences that a prison sentence levies on people once they are released.[8]

Alexander's writings, along with pressure from national advocacy organizations such as the Drug Policy Alliance to moderate drug sentencing laws, ultimately reached the highest levels of government. In 2015, Barack Obama became the first president to ever visit a prison and used the opportunity to commute the sentences of forty-six people who had spent many years in prison, many for nonviolent drug offenses.

Obama's criminal justice platform stressed the racial inequities in the system and the need for more effective reentry programs.[9] His attorney general Eric Holder condemned "widespread incarceration" as "both ineffective and unsustainable," and ordered a rollback in enforcement of some federal drug laws.[10]

At state and local levels, community-based activism blossomed, targeting the excessive expenditure on prisons and jails, racialized police violence, and the need for bail reform. In many of these struggles, radical voices led the way, often from people who were survivors of incarceration themselves.

Activist-philosopher Angela Davis, a political prisoner in the 1970s, was among the leaders calling for a more radical agenda, including the abolition of prisons. This growing mobilization against mass incarceration overlapped with the meteoric rise of nationwide protests against the police murders of unarmed Black people such as Michael Brown, Eric Garner and Sandra Bland.

The newly emerging formation Black Lives Matter, founded by three Black women, Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi and Alicia Garza, became the largest organized voice in decades for racial and gender justice. The growth of these social justice movements forced many people in the law-and-order camp to moderate their views.

Former speaker of the House of Representatives Newt Gingrich, a Republican and long a staunch supporter of the "lock 'em up and throw away the key" approach, formed the conservative, reform-minded campaign Right on Crime in 2007.

Gingrich and his cohort spoke of an "urgent need" to reduce the prison population and argued that "conservatives must lead the way (in) fixing the system." Gingrich's change of heart apparently reflected a deep-rooted soul-searching: "Once you decide everybody in prison is also an American then you gotta really reach into your own heart and ask, is this the best we can do?"[11]

E-carceration for Profit

These shifts in viewpoint among both Democrats and Republicans sparked debates about measures to reduce the prison population. The economic crisis of 2008 put further pressure on lawmakers to reduce expenditure on the criminal legal system.

One result was an exploration of "alternatives to incarceration," ways to handle people who broke the law without resorting to prison or jail.

These alternatives, which included forms of e-carceration such as electronic monitoring, reflect what I have labeled "carceral humanism," the re-packaging of methods of social control and punishment as the delivery of caregiving services. This reform process had economic ripple effects, prompting those who had financially benefited from mass incarceration to explore new avenues of gaining revenue through punishment.

At a time when the technology sector as a whole was taking off, e-carceration suited the moment. The discussion about alternatives to incarceration overlapped with the development of heightened GPS capacity, and investors began to eye electronic monitoring as a ticket to the future.

BI Incorporated, the Boulder, Colorado, firm that bought out electronic monitoring originator Michael Goss in the 1980s, was the leader from the outset, first cornering the market for radio-frequency devices, then pioneering the expansion of GPS tracking. The GEO Group, then the world's second-largest private prison operator (it has since become number one), seeing the opportunity in e-carceration, jumped into the fray, buying out BI in 2009 for $415 million.[12]

Corporations including the GEO Group recognized that the addition of GPS capacity to ankle monitors didn't just enhance authorities' capacity to track location. As these devices got "connected," they blended location-tracking information with data housed on the rapidly expanding mega-storage sites that became known as "clouds."

Rather than remaining solely a tool of criminal legal policy, this foundational technology of e-carceration was becoming part of the surveillance state, a politicized system to aggregate and store data for transmission, retrieval, comparison, mining, trading and, of course, intelligence gathering.

The technologies of e-carceration, especially under the surveillance state, dehumanize in a unique way, transforming us from human beings to a collection of data points. In this world of e-carceration, we are no longer living, breathing beings or spiritual entities. Nor are we simply a case file or registration number as in the pre-computer, pre-internet days.

We become data points rendered on a screen, in an algorithmic formula, living not on the street or in a house but in databases or computer renderings of reality. We acquire a digital life of our own. In the words of Shoshana Zuboff, author of *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, "both the world and our lives are pervasively rendered as information."

But the power dynamics of this relationship often remain hidden. Zuboff provides us with an important wake-up call: "We think we're searching Google. Google is actually searching us."[13] ■

Notes

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The Invisible Chinese Activists

By Mo Chen

DISCUSSIONS ON CHINA on the international Left have decidedly become more state-centric amid the escalating US-China conflict. China is regularly discussed as if the Chinese state and society are the same thing, or the Chinese state represents the general interest of the Chinese people. This has become a barrier to developing a critical understanding of China in solidarity with its labor and social movements.

This conflation is a rather recent phenomenon. Until a few years ago, the Left was far more interested in the workers' movement in China, and in building solidarity with labor activists. Instead, today's state-centric discussions function to direct attention away from analysis of social movements from below that arose in response to social polarization.

We cannot feign complete ignorance of the social movements and activists. They have been written about by activist themselves and researchers, and reported on in mainstream international media. There is no excuse, and we need to shift the perspective back to the concrete movement organizing on the ground in China, and identify with their experiences rather than that of the state.

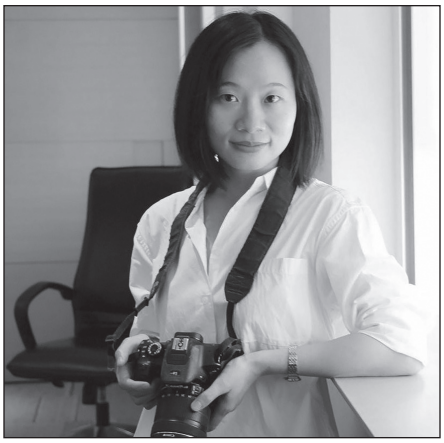
In particular, I want to center the young Chinese activists who have become doubly invisible by their employers and by the state, and are at risk of being made invisible a third time on the international Left.

Many of the young Chinese social movement activists today have either been radicalized during or later inspired by the diverse social movements that emerged in a period of deepening capitalist development in the 2000s and 2010s. Young people began to engage in grassroots organizing, ranging from feminist, environmental and anti-discrimination to labor.

It was by no means a golden period, since activists were arrested and organizations were shut down, too. But a liberal period of politics allowed rights-based as well as more radical form of social activism to develop, as long as it did not directly and explicitly challenge state power.

A key dividing line is 2015, the year when hundreds of labor, feminist and human rights activists and lawyers, not just individuals but now whole networks got swept up in highly coordinated crackdowns. This reflected a nervousness on the part of the Chinese state, worried that networks of activists would take advantage of any emerging social crisis amid China's economic slowdown and threaten political stability.

Mo Chen is an activist and writes about social movements in China.



Journalist Xueqin Huang. Women's Media Centre

A chilling period ensued where surveillance and harassment of activists became more serious as well as more sophisticated, as state resources were poured into crushing dissent.

This is the context in which the social movement activists operate in today. Despite this harsh reality, we see activists continue to push boundaries and explore possibilities.

In what follows, I present the snapshots of just three young Chinese activists.

The Rise of #Metoo

In 2017, during the early days of China's #metoo movement, a young journalist Xueqin Huang conducted a survey of female journalists in China on their experiences of sexual harassment. She had been troubled by the stories she heard from female journalists of harassment by their bosses, fellow journalists and others.

Out of more than a dozen of journalist friends and colleagues she asked informally prior to the survey, only one of them unequivocally stated no experience of harassment. The survey received over 400 valid responses, and more than 80 percent reported various forms of sexual harassment. A majority had chosen silence and tolerance of harassment.

Xueqin sent the published survey results to more than 30 media companies across China in the hope of raising the alarm on the epidemic of sexual harassment. Not only was there little response but in the Chinese domestic media there was also media blackout of this survey.

Earlier in 2015, feminist activists already mobilized to raise awareness of sexual harassment and were arrested for a planned street protest days before the International Women's Day. Despite this, the growing movement encouraged many women to come forward to talk about their past instances of sexual harassment which they had kept silent for many years.

Xianzi is among a small but vocal group of women, from college students, activists to employees, who did raise their voice about sexual harassment in a very public manner. In 2018, Xianzi penned an essay online, detailing her experience of sexual harassment four years before.

While an intern at the national broadcaster CCTV, she was called into a makeup room in the office building and sexually harassed by one of the most prominent Chinese television hosts who had manufactured a positive public image. A visit to the room by another worker allowed Xianzi to escape, and she reported the case the next day to the police who summarily dismissed the case and persuaded her to not pursue it further.

The accused not only refused to acknowledge anything happened, but sued Xianzi and a friend of Xianzi who had been supporting her for defamation in August 2018. This prompted Xianzi to file a counter lawsuit. During her first court experience in 2020, hundreds of supporters showed up for hours in the cold northern Chinese winter.

In 2021 the court ruled against Xianzi, citing insufficient evidence. Xianzi has vowed to appeal to the court decision.[1]

Exposing Labor Abuse

In late 2017 an accidental deadly fire on the outskirts of Beijing killed 19 people at a low-rent apartment building that primarily housed China's own internal migrant workers. The Beijing municipal government reacted by demolishing apartments deemed risky

and evicting tens of thousands of migrant workers from Beijing from their places, leaving them nowhere to stay in the winter.

Qiaochu Li is one of many volunteers and organizations who documented what was happening and provided information to migrant workers about job opportunities and affordable places to stay.[2]

Qiaochu has studied labor at university, and worked as a research assistant on labor-related projects at a Chinese university. She is deeply engaged in labor rights as well as feminist issues. In the early days of the pandemic in 2020, she joined with other volunteers to distribute masks to sanitation workers who lacked protective equipment.

Realizing also that domestic violence could be on the rise while everyone is locked down at home, she and others raised this issue online and spread information on the prevention of domestic violence.

Qiaochu is one of many young students drawn to the cause of labor rights for China's vast number of internal rural migrant workers over the past 20 years.

Fang Ran was another young student who became a researcher on China's labor movement, not out of pure academic interest, but rather genuinely inspired by workers' struggle. He is one of many Chinese college students who have been radicalized and dedicated to supporting workers and other marginalized groups.

While still in college, Fang Ran co-founded the Research Association of Political Economics and Modern Capitalism, a Marxist student society that is distinct from the Chinese state's Marxism. He has actively participated in student and labor activism for several years.

Some students "industrialized," going into factories for years to organize workers.[3]

In response to the radicalization on some university campuses, the government and universities have tightened their grips on teaching and liberal and leftist student clubs, shutting down Marxist-related societies or at the very least replaced the radical student leaders with loyalist students.

Qiaochu Li (above) and Fang Ran (right). Ran photo: HKU Sociology

Activists' Lives and Politics

The snapshots of these young Chinese activists can capture only a tiny part of their life stories and activism, not even scratching the surface of the movements in which they have been a part.

Their politics diverge, ranging from what we recognize as left liberals to Marxists. Because the ideological space in China remains distorted by the presence of the CCP and its persistent claim to represent Marxism, any deviation from that ideology, even in mild forms, could be considered as threatening. Just as threatening is any attempt to reclaim Marxism and left politics.

We learn of these activists either because their case has become very public for which they have suffered at considerable personal costs (Xianzi), or because they have been arrested and remain in detention with little communication with the outside world (Xueqin, Qiaochu and Fang Ran).[4]

Xueqin was arrested twice in 2019 and again in 2021, Fang Ran was arrested in 2021, and Qiaochu was arrested multiple times over recent years (as much as for her own activism and vocal criticism of the authorities as for her support for her partner, who is a prominent, imprisoned human rights activist).

All of them have remained in some form of government detention with limited communications with the outside world. We know more and more details about their stories often because friends and families have been writing about them since their arrests. They have now become invisible.

Responding to the Pandemic

Despite the grim reality, there has been signs of hope.

In the early months of the pandemic in 2020, there was a limited revival of activism, largely an outburst of spontaneous mutual aid initiatives that tapped into preexisting activist networks as well as completely new grassroots mobilization. That is when the Chinese authorities were underprepared for the pandemic response, and people were mostly left to their own to protect themselves and each other.

The chaotic first few weeks, in particular, offered a space for people to organize out of necessity and out of social solidarity to support each other. It is not the first time that disasters unleashed spontaneous actions from below for self and mutual protection. The social mobilization during the massive Sichuan earthquake of 2008 elicited an outpouring of grassroots efforts to support people affected by the earthquake, following several years of civil society building.

In the early months of the pandemic, too, all sorts of mutual aid initiates sprang up in China: some are entirely spontaneous efforts by ordinary residents volunteering their time, while others drew from preexisting activists and their networks.[5] Limited advocacy works also temporarily resumed around labor protection, for instance, of medical workers who needed protective gears and sanitation workers who similarly didn't have enough masks at the beginning.

Feminist activists organized around domestic violence that spiked during the early months of the lockdown in Wuhan and other areas in China, and LGBTQ activists focused on the specific needs of LGBTQ people such as access to medications.

Citizen journalists — ordinary citizens with no journalistic training but took on themselves to write about social issues — collected information and came to do their own reporting on what was happening, believing the authorities were not telling the truth, a view shared among ordinary people at the time.

All this revived grassroots activism was important in providing immediate support to people in need. While unfortunately it did not last very long before the state stepped in to quash grassroots efforts, this was a crucial experience for many people to get a taste of grassroots activism, and for more experienced activists to develop their work and renew their commitment.

For its part, however, the Chinese state appears more confident of its social control mechanisms and capacities, having used

Poster created by Zheng Churan

Wei Zhili, a labor rights defender based in Guangzhou, was arrested in 2019. He had been researching toxic working conditions. For more information: https://laoquan18.github.io/Wei-Zhili/.

the pandemic responses to implement and extend its abilities.

Discontent and Future Prospects

Against arguably the worst political repression that young social movement activists are facing and with many arrested or otherwise put under tight surveillance, what is the prospect of a new generation of young activists emerging?

There are odds to overcome. Repression has closed down grassroots organizations which until recently provided opportunity and space for young people to learn about organizing and advocacy.

These organizations were by no means without problems: some may lean too much on advocacy and less on organizing and mobilization in their communities. As imperfect as they were, they served as a training ground and jumping board for young activists. Absent of them and under pressure, young activists are often on holding patterns.

This is why the early pandemic months in China were a critical time for many activists to have some space to breathe and organize. But activists have adapted too by not relying on organizations, and instead constituting themselves as networks that allow individual activists to take initiatives while coordinating and collaborating with others in the networks.

Against these obstacles, there are structural reasons why young people are likely to be more active. As with their counterparts in much of the world today, there are simmering discontents among young Chinese.

The deepening capitalist development that delivered higher salaries and improvement in people's lives over the last three decades, including rural migrant workers, has generated conflicts and contradictions in both the economy and society that can no longer be ignored and are acutely experienced by young people.

One example is that in 2019, a nationwide online mobilization by tech company workers protested against the very toxic work culture of very long work hours and excessive overtime.[6] It forced open a very public conversation about work culture that garnered sympathy well beyond just tech workers.

But this sense of discontent among young Chinese is not just over the extremely competitive nature of their work. It's also a sense of stagnation which reflects their class experience.

The term that suddenly became widely popular in 2020 is "involution," an obscure academic term which means in certain agricultural societies there is growth without development.[7] In the Chinese context, however, this term took on the meaning of working hard — putting in more and more hours into work to get ahead — but not seeing the outcomes of their efforts.

This points to a rising, if still very rudimentary, class consciousness among young Chinese workers based on their lived class experience. The development model, which many believed would continue to deliver more material benefits and social advancement, seems running out of a steam, something that the Chinese state too clearly recognized and is now trying to address.

But it's not simply that the economy has been growing at a significant lower pace compared to a decade ago or so ago. It is also a result of the symptoms of China's breakneck capitalist development — runaway inequality, the pricing out of young people from the real estate market, the sense of lack of control over their work and life, becoming appendages to the (computer) machine.

In some respects, young people are beginning to see their conditions not as isolated, individual experiences but as shared class experience even though not been explicitly framed in class language.

Some have been drawn to labor because of the recent protests by food and parcel delivery workers who work for e-commerce and logistics companies.

As is the case globally, platform economy has been booming in China, employing millions of logistics workers, many of whom are rural migrant workers who left the factories. Their conditions, consistent with their counterparts elsewhere in the world, have been highly precarious, subject to work intensification, declining incomes due to cuts to their piece rates and being prone to work injuries on the road.

Delivery workers autonomously organized a number of protests and strikes,[8] maintained their own networks online and offline, and a leadership was slowly emerging (one of the most prominent organizers who established a mutual support network for delivery workers and came out strongly in support of their rights was arrested in February 2021, but is widely believed to have been released in late 2021 without trial).[9]

This leaves us with a mixed picture for activism in China. State repression has devastated activists, their organizations and networks. Those not arrested are tightly monitored, and regularly harassed and warned to stay away from activism. Yet activists are still around and when there is a space for activism they have showed up and rapidly mobilized.

Even more encouraging is that more and more people are less content with the capitalist development model in China. Until 2019 and 2020, public discussion and activism around labor rights have been muted because of the previous crackdown. Then all of a sudden we saw first the discussion around work culture among white-collar workers, and then public interest in delivery workers.

Open dissent can still be contained to a quite extraordinary extent in China, but the underlying discontent cannot be so easily eradicated. For the international Left, the more we learn about these movements and activists in China and the conditions that drive young people to express their discontent, and the more we see them as part of a global shared struggle, the better chance we have of building a global progressive movement. ■

Notes

1. https://lausan.hk/2021/censorship-china-metoo-movement/
2. https://madeinchinajournal.com/2018/05/17/beijing-evictions-a-winters-tale/
3. https://madeinchinajournal.com/2020/06/25/leninists-in-a-chinese-factory/
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9. https://labornotes.org/2021/04/china-leader-delivery-riders-alliance-detained-solidarity-movement-repressed

Decolonizing and Confronting Femicide: **Feminism(s) in Mexico**

By Margara Millán

"Se va a caer porque lo vamos a tirar, no solo al patriarcado sino también al capital."

MEXICO HAS BEEN part of the multifaceted and heterogeneous resurgence of global feminism in recent years. Indeed Mexican feminism, or shall we say feminisms, have a long and rich history (Espinosa 2009; Jaiven and Espinosa 2019).

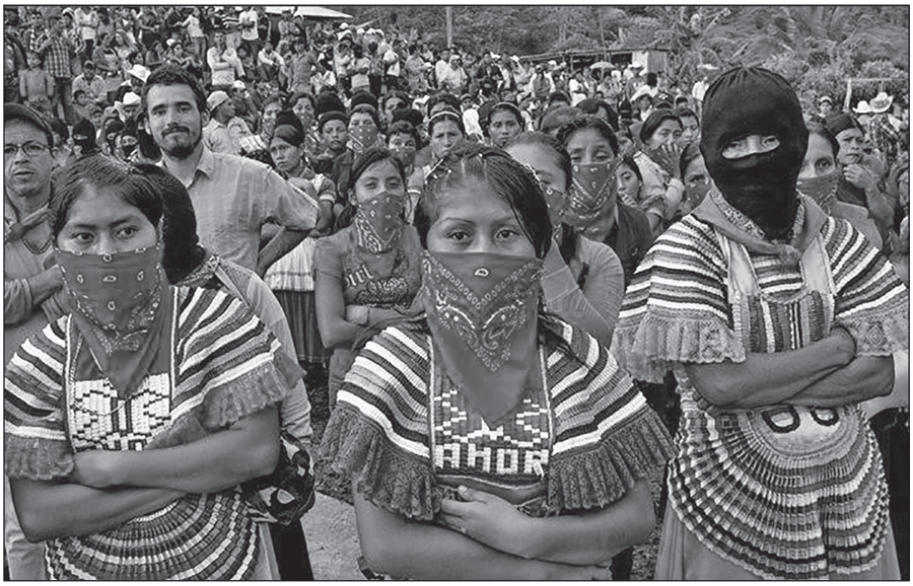
New configurations of Mexican feminisms draw their motivations from two historical factors: the Zapatista uprising with its radical criticism of capitalist, racist and patriarchal modernity, and the violence against women present in our country.

Zapatismo has been a turning point for the feminist movement since 1994 by its unveiling of the racism and colonialism in Mexican society and culture, which has led to a critique of the nation-state and its colonialist underpinning. Thus, the larger autonomist and decolonizing trend has become an important component of feminism in Mexico.

At the same time, the spread of feminism in Mexico has also been the result of multiple and exacerbated violence against women — disappearances and femicide — acts committed frequently and with impunity.

A large number of outraged women, from different social classes and ethnicities as well as age groups, have converged in massive demonstrations protesting this violence, expressing the "spirit" of a rebellious feminism that occupies the public space. (Ventura 2022)

In this article, I describe the twin poles of contemporary Mexican feminisms, beginning with the impact of Zapatismo. I then explore how the pervasive violence against women has shaped the feminist movements.



Zapatista women, Second International Meeting of Women Who Fight, Chiapas. Balkan Hotspot

1. The Zapatista *Ya Basta!*

Contemporary Mexican feminisms have been shaped by larger historical forces such as the Zapatista movement. There is a before-and-after-Zapatismo in Mexico. In the before period, the model of the Mexican State had been assimilationist, with Indigenous communities understood and basically represented as "the poorest sectors" of the nation.

State policy aimed to incorporate Indigenous people into "national development" in the interests of "progress" and "modernization," terms that have subsequently been discredited.

Feminism has not been immune to this legacy of Mexican national development, which constructed the figure of Indigenous men and women in patronizing terms. What Chandra Mohanty (2008) has described as the Western view of "third world women" is generally reproduced within mainstream Mexican feminism's stereotype of Indigenous women as passive victims of archaic versions of patriarchy.

For this reason, many Indigenous women object to being called feminists. Zapatismo challenges feminists from a perspective that directly questions the way in which state nationalism has constructed the figure of Indigenous men and women. (Millán, 2009)

I agree with the view that feminism cannot be understood as universal patriarchal oppression, but as a relational and situated process — situated not only in the critique of the masculine and patriarchal order, but also in the series of relationships and vectors of power and oppression among women.

The emergence of black, decolonial, autonomous, trans, popular feminisms are examples of these situated critical interventions and manifestations of a plural, heterogeneous and contradictory political subject. (de Lima Costa, 1998)

The hetero-patriarchal, capitalist and colonial system not only imposes different forms of oppression, resulting in different positions of power among women; it also generates different visions of the world. The concept of "intersectionality" within feminism has sought to account for these unequal relationships among women, making it clear that an abstract and universal subject, "Woman," is the product of precisely the system we are fighting.

To my mind, it is more accurate to speak of feminism as a series of movements rather than as a specific agenda or platform, although, of course, there are many feminist groups that assume this form.

From phenomena such as the #MeToo[1] movement, the 2016 women's march in the United States, #Nosotras paramos and #NiUnaMenos in Argentina, #NiUnaMás and #VivasNosQueremos in Mexico, any of the meanings of "feminism" that dictionaries offer have been surpassed by the paths that the struggle of women are taking.

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In other words, the diverse situations of women and their oppressions are rooted in a simultaneously capitalist, colonial, patriarchal, heteronormative, able-bodied, extractivist structure…And these are the structures that must be transformed: feminisms have overflowed their channels, (neo)liberal and institutional, and have done so massively. They have moved from Politics to politics (Echeverría, 1997); from the civic movement to the contentious one. (Tarrow, 2015).[2]

In this larger context, the Zapatistas have articulated a vision of struggle marked by complexity. For example, they coined the phrase *Acordamos Vivir* (to fight you have to be alive, so the first agreement is to agree to live) at the meeting of the First Political, Cultural and Sports Encounter of the Women Who Fight.[3]

This meeting, held on March 8, 2018, International Women's Day, featured many organized and disciplined young women, eager to listen and share their proposals. Both the call for this meeting and its closing statement clearly voice the Zapatistas' intention to organize in diversity, among women and "others," respecting the different struggles while recognizing a common enemy, which is not only patriarchy but also capitalism.[4]

These statements illustrate the decolonizing meaning of "among women" and are directed to academics and non-academics, white and non-white, young and not so young, as equals. The statements emphasize the necessity of "speaking in many languages" and understanding the language of the other.

The Zapatistas question capitalist modernity not only for the exploitation of work (human and non-human) but also for its basic colonizing foundations of "progress" and "development" based on constant industrialization, the ideology of individualism, notions of success and social wealth reduced to and controlled by the accumulation of value.

Zapatista communities experience these values as the dispossession of territory, a shrinkage of the capacity for self-government, a decrease of political determination, and diminishment of their quality of community life.

The Zapatista *Ya Basta!* resonates with other visionary criticisms of capitalist modernity, its ecological irrationality, and its instrumentality.

The movement has advanced practical proposals for resistance to transform the world. The autonomies, the *caracole*s, the Good Government Boards, are models for a world seeking to be de-patriarchal and anti-capitalist, and where women are positioned as central protagonists of the struggle.[5]

The Zapatistas have disseminated their vision of a decolonial national society — not only with their word as *Comandanta*s and "bases of support" — but also in the *Escuelita Zapatist*,[6] and of course in the women's meetings. Their impact is evidenced by the many women's groups in the cities that are adopting and adapting their principles of horizontality, autonomy, mutual care, self-defense, organization.

But also importantly, Indigenous women outside Zapatismo have made an impact on their organizations; for example, women in the National Indigenous Congress (CNI)[7] have transformed the discourse. In a space that began as majority male, the presence of women in meetings, particularly of combative women since 2018, has given the anti-patriarchal struggle within the movement and their communities more visibility.

All this has happened without the Zapatista women or the *compañeras* from the CNI positioning themselves as "feminists" but rather identifying themselves as women who fight. Thus, the effect of the women's revolt generated from and by Zapatismo has not only influenced urban *mestizo* women but has also been spreading in the very ranks of organized Indigenous men and women and in their communities.

Even the recent movement of "organized women," as the students of the National University called themselves, during the years 2018-2021, shows the imprint of the Zapatista women. From the organizational form of separatism, to direct action through the seizures of faculties and schools, to the use of the hood for their decolonial criticism of the academy, the impact of Zapatista women is evident.

The Zapatista mandate is very clear: women are being killed; it is necessary to organize and fight. Their communiqués explicitly connect to the concerns of the movements of mothers of the disappeared and victims of femicide, pointing to their importance in the larger movement of contemporary Mexican feminisms.[8]

2. Violence and Impunity in Mexico

The mobilizations and the organization against femicide violence and forced disappearances in Mexico have a long history.[9]

Feminist anthropologist Marcela Lagarde coined the term of "femicide."[10] Femicide occurs in the context of violence in our country, and of the war against women, whose mechanism was analyzed by Rita Segato (2006).

The disappearance of people increased after the so-called "war against drugs" declared by the government in 2006.[11] The connections among the drug traffickers, authorities and elements of the army is documented. This has been made visible in recent years by the work of people dedicating themselves to looking for their children in clandestine graves, house of extermination, and places where bodies are abandoned.[12]

While perhaps a decade ago localized in certain regions, this type of violence has been spreading throughout the country, in such a way that it can occur anywhere. The study of violence in our country has shown how it is sustained in the triangle of violence enunciated by Galtung (2003).

Thus daily, domestic partner, physical, psychological or symbolic violence, cultural violence, structural violence, class violence, the racialization of bodies, are all part of an iceberg that sustains and allows extreme violence culminating in femicide. These structures of violence also include disappearances and are facilitated by the presence and territorial dominance of "organized crime" groups.

The momentum of women's mobilization in Mexico began perhaps with #24A, a massive mobilization on April 24, 2019 called by two young women against police officers who had raped them. The mobilization responded to the campaign launched the day before, on social networks, #MiPrimerAcoso, and #NosQueremosVivas.

The first received a massive response, and made visible the harassment against women, especially in the family environment and since they were nine years old, revealing very important child and adolescent violence. The #MeTooMx took place in 2020 with complaints by professional women: writers, journalists, cinema, etc. (Eight journalists in Mexico were murdered in the five weeks of 2022 alone, at least two of whom were women, Lourdes Maldonado and Michelle Perez Tadeo —ed.)

Even earlier, since 2016 so-called "clotheslines" have been installed in some higher education institutions, featuring posters with the names of harassing classmates or teachers. Anonymous complaints are publicized as a strategy to break the silence without putting yourself at risk. Faced with questions about the credibility of an anonymous complaint, #YoTeCreo was initiated.

From all this, beginning with March 8, 2017 #8M became the space of the massive mobilizing of very diverse groups against femicide violence, who also voiced capitalist, racist and patriarchal critique.

A turning point following this march was the femicide of Lesvy Berlin Osorio on the campus of the National University. Lesvy's mother Araceli Osorio was accompanied by dozens of students in what became one of the most resounding movements.[13]

Families of victims, students, collectives of the so-called "black bloc," anarchists, mothers searching for the disappeared, dissidents and sexual diversity groups joined with demands from unionized women as well as complaints of dispossession and displacement of communities for extractivism, the resonance of another type of femicide such as that of Indigenous environmental activist Bertha Cáceres in Honduras, the

demands and struggles against open mining and megaprojects imposed on the peoples without consultation, the denunciation of transfemicide, and more.

These combined protests of the multiple collectives and groups that today find a commonality in the violence they face, give the #8M mobilizations an exponential power.

3. Nevermore A Mexico Without Us

The feminist economist Amaia Pérez Orozco (2015) argues that the contemporary women's movement is pushing to install an interclass, intercultural and intergenerational debate that gives rise to structural changes. Although each local or national reality favors some of these vectors over others, I believe that the influence of Zapatismo has centered the intercultural debate, generating an anti-racist feminism, and increasingly made mainstream feminists aware of the cultural racism that they have historically shared.

This debate has led to the development of a decolonial view that makes feminism and its legacy itself as a place of criticism. The debate that has predominated has occurred in the form of parallel movements which at times converge in the struggle, and which also maintain productive tensions between them.

These include the youthful feminisms with anarchist roots, who take to the streets, which function as a network. Many of these women stand against violence and favor the decriminalization of abortion. There are the movements united by a more capacious understanding of sexuality, which understand heteronormativity to be part of the capitalist patriarchal structure. These activists also recognize and protest transfemicidal violence.

There are the movements of the families of victims (especially the mothers) of the disappeared persons and of the women victims of femicide. Within this broad and heterogeneous spectrum, an urban Zapatista feminism affiliated with the Zapatista women's struggle also appears with a decolonial intention "from below and to the left."

Collectives in defense of the rights to one's own body, the right to a desired motherhood, against harassment and patriarchal violence, against femicide, in defense of the territory, against extractivism, in defense of trans lives, are part of the larger contemporary faces of Mexican feminisms.

The larger movement is not without tensions and ruptures, but includes also moments of important unity of action such as the one carried out by the organizational convergence space called #JuntasyOrganizadas for the 2019 march, which was massive, disseminated throughout the country, and where anarchist feminists, trade unionists, sexually diverse people, families of victims marched together.

The recomposition of what we now call the feminist movement — and therefore of feminism — demands to be framed in a context of civilizational crisis, in a series of local and global uprisings. An increasingly plural, translocal, intersectional and performative struggle has implications regarding the conventional concept of the political subject, "women," and also what we understand by feminism(s).

Feminisms are part of a global interaction, developing contextual and localized positions, political articulations and organizational platforms. In the particular Mexican case, we are witnessing a moment where class experiences and interactions, intergenerational and anti-racist positions, and a decolonial intention are played out, all in the face of violence against women. (Millán 2020)

"We declare ourselves as women in struggle against patriarchy, neoliberal capitalism and neocolonialism, with the conviction that if we women do not free ourselves from slavery, society will never be free."[14] ■

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Notes

1. "Hashtags," a new way of enunciating the intervention of social movements.
2. Tarrow (Donoso and Basaure, 2015) calls contentious policies to refer to collective actions that leave the framework of liberalism.
3. By calling it this way, the Zapatistas distinguished themselves from feminism while building a bridge, an invitation to encounter.
4. Nearly 9,000 women from all over the world arrived in Zapatista territory, where they camped and lived together for three days.
5. Influencing even a notion of generic democracy as a starting point for societal political democracy (Millán, 1996).
6. Between 2013 and 2014 Zapatismo convened to the Escuelita Zapatista, where they taught the topics of: Autonomous Government, Participation of Women in the Autonomous Government, and Resistance. Materials: https://www.centrodemedioslibres.org/2017/08/02/libros-en-pdf-de-la-escuelita-zapatista-la-libertad-segun-ls-zapatistas/
7. Mixed-sex structure that was founded in 1996 at the call of the EZLN, for the political reorganization of the Indigenous peoples and communities.
8. http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2017/12/29/convocatoria-al-primer-encuentro-internacional-politico-artistico-deportivo-y-cultural-de-mujeres-que-luchan/ and https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2018/03/10/palabras-de-las-mujeres-zapatistas-en-la-clausura-del-primer-encuentro-internacional/
9. Mexico did not go through dictatorships like several Latin American countries, but it did not lack a policy of extermination of young militants. After the movement of 1968, there was an emergence in Mexico of urban guerrillas, young people who opted for the armed struggle, against the authoritarianism of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Many of them were killed, tortured or disappeared by the political police and the paramilitary arm of the state. The EUREKA movement, with Doña Rosario Ibarra de Piedra, and the H.I.J.O.S. belong to that time, denouncing what was silent. Their slogan was "Alive they took them, alive we want them." (See Mastrogiovanni, 2019)
10. She uses the term in 2006, in her translation of the book: *Femicide: The Politics of Women Killing*, edited by Diana Russell and Jill Radford, to emphasize that it is a crime against women for being a woman.
11. The State recognizes about 90,000 disappeared.
12. See: Hernández y Robledo (2020), y Universidad Veracruzana (2021).
13. https://nacla.org/news/2017/07/31/justice-lesvy-indifference-and-outrage-response-gender-violence-mexico-city
14. https://www.congresonacionalindigena.org/2018/07/30/declaratoria-final-del-primer-encuentro-nacional-de-mujeres-del-cni-y-el-cig/

Faiz Ahmed Faiz: **The Restless Traveler**

By Ali Shehzad Zaidi

THE REVOLUTIONARY URDU poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-1984) retains its transformational power. Recently, Faiz's "We Will See" became a rallying cry during student protests in India against the 2019 Citizenship Amendment Act which grants a path to citizenship only to non-Muslim refugees from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

The act also denies citizenship to those Indian Muslims who, lacking the means to acquire identity papers and birth certificates, are subjected to disenfranchisement, deportation, and imprisonment even if they were born in India.

Faiz wrote "We Will See" in defiance of Zia-ul-Haq's military dictatorship (1977-88). Its title, which evokes Judgment Day, is taken from a refrain in the *Qur'an* (Singh):

> We will see.
> Certainly we, too, will see
> That promised day —
> That day ordained
> When these colossal mountains
> Of tyranny and oppression
> Will explode into wisps of hay —
> The day when the earth under our feet
> Will quake and throb
> And over the heads of despots
> Swords of lightning will flash —
> The day when all the idols
> Will be removed from this sacred world
> And we, the destitute and the despised,
> Will, at last, be granted respect —
> The day when crowns
> Will be tossed into the air
> And all the thrones utterly destroyed.
> Only the name of God will remain
> Who is both absent and present —
> Both the seen and the seer.
> The cry "I am Truth" will rend the skies
> Which means you, I, and all of us.
> And sovereignty will belong to the people
> Which means you, I, and all of us.
> (*Faiz in English* 24-25)

Ali Shehzad Zaidi is Professor of Humanities at the State University of New York at Canton where he teaches Spanish and French. He has published articles on Shakespeare, Calderón de la Barca, Unamuno, and Eliade. Zaidi co-founded the Transformative Studies Institute with John Asimakopoulos and edits its peer-reviewed interdisciplinary journal, Theory in Action.

The poem deposes the idols of money, power, and prestige while seeking meaning in collective existence. The words "I am Truth" are those uttered by the Persian Sufi mystic Mansour Hallaj who was executed in the early 10th century. They affirm the unity of all creation, heightening the paradox of God existing, seemingly at once, everywhere and nowhere.

Even before the partition of India, Faiz had become a literary sensation with the publication of his first collection of poetry *Naqsh-i-Faryadi (The Lamenting Image)* in 1941. After Pakistan's independence in 1947, Faiz became the chief editor of *The Pakistan Times*.

In 1951, Faiz came further into national prominence during the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case, in which he and many of his associates were imprisoned, blacklisted, or forced underground. Among them was Sajjad Zaheer, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) who, like Faiz, spent four years in jail.

In 1954, while Zaheer was still imprisoned, the CPP, repressed since its inception, was banned outright. After his release from jail in 1955, Zaheer went into exile in India. In his memoir *The Light,* written in prison, Zaheer affirms:

"History is witness to the fact that conservative rulers and unlawful governments have always tried to put down the voice of truth with force and violence. If they have not been able to buy off or intimidate an independent mind, a truthful tongue, or a bold pen, they have used the iron chair, the poison cup, or the executioner's sword to achieve their end. But history also proves that the free spirit of man can never be confined. No true scholar, poet, or artist, whose work reflects the evolving reality of his times, can be suppressed. Even if he is forcibly silenced, the very reality that is denied free expression bursts forth like clear springs from the hearts of millions of the common people." (*The Light* 72)

Faiz was released from prison the same year as Zaheer and went into exile in London. As had been imprisonment, exile proved to be a seminal and defining experience for Faiz, as in "Resolution":

> My heart, my restless traveler:
> again it has been decreed
> that you and I be banished
> from this our beloved land.
>
> We will construct our poems
> in foreign towns
> and bear our contempt for oppressors
> from door to door.
> (*Faiz in English* 28)

Travel would remain a constant for Faiz. Late in life, Faiz wrote two memoirs of his visits to socialist countries: *Cuban Travelogue* (1973) and *Months and Years of Friendship: Recollections* (1981), which concerns his impressions of the Soviet Union.

Exile, Return and War

After co-founding the Afro-Asian Writers Movement at the 1958 conference in Tashkent, Faiz returned to Pakistan but was arrested upon arrival. He spent two years in prison and, after his sentence was commuted, again went into exile in London.

Faiz returned to Pakistan in 1964 to become the principal of Abdullah Haroon College in the working-class neighborhood of Lyari in Karachi. During his exile, the regime of General Ayub Khan had consolidated power through its Inter-Services Intelligence agency.

Ayub won the 1965 presidential election despite losing the popular vote to Fatima Jinnah, sister of Pakistan's founder, Mohammad Ali Jinnah. In a tainted indirect election, Ayub claimed victory with the support of more than 62% of the electors. Two years later, Fatima Jinnah, who had become a symbol of resistance to the military regime, died in her home under suspicious circumstances.

In 1968, the student protests that were sweeping Paris, New York, Mexico City, and other major cities, spread to Pakistan. Popular support for the demonstrations and strikes against the military dictatorship forced Ayub to resign in March 1969. Ayub was succeeded as president by the Army Chief of Staff, General Yahya Khan.

Although he allowed direct elections to be held in 1970, Yahya refused to yield power to the winner of those elections, namely, the Awami League, which had pledged autonomy for East Pakistan. In March 1971, Yahya suspended the constitution and dissolved the National Assembly, causing the leader of the Awami League, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, to call for the independence of Bangladesh.

The Pakistani Army massacred Bengali nationalists and intellectuals, including students and professors at Dhaka University. Meanwhile, Bengali mobs and the separatist guerillas known as the Mukti Bahini were massacring Biharis and other Urdu-speaking Pakistanis.

War between India and Pakistan began in December 1971, ending that month in the surrender of the Pakistani Army in East Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh. In this excerpt from "Return from Dhaka," Faiz mourns the communal madness that had transpired:

Twisted brass bangles
and laughter
slit from ear to ear.
On every tree
a crucified nightingale.
The river reflects the sky
and the sky is the growl
of a tiger.
Will the monsoons restore
colour to the earth?
How long
will the fuel of pain
burn?
(*The unicorn and the dancing girl* 96)

The image of the tiger recalls the tigers that roam the Sundarbans, the mangrove forests of Bangladesh, as well as the ferocity of the cataclysmic events taking place there. The sky's reflection in the river awakens the memory of the monsoons during the seventies that resulted in floods as well mass famine in Bangladesh in 1974.

In a speech about the classical Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib, Faiz said that the mark of a poet's greatness is the ability to encompass the world's pain in one's art (Hashmi 100-101). This ability, a measure of Faiz's own greatness, is on full display in "Return from Dhaka."

Theme for a Poet

Through his alchemic imagination, Faiz turned pain into something beautiful and lasting, as in "Theme for a Poet."

Imagine roses blooming
in a limestone quarry
and wine squeezed out of
desert thorns.

Mountain stream
cleaved in two
by a dark boulder.
Fear and hope.*
(*Faiz in English* 31)

Although a dark boulder blocks the mountain stream's path, water, to take the long view, will eventually find its way. The temporarily thwarted progress towards justice awakens both fear and hope.... To invest an unjust world with feeling is to become its heart and conscience.

Roses connote love, passion, and divine contemplation. The image of limestone, which has healing properties, conveys the poet's quest to transmute suffering in the parched spiritual wilderness evoked by the desert thorns. Wine symbolizes initiation into mystical knowledge and joyous communion which can be realized even amidst desolation.

The mountain stream is an image that combines water, the source of life, with the mountain, representing spiritual ascension and stature. Although a dark boulder blocks the mountain stream's path, water, to take the long view, will eventually find its way. The temporarily thwarted progress towards justice awakens both fear and hope.

According to the Urdu poet N. M. Rashed, Faiz was influenced by the Romantic poets, especially Keats and Shelley (8). Faiz found in the 19th-century composer Chopin a kindred romantic soul. In "Chopin's music," Faiz summons a bitter-sweet world of destruction and creation:

Rain-spears and the night a sieve.
Weeping walls, houses sunk in silence
And freshly-bathed plants.
Winds in the lanes and alleys.
Chopin's music is being played.
The moon's pallor
On the face of a wistful girl.
Blood on the snow
And every drop a leaping flame.
Chopin's music is being played.
Lovers of freedom ambushed by
the enemy.
A few escaped.
Others were slaughtered.
They will always be remembered.
Chopin's music is being played.
A crane covers her eyes with her wings
And weeps alone
In the sky's blue wilderness.
A hawk pounces on her.
Chopin's music is being played.
Grief has petrified a father's face.
The mother sobs as she kisses
The forehead of her dead son.
Chopin's music is being played.
The season of flowers has returned
And lovers rejoice.
Everywhere there is the dance of water.
Neither clouds nor rain.
Chopin's music is being played.
(*Faiz in English* 59)

The image of rain-spears evokes tears and piercing pain. In China, the crane symbolizes longevity and its migratory flight heralds the arrival of spring besides evoking the soul's immortality. In India, the crane is associated with treachery (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 240-241), which can be seen in the crane's fate in "Chopin's Music."

The moon's pallor recalls Percy Shelley's "To the Moon" in which the moon is a disconsolate pilgrim of history:

Art though pale for weariness
Of climbing heaven and gazing on the earth,
Wandering companionless
Among the stars that have a different birth, —
and ever changing, like a joyless eye
That finds no object worth its constancy?
(Shelley 1081-1082)

These poignant images in "Chopin's Music" beckon us to, if not to intervene in the world, at the very least to bear witness. To invest an unjust world with feeling is to become its heart and conscience. ■

*The above text of "Theme for a Poet" is Kamal's revision of the original version in *Faiz in English.* The second half of the poem formerly read:

Fear and hope.
Mountain stream cleaved in two
By a dark boulder
Hunger is the wild dog.
(*Faiz in English* 31)

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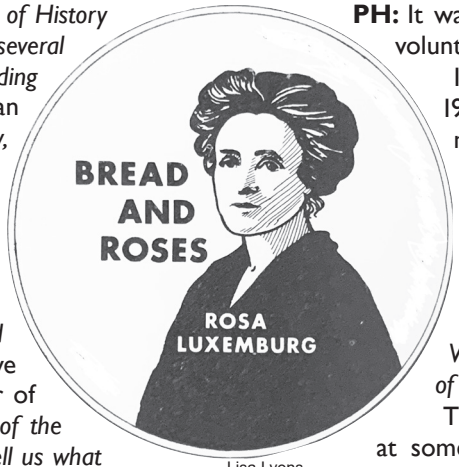
Uncovering the Hidden Legacy: **The Complete Rosa Luxemburg** an interview with Peter Hudis

William Smaldone is the E. J. Whipple Professor of History at Willamette University. He is the author of several books in German and socialist history including Rudolf Hilferding: The Tragedy of a German Social Democrat *(1998) and, most recently,* European Socialism: A Concise History with Documents *(2019). He conducted this interview with Peter Hudis in January 2022.*



Lisa Lyons

William Smaldone: *We're here today to interview Peter Hudis, Professor of Philosophy and Humanities at Oakton Community College and author of* Marx's Concept of the Alternative to Capitalism *and* Frantz Fanon: Philosopher of the Barricades. *He is also the general editor of the complete works of Rosa Luxemburg. Can you tell us what editing her complete works means?*

Peter Hudis: It means basically putting together a collection in which everything she ever wrote is available. That means published materials, pamphlets, articles for journalism, but also draft manuscripts that have recently been discovered. In some cases, we have reports of her lectures by her students at the German Social Democratic Party school. Perhaps we will even include police reports of transcripts of her speeches and meetings. These are not always totally reliable but shed some light on her legacy.

Putting together a complete collection of all of her writing has never been done before. And you realize she wrote in three different languages: German, Polish and Russian. It means collecting all that material and translating it; at least eighty percent of this material has never been available in English. All these will be new translations with extensive footnotes and a glossary.

WS: *Is there a particular model that you and your team are working from? Are you using the* Marx-Engels Collected Works *as a model?*

PH: Although this may be pushing my ambitions too high, I see the *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe* (known as *MEGA2*) as the gold standard. It is now put out in Amsterdam but originally started in Berlin. I realize we're not going to match the kind of a detailed editorial apparatus they have, but we want to make it as scholarly as possible.

We do want to avoid some things that you do get in the *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, with footnotes that label some of Marx's adversaries as "petty bourgeois deviators," etc. We want to have a fair presentation of the material in its proper historical context, without the editorializing that is sometimes done there.

WS: *What inspired you? I mean, it's a monumental task.*

PH: It wasn't exactly something I thought of or volunteered for!

I got interested in Luxemburg in the 1970s, when I joined the socialist movement. I was thrilled when I came across her work. A number of years later my mentor Raya Dunayevskaya, an important Marxist humanist philosopher, asked my help in translating some of Luxemburg's writings. That was for a book she wrote, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution.*

That started me on archival work, looking at some of Luxemburg's original manuscripts in German. I got her *Gesammelte Werke (Collected Works)* and began to see there was so much that's not in English. I thought it would be good if someday somebody put together an English version.

Although I translated a few articles and would be invited, on and off, to speak about her work, it wasn't part of any systematic project. Then in 2007, I was invited to South Africa to a conference on political power and the role of the state in social transformation. I was to give a keynote address on Luxemburg, which was a great thing to do.

There were people there from all over the world — including Brazil, France, Argentina, China and Germany. Some had been doing work on Luxemburg. After dinner we were talking and folks said they were interested in Luxemburg, but it's really hard to get a lot of her work.

How much of it is really in English? Well, most of it is not. Then Arndt Hopfmann, who at that time headed the South African office of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, said "Peter, why don't you put the complete works together?" I answered, "You have to be kidding me!"

With 15 people around the table, we began talking about the possibility, and followed up with correspondence over the next couple of years. Then we actually started getting a proposal off the ground.

The German collected works is a wonderful resource, but it is not complete and it was felt that her complete works really need to be in English because not that many people read German around the world.

I had a wish list for who would be the best publisher to publish such an English edition. I thought, Oxford University Press has wonderful international distribution so without knowing whom to contact, I sent them a letter.

I got a phone call back that asked if I could come to New York within the next two weeks to meet with the editorial

board. They provisionally agreed to publish the complete works. But they said they would need an upfront commitment from a foundation to cover the entire cost of translating the materials in what would be a multi-volume edition.

They'd put out the collected works of W.E.B. Du Bois. If there was any model I was looking to from Oxford, that was it. They did a great job on a huge amount of material. But we couldn't find that kind of commitment. At the most we were told we could get money for a year or so.

So we couldn't go with Oxford, but Verso Books came and said, how come you didn't come to us?

Political Space and Broader Audience

WS: *Very good. Well, why do you think now is the moment when this project has come to the fore?*

PH: That's a good question. Luxemburg is such an outstanding figure, and she's important from so many different directions and for people coming from so many different backgrounds. Why hasn't there been a collected works in English, if not a complete works, before now? I'm not sure.

One factor could be that there's never been a "Luxemburg movement" as such. There have been many movements associated with the names of Lenin and with Trotsky and others, but there's never been a political party or movement that was associated with the Luxemburg's name.

The second, and the most important reason, is the collapse of "Marxism-Leninism," or at least the Marxist-Leninist regimes, which opens up political space. Luxemburg was on the margins of a lot of left-wing discussion in many parts of the world, especially in the Global South. Because of the influence of the so-called socialist regimes, she was largely *persona non grata*.

With Russia and China turning to the so-called "free" market after the failures of their command economies, here's Luxemburg writing that there an alternative to reformist social democracy and authoritarian revolutionary socialism. Here is somebody who has navigated a path that avoids both of those defective positions.

This is not the first time in history that this search for a third Marxist way has been articulated. We saw it in the late '60s as well. But it is much stronger in this period.

WS: *I think there is resurgence of interest in Rosa Luxemburg's life from two quarters. First, from those who see her as a potential radical socialist alternative to the "Marxist-Leninist" model, which is in retreat as you noted. Second, in the scholarly world, there has also been growing interest in her. Given that, why hasn't there been an effort to put out more of her works in English? There have been some fairly well-known collections, by both Pathfinder Press and Monthly Review Press. But they were quite limited in scope.*

PH: I was asked by Monthly Review Press, along with Kevin Anderson, to put together *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader* (2004). That's what got me invited to South Africa. It was published a few years before I was invited there. But to some degree it could have been that certain issues have emerged or new forces had begun to make their voices heard.

I'm thinking especially of the feminist movement. One of the barriers that existed on the part of Marxists was the general assumption that Luxemburg wasn't really a feminist. And from the opposite point of view, there was the assumption among many feminists that she wasn't really a feminist because she was a Marxist. [On this discussion, see "Rosa Luxemburg for our time" by Nancy Holmstrom, https://againstthecurrent.org/atc181/p4585/ — ed.]

So, they had people engaging in one way or another with Luxemburg from either the Marxist or feminist side but not making much of an attempt to connect to her as a Marxist-Feminist. There were exceptions, such as Sheila Robotham, but these were exceptions and not the rule.

As early as the 1980s, however, and certainly after the 2000s that started to change, particularly Jacqueline Rose's *Women in Dark Times* (2014). An important chapter of her book is on Luxemburg and written by someone not connected to the orthodox Marxist tradition.

Rose is a brilliant British academic known for her writings on the relationship between psychoanalysis, feminism and literature. The people who are reading Luxemburg are interested in feminism and interested in issues of social justice. They are saying that the dichotomy of seeing her as a Marxist or as a feminist does not make a lot of sense.

It's now a much broader audience than the traditional left. There's a whole new generation of feminists as well as decolonial theorists who are finding their own issues reflected in her writings. A new generation comes along, asking new questions about a so-called old figure, and they want to know more about what she's about.

Trove of New Material

WS: *That's very interesting. Given the scope of her work, which encompasses a wide range of political, economic, social and cultural issues. are there any particularly exciting new discoveries that have emerged? What are you and your team finding as you work through this trove of material?*

PH: Yes. There are lots of other figures that make my own work possible, but one who got me thinking about collecting Luxemburg's works from the very the beginning is Narihiko Ito, the great Japanese Luxemburg scholar.

He had been planning to put out a Japanese edition of her complete works. It didn't get off the ground for various reasons, but he was a serious Luxemburg scholar who (among may other things) went to research archives in Moscow in the 1990s.

While we had always known that she had taught at the Social Democratic party school in Berlin from 1907 to 1914, he located eight or nine previously unavailable manuscripts and lectures from her work there dealing with the non-Western world in that period.

Paul Frolich mentions this in his biography of Luxemburg, *Rosa Luxemburg: Her Life and Times*, but what happened to those manuscripts? They were not in her apartment at her death, which was ransacked by the *Freikorps* [the military death squad that murdered Luxemburg in 1919 — ed.] in any case.

A lot of things were destroyed, so it wasn't clear what had survived, but he found them in an archive in Moscow. That was an amazing discovery — and the material consisted of Luxemburg delving into the latest studies in anthropology and ethnography of Native Americans, Australian Aborigines, peoples of Sub-Sahara Africa and Northern India.

She was trying to understand precapitalist social formations, including how communal formations cultivated the land.

These are an inspiration for those trying to critique colonialism, imperialism, and the destruction of such communal forms. They also suggest how these communal formations might possibly presage what a possible future socialist society could mirror.

We knew some of her thinking because of the *Introduction to Political Economy*, which was a work that came out of her lectures at the party school. One chapter had been translated by members of the Trotskyist movement back in the 1940s. But it was only the first chapter of a book that's close to 250 pages. The bulk of it was never translated into English although it has been in French, Italian, Spanish and Japanese.

We said, "Let's assemble all these chapters together as the first volume of the complete works along with the whole of Introduction to Political Economy." This is something people haven't seen in the English-speaking world.

We begin the complete works with several volumes of Luxemburg's economic writings, then publish her political writings. We will add another volume of economic essays and manuscripts that haven't been available in English in an additional supplementary volume. What is particularly valuable is that these are the issues decolonial theorists today are examining very closely, as can be seen from the recently published collection *Creolizing Rosa Luxemburg* edited by Jane Anna Gordon and Drucilla Cornell

It's important to understand she wrote a lot of her work in Polish. Almost all of this is not in the German collected works.

Clara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg walking to the SPD Congress. Magdeburg, 1910.

They have not been republished since they were written in 1903 or 1911 or whenever. Even in the original Polish, they were for a long time very, very hard to access. I didn't realize how much of that there is.

At first, I thought we'll get some of the Polish material and translate and publish it. Now I realize it's thousands of pages! Some are short articles that she wrote for the daily press and revolutionaries on the ground. Others are significant theoretical essays.

One, which she wrote in 1908, summarizes the lessons of the three Russian Dumas, the parliamentary body (with very limited powers) that was a concession by the Tsar to the 1905 Russian Revolution. This will appear in Volume Four, which Verso is putting out within the next couple of weeks.

It is a remarkable discussion of how an underdeveloped society, as Russia was at the time, could achieve a transition to socialism. She asked how could a developing country, without a long experience of capitalism or industrial development, carry out a socialist revolution? How can you move toward socialism when you're surrounded by hostile powers who are out to get you?

Of course, the radical movement has debated this issue over the last hundred years. Given this problem, Luxemburg, it turns out, has a very distinctive notion of how to transition to socialism compared with Lenin, Trotsky or Kautsky. I had not known about this until a few years ago when I finally learned of the document; it is now translated from the Polish by Joseph Muller.

There's been a lot written about what she was doing inside the German Social Democratic Party and within the Second International in general. But what was she doing inside her own Polish party? She had two Polish parties, one that lasted until 1900 and another that she led from 1903, and which lasted until the end of her life.

In English we don't have a balanced assessment (with a few important exceptions) of these discussions. I don't think biographers or many other writers seriously studied most of the Polish material, which might be understandable given the language barrier. But that's no excuse.

Now that we're getting this material translated, a different kind of picture in emerging. It's much more complicated than Luxemburg the democrat versus others as the hierarchical authoritarians.

There's truth to both claims. But we also see that within the Polish party there was a lot of factionalism, and many expulsions. There was a lot of centralism, which raises the whole question: What's the relationship between the principles that a major theoretician enunciates in her writings and how that is practiced organizationally at an everyday level? We would not be able to make that evaluation with someone like Luxemburg without that Polish material.

Organizing and Editing

WS: *Two or three things you just raised will be enough to engender a whole new industry of writings on Rosa Luxemburg and her role on the left. It's going to be fascinating. What about some of the editorial challenges facing the project? How do you recruit your editors?*

PH: Through the entire project we've been helped very much by members of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung both in New York and in Berlin as well as the South Africa group, where it

was first conceived. They provided us with a degree of financial assistance, but more importantly with all kinds of editorial assistance.

There are great Luxemburg scholars in Germany, including Annelies Laschitza (1934-2018), who spent 45 years of her life studying and collecting the writings of Luxemburg, including identifying her many writings written anonymously or under a pseudonym.

That made our job much easier. She's the one that went into the archives and found the originals and transcribed them in many cases. We wouldn't be able to do this without her, without people like Narihiko Ito (1931-2017), as well as others such as the Polish historian Feliks Tych.

We sat down with such scholars and asked how we should organize it. Do we simply do a chronological development? That made a lot of sense and what I preferred at first. But we decided to publish the new economic writings first.

That suggested more of a thematic arrangement. Now there is a separate rubric on her political writings, and within that rubric it is broken down into various sub-themes, such as what she wrote on actual revolutions, that is 1905 as well as 1917-18 in Russia and Germany. Three volumes are devoted to this subtheme "On Revolution," two of which are complete and a third volume of which will soon be.

The next sub-theme is "Debates on Revolutionary Strategy and Organization." These include the debates she had with Eduard Bernstein, Karl Kautsky, Lenin and with a great many others. This will be at least four volumes of 600 pages each. Then there are her writings on the national question, with at least three volumes worth 600 pages each. And there are her cultural writings.

You see the hurdle a thematic approach posed. How do you decide which document fits into which rubric? In her political writings she might mention the national question in one paragraph and discuss revolutionary strategy in another paragraph.

Where do you draw the lines? That's a lot of work to do, but the biggest editorial challenge with a complete works is that you can't leave anything out. What happens when you discover a manuscript after you finished the volume it should have been in? We have already run into this! We found another 250 or 300 pages of economic writings after we published two volumes of 600 pages each, on her economic writings.

We decided that eventually we're going to issue a supplementary volume to the two, but you can't do that with every volume. (For Volumes One and Two, see https://www.versobooks.com/books/1734-the-complete-works-of-rosa-luxemburg-volume-i and https://thecharnelhouse.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Rosa-Luxemburg-Complete-Works-Volume-2-Economic-Writings-2.pdf.)

In selecting the editors, we started out with a small group that was advised by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung in Germany. We then put out a call to people we knew as well as a public announcement. We now have about 20 people on an editorial board representing seven or eight countries. Everyone who works on the project does so *gratis* — this is our labor of love. The only money we have is for the translators. It's vitally important to compensate them for their work.

Occasionally we put out a call for people who would like to join the editorial board; we did that last year. We had dozens of applicants. We couldn't add everybody, or we'd be very unwieldy, but we found some really great people that we didn't know before as well as great people who we did know.

Financing the Project

WS: *I'm amazed at the number of people that applied to help with the editing, having that many is really something. What about the financial side?*

PH: Let me first tell a story. I've been to China several times, largely because among Chinese Marxists there's a growing interest in Rosa Luxemburg. I've been to Wuhan University several times, where the chair of the philosophy department had sponsored a conference on Luxemburg.

The Chinese are now publishing the complete works of their own, kind of inspired by the English edition. Their first volume came off the press about a month ago. Of course, they have resources we don't have, because they're getting published by a major state-connected publishing company. And they have university resources too.

The last conference I attended was just before the pandemic. And someone in the audience asked about our financing. I answered that none of the editors receive any compensation for our work. There was dead silence in the room.

I explained that what funding we've been able to get comes from two sources. One is from the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, which has been very helpful, but they cannot fund the entirety of the project. We have to reapply every year and have no guarantees. Sometimes we get the amount that we want, sometimes we don't.

In 2021, because during the pandemic other projects were held up, we got more than what we asked for. But their funding is not an open-ended checkbook. So we utilize other fundraising venues as well. For example, if you type Rosa Luxemburg Toledo into any search engine, it brings you to a website where you can make donations to Luxemburg's *Complete Works* in English. All the money collected within that fundraising platform goes towards translations.

WS: *It's an interesting feature of your project that you can turn to an institution like the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung. It is an institution connected to Die Linke (the German Left Party). In German politics, each party represented in the parliament has its ancillary institute that can carry out such projects. They can carry out political work or pursue historical work, on behalf of the movement that sponsors them. It's an interesting feature of the German political landscape, and one we do not have in the United States. But I'm wondering if down the road raising money via the Toledo model might become more important than the funding from the Luxemburg Stiftung.*

PH: That's already the case to a certain degree. The Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung has a number of priorities including important work with NGOs in the Global South. They have concrete projects and don't simply exist for publication purposes. But without their support, we could never have come as far as we have.

Our editorial board is looking for grant proposals and other funding streams that we hope to tap. But of course, that takes a lot of time and effort as well. Definitely, the Toledo fund is an important platform (see https://www.toledotranslationfund.org/complete_works_rosa_luxemburg).

WS: *And all this is made more difficult because most of the editors involved also have to earn a living….*

PH: Yes, at their *paid* workplace. I teach, as you mentioned, not at a research university. I teach philosophy at a working-class community college with a heavy course load.

WS: *When we are directing students to different sources, one of the places we can send them is to the Marxist internet archive, which publishes a wide variety of works by socialists from a across the spectrum. And I know that in the past, they've had some difficulty with copyright matters. Has that been a problem for your project? How have you dealt with it?*

PH: No, fortunately none of those problems have occurred, thanks to the publisher Dietz Verlag, which has the rights to Luxemburg works. They are the publishers of the *Gesammelte Werke*. I should also mention that since 2016 they published another two volumes in German of Luxemburg's previously unavailable German writings Each is a thousand pages, almost none of this material is available in English.

There's also a large amount of Luxemburg's writings that has either been discovered over the last 20-30 years or just was not included in earlier editions.

WS: *That's a great advantage. I'm wondering, given the scope of the project, how long will it take to complete?*

PH: In addition there is the need to gather all the material that goes in a particular volume. It's immensely more complicated than I realized when I first started.

There are other things to keep in mind — like making sure her oral interventions at various socialist conferences are included in cases where minutes recorded them.

Verso will publish one volume per year. Volume Four is coming out now. That means Volume Five, which we've just about finished editing, won't be out for another year. This volume will contain her writings on revolution from 1910 to the end of her life in 1919.

We're already working on Volumes Six and Seven, which have her writings on revolutionary strategy and organization. One interesting complication that arose in the course of arranging this is that in 1904 Luxemburg was writing for a Polish newspaper, *Gazeta Ludowa* in Poznan, at the time in German-occupied Poland.

It was well known that she wrote for it, but it turns out most of her articles were unsigned or with pseudonyms. But we have been able, thanks to our friends in Germany and Poland such as Jörn Schütrumpf and Eva Majewska, to identify and select those written by her. Upon further investigation, it turns out she had started this newspaper largely to show her German party, the SPD, which was funding some of her work in Poland, that there was a lot more support among the Polish workers than there really was for her party. She was putting out this very prestigious-looking newspaper in which she wrote most of the articles. It's a lot of material, almost 200 pages worth, mainly from 1904.

About 18 months ago we were already commissioning translations for Volumes Six and Seven of the complete works, which will include this material. So you plan and then come up with new material, which is a pleasant surprise but nevertheless increases your workload.

Theoretician and Revolutionary Activist

WS: *What you just described tells us about her incredible capacity for work. What's the degree to which your volumes can contextualize all her work for the reader?*

There's also a large amount of Luxemburg's writings that has either been discovered over the last 20-30 years or just was not included in earlier editions.

PH: That was a real challenge in Volume Three, which will be out in paperback soon. That was the first volume on revolution, with her writings from 1897 to 1905, most taking up the 1905 Russian Revolution. Most of this material was not available in the *Gesammelte Werke* but is in the supplementary Volume Six that had been put out in 2016.

Luxemburg was not only writing pamphlets and booklets, but composing virtually daily reports on the revolution in the German socialist press. (See Volume Three: https://www.versobooks.com/books/2777-the-complete-works-of-rosa-luxemburg-volume-iii) She was writing a daily column, called "The Russian Revolution," for four or five months or so at the end of 1905. That consists of about 300-400 pages worth of material in Volume Three.

Here's a very unique thing: She's a revolutionary theoretician, but it's very unusual for a Marxist theoretician at the same time to also be immersed in and recording the day-to-day unfolding of a revolution happening right in front of her.

Then she goes to Russian-occupied Poland at the end of 1905, directly participates in the revolution and is thrown in jail. She is writing an amazing amount of material on a daily level. When you read through it, you understand this is the raw material for what becomes her famous *Mass Strike* pamphlet, written in 1906. She wasn't simply theorizing out of a debate with other radical intellectuals. She was drawing from hundreds of pages of journalistic material.

It's easy for intellectuals to say, well, these are just news reports. But it's fascinating to read because you see the raw material that she was studying in order to develop her theoretical arguments. She's not developing abstract theses out of the sky. This is not an academic preoccupation. She's trying to generalize from a concrete set of realities. That's what William Pelz and Axel Fair-Schultz established in their introduction to Volume Three, saying here is the historical and social context in which these writings were composed.

Sandra Rein and I co-wrote the introduction to Volume Four. We took great pains to explain the difference between her writing for a German audience and a Polish one. A version of the introduction appears in *Thesis Eleven*, the Marxist journal that comes out in Australia, as well as in the French journal *Actuel Marx*.

Her German audience was part of a huge, massive and above-ground socialist party with millions of members. It's a different thing when you're dealing with a small underground party in Poland where there's no avenues for democratic expression or outlets. She addressed each audience in a different way, given that context. Each volume's introduction needs to be sensitive to this and needs to find a way to spell it out for a modern audience.

WS: *Here again, we see the richness of your project. Anyone who's heard of it must be excited. With each successive volume I know I am. I thank you very much for this interview. We wish you luck in your future work.*

PH: Great to talk to you about the project. ■

The Ten-Year Plan:
On-the-line in Auto — 1970s-1990

By Elly Leary

I GREW UP Jewish in the 1950s Jim Crow south. Like African Americans, Jews lived a completely separate life barred by law (dressed up in the fancy word covenants) from living in certain neighborhoods and social events and organizations. My parents were part of the Jewish ruling class so I spent a lot of time with the maids, spending weekends with them in the "ghetto" and attending Black church when my parents were out of town.

You don't come away from such a situation unaffected. I brought this sensibility with me to Boston where I went to college and grad school.

By the time I joined the Proletarian Unity League (mid-1970s) — which later merged with other collectives to become Freedom Road Socialist Organization, now Liberation Road — I was a well-seasoned political person.

During the late 1960s, I became a part of Student Health Organization (a spinoff from SDS). From that I became involved in several socialist feminist collectives: one which ended up writing *Our Bodies Ourselves* and the other dealing with forced sterilization of Black women (the Mississippi Appendectomy, its most famous victim being Fannie Lou Hamer), which was a plague in more than just the south.

From there I was part of forming the first women's law office/WLC (1971). Oddly, we did mostly labor work: helping caucuses form in unions, writing a Supreme Court brief for the left independent labor federation in Puerto Rico (associated with Lolita LeBron and the Puerto Rican nationalist movement), and immigration issues (especially leftists fleeing from repression in Latin America).

That is what led me to the shops. In addition to the WLC (where I was in charge of political education/study), I was also part of a large (40 people) labor-oriented study group. After two or three years we purposefully broke up to join national formations. Some went to the Revolutionary Union, some to the October League, some the Workers Organizing Committee, and some to PUL. All were in the Maoist orbit.

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

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

This issue features two retired autoworkers, Elly Leary, a member of Liberation Road, and Jon Melrod, author of Fighting Times: Organizing on the Front Lines of the Class War.

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

Entering Industry

During this period, about 15 of us took a trip to Philadelphia where the Philadelphia Workers Organizing Committee (PWOC) hosted a meeting to talk about "colonizing." (If you don't know, colonizing is distinct from salting. The latter is union sponsored, the former not.)

There I learned three valuable and inter-related insights:

1) Eyes open, mouth shut for the first six months.

2) The first people to join you might be the "loud mouths," the habitual complainers; one should take time to identify the "natural leaders," those who hang back waiting to see our seriousness, our patience, our stick-to-itiveness.

3) The kind of results we were looking for take 10 years to build. If you aren't prepared for that, don't go. It just wrecks it for those who can make the commitment.

The PWOC men (unfortunately, all) had already entered heavy industry: steel and Budd automotive. Everything they said turned out to be true.

Maoism (or, as it was known in the United States, the New Communist Movement, NCM) differentiated itself from more Trotskyist tendencies by placing more emphasis on the "national question" [the African American movement as a national liberation struggle —ed.] within the social movements, including the labor movement, which was the primary focus.

This was central to our analysis of the development of U.S. capitalism. Roughly speaking, we would say that the class question could not be resolved without simultaneously resolving the national question (See *A House Divided. Labor and White Supremacy,* PUL 1981).

Within that NCM, PUL was distinguished on several fronts: 1) "Queer" is not a bourgeois deviation (we had queer women leaders from the very start). 2) While other Maoist (and Trotskyist) groups were firmly committed to "no unity with the labor bureaucrats," we believed that was a tactical question. 3) Among the Maoists we were most known for our anti-sectarian approach and the orientation that there is not one true party. (See *Two, Three Many Parties of a New Type? Against the Ultra-Left Line*, PUL 1977). 4) We also placed a heavy emphasis on the south.

PUL always encouraged comrades to leave bourgeois jobs and go colonize. Like Marxist organizations everywhere, we

GM/Framington workers on their way to the 1983 Labor Notes Conference, (Leary is third from the left.)

held that the working class was the engine of social and revolutionary change.

Trotskyist-oriented groups at the time smartly encouraged and got buy-in for comrades to move to the industrial heartland to get jobs in heavy industry. PUL was mainly centered on the coasts where heavy industry was rapidly disappearing. While comrades tried to get jobs in "heavy industry," many ended up in hospitals, public service (teachers, city and state workers in all categories) given the nature of the coastal economies.

Comrades were encouraged to move south, and a number did (ending up founding, along with others from the Maoist SDS "Revolutionary Youth Movement II" stream, Black Workers For Justice). Even as we were encouraged to get working class jobs, a good number of our comrades devoted their principal activity to building up the Black and Chicano national movements (and, starting in the early 1980s, Central American immigrant communities on the east coast).

Hard Work Finding Work

Getting an industrial job in the Boston area posed problems. Six or seven comrades managed to land jobs at the shipyards — which closed within four years. Boston still had a defense industry: Raytheon and General Electric. GE's Lynn mammoth factory complex (think Ford Rouge) was crawling with leftists of all stripes. Sometimes relations were friendly, others not.

I was one of about seven people who applied to GM. Our plant, as we later learned from Herman Benson (Association for Union Democracy), was one of the few in the entire UAW that was mob controlled — not by the infamous Winter Hill gang (Whitey Bulger) which had the mothership Local 25 of the IBT, but by the Worcester mob. So hiring generally was a combination of mob, worker family members and company-picked inside application process.

We understood from the beginning that to stand a chance, a resume with factory experience was necessary to make it in GM and other big shops. Many of us started out in the lower rungs of industry (electronic shops making speakers for Bose; 20 people machine shops). I spent a couple of years at a box factory (where I met my husband).

Fortunately, when I applied to GM/Framingham the company was under pressure from EEOC to hire women and "minorities." Our factory was part of the first post-WWII wave of auto plants relocated from the cities to "greenfield" sites in the countryside to eliminate job applications from African Americans. With no public transportation, 30 miles west of Boston set next to the women's prison, that enabled GM to hire very few African-Americans and to count men (only) from the Azores as minorities.

GM Framingham was the only auto assembly plant in New England; the Ford plant in Somerville Massachusetts (a contiguous suburb of Boston) had closed in the late 1950s having produced the disastrous Edsel. It was a smallish plant, around 3800 workers on two production shifts (there was also a separate, and smaller, maintenance shift). As GM moved out of the cities, they no longer built the behemoth installations as in Flint.

So what was it like once I got there in 1977? Three things stand out:

The work regime. The assembly line is no joke. When you arrive you see workers moving slowly, like a metronome, deliberately and seamlessly from one car to the other — sometimes chatting with one another, but often not. You say to yourself, I got this.

For the first three weeks you are chasing your ass in a tight 10-foot area, running from car to car trying to finish in the allotted time and space, covered in sweat and bathed in stress, only to dream of that stressful experience at night.

Those behind and in front helped where they could but that metronome pace meant they had no free time themselves. Finally, finally you can stop running and get the job done. In the "good old days," work time was programmed for 55-57 seconds per minute, but by the end it was 59 seconds a minute.

And then there is the boredom. You need to make peace with the conveyor belt that rules your life. Not all of my comrades were able to do that. They quit. (Clearly the working class folk don't often have that option.)

You needed to be good at separating mind from body; otherwise you'd go nuts. Learning about the autoworker in Detroit who "went postal" surprised none of us at our factory. Once good enough you could spend time chatting with your co-workers (that is, the person across from you or behind you or ahead of you), or you could go into lala land.

I loved chatting with my co-workers. One favorite topic: "All in the Family," the TV show. It offered a treasure trove of political topics: racism, sexism, homophobia, patriarchy, abortion, unions, xenophobia, family relations and politics (Archie Bunker's hatred for FDR was a central feature).

For the lala times I tended to write leaflets and our shop newspaper in my head (or shopping lists). Because of the limited chance to engage with a broad range of people, I worked my way into the category of "nickel man" — five cents more an hour for being an absentee replacement. In that job you went all over the factory to fill in.

Did I mention the 100% injury rate? Repetitive strain injuries were a big thing. No one escapes slashes, burns, factory accidents (getting caught in the moving conveyor; something

falling on you). All part of the job.

Between four and five years marked the onset of most physical and mental injury. This was closely linked to political consequences: trying to swim against the tide to create a "bottom-up, democratic and social justice union" was tough going in the best of times.

Those around you wanted to see if you "had what it took" (able to stay on the job after five years) before they stepped forward — even if they believed in the righteousness of our cause. Who wants to be left holding the bag?

Swimming Like a Fish

Talking union politics. The second major issue to deal with was how to discuss "politics" and our vision for the future. Being a "greenfield" plant, workers came from the countryside (as in family farms) and small mill towns in central Massachusetts and Rhode Island that had long since lost their small mills.

Many were Vietnam Vets; nearly everyone was white (3% African American, no Latinos, 3% women), all of whom had less than five years seniority.)

The other shaping dynamic was the consequences of "ultra-left" errors of the October League (they hadn't graduated to the CPML yet). In 1976 a group of them began leafletting outside the plant — selling newspapers and screaming at the workers to "abandon your sellout leadership." At the time, there were OL comrades working there: two from the working class and two "declassed intellectuals."

Finally the "men" had had enough: about a dozen of them went outside armed with lead pipes and other heavy metal instruments and had it out. The brawl and the resentment of the left "telling us what to do and that we were stupid" was still talked about 10 years later.

After that, only the two OL working-class comrades (women) were left employed and what a miserable time they had: reviled by the "commie hating vets" and being women to boot.

So when I arrived six months later (the first from PUL), I knew a couple of things: swim like a fish in the sea (my favorite Mao dictum); start where people are at; eyes open, mouth shut while you assess the situation; figure out how to bring up the necessity for a rank-and-file driven union (at that point the union hadn't called meeting in three years) and, most of all, how to talk about socialism in an anti-communist haven while still being true to your beliefs.

In the beginning I started simple. I asked one of the elders (son of a coal miner) on my line/workgroup: "Last place I worked we had a union, when are the union meetings here? My policy is always to try to make the best of a bad situation." I then spoke to my committeeman (steward in the UAW system). The snort reply told me all I needed to know.

As luck would have it, the International union had mandated some membership education. I was invited to attend one of these "sessions" — filling the woman quota no doubt. Mostly it was geared toward members getting involved in the Democratic Party. But it did have a segment where we had to write and give a three-minute speech on a political topic.

I decided to make mine on the "woman question" since everyone considered we were taking men's jobs (I mean these guys told you that from night to morning). Rather than a Lenin-type harangue/stump speech, I chose "It takes two

GM/Framingham New Directions activists Elly Leary, Mac McDonald and Dianne Villemaire.

to pull the plow." So I got noticed and not necessarily in the best way.

Some months later a few Trotskyists got hired and immediately started a petition to have union meetings. While the petition caused them all kinds of personal grief (and they were gone in several months), it did allow the opening to talk about that. A few more comrades had managed to get hired and by now some "natural leaders" had been identified.

Also, local elections were coming up, a perfect excuse for a union meeting: find out the rules of the road. One of our comrades ran for alternate committeeman (a sub).

An African American ran for the Executive Board. He worked overnight so it was hard to know him, but he was the son of autoworkers from the midwest and progressive. Later on, he became the titular head of our caucus.

A few others ran for the Joint Council (the body that OK'd the Executive Board decisions). This was treading new ground. I ran for the Joint Council on a ticket with the elder. This being a mob shop, he was pulled aside (at gunpoint I presume, firearms were fairly plentiful; I had a gun aimed at my head during this time as well) and told they would "let" him win if he ditched the "commie."

Bless him, he stood his ground even though he was as conservative as the day is long. And that is when we learned about the second set of ballots, to be pulled out when necessary. The old-timers kept telling me about them, but I had considered that more legend than reality.

Fortunately/unfortunately, a little later (1979) I turned up pregnant. There was no maternity leave. By this time, more women were hired, thanks to EEOC mandates for government contracts. There were at least five of us who were pregnant.

I had read in the newspaper about a Massachusetts Supreme Court decision requiring contracts that had medical leave clauses to include pregnancy. What a boon. I contacted all the women, showed them the article and asked if they would join me in meeting with the union to have them lobby for us. Two others agreed.

The Local leaders were bullshit, but the UAW International leaders knew they had to do something (I also reminded them I could go to the EEOC). The union said they would take up the issue and, long story short, we got pregnancy leave for women throughout GM!

Returning to the shop after having the baby, the next big fight was a national one against reopening the contract and

giving breaks for the automakers (1980-early 1982).

Fighting Concessions, Building a Caucus

One of the great benefits of being in a national political organization is that you know what's going on around the country and, somewhat, the world. We found out about a national organization, Locals Opposed to Concessions (LOC).

Our small band of leftists easily recruited a number of other workers to help distribute their literature. This group became the nexus of our future caucus. Workers were thrilled that we took the effort to keep everyone informed about industry-wide resistance.

You needed to be good at separating mind from body; otherwise you'd go nuts. Learning about the autoworker in Detroit who "went postal" surprised none of us at our factory.

The Local union leadership strongly backed the International on concessions and kept everyone completely in the dark. A past Local President, Owen Bieber, was regional director and within a year was the International President (he was as stupid as a pet rock). That put lots of pressure on the Local to deliver the vote.

One of the many things we learned from LOC was that poll watchers to oversee the contract vote count at each local were imperative. We had two high seniority people agree to do the job. Yet the final reported vote tally did not match the one they meticulously counted.

It was at this point we took some folks to *Labor Notes* and connected with like-minded autoworkers from all over.

Building a caucus, our third major activity: through the anti-concession work we developed a team in which all departments were represented. We mapped the shop line by line, department by department — who worked where and where we thought they stood on union issues. Our strength was on the night shift.

We then formed our coalition, STAND UP (an acronym that none of us can remember what it stood for since it was forgotten within the hour). Over the succeeding years, our caucus became the home of what few women and Black workers were in the plant, the handful of colonizers from different left organizations (fortunately not enough of us to cause infighting), working class leftists, but also a number of religious/evangelical men who were appalled by the corruption and dishonesty.

We developed a five-point platform (unusual since everything had been personality-driven prior). STAND UP assessed that the first job was to clean up the elections in our local. We put out a flyer inviting everyone to a "between shift meeting" (there was one hour between shifts) to call for fair and open elections in our local. We had no idea what would happen.

The response was overwhelming. At least 500 workers showed up. It was sheer pandemonium — in a good way. We then recruited a slate to run for the election commission. Such an election hadn't been held for many years: lackeys were appointed to help count.

That election had the biggest voter turnout in the history of the local (even when the first was canceled because of a snowstorm). And you guessed it, because there were no challengers (observers in UAW parlance) allowed, we didn't win all the seats.

This ushered in the production of a shop newsletter called *News and Views*. Because of consolidations within the auto industry, we always focused our lead story on an industry analysis. (Several of us subscribed to *Automotive News*.)

We called different locals around the country (as rank and filers) to ask about production figures, so we could chart the whipsaw. But of course what everyone really wanted to read were the small boxes on shop gossip and the corruption of our local officials.

We started handing out these papers (which we produced on a mimeo machine) at the gate. The harassment and intimidation from the union *apparachnicki* was so great we changed course. We had a crew that came in early (all three shifts) and placed copies on each workbench.

It turned out to be one of the best organizing moves we ever made. There was no gauntlet of union officials to intimidate you from taking the paper. Before we put out any edition, we had a team of readers — mostly honest centrists — look over the paper and give us feedback. Rarely were we asked to change things, even as these middle folks said we were sure to get blowback.

We even had a program where some of us would read the newsletter to the half dozen or so we knew could not read. (I know how busy you are, let me read this to you while you work and we can chat about it).

Corruption and Intimidation

The paper was a giant success. But as the next local election rolled around, the stakes got higher and the intimidation more dangerous. Several of our key players told me they had to quit the caucus because their wives couldn't take the threats to them and the kids anymore. My own husband received those calls.

I for one ended up having a group of informal "body guards" who made sure the walk around the plant and to the car was uneventful (I know the other women in our caucus had likewise).

Meanwhile, we were laid off for about nine months and when we got back there was only one shift (roughly 1900 production workers). This decimated our ranks as many of our team did not make the seniority cut when one shift was called back. That left me the de facto lead organizer of the caucus.

Even with some people on the election committee, they weren't able to stop the second set of ballots from turning up as our election committee reported to us. So while we could win a few seats here and there, we were never able to win a working majority. It would have been close anyway.

We tried going to the NLRB (who told us the fastest we could get something done was two years down the road). The Association for Union Democracy came from New York to help us. The local threatened to sue us.

We knew we couldn't foot the bill for all this by ourselves, and in one edition of *News and Views*, we announced we would be doing a fund collection. Again we had no idea what would happen. The money poured in. Our "collectors" — those with off-line job categories that allowed them both free time and plantwide mobility — were crying, they were so happy and astonished.

It was not unheard of for someone to drop by our workbench or give a known caucus member $100 bill; most people

contributed $2-20.

A highwater mark was in 1986 when we ran a slate on a political platform (unheard of) for the UAW National Convention. Folks were highly energized in the shop. In another case of backroom ballots, only one of us made it. Frankly, the obvious loss demoralized a lot of people.

The first night of that convention, our delegate (the Black activist mentioned above) excitedly called and told us there was an entire region of the UAW represented at the convention in a new caucus with the same platform as we had. It was called New Directions. Upon his return we folded into New Directions and became part of their first national convention the following year. One of us got placed on the NDM National Executive Board.

So when the first NDM convention was called, seven of us went. This was a big step forward. It showed our rank-and-file members that they weren't, as our local and regional leaders often accused us, crazy leftists and "no one else in the world thinks like you."

Our final push was in local elections in 1988. Same story: a second set of ballots. But this time an enterprising supporter (not identified as a leader in the caucus) went to the local printshop and got a copy of the union requisition: It clearly showed twice as many ballots ordered and printed as there were union members in the shop.

Around this time GM announced the plant would close down for good in a year. The game was lost, but many lessons learned.

Drawing the Lessons

The caucus was a united front of democratically minded people who hated corruption, dishonesty, favoritism, and lack of resistance to management attacks.

Because it was essentially an all-white shop, race played a very minor role. It was easy to keep us together. We learned several key lessons:

No lecturing — even nicely. Your job is to find out what is on people's minds and what they are looking for. Today we call that active listening; at that time it was filed under the topic, "meet people where they are at not where you wish them to be."

Give everyone a little something to do. Even though leaders and leftists know we can do many tasks simultaneously, we consciously chose not to. There was a psychological element to this: If you were the martyr whom everyone admired then they could not see themselves being a leader.

Equality of opinions before the group votes on what to do.

No one wants an armchair critic. Put your money where your mouth is and run for office if you have a better idea.

Better make it fun. The caucus could not be only all about business. Even outside the caucus you needed to be a fun co-worker. I arranged all the in-shop parties for my line and department.

Because there were women in our leadership, we had to be sure the wives and family members did not see us a threat to their home life. One good way was to do out-of-shop activities which included family members.

Key theoretical conclusions that came from our experience:

1) The "Leninist" formula that unions are simply conveyor belts to the party is incorrect. Like all mass organizations, unions do and must have a life of their own. A good bottom up, mass organization needs to be a place where individuals can grow. It should become a "training ground" and a model for when we are in charge. Should we be mindful and look for possible recruits? Of course, but not at the expense of the mass organization.

2) Communist leadership of the unions was another "Leninist" favorite that was not entirely correct. Yes, of course we seek to have unions be instruments of working class power and engines of social justice. But communists cannot be the only leaders, nor should leaders we develop be under our ironclad control.

By the time PUL had merged with others to become Freedom Road, we developed that insight into a theoretical construct — leadership development unionism — akin to the Trotskyist notion of rank and file unionism. We haven't done a good job unless we can replace and replicate ourselves from among the natural leaders.

Given our understanding of racial capitalism, folks of color and women were given a lot of attention. Certainly, through the sweep of history, they proved to be the most ardent and patient fighters of oppression.

3) From the People to the People, and the practice of democratic centralism: Both constructs are about the relationship between leaders and the base. This whole area was a big one, especially for me. It is clear now to us all who have made the journey from the 1960s and are still in Liberation Road, that our practice of democratic centralism in those days was flawed.

We seemed to put all the emphasis on centralism and too little on democracy. This flaw was widespread throughout Maoism in the 1970 and '80s (I can remember gay comrades who were in either the RU or OL coming crying about being forced into heterosexual marriage or being purged. It was heartbreaking).

Likewise, the popularization of this principle in Maoism — From the People to the People — was turned on its head: In practice it became "to the people and then wait for heavy pushback." Furthermore, the UAW, since the Communist Party had been very influential in its formation, had this flawed concept built into its organizational structure. Everything flowed downhill until the bottom revolted.

How could we ever hope to build a caucus within the UAW or recruit to our organization if this was our model of accountability, and solidarity and organization? By the early 1990s, we came to a more nuanced view of democratic centralism as the two-way street between leaders and the base, each having rights and responsibilities.

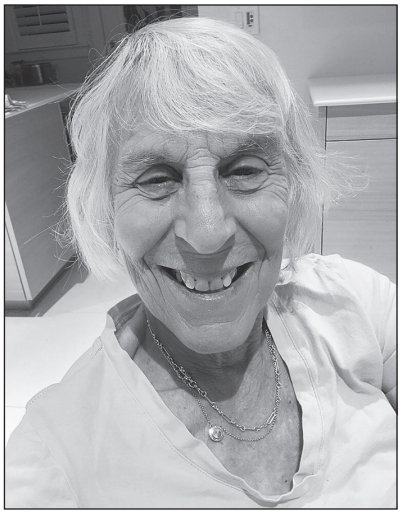
4) The complete intractability of white supremacy, even in the blue north. Naively, I thought if we just went into the shops and patiently explained the nature of the system of institutional racism, as well as individual prejudice, and how it was used to keep the working class divided and out of power — *voila!* — things would right themselves. Believe me, this was cause for much mirth among comrades and friends over the years.

In that final local election in 1988, we ran our leading caucus member, who was Black and with tons of seniority, for President again with a platform. He ran against a drunk and a

crook who had been there for a number of terms. One friend came up to me the day before the election. She was actually crying when she told me, "I know Chuck is a drunk and crook and that Howie is a upstanding guy, but I just can't vote for a Black person."

That, combined with the second set of ballots, doomed us. We got one person on the Executive Board and several Joint Council members — no threat to the establishment. And so it goes.

The lesson I learned from this has stayed with me: Exit polls and pre-election surveys are rife with liars. It is no stretch to think that many people would never admit to a pollster that they voted for Trump. Who wants to admit they are down with white rule?



Elly Leary today.

Our Flaws

1) Timidity on recruiting explicitly to socialism, much less recruiting to PUL/Freedom Road. Anti-communism hung over our heads like a sword waiting to behead us. Today the local union meetings in navy blue Massachusetts are filled with MAGA hats.

The shenanigans of the OL certainly did not help matters. So we chose to gently talk about socialism without necessarily labeling it such: more emphasis on the principles than the labels. It was not unusual for some co-workers to sidle up and ask, "Are you a communist?"

After a few tries, I had it figured out. You should not be defensive, but proud of who you are.

Most of all, don't launch into long explanations (think Trotsky and Lenin, who were admittedly talking to crowds or workers who were unable to read). Rather than talk about socialist principles and rhetoric (workers are the vanguard) and things like the Three Worlds Theory (a topic which I barely understood, could not see its relevance to my work, despite it being central to my pal Max Elbaum's great book, *Revolution in the Air*), we concentrated on the basics.

My standard simple answer to "are you a communist" was something like: "If you mean that workers should have control of their work; the bosses have way more money and power than they are entitled to; it isn't right to treat people differently because of their skin color, their gender or where they come from, then yes."

By 12-plus years in, I remember a bunch of guys from the brawl with the OL coming up and saying, "We need to apologize for everything about that fight out front." I reminded them that I wasn't even hired yet. "No matter," they replied. "You were right all along."

Nonetheless, I would say that we were overly timid. By the end, several of our caucus members joked: "So when did you plan on talking about socialism?"

2) We barely engaged in the wider Boston area labor movement. Being stuck 30 miles west of Boston in the middle of nowhere, it was easy — we bathed ourselves in this cocoon. But bad on us because we did not expose our caucus folk to issues, fights and struggles, as they should have been; we denied them the opportunity to offer their insights.

Although we let our views be known, we could avoid the contentious "super-seniority" (affirmative action to protect recently hired women workers, for example, from layoffs) debate, or the hiring of the local working class especially if the new immigrants of color were moving to the community (which comrades in Lynn did a most fabulous job of addressing). Hiring at our plant had ended five or six years before.

A Changing World

Let me be clear. The caucus at GM was probably the most important political experience of my life. It helped me think carefully about the relationship between theory and practice; the nature of organization, and the steps necessary to upend racial capitalism in the United States.

It was also a place where I grew from a shy and not necessarily assertive person, to a woman able to talk in large crowds, stand up to intense pressure even when it had deeply violent under-and-overtones, and to become a leader who looks to and was able to develop other leaders. (Since retiring I've been busy mentoring.)

Furthermore, the caucus became my social system: that was who I hung out with, who I went shopping with, whose children my kids played with, who I retired with (we chose Naples because of Victor Reuther). In short — a home.

And most importantly, it made me acknowledge and be unafraid to admit that I was not only a socialist but belonged to a political group with national and international comrades from whom I get ideas and support, and access to things the rank and file are eager to be part of.

This especially played out in my next UAW job, with clerical and technical workers at a local university (now the largest UAW local in my area as the result of de-industrialization). Bringing my skills from GM and leadership in New Directions, I quickly became an elected officer. (I refused a recall to a small GM parts depot to continue work in this shop.)

While the regional UAW harped on my communist roots, I could easy bring up ideas and connections in Executive Board meetings. I was always being asked: how did you think of that? I could tell them I learned it at Framingham or truthfully say, "You don't think I dreamed this up by myself. I have a group of friends all over Massachusetts, the U.S. and the world, and we constantly talk about work and politics and how to solve problems like this."

None ever blinked. It was an admission that I was in a political organization. It wasn't an evil cabal; it was a source for moving forward. I realized then that it gave me more than I gave.

Since our time of "colonizing," the whole labor world has changed. There was no dilemma then about getting a job as an international staffer, organizer, educator, and having the ability to bring our politics to a much wider audience. It was the rank-and-file route or nothing.

Furthermore, working-class jobs — even in places like hospital kitchens — paid enough to survive on. Those days, too, are long gone. ■

From Campus to the Factories: Organizing in '70s Wisconsin

an interview with Jon Melrod

JON MELROD IS currently living in Sonoma County, California and devoting his time to promoting his upcoming book Fighting Times: Organizing on the Front Lines of the Class War. *Dianne Feeley interviewed him for* Against the Current.

Dianne Feeley: *Where did you grow up?*

Jon Melrod: Growing up in Washington, DC was like living in an apartheid-like city. When my family drove out to the Virginia countryside, I saw a Black prison chain gang, shackled together, working on the roadside, with big white guys with shotguns on horses. When the nearby Maryland amusement park, Glen Echo, where we went as kids got desegregated, whites went out of their mind. They poured bleach into the water so that nobody could use the pool and they shut it down.

And when my father and I went to the D. C. high school football championship — a Catholic school that was private and white, competed against a public school that was all Black — a race riot broke out. These incidents taught me at a young age how deep racial divisions ran and how the fight against racism was so vital.

When I was at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, I was active in SDS. By the fall of 1969, SDS leadership knew that our first meeting would be huge. The year before, we had thrown the mandatory Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) off campus. In May there had been the Mifflin Street riots, during which pitched street battles with riot police went on for days. So we knew people were really looking to SDS.

There were about 800 people at the meeting, mostly new students. The Weathermen (a faction that played a major role in the 1969 SDS split —ed.) came to disrupt it. About a dozen of them marched in, dressed in black leather. They grabbed the mic and said, "We're a bunch of stone-cold communist revolutionaries. And we ain't students up here. We should go out onto the streets right now and start tearing down shit, burning buildings."

SDS leaders had contingency plans to turn our chairs around and conduct the meeting from the rear of the room, where we had another mic. Unfortunately, the Weathermen so disrupted what had been a very well-planned meeting that it led to the devolution in Madison of what was a really well-organized, tightly-knit SDS chapter.

SDS had developed three demands around the Vietnam War that we wanted to unify everyone around. They were well-conceived demands, a systematic program of how to organize the campus struggle against the war: throwing ROTC, the Land Tenure Center and Army Math Research Center off campus.

The Land Tenure Center did research for counterinsurgency in Latin American countries; Army Math developed the technology that enabled the military to locate Che Guevara in the jungle of Bolivia.

Because the Weather people so disrupted the fall introductory SDS meeting, we had to rebuild and pull the student body together around those three demands. We were very organized. Three nights a week we went into the dorms, room to room talking about the war and why we thought Washington was fighting, using facts and logical positions to demonstrate our opposition.

Beyond SDS

So we really had a sense of organization, which is something I've carried through with my whole life, believing that you had to have organization. When SDS totally fractured, we formed a new organization, the Mother Jones Revolutionary League (MJRL). We wanted our name to be a tribute to a courageous woman fighter who had played such a prominent role in the working class as a woman leader. From the beginning, we looked toward the working class as the motive force that held the power to radically transform capitalist society.

When I traveled to the Bay Area in the summer of 1970, I checked out the Revolutionary Union (RU) because my girlfriend's brother was a member. I started working on their first working-class newspaper *People Get Ready* in Richmond, California. And I worked on the Los Siete De La Raza movement to support seven Latinos who had been arrested on framed-up murder charges. There was a Bay Area-wide mass movement supporting Los Siete, the Panthers were part of it and the seven were eventually found not guilty.

For me, the RU was just a natural evolution, more than a conscious ideological choice. Many of the Madison group of about 40 cadre in MJRL joined the RU. We left Madison to go to Milwaukee and went into various factories to organize.

At that time you could get an industrial job in a day. We all followed a relatively similar game plan: build a militant rank-and-file caucus based around a newsletter that primarily rooted itself in shop-floor issues. We sought to democratize the union, create transparency, build militancy and bring the rank and file into the leadership of the union. At the same time, we utilized the newsletters to bring in political struggles taking place like the murder of a Black youth by Milwaukee cops, notorious for their racism.

I should mention that while I was a member of the RU, the organization didn't always play a determinative role in what we ended up doing. We were sort of a unit that grew from our leadership in SDS and stayed together as we moved to Milwaukee to get jobs. Over time, as our organizing work in factories developed, some in RU leadership critiqued our practice as right-wing trade unionists, not revolutionary.

I used to reply: "You come and work in this plant by your-

Wildcat strike, 1980.

self with 7,000 people. You think you're going to unfurl a red flag at the punch out line on May Day? We worked hard to build for May Day marches in Milwaukee, but based those rallies on concrete political, social, and economic issues that impacted Blacks, women and all working people." We had our own thing and our own people, and our own brand of what we were doing and I remain proud of it to this day.

DF: *What was the situation when you hired in?*

JM: I was lucky to score the best industrial job in the city. I went to work at the American Motors Corporation (AMC) Richards Street plant on the auto assembly line. The plant had a very long, militant tradition. I started in 1972. Three years earlier, there had been a dozen wildcats within one week in the two AMC plants, the ones in Milwaukee and Kenosha.

We had one steward for every 35 employees; a steward could get off the line in a half hour by giving notice. And if they didn't get off the line within a half hour, the person on the line who requested the steward walked off the job and sat down in the lunchroom, waiting for the steward. All overtime was voluntary; we had a right to strike over all grievances.

It was the International UAW, under Walter Reuther, who bargained away all three of the planks that had historically made the UAW strong and militant. In my book, I talk about how Reuther replaced 'blue button stewards' with the committeeperson system in the Big Three (GM, Chrysler and Ford). He gave up voluntary overtime and vehemently opposed strikes as disrupting production.

Despite attempts, the International was never able to break the back of our union's independence at the two AMC plants. In '69, during the wildcats, an article in the New York Times called on Reuther to get the AMC UAW locals under control because it was so disruptive to production, but he was never able to do so.

When I first started at the Milwaukee plant there were no other political people there, but there were hundreds of young people. Young white kids were sort of the Woodstock generation, they were rebellious and anti-system. The Vietnam vets of color felt betrayed by being in Vietnam. They did not plan to be subjugated by a new boss.

I went over to visit one of the first guys I met, a Black vet who had Marx's *Capital* on his bookshelf. I asked him "How'd you get into Marx"? He said when he got back from 'Nam, there were some brothers on the base in a study group and they read Marx, but it was hard to understand. I said "Yeah, it is hard to read, but it sure is the truth, isn't it?" And his response was "Yeah, it is."

The Fightback Caucus

DF: *How did the caucus get formed?*

JM: When the company announced that they were going to schedule Saturday overtime, we checked out the contract that none of the young people had read. I found a provision saying overtime was voluntary. So, we photocopied pages of the contract, and handed them out. The next day, when the company went around and asked for people to work overtime, there was widespread refusal among the young workers: Working five days a week is enough slavery, we're tied to this line and we're not going to be there on our weekends.

They couldn't get a workforce. Soon after that, management tried to speed up the assembly line. By this time, we had formed a rank-and-file caucus. We knew we couldn't fight the speed up one person here, one person there; we'd have to be at the gates with the leaflets to stop the speed up by fighting it together.

Half of our original Fightback Caucus, UAW Local 75 were women — Black women, mainly church women. The whole 13 years I worked in auto there were many active women, largely women of color. The church had given them a sense of organization, a sense of looking out for each other.

At our first caucus meeting Kitty, a young Black woman put up her hand, "I'm the treasurer at my church. I'd like to be the treasurer of the caucus." Then a Puerto Rican guy who I had seen wearing a Young Lords button on his shop coat volunteered to be the secretary and take notes. A Black Vietnam vet volunteered for another position. I became the *de facto* chair. So, all of a sudden, after our first meeting, we had an organized caucus of about 10 young workers.

We put out a leaflet calling for a fight against the speedup. We read the contract, which said that we only had to work at a normal pace. So, when management created new work assignments that dictated to the second what you had to do, there was a mass rebellion.

People kept working at a normal pace. The older workers taught us that the way you fight a line speed up is to "ride the line." You stay in the car until you finish your whole job. That means by the time you finish your operation you're two or three stations out of your work area. You've pushed everybody else down the line. There were repairs in aisles, repairs on the roof. We had completely disrupted their plans. That's when I began to hear rumors about me being circulated by management and realized that I was personally being target-

ted. Years later I got my FBI file through a FOIA request and found out AMC had approached the FBI about me. The FBI came back and said, he's in the Revolutionary Union. They're putting out newsletters in factories all over Milwaukee, and their newsletters all look alike. They're causing sit downs and work stoppages.

Now I have files with those entire memoranda exchanged between AMC and the FBI, and that led to my firing a couple weeks later.*

"Throw the Bum Out" action demanding Nixon resign.

DF: *Were you coordinating with RU members across the city?*

JM: Yes, we coordinated our activities, but we were green so there was a lot of finding our way. Unfortunately, there were no veterans to teach us how you go into the working class and organize these struggles. We had to figure it out on our own. None of us were older than 22, 23 years old. We leaned on each other a lot. When I look back at the newsletters that we put out at probably six or eight factories, the FBI was right, they all looked the same. They were all printed on the same mimeo machine.

We had our own newspaper, *The Milwaukee Worker*. Despite the level of militancy and activity in fighting forced overtime and speedup, I wanted to broaden the context in which those struggles were taking place. That was the importance of the RU newspaper, which wrote about organizing going on in Detroit auto plants; it talked about the police murder of a young Black person, Jerry Brookshire, or the arrest of a local young Latino Ray Mendoza on murder charges. I'd stand out in front of the factory gates and sell *The Milwaukee Worker* and I'd sell them in the shop as well.

About four months after I was hired, I was standing in line to punch out with a stack of *Workers* under my arm. One of the conservative Korean War vets challenged me. The Korean War vets, all white, worked in the cushion room, where they had easy off-line jobs. The guy called me a communist and said if I didn't cut out selling that newspaper, I was going to end up like Roy Webb.

I didn't know what he meant, but Roy Webb had been a steward and a member of the old Communist Party. He had circulated a petition opposing the Korean War, and these conservative workers had thrown him down the stairs and broken his neck.

Then a Black guy named Jimmy Graham, over six feet tall and in hella good shape, stepped between me and the redbaiter. He said, "I just came back from Nam. I didn't go over there to dodge bullets, fight some fucking war that I don't know what it's about to come back and have you tell my man over there that he can't speak out and say what he wants to say. Before you think you're going to do anything to him, you're going to do something to me."

We remain friends to this day even though I live in California and he is in Milwaukee.

After the FBI became involved, the company hired three private detective agencies to check out all the new hires and found out that I had falsified my application. I was discharged, but at the union meeting members wanted to vote in favor of scheduling a strike vote to win my job back — remember, we had the right to strike over unsettled grievances. But when the vote was taken, the president ruled the vote was against scheduling a strike vote. We won the vote! They won the count!

I appealed to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), which found I had been fired for protected union activity. Even though I had falsified my application, I had been in truth fired for fighting over wages, hours and working conditions — protected activity under the National Labor Relations Act.

Winning Reinstatement

At first I wasn't going to bother going to the Board. After all, they are the government and I assumed would never take up the case. What I learned from that experience is that you have to utilize every avenue to strengthen your struggle. You may be surprised at what you can win.

I have an FBI memo in which AMC states they would never bring me back, no matter what the NLRB said. Then a federal judge ordered me rehired; still AMC wouldn't budge. Finally the case went to the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals in Illinois. When that court ordered that I be rehired I eventually was reinstated.

During those two and a half years I worked in a couple of different plants, union and non-union. I got fired at the Crucible Steel foundry before the end of my probationary period when the FBI told the superintendent to fire me.

Now that I have my FBI file, I know the FBI had been alerted about my employment at Crucible by the Milwaukee Red Squad (the police). But then I got a job at a steel fabrication plant where I was able to build a strong caucus, and we led the first strike lasting over eight weeks in over a decade and a half.

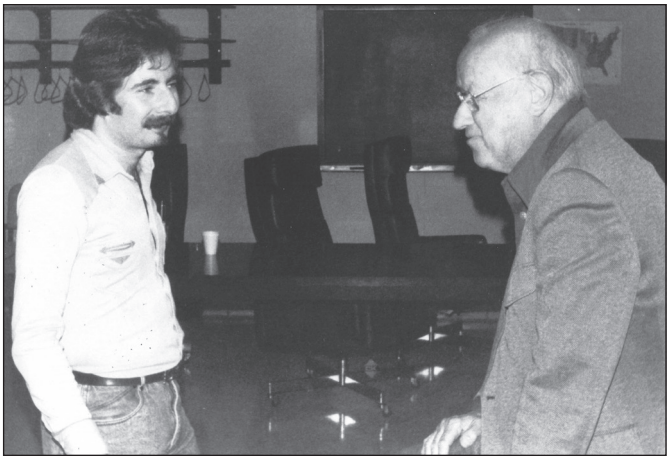
In January 1976 AMC was forced to reinstate me. Soon after I got back, the caucus insisted that I run for a union position. I ended up running for head steward even though I didn't think that I was ready.

At Local 75, we had a very democratic system of voting that enabled everyone to vote. The ballot box went from person to person down the assembly line so everyone votes. This actually favors the rank-and-file candidates. But this time, they placed the ballot box in the guard shack over the weekend.

On Monday, we came out with a leaflet pointing out that never happened before in the history of the union. Why would union leadership allow the company to watch the union ballot box — it's clearly an attempt to keep Melrod from becoming head steward. We held a march to the union office, demanding that the election be re-held, which it was. But I didn't win.

Then AMC announced that they were cutting a thousand jobs from the Milwaukee plant with 350 going to Kenosha. We put out a flyer demanding the local call a strike vote to stop the runaway of the thousand jobs. We organized a picket line in front of the AMC employment office. Because we didn't allow a truck with parts through the line, I got fired again, along with three other caucus members, for causing what they

*To see a database of those FBI memoranda go to https://www.jonathan-melrod.com/fbi



Meeting with Victor Reuther at UAW Local 72's fiftieth anniversary. By opposing contract concessions, the UAW International barred Reuther from the UAW Convention floor.

claimed was a work stoppage.

However, the NLRB ordered them to remove the discipline and it turned into a two-week suspension. But the transfer went through that summer, and I was one of the 350 transferred to Kenosha, an hour's drive from Milwaukee. When we got to the Kenosha plant, we discovered the Kenosha workers considered us as competition stealing their jobs, causing their low seniority folks to be laid off.

Local 72 workers couldn't prevent us from transferring, but they didn't welcome us in any way. A couple of militant activists had just begun to form a caucus — Fighting Times — which took a courageous stand and put out a flyer welcoming us, but it was a slow, daunting process to build a unified local.

Knowing that I had to eliminate the division based on geography, I moved to Racine, just a few minutes from the plant. I felt if I was going to organize in Kenosha, I had to live nearby.

I immediately started hanging out with the Kenosha workers at the bar, shooting dice, drinking, talking the way you talk after work and soon I was accepted as a UAW Local 72 guy. Most of the Milwaukee people continued living in Milwaukee and basically segregated themselves.

Union Positions

The steward system, where representatives are elected annually and represent 35 workers, creates the possibility for many shop floor militants to be elected. With the steward system, if you don't do your job within the year, you likely got voted out. The steward system created a much more active and a much more militant union.

For example, when we were fighting speedup, one of the vets in the caucus suggested we make up t-shirts with a stop sign on the front that said "Fight Speedup."

We figured out how to silk screen t-shirts at my house. We brought the first bag of 20 into the plant and sold some in the lunchroom. Right away, people bought them all. We said, we're onto something and silk screened another 50. When they were all bought in the next morning management put out the word that anybody who wore a t-shirt the next day would be discharged. The head steward of my department (trim) and the local's Vice President both announced they were going to come to work the next day wearing t-shirts.

When I first got hired in, I thought the union officials would all be bureaucrats and oppose anything militant we did. I quickly learned that even at the membership vote to fight for my job there were stewards, a few head stewards and the Vice President, who voted to schedule a meeting for a strike vote to win my job back. I'm not saying that exists in every union, because I know it doesn't, particularly in the Detroit auto plants where people had a much tougher fight with the union than we did at American Motors.

The President of Local 75 in Milwaukee was in bed with the International UAW. The International rep came to the meeting where we were discussing what to do about my being fired. He advised people not to vote to strike because they shouldn't risk their jobs for one communist who hadn't worked in the plant longer than nine months. So clearly there was a cabal between the International and some of the union officers in Local 75, but there were also decent militant trade unionists. I learned it was important not to lump them in as a single group.

An important lesson that Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) taught us is that sometimes you make tactical alliances within the union. It doesn't mean that that'll be an alliance that will apply to everything you ever do, but an alliance at a certain time or over a certain issue can move the union forward to create a greater democracy and more militancy.

DF: *How did rank-and-file activism develop in the Kenosha local?*

JM: When people from our caucus were elected to stewards' positions in the Kenosha plant, we supported a "reform" candidate for president. He was pressured to put us on the local's standing committees, which were powerful positions.

We used the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC), where we had a caucus member, to launch the first Martin Luther King commemoration of any UAW local. We won a paid day off to honor Dr. King and the civil rights movement two years before it was won for the rest of the UAW in the national contract.

So we were able to utilize the union structure to our advantage. I was put on the education committee and proposed a seven-week union school for active members and stewards. We held one class each week to teach people how to write grievances, how to bargain, but we also taught the history of the local.

I went through the local's history of how socialists, communists and other radicals formed the original organizing committee at the Nash plant, which became American Motors. Actually, our local was the oldest in the UAW.

Two hundred and thirty members, both on first and second shift, signed up to attend the union school. It was a tremendous success. We did our organizing within the union structure while we maintained our caucus and put out our shop newsletter.

Even though our caucus members were a minority within the union committee structure, we were able to unleash the power of those committees. The women's committee showed "With Babies and Banners," the history of women during the Flint sitdown strike, to celebrate International Women's Day.

We were able to have the FEPC rent a bus to bring local members to walk with other trade unionists for a Martin Luther King march to demand a national holiday. There were a couple thousand, mostly Black, workers from unions in Milwaukee. In those days Black workers had union jobs.

We marched through the Black neighborhood connecting unions with the community.

This in turn broadened the FEPC's work. The FEPC invited a speaker to our first MLK event. He led a committee in Milwaukee against police murders and spoke about the viciousness of the police tactical squad. In those days, the police drove through the Black community with shotguns out the window just to scare people. They were renowned for the level of racism and unbridled brutality.

We'd always look for political issues that could deepen workers' understanding of the class relations in society. As I saw it our goal was to create a class-conscious workers' movement, not just a trade union movement.

We really got our opportunity to do that when Renault, the French automaker, bought half of American Motors. We were then clearly part of an international working class.

Speaking on the floor of the 1983 UAW Convention in support of One Member, One Vote.

Barriers of Racism

DF: *Did your caucus link up with other caucuses around racial issues within or outside the plant?*

JM: Yes. The Fighting Times caucus also went to march against the Klan in Tupelo, Mississippi. Our caucus leafleted the whole plant of some 5000, recruiting people to go with us and educating the plant about the KKK's racist role terrorizing Black people in Mississippi.

Around 1000 marched. After we returned, I talked to one of the most militant chief stewards in the paint department, a white guy whose family was from the south. He told me, "You don't understand that the Klan are a bunch of good old boys kind of like the Dukes of Hazard."

I said, "That's just not true. We went down there because they're prohibiting Black people from voting. They're stealing Black farms. They're not hiring Blacks. Their police are more brutal toward Blacks."

Now, he and I collaborated on union affairs. When there would be a walkout in his department, my department supported the walkout. But he and I would argue constantly about racism.

I'd say, "How can you be such a militant trade unionist, willing to put your job on the line for everyone in your department, including Blacks, yet have these ideas in your head?" Much as I made it a struggle to change what was in his head, I never succeeded.

With a production cutback, he lost his job in the paint department and got bumped into the machining department. Because of the machining oil, around a dozen people including him got terminal cancer. When he was buried, he had a UAW chief steward button on one side of his lapel and Klan paraphernalia on the other. He went to his grave thinking you could be both a Klan member and a good union member.

DF: *This story is why it's important to understand that when we're all in the plant together, the majority will defend women and Blacks, but when we leave the plant, we go to different neighborhoods that are still largely segregated. We live different lives; our children go to different schools and have different friends. Most white workers don't feel comfortable entering majority Black spaces. That's why socialists can't just be for uniting the class at the workplace.*

JM: I think you're a hundred percent right. Let's just even look at the first Local 72 Martin Luther King event, which was attended by 98% Blacks. The last event before I left in '84 had a thousand people; it had become an event for Blacks in that entire area of Wisconsin. But again, there were still a limited number of whites.

We tried to knock those barriers down with a lot of social events. The caucus held social events that were completely integrated. We would try and bring the cultures together particularly through food and music. Even in the trim department, we put on departmental-wide parties that crossed those racially divisive lines.

One time we had a trim department party that 400 attended at union headquarters. It was racially proportional to the workforce, because union headquarters was neutral territory. But then something terrible happened. A Black woman, whom I was friendly with and was in the caucus, came over and sat on my lap. It was just a social gesture but the young white woman I was going with came out of the bathroom and immediately came over to me and said, "What's that *** doing sitting on your lap?"

That was, as they say, a deal breaker in terms of my relationship. But another time I came into work and there was a cluster of young white guys who called me over. The chief steward spread gossip that he had seen a young white woman kissing a Black worker in the parking lot. (Both worked in trim and were active in our caucus.) I had been elected Department Chair, which meant I could call and set the agenda for departmental union meetings. So we put out the word that we were going to confront the chief steward at this meeting.

About 80 came, about half were Blacks. Most had never gone to departmental meeting before but they unloaded about racism in the union and racism in the company. It became a session where they felt they could speak out. Under the circumstances, the chief steward was forced to apologize. He probably wasn't sincere, but the point is that you had to

battle over racism while recognizing it's deeply ingrained.

Beyond Kenosha

DF: *How did international contact change union members?*

JM: In 1982 when UAW Local 72 was invited to attend the first world conference of Renault workers, the caucus raised money in front of the plant holding out coffee cans. The caucus message was that we can't limit ourselves to just thinking about our own situation in Kenosha, now we were part of 100,000 Renault autoworkers.

We sent two caucus members, including me, to the conference as part of 57 delegates from 13 countries around the world. The International UAW didn't want to have anything to do with the conference because French unions are defined by their politics and the UAW was anti-communist. (Of the two main French trade union federations, the CGT was dominated by the politics of the French Communist Party and the CFDT by the social democracy. Both unions had representation in the French plants.)

At UAW conventions we worked with Locals Opposed to Concessions, with people like Bill Parker and Pete Kelly. We tried to inspire locals that overtime should be voluntary, that there should be a right to strike. We advocated the steward system, where stewards represent the frontline militants.

We took that same message to the Renault world conference of auto workers, which voted to support the UAW at American Motors/Renault in keeping the superior contract we had won.

It became part of people's thinking that we needed to look further afield than our Kenosha local, to see who our friends and allies were.

As part of working to transform the department union, I mentored a group of young Blacks and young women on how to run for steward and how to stand up to management. After that election, half of the stewards elected were women and Blacks.

It completely changed the complexion of the union. Now at our stewards' meetings, which we could call right in the department, we were talking about how there is a line for the women's bathroom on breaks. There weren't enough toilets and there weren't enough sanitary napkins — issues that women had never brought up became union issues.

To me, that was one of the biggest accomplishments I felt that I made. In the trim department the stewards were a third Black and a third women. The steward body was representative of the workforce on the trim line We became a much stronger unit because of it.

The Crisis

In 1984, the gas crisis ended and people stopped buying small cars. But those were the only models we were making. AMC/Renault sales took a dive and Renault came back for some serious concessions.

I had always taken a position against any concessions, saying that concessions don't get us a single job. It's the market that determines how many cars are being sold. That's the lesson I learned from Pete Kelly and Al Gardner, UAW veterans in Detroit who first formed Locals Opposed to Concessions. Chrysler workers took concessions and then the workforce was cut in half. Concessions don't do us any good.

Management demanded that we agree to 13 pre-conditions (concessions) or they were going to shut the plant. The local president, respected by everyone as having led countless sit downs and wildcats going back years, declared the pre-conditions constituted "unilateral surrender" — not within his repertoire.

As a tactical move four local officers, including the president, recording secretary, me and John Drew, another caucus member, drove to the NLRB office to make a formal complaint. Meanwhile the company sent notices to members' homes declaring it would begin phasing out operations within 60 days, with other operations, including the engine division, to follow as soon as possible.

Within two days, the NLRB issued a ruling that the company violated the National Labor Relations Act by bargaining in bad faith. That, plus all the public pressure we could bring, broke the stalemate and we bargained without pre-conditions hanging over us. At the next union meeting, when we asked members if the local was willing to accept concessions, out of the thousand who were there, almost everybody voted no. They voted that the bargaining committee could enter into negotiations, but only to guarantee jobs for the Kenosha plant or to bring a new Renault model to the plant.

I had always tried to understand the auto industry by reading the *Wall Street Journal* and *Automotive News*. I knew that in this case, Renault had unused capacity in France and that our labor costs were in fact higher.

That meant we were in a weak position. Given that the radicals on the board held the balance of power, what could we recommend to the membership? What could we possibly gain if we bargained to accept those concessions?

That July 12, UAW Local 72 members ratified a new agreement, sacrificing long-cherished provisions in exchange for a bit of job security, They knew that a No vote, in this case would shut the plant with work being moved to France to utilize unused capacity. In the final analysis, as our president described it, "We decided a job with a Big Three contract is better than no job at all."

Our steward structure was replaced with committeepersons who represented 250 workers; we took a pay cut, softened by increases in pensions and insurance benefits. This was no minor provision, given that we had 18,000 retirees. The contract kept the engine plant open for more than a decade and when Chrysler bought the plant and shut the assembly plant down, workers had the right to transfer to other Chrysler plants.

DF: *Was the only way you could have won by demanding nationalization, which is what Renault workers had in France? That's why the UAW is wrong to embrace the electric car as saving the auto industry. If we are really serious about climate change, then what could the current work force do to quickly reduce the environmental catastrophe? Society can't afford individual vehicle production; we have to move to developing free, quality mass transit system at the local, regional and national level. That's creating a new market.*

JM: That's right. Under the capitalist system, we're always at the disadvantage because we don't control the means of production and we don't control the market. That's the ultimate contradiction of capitalism. It's not in business to guarantee employment. ■

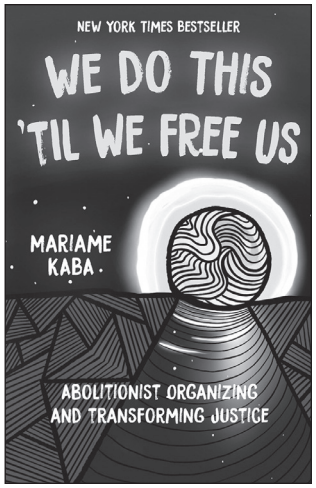
To preorder Fighting Times *or to read excerpts before the book is released contact: www.jonathanmelrod.com.*

REVIEW

Prison Abolitionism, A Primer

By Efrén Paredes, Jr.

We Do This 'Til We Free Us
Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice
By Mariame Kaba
Haymarket Books, 2021, 240 pages, hardback, paperback and e-book.



AT A TIME when conversations about the carceral state and caging of human lives have reached fever pitch, Mariame Kaba offers us a thought-provoking guide to consider a constellation of forward-thinking ideas in *We Do This 'Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*. It is edited by Tamara K. Nopper and includes a foreward by Naomi Murakawa.

The book is the first of the three-part Abolitionist Papers Series. The other titles include *Change Everything: Racial Capitalism and the Case for Abolition* by Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and *Abolition. Feminism. Now.* by Angela Y. Davis, Gina Dent, Beth Richie and Erica Meiners. Both are edited by Naomi Murakawa.

Kaba, a New York-based prolific abolitionist organizer, thinker and scholar, is founder of Project NIA, an abolitionist organization with a vision to end youth incarceration. She writes "Prison Culture: How the PIC Structures Our World," a widely read blog she has published since 2010, and is active in movements for racial, gender and transformative justice.

We Do This 'Til We Free Us is a compilation of interviews, speeches, and personal and collaborative writing that discuss a range of important issues related to abolition logic. The book is divided into seven parts, each beautifully written in language relatable to activists, community organizers, and anyone interested in making their communities safe.

Prison-Industrial Complex

In her opening chapter Kaba explains that prison industrial complex (PIC) abolition "is a political vision, a structural analysis of oppression, and a practical organizing strategy. ... It is a vision of restructured society in a world where we have everything we need: food, shelter, education, health, art, beauty, clean water, and more things that are foundational to our personal and community safety."

She adds, "[it's] a positive project that focuses, in part, on building a society where it is possible to address harm without relying on structural reforms of oppression or the violent systems that increase it." (2)

Illogical Prison Deterrence

Critical Resistance describes the prison-industrial complex as "the overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social and political problems."[1]

The PIC has resulted in the incarceration of over 2.3 million people in prisons and jails across the nation. There are also approximately 3.6 million people on probation supervision, and another 870,000 on parole. This totals nearly 7 million people entangled in the criminal legal system. The number does not include the number of people in immigration detention.[2]

The United States is by far the largest incarcerator than any nation in the world, exceeding even countries like China and Russia. If incarceration were an effective remedy to crime, by the sheer number of imprisoned citizens this should be the safest country on the planet.

The volume of crime and harm committed in this country, however, doesn't reflect that presumption. We observe more crime and harm being committed in the United States than in other countries.

We Do This 'Til We Free Us partially attributes the unprecedented level of incarceration in the country to a society that "celebrates criminalization, cops, and prisons" (21) which has taught us to fear one another and embrace social control. Our society has been "locked into a false sense of inevitability" (25) which mistakes emotional satisfaction with justice.

Kaba remarks, "A system that never addresses the why behind a harm never actually contains the harm itself. Cages confine people, not the conditions that facilitated their harms or the mentalities that perpetuate violence." (24) Merely locking people away in cages doesn't prevent, reduce or transform harm.

When sent to prison people are dehumanized and subjected to myriad forms of mental, emotional and physical abuse and trauma by other incarcerated people as well as by those who work inside prisons. These are facts which receive little public attention.

Exploring Solutions

During my lived experience as an incarcerated person in Michigan during the past 33 years, I have never met an incarcerated person whom prison alone ever changed for the better. People in prison change because they choose to change, not because they are forced to do so. The impulse to be a better person is antithetical to the pathological nature of prison culture.

If not for people being intentional about wanting to change on their own, educate themselves and participate in rehabilitative programming, many incarcerated people would leave prison far worse off than when they entered the system.

No one in prison guilty of committing a crime was deterred by the threat of incarceration. There are death penalty states that have higher incidents of violence than non-death penalty states. With few rare exceptions, people don't commit crimes with the expectation of going to prison.

Further evidence that prison doesn't deter crime is also clear when examining the recidivism rates of people released from prisons. Nationally "68% of people released from state prisons are arrested within three years, 79% within six years and 83% within nine years."[3]

Even experiencing the horrors of American prisons still served little deterrence to many not to return. When a system has a dismal failure rate that high, it only makes sense that other alternatives need to be explored.

Kaba believes that "[o]ur failure to build a culture of care that nurtures human growth and potential, rather than incubating desperation, ensures that more 'criminals' will be created and subsequently punished, to the great benefit of those who profit from industries associated with incarceration." (21)

Efrén Paredes, Jr. is an incarcerated journalist and social justice advocate who works at the intersection of decarceration, racial justice, and conflict resolution. You can read more of his writings or listen to his TV news/radio/podcast interviews by visiting http://fb.com/Free.Efren.

We Do This 'Til We Free Us urges us to create as many alternative experiments as possible to prisons, policing and surveillance to solve problems in our communities and make them safer. Kaba believes that many people don't explore alternatives because we have limited our imagination to believing that the current apparatuses of government social control are the answer.

She writes, "If my focus is on ending harm, then I can't be pro deathmaking and harmful institutions. I'm actually trying to eradicate harm, not reproduce it, not reinforce it, not maintain it." (155) This means rejecting all forms of state violence, which include prisons and policing.

While it's true that many experiments may fail, there are organizations and groups across the country that have created innovatie models which are operating successfully and making communities safer. *We Do This 'Til We Free Us* peppers the reader throughout the book with some of those successful experiments.

By exploring alternative solutions to policing and prisons we are able to experiment with the use of transformative justice. Kaba cautions, however, that transformative justice isn't merely a process of delivering an outcome we like.

Transformative justice "is a community process developed by anti-violence activists of color, in particular, who wanted to create responses to violence that do what criminal punishment systems fail to do: build support and more safety for the person harmed, figure out how the broader context was set up for this harm to happen, and how that context can be changed so that this harm is less likely to happen again." (59)

The Invest/Divest Model

One of the most misunderstandings of prison abolition is that people will not be held accountable for committing crimes. The truth is that prison abolition seeks to create humane and moral alternatives to prison balancing accountability, public safety, and repairing the harm caused.

It also strives to create a society that builds social institutions and conceptual frameworks which make our reliance on prison unnecessary. Prison abolition is as much a vision about building alternatives to police and prisons as it is replacing them with something better.

Most crime is the product of desperation in struggling communities. According to Kaba, "Understanding that harm originates from situations dominated by stress, scarcity, and oppression, one way to prevent violence is to make sure that people have the support to get the things they need." (59)

We Do This 'Til We Free Us suggests another way to reduce harm caused by police in our communities, utilizing the invest/divest framework. The concept reallocates money from systems that harm marginalized communities, and invests them in supportive community-based programs.

Not only can this reduce police shootings and other forms of police violence in poor and underserved communities, it can replace police with unarmed people who can respond to incidents by providing life-saving social services.

Mariama Kaba

People in mental health crisis don't need armed police to threaten or harm them; they need trained mental health workers to help them and others de-escalate conflict. People struggling financially also don't need to be incarcerated and separated from those who depend on them for their care and survival. They need better jobs in addition to more community resources and opportunities.

If we are able to redirect billions of dollars of funding from militarized police forces to fund affordable housing, health care, education and good paying jobs, we would vastly reduce crime. We don't see high crime rates in affluent communities where people's needs are being met. We also rarely see them being occupied by a militarized police presence.

Society has generally focused its gaze on punishment rather than the causes of the crime problem, because it requires addressing a host of inequities for the poor and communities of color — two demographics that the power structure refuses to acknowledge, because it is necessary for the prison industrial complex to thrive.

Aggressive policing and caging members of communities is not solely a product of government's failure to address the social ills that plague poor, low-wealth and underserved communities. It is also part of a racist legacy of oppressing Black and other people of color, with its roots dating to the days of slavery in this country which is discussed in *We Do This 'Til We Free Us*.

Ultimately our focus must become trained on prevention and dealing with the causes of crime rather than its symptoms. If not, the PIC will continue being fed members of overwhelmingly poor and low-wealth communities, and disproportionately black and brown bodies, through hyperincarceration.[4]

Centering Women in the Conversation

An important aspect of this book is its emphasis on centralizing the experiences of women of color with the criminal legal system.

The book underscores the problem of women, trans and gender-nonconforming people who have survived sexual and other forms of interpersonal violence, being punished for defending themselves. These are important points frequently glossed over or ignored in critiques of the criminal legal system.

Kaba's perspectives on gendered and sexual violence have been shaped by her own experience as a survivor of violence, doing anti-sexual assault work on her college campus during the late 1980s and early 1990s, and supporting and organizing with Black women and girls much of her adult life. Her views are also richly shaped by feminist theory which she illuminates throughout her book.

We Do This 'Til We Free Us also discusses the need to reject the dehumanizing practice of victims and survivors of sexual crime being "flattened in the service of perfect-victim narratives" (37) or being cardboard cutouts people can project their distorted narratives onto.

Too often the media devalue women and trans people of color and their lives. Once objectified, an environment is created wherein "innately inferior bodies can be debased, punished, and killed without consequence." (32) It's the primer for a litany of subsequent abuses.

Kaba writes about the #MeToo and #SayHerName movements as well. She discusses the police killing of Breonna Taylor, court cases involving high-profile sex offenders, and how she views the approach to these subjects through an abolitionist lens. She realizes the importance of this conversation because of the pleas for extreme punishment in these instances, reminding us that justice isn't synonymous with our feelings.

As a cisgender Mexican-American male, I appreciate Kaba educating us about the number of women, trans, and gender nonconforming people being subjected to sexual violence so that men and boys can do our part to help stop the harm caused by heteropatriarchy[5] and toxic masculinity. Her book is not only an important educational tool but also a bold call to action.

Rather than seek vengeance to solve gendered and sexual violence, Kaba proposes solutions that help victims truly heal

and repair the perpetrators of violence to prevent them from committing future harm. Solutions also include valuing the lives of every member of our community, protecting them, and creating a culture of care.

Toward Meaningful Change

We Do This 'Til We Free Us discusses the wisdom imparted to the author by her father Moussa Kaba, who said "You have a responsibility to live in this world. Your responsibility is not just to yourself. You are connected to everything." Her father also told her, "Everything that is worthwhile is done with other people." (177, 178) She says these "became the soundtrack" in her head and a lodestar that has guided her life's work.

Kaba shares that she has constantly employed the wisdom of her father by reminding those she teaches the importance of working together to engender change. Without working collectively it's impossible to create solutions to problems that affect us all.

No single individual knows all the answers to the myriad challenges we face. Without working together we deny ourselves the vast resources and collective reservoir of wisdom we have to share with one another, which is absent when people are separated into silos.

We Do This 'Til We Free Us calls on us to engage in what Tamara T. Butler calls faithful witnessing, "an effort to dismantle oppression ... [and] a practice of seeing, hearing, and working alongside in ways that are resistant and attentive to colonial violence."[5]

Readers will appreciate Kaba's authenticity and straightforwardness. She uses her fierce and illuminating truth-telling to deliver unflinchingly honest words to anyone striving to create a more safe and peaceful world.

This book is as much a brilliant critique of policing, prison, and surveillance as it is a guide that anyone interested in abolition logic should read. There is much to learn and teach found between the covers of this timely and trailblazing book. ■

Notes

1. Rafi Reznik, "Retributive Abolitionism," 24 *Berkeley J. Crim. L.* 123, 129 (2019).
2. Wayne S. Mckenzie, "The Carceral State as a Civil Rights Issue," 36 Crim. Just. 1, 1 (2022).
3. "5 out of 6 State Prisoners Arrested Within 9 Years of Their Release," Bureau of Just. Stat. (May 23, 2018), https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/press/18upr9yfup0514pr.cfm.
4. "Hyperincarceration" is a term coined by Loic Wacquant. I prefer the term over "mass incarceration" because Wacquant states it "captures more clearly the idea that increased imprisonment has been targeted at particular racialized groups ... and others marginalized into a liminal existence between prison and community, including people with mental health disorders and drug and alcohol addictions." (Loic Wacquant, "Race & Hyperincarceration in Revanchist America," 140 *Daedalus* 74, 78 (2010).
5. "Heteropatriarchy is generally defined as a system of power and control based on compulsory heterosexuality, patriarchy, and imposed gender-binary systems." (Blanche Bong Cook, "Biased and Broken Bodies of Proof," 85 UMKC L. Rev. 567, 572 (2017); see also Angela P. Harris, "Heteropatriarchy Kills: Challenging Gender Violence in a Prison Nation," 37 *Wash. U. J.L. & Pol'y* 13, 17 (2011).
6. Tamara T. Butler, "#Say[ing]HerName as Critical Demand: English Education in the Age of Erasure," 49 *Eng. Educ.* 153, 160 (2017).

The Black Political Convention — *continued from page 4*

The National Black Independent Political Party came too late in 1980. Jackson did not join it as he had become a player in the Democratic Party.

Yet it was significant that the NBIPP was formed. It represented the radical nationalist perspectives of the Black rights movement. That voice remains alive to this day.

D.L. Chandler wrote recently (go to blackamericaweb.com):

"The National Black Independent Political Party (NBIPP) was formed in November 1980 as a response to the growing concerns of the African American community and their place in the political ecosystem. To date, the NBIPP remains as perhaps the most prominent example of Blacks breaking with the major two-party system of Democrats and Republicans.

"Keeping true to its overall mission, the national charter expressed its concerns and aims in pointed fashion.

"'The National Black Independent Political Party aims to attain power to radically transform the present socio-economic order. That is, to achieve self-determination and social and political freedom for the masses of Black people. Therefore, our party will actively oppose racism, imperialism, sexual oppression, and capitalist exploitation,' the charter stated.

"The NBIPP disbanded after just six years with little in the way of explanation. Although several books have since been written about the rise and fall of the NBIPP, few outside documents point to the machinations behind the party's end."

As a supporter and promoter of NBIPP, I knew it was nearly impossible for it to run candidates. The Old Guard, including Jesse Jackson and the Black elected officials had decided that independent politics was not the way forward for their careers and the Black community.

The Black middle class grew in the post-civil rights revolution era. It became the base for these new empowered Democrats.

Nevertheless, the Black Agenda created in 1972 and the formation of NBIPP marked milestones for the Black left, including those of us active in the socialist movement.

It was my view that an independent Black party could lead to increased street actions and multiethnic unity, including the formation of an independent Labor party unifying Blacks, and the broader working-class population.

We thought that radical change was possible soon. NBIPP's collapse, in fact, was due to objective changes in the class struggle in the 1980s.

Backlash and White Supremacy

The right-wing white backlash was beginning everywhere. Some eight years after Gary, Ronald Reagan was elected president. He openly appealed to white racism.

One of his first actions was attacking Black rights (then falsely calling affirmative action programs as a form of "reverse racism") and the union movement. He and many Democrats also criticized busing programs to desegregate public schools.

Reagan broke the strike of air traffic controllers in 1981, and the AFL-CIO did nothing. This gave employers the green light to use scabs and go after private and public sector unions.

A flaw in our socialist analysis of the Gary event was that we never explicitly explained the ideology of white supremacy.

Socialists and militant nationalists attacked the root cause of national oppression and racism — the capitalist system. But the ideology of white supremacy was key to capital's divide-and-rule methods.

Whites are taught at an early age that people of color, especially Native Americans and descendants of slaves, were inferior. Racism is central to capitalist rule.

Key to Building Unity

Unity did happen in the 1960s at the height of the civil rights battle. But it was never as strong as needed.

Many on the left saw class "bread and butter" issues as the way to bring white and Black people together. But downplaying the national oppression of Blacks and others is why the ruling class has effectively divided the working class since even before the 1776 revolution.

White people including workers will and can be radicalized around issues of racism, as the anti-police violence movement in 2020 showed. But it must be done openly. Unconscious bias must be confronted.

The far right understands this better than liberals. They use "cultural" issues to convince many white people to protect their advantages as whites. It is not a surprise that these same elements want to ban books from schools that discuss Black history and racism.

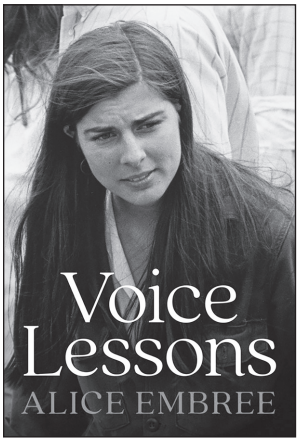
Despite their unfulfilled promise, the Gary convention — its debates and written program — and the later formation of NBIPP remain important events to study and learn from. ■

REVIEW

How Alice Became an Activist

By Adam Schragin

Voice Lessons
By Alice Embree
Tower Book Imprint/University of Texas Press, 2021, 300 pages, $29.95 hardback.



ALICE EMBREE'S MEMOIR, *Voice Lessons,* weaves stories of inner and societal change to tell the story of a radical awakening in small town Austin, Texas and paints a carefully considered portrait of a life in and of movements.

The book begins with a sketch of a childhood in a much smaller, much more segregated Austin: "Fewer than 160,000 lived in Austin in 1955, and the thundering roars of jet-propelled commercial flights were far in the distant future," she writes. Behavioral observation is a skill Embree learns early, and not infrequently what she sees is acquiescence to oppression.

In the '50s topics like menstruation and birth control were taboo, and she also watches as the adults in her immediate family trip around the subject of her mother's cancer as if the disease was a personal failing.

A telling incident occurs in 1961 when Embree is on a school trip as part of the "Red Jackets," the Austin High drill squad. The Red Jackets were integrated, and after being turned away from one restaurant, at the next "a waitress came over, addressing Glodine [a Black student] in the sweetest voice, 'I'm sorry, honey, we just can't serve you here.'"

Embree recalls, "I wasn't afraid to speak up, but I expected others to respond, to get up as well. No one else did. The adult sponsors didn't intervene. They didn't follow us outside…it was the silence that shocked me."

Breaking up the silence becomes a passion for Embree at The University of Texas, where she joins the Students for a Democratic Society, picketing and sitting in at segregated lunch counters. She develops her voice by working as a typist and editorial assistant (charmingly referred to as a "Shitteworker") at the countercultural 'zine *The Rag*, and then as a writer full stop.

Many memoirs by authors radicalized in the '60s use the decade as the central ballast for their stories, but for Embree that time serves as a springboard first into women's liberation and then more broadly into "intersectionality." The process is gradual, but it all leads back to one moment, a phone call that Embree says "changed my life."

She had moved to New York with her then-partner Jeff Shero* to launch another countercultural magazine called *The Rat.* While Shero is taking a break from *The Rat* to work on a book in Mississippi, he is notified that the publication has been taken over by women in his absence. Embree overhears him on a phone call describing his former colleagues as "bourgeois bitches."

In the '50s topics like menstruation and birth control were taboo, and she also watches as the adults in her immediate family trip around the subject of her mother's cancer as if the disease was a personal failing.

Suddenly, "the personal became wrenchingly political," as she puts it, and "an unfamiliar rage, rooted in a thousand dismissals, came to a rolling boil." Shero later told editor Abe Peck that Embree "exploded like I'd only seen Black people go hysterical in the South."

A realization that her partner's progressiveness only extended to where his comfort zone ended — and beyond that was a politics indistinguishable from mainstream male chauvinism and racism — spurred Embree to search for a truly inclusive movement, one founded by women and led by women.

Embree eventually leaves Shero and becomes fully ensconced in this new activism back in Texas, involving not just a feminist awakening at *The Rag* but the formation of the Austin Women's Center and a women's birth control hotline, which Embree says addressed "two issues women faced: access to birth control and access to safe, legal abortions."

Embree stepped into more leadership roles. She became an organizer of the Texas Media Conference and in her off time placed a hex on the LBJ library with her sisters in WITCH (the Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell).

Feminism was Embree's driving force in the '70s, and she formed or joined grassroots organizations like the Austin Women Workers, the Austin Women's Health Organization and more. And while in the '60s Embree's interest in democracy abroad led to her getting involved with the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), in the following decade her international advocacy expanded, especially after Chilean president Salvador Allende was deposed and killed in a military coup in 1973.

Embree and other Austin activists responded first by crashing CIA director William Colby's speech at the University of Texas, and later creating The Austin Committee for Human Rights in Chile, active from 1977 until democracy was restored in that country in 1989.

One potential pitfall for memoirists is the tendency to embellish potential or personality, which Embree avoids through honest appraisal. "We were like butterflies, with the gunk of the chrysalis still stuck to our wings, the legacy of '50s expectations shrouding our vision," she says, and later writes: "Our concept of revolutionary change was, to put it mildly, naive."

Embree is one of many activist memoirists to reach a similar conclusion, but what sets her apart is optimism. "The energy level of younger activists, new to the struggle, is both exhilarating and exhausting," she states toward the end of her book, and tells me via email that she was "elated" when leftist Gabriel Boric won the Chilean presidential election.

For her part, Embree expresses that "I hope I bring a sense of staying power, a reminder not that we did things better in the '60s and '70s but that movements in our younger years changed the trajectory of our lives, not for a decade or two but for a lifetime."

Activists lucky enough to have met Embree can attest to her knowledge and strong example, to say nothing of her staying power. For those who haven't had the pleasure, *Voice Lessons* is an excellent introduction. ■

Adam Schragin is a writer and editor living in Austin, Texas. His first book of essays Chalk Diary *will be out via Atmosphere Press in late 2022.*

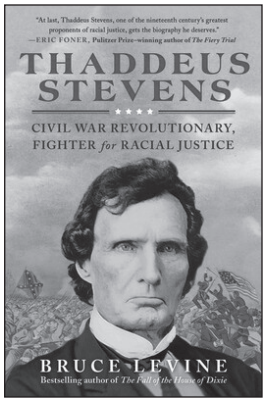
* now Jeff Nightbyrd

REVIEW

When Radicals Ran the U.S. Congress

By Mark Lause

Thaddeus Stevens:
Civil War Revolutionary, Fighter for Racial Justice
By Bruce Levine
New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021, 336 pages, $18.99 paperback.



IT IS HARD to explain the importance of a Thaddeus Stevens (1792-1868) or the Radical Republicans, or even institutions such as the U.S. House of Representatives, to those only familiar with the present Congress.

In his final days, Stevens could look back on a lifetime of achievements that arguably did more good for more of the people of his country than any other member of the U.S. House of Representatives in its entire history.

Almost twenty years before, he had walked into what looked like an exclusive gentlemen's club of well-connected lawyers. They generally deferred to a hard-drinking cabal of Bible-thumpers who actually held many — sometimes most — of the people of their districts in actual slavery, if not in contempt.

Stevens left a body that had actually broken the power of that cabal and generated new Constitutional Amendments eliminating slavery, guaranteeing equality before the law for those previously held in slavery or excluded by virtue of their race, and ensuring the right to vote of those people.

He did so through the organization and leadership of a Radical caucus within the Republican party. One of the most important figures ever to have sat in the Congress, Stevens had every reason to expect more from history.

Bruce Levine built *Thaddeus Stevens: Civil War Revolutionary, Fighter for Racial Justice* over the ideological ruins of generations that deliberately chose to get it wrong because it was politically useful to do so. Events left Radical Republicanism orphaned by history, even as unrepentant Lost Causers produced generations rationalizing slavery and its legacy.

From Reconstruction to Red Scare

With few exceptions, politicians, academics and the molders of popular culture yielded ground to new institutionalizations of white supremacy. A decade after the Supreme Court's *Plessy v Ferguson* (1896) ruling that sanctioned racial segregation, Thomas Dixon Jr.'s *The Clansman* (1905) shaped an entirely fictional narrative to justify its victory, a view that D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) brought to millions who would never look deeper.

The movie portrayed Stevens as Austin Stoneman, a crippled and embittered cynic about the unity of the country motivated only by exacting revenge on the poor defeated South. The first Southerner to occupy the White House since Reconstruction, Woodrow Wilson liked both the book and the movie.

Among academics, the son of a New Jersey businessman, Professor William A. Dunning of Columbia University, inspired a current of scholars who parlayed pseudo-constitutionalist "principles" into a lawyerly plea for deference to the Jim Crow South. The so-called Dunning school dominated the understanding of Reconstruction and of Stevens, in academe and beyond.

None of this went far enough for Otto Eisenschiml, an oil company executive dissatisfied with the "official" view of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. From the late 1930s onward, he wrote a series of books conjuring a conspiracy theory that blamed the president's murder on the Radicals.

Although groundless in terms of evidence, Eisenschiml wrote in a world where the U.S. authorities increasingly encouraged Americans looking to their left to see hidden agendas within hidden agendas. Like Russian *babushka* dolls, American "radicalism" contained socialism, which masked a Communist movement in which nested a network of Soviet agents.

Through the advent of the Cold War, Eisenschiml's writings outsold those of professional historians by leaps and bounds, providing themes for Broadway plays and movies.

There were dissenters: Black and radical writers such as W.E.B. Dubois had always made unanswerable criticisms of the fashionable condemnation of the Radicals. The 1950s and 1960s saw a new civil rights movement erode the old dogmatism, with a delayed but very real impact among historians.

Their concerns increasingly centered on the previously enslaved working class with whom Stevens had sympathized so deeply. An outsider, the German-born Hans Trefousse, a veteran of the war against Nazism produced a series of studies in an effort to rehabilitate the Radical Republicans, including *Thaddeus Stevens: Nineteenth-Century Egalitarian* (1997).

(Bruce Levine's article in *ATC* 214 on Thaddeus Stevens is posted at https://againstthecurrent.org/atc214/thaddeus-stevens-bourgeois-revolutionary/ —ed.)

Public Life of an Outsider

Levine's *Thaddeus Stevens* offered a surgically focused biography of the "public man," shed of any preoccupations about answering the legion of rumors arrayed against his personal life and motives. He offers useful insights into some of what shaped his subject's view of the world early in life.

Stevens overcame serious obstacles, including a clubfoot and his father's abandonment of the family, but he got through Dartmouth, went into law, and settled at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, where he also invested in an iron works.

Perhaps a lingering sense of being an outsider drew him to the Antimasonic party before joining the Whigs and moving to Lancaster in 1842, at the age of fifty.

Levine rightly places Stevens' strong and early views on slavery and race at the center of his public life. He publicly challenged Pennsylvania's disenfranchisement of free Blacks and quietly helped runaway slaves escape north. His election to Congress in 1848 launched a national career, inseparable from the rise of antislavery politics and the new Republican Party.

After the national victory of that party, Southern secessionism hoped to spark a panic in the loyal states and, particularly, intimidate political leaders. Through it all, few remained as level-headed and uncompromising as Stevens.

The importance of Stevens belies the general preoccupation of scholars of the period with generals and their command-

Mark Lause is a professor of history at the University of Cincinnati and author of 10 books on U.S. radical and working-class history.

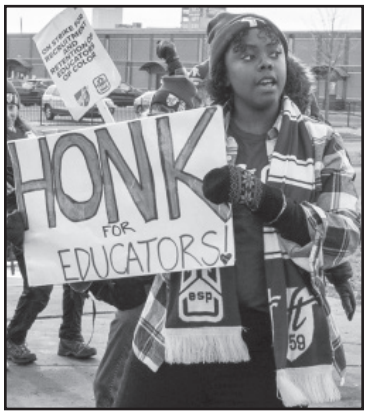
ers-in-chiefs. As the thrust of history has carried the United States from a republic of sorts towards an imperial government, focused on strong executive leadership ("the imperial presidency"), the structures that shape civil society, notably the media, have always preferred the executive, particularly when set in the drama of war.

Stevens became the principal voice of the Radical caucus of the Republicans in Congress because he had the clearest vision and sharpest approach to their goals. His insistence upon the immediate abolition of slavery made him a critic of the reluctance and caution in the course of his own party's leadership.

Levine's subject played a unique and decisive role in shaping what became the disruptively transformative character of the Civil War: *its astronomical cost.* As the chair of the Committee on Ways and Means, Stevens became a vital innovator in financing the war. In the Legal Tender Acts, the government took charge of the money supply and addressed the immediate demands of the war by printing Federal "greenbacks."

From his perspective, the war had to be won as quickly as possible without the usual obsessions about cost. At the same time, other Radicals controlled the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, which did what it could with limited resources to combat fraud by contractors and agents of the government. (Not surprisingly, later critics of the JCCW portray it as an obstacle to a military authority unfettered by pesky elected officials.)

Secondly, Stevens took the position that secession constituted a self-exclusion of the rebellious states from the rights guaranteed in the Constitution. With the later Wade-Davis Bill, this drew the clearest war-time line between the Radicals and the rest of the Congress.



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Reconstruction and its Shortcomings

War and emancipation radicalized some officeholders, and, in the aftermath of the Union victory, new figures entered the government, as insistent as Stevens that the readmission of the Southern states would require Radical change.

Northern voters agreed, and over three-quarters of the ballots cast in the Congressional elections of 1866 went to the Republicans and, disproportionately, for those who allied with the Radical caucus.

They initiated new Constitutional amendments ending slavery everywhere in the United States, and guaranteeing Black equality before the law and the right to vote. Enforcement of voting rights was, as it apparently remains to this day, a different matter.

Stevens and the Radicals understood that the fundamental issues turned on the question of "free labor," but so did their enemies.

At their heart, armed white neo-Confederate terrorist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan emerged in response to land occupations and strikes waged by the newly freed people of color.

Relying on its time-honored use of race, the reactionaries chose to make their open fight against the Radicals through the old political institutions, using the common language of "liberty" to establish what would actually be the opposite.

Reconstruction's disappointing results make little sense without acknowledging the deep flaws in the wartime Union cause and the limits of the institutionalized Radicalism among officeholders. Despite new Constitutional Amendments, the Federal will to enforce them proved wanting, and would do so for generations.

The resulting restoration to power of former Confederate elites represented the Federal betrayal not only of African-American aspirations, but also those of Southern whites who had hoped to escape a return to the political dictatorships of those elites. Nor can these retreats from Radicalism be separated from Washington's more direct and deliberate reaffirmation of the U.S. race war on Native peoples and the more quiet abandonment of civic equality for women.

Stevens and his some of his colleagues transcended the domesticated institutionalized Radicalism, serious in its own right but operating generally within institutional constraints. His personal ties with people of color, his role in the Underground Railroad, and his confidence in the ultimate wisdom of the voters set him apart, as it did the best of his colleagues.

In his own case, Stevens had an absolute and unflinching faith in what Frederick Douglass called a "Composite Nationality" based on "a perfect human equality."

Scholars tend to excuse the racism of the period based upon "the times," ignoring the fact that some Americans were not so bounded. Of those, none held a higher office in government than Thaddeus Stevens or his comrade Benjamin Franklin Wade, the president *pro tempore* of the U.S. Senate and the next in line to become president had Andrew Johnson been impeached.

Wade not only shared Stevens' insistence on the absolute equality of former slaves under the law, but had long advocated the equality of women and legislation requiring businesses to improve the lot of the working class.

The most consistent Radicals embraced the need to confiscate the land and property of the traitors for redistribution it to those who had made that land and property valuable, the former slaves.

These demands came directly from those toiling in those fields, but most Republicans became convinced that such a move would alienate white landowners.

Reconstruction Remains Unfinished.

The issues that inspired Radical Republicanism could scarcely be more relevant in the current political climate. The slaveholders couched the defense of their "peculiar institution" in the language of "liberty." They couched their alleged right to own slaves in the same terms that capitalists defend their ownership of anything today.

Conversely, officeholders and the media have become obsessed with repeating that "our democracy" is at stake, while entirely oblivious to the fundamentally undemocratic features of the power structure they protect. They wage a rhetorical war against the oligarchs in the service of oligarchies.

Officeholders of all stripes seem to reach their often self-imposed institutional limits with sanctimonious symbols and rituals. Douglass' vision of a "Composite Nationality" based on equality claims the trappings of victory, even as reactionaries whine about Martin Luther King to assert that racism ended with the election of Barack Obama.

Reconstruction is unfinished, and so is the writing of its history. New work is, or will, carry research into the field beyond those in public office, to recover and document the popular efforts to reconstruct a nation, aspirations that fueled the hopes of the Radical caucus of Thaddeus Stevens.

Now, as then, the impetus for change comes from that same source: the people, whose only real political power lies ultimately in their numbers and a commitment to concerted action. Only with this recognition will radicals once more gain practical strength barge into the halls of power and resume the noble work of Stevens and his caucus. ■

REVIEW

Dust Bowl Chronicler

By Cassandra Galentine

unknown no more:
Recovering Sanora Babb
Edited by Joanne Dearcopp and Christine Hill Smith
Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2021, $26.95 (paperback), $21.95 (ePub).

SANORA BABB's DUST Bowl novel *Whose Names are Unknown* ends with a failed farm worker strike, but also leaves readers with the sentiment that "One thing was left, as clear and perfect as a drop of rain — the desperate need to stand together as one man. They would rise and fall and, in their falling, rise again." (222)

This final scene captures the difficult material reality of fighting for better working conditions, while also gesturing toward a future of community care and collective class consciousness. A balance of reality and hope fuels much of Babb's work, which editors Joanne Dearcopp and Christine Hill Smith reinvigorate with their edited collection *unknown no more: Recovering Sanora Babb.*

Covering Babb's expansive career as a journalist, memoirist, novelist and poet, the essays included in *unknown no more* do justice to Babb's often overlooked and formerly "unknown," or "once known and then lost" life and extensive writing career (Dearcopp and Smith 2).

Babb (1907-2005) was born in Oklahoma Territory to Walter and Jennie Babb, who moved with Sanora and her sister Dorothy between their grandfather's broomcorn farm in Colorado and Oklahoma throughout their youth. Her formative years exploring the High Plains and witnessing the ramifications of drought inspired much of Babb's memoir *An Owl on Every Post* (1970) and shaped her multifaceted career.

In this collection, the editors have curated a series of essays that shed light on Babb's writing career, which spanned decades including the tumultuous years of the 1930s Dust Bowl. During that time she served as an assistant to Farm Security Administration camp manager, Tom Collins.

The economic turmoil of the 1930s is chronicled in *Whose Names are Unknown*, which follows the Dunne family as they migrate from Oklahoma to California to escape drought and dust and work towards multi-ethnic and multi-racial solidarity with their fellow farm workers.

Exploring Babb's published work, her archives and personal life, the authors included in this collection achieve the goal of cementing Babb's place in the history of regionalist writers and writers of the literary left.

The essays in this collection range in topics from Christine Hill Smith's piece "The Radical Voices of Sanora Babb," which chronicles Babb's relationship to the Communist Party and her place within the history of the literary left, to Caroline Johnson and Mariah Wahl's discussion of their experience presenting Babb's fiction alongside her archived work to the public in "No Longer Unknown: Exploring the Archive of Sanora Babb."

The collection also provides valuable pedagogical approaches to incorporating Babb's work into the college classroom through Jeanetta Calhoun Mish and Cullen Whisenhunt's essay, "Transcending Regional Literature: Teaching Sanora Babb."

Misch and Whisenhunt outline various ways in which Babb's writing could be taught in college classes on the Dust Bowl, working-class literature, rural literature, literature of California, migrant literature, environmental literature and more.

Babb and Steinbeck

Of particular note is Christopher Bowman's illuminating essay on the relationship between Babb's *Whose Names are Unknown* and John Steinbeck's similarly situated novel *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Much existing scholarship on Babb and *Whose Names* frames Babb and Steinbeck as competing authors of Dust Bowl fiction. This claim is often backed by the fact that Steinbeck used Babb's field notes to help draft *The Grapes of Wrath*, and that the publication of Steinbeck's novel delayed the publication of Babb's *Whose Names* until 2004, as her editor did not think two Dust Bowl novels could succeed on the market simultaneously.

Bowman's refreshing analysis of the two novels, in addition to both authors' personal correspondence with Tom Collins, challenges this characterization of their relationship. Instead, Bowman encourages us to read *Whose Names are Unknown* and *The Grapes of Wrath* "in conversation — rather than in competition — with one another" (96).

Erin Royston Battat's essay, "Discovering Ecofeminism in Sanora Babb's Narratives," is also an essential piece of the collection.

Battat "explores Babb's feminist alternative to the frontier myth in her three autobiographically informed narratives," *An Owl on Every Post, The Lost Traveler,* and *Whose Names are Unknown*.

The essay also analyzes how Babb demonstrates "antiracist and anticapitalist commitments" and an evolving "environmental consciousness" despite centering her work around white women characters who confront their privileges of whiteness to varying degrees. (41)

Women's Strength

Additionally, Iris Jamahl Dunkle's essay "The Real West in Sanora Babb's Short Stories" dives into Babb's short fiction published across numerous magazines throughout the 1930s and '40s. Dunkle argues that Babb's stories interrupt the "phallocentric" portrait of the "literary West" by depicting a "true West" in which "women were more than weak helpmates and where diversity was not only showcased but depicted as the integral and indeed ancient fabric of the region." (56)

In particular, Dunkel's reading of the character Mrs. Tsiang from Babb's "A Scandalous Humility"— originally published in *Northwest Review* (1968) and re-published in her short story collection *Cry of the Tinamou* (1997)— reveals how Babb imbued her multicultural women characters with strength and independence typically reserved for white men in literature of the West.

These essays along with the many other contributions to *unknown no more* provide historical context on Sanora Babb's life and writing that is sure to shape the growing body of scholarship about her poetry, fiction and journalism.

continued on page 44

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REVIEW

Collective Diversity:
Surveying Revolutionary Thought

By Herman Pieterson

Revolutionary Collective —
Comrades, Critics and Dynamics in the Struggle for Socialism
By Paul Le Blanc
Chicago, Haymarket Books, 2022,
xiv + 256 pages, $19.95 paperback.

PROPOSING THAT "WE find their contributions inseparable from (the) quality of revolutionary collectivity," Paul Le Blanc has compiled a number of essays on revolutionary and even ex-revolutionary thinkers. (vii)

The book's somewhat disparate chapters are linked to the author's view of the necessity of collective thinking and elaboration as well as organizing. The sense of a "revolutionary collective" across time and space involves both the goal of the struggle for socialism, the way to get there, and how individuals are part of the larger movement.

The figures covered range from Lenin and Bolshevism through the work of well-known representatives of the "Leninist tradition" like Trotsky, Lukács and Gramsci to Rosa Luxemburg and to lesser known authors like Alexander Bogdanov and Karl Korsch, plus more recent revolutionaries Dennis Brutus and Daniel Bensaïd.

The personnel assembled are predominantly male and predominantly white. But so is most of this tradition — at least in its literary-canonical form.

Le Blanc's subjects even include James Burnham "who, after a relatively brief but passionate affair with Marxism, went on to compose a devastating critique," becoming a decades-long partisan of the West's anti-communist crusade. (ix)

Why read another book on these people? Hasn't most been said already? Not quite so. I for one learned new things from the essay on the philosopher Bogdanov, was unfamiliar with poet and activist Dennis Brutus, and got a better idea of the development of James Burnham. And Le Blanc has a very clear and didactical style that helps communicate his perspective on classical figures like Trotsky or Gramsci.

Thus the book can be used as an introduction to the various sources of modern Marxism. And it can serve as a starting point for further debate and clarification on questions of theory, practice and organization. It is not by accident that the collection closes with "Conclusions on Coherence and Comradeship," written in reaction to the crisis and dissolution of the International Socialist Organization in 2019.

Le Blanc tries to come to grips with different interpretations of "Leninism" by discussing several authors. He is most content with those authors who stress the continuity of Lenin's approach through the different periods of the struggle to overthrow tsarism, and through the early years of the Soviet state — essentially democratic, based on the capacity of the working class to organize and to conquer hegemony in the fight against tsarism, and firmly grounded in the tradition of Marx and Engels.

Le Blanc agrees with Tamás Krausz in his *Reconstructing Lenin* that the Bolsheviks benefited from real feedback thanks to their close relations with a social base, and that concepts as "vanguard party" and "democratic centralism" make sense only because of this.

He disagrees, however, with the organizational conclusions of the Italian activist and philosopher Antonio Negri. While Negri links the type of organization closely to the organization of workers in the factory, according to Le Blanc organization is more prosaic than this.

Any organization, any struggle will involve the existence of cadres. This generalization goes beyond factories and tsarist Russia. Obviously this is where the Trotskyist Le Blanc and the *operaist* (workerist —ed.) Negri part company.

Originality, Continuity and Debate

Leon Trotsky was not part of the Bolsheviks before 1917, but when he joined during that year he adopted their approach. When later fighting the Stalinization of the communist movement, he said that all the old formulae of Bolshevism had now been labelled as "Trotskyist." He identified entirely with the legacy of Lenin's party.

Was there something then special about Trotsky's ideas? Paul Le Blanc thinks it is unhelpful to turn Leon Trotsky into some kind of ideological icon with a special set of theories.

In fact, Trotsky stood in the tradition of Marx and Engels, and his most distinctive contribution, the formulation of a coherent framework of permanent revolution, was hardly "original." Many others from Marx and Engels to Kautksy, Parvus and Rosa Luxemburg contributed to it.

In his chapter "The Unoriginality of Leon Trotsky," Le Blanc makes similar cases for Trotsky's analyses of the Stalinist bureaucracy, the necessity of a United Front of workers' organizations to fight against fascism, and the Transitional Program.

One of the more fascinating people in the Bolshevik party — before the First World War and later outside it during and after the Russian revolution — was Alexander Bogdanov. We know him mainly as the target of Lenin's philosophical polemics in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, but he was much more.

Bogdanov's work covered natural sciences, education and culture. He was a founder of the *Proletcult* movement, and with Lenin the leader of the Bolshevik faction between 1903 and 1909. Bogdanov thought it necessary to develop socialist proletarian culture and science. In political practice his group advocated boycotting the post-1905 Duma elections. Le Blanc's discussion of Bogdanov's philosophical elaborations reads like an invitation for further discussion.

In the 1920s, new debates arose in the context of building the Communist International, the stabilization of bourgeois rule in central and western Europe, and the analysis of fascism and bourgeois rule in general. Georg Lukács was one of the Central European minds contributing to this debate, as a philosopher and as a leader of the Hungarian communist party.

His *History and Class Consciousness* is best known as an introduction to the dialectical unity of theory and practice in historical materialism. Lukács later felt forced to abandon much of his most creative positions, "simply

Herman Pieterson is an activist and historian living in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

to survive politically in the Communist movement (and, finally, to survive physically while living in Stalin's Russia)." (ix)

Lukács' manuscript, *Tailism and the Dialectic,* written after the first round of polemics against him in 1924 was published only after its discovery in the archives in 1996. In his discussion of political and organizational matters, the manuscript reveals his continuing attachments to the philosophical positions in *History and Class Consciousness*.

Le Blanc's take on Lukács seems to me to be a fruitful one: try and unearth the core ideas from these philosophical and polemical texts, in order to find a sophisticated fusion of classical Marxism with the orientation of Bolshevism.

Gramsci, Luxemburg, and More

Antonio Gramsci was a leader of the Italian Communist Party when he was imprisoned by fascism in 1926. He filled dozens of notebooks, even while "he died a slow death during his ten-year imprisonment." (ix)

Gramsci had to use code words and obscure formulations, both to fool his jailors and to maintain his connection to an official communist movement that would not have approved of his positions.

Paul Le Blanc notes a variety of ambiguities in Gramsci. But he also notes Gramsci's idea of revolutionary democracy and the type of party that would be necessary.

Of course it is inevitable that a human being like Rosa Luxemburg could be wrong, but she deserves being taken seriously: for opposing the degeneration of Social Democracy even before 1914; for her battle against reformism but not against reforms; for her analysis of the destructiveness of the process of capital accumulation. She is also notable for her sense of the actuality of revolution, and for her notion of the mass strike as an interplay of organizational leadership with semi-spontaneous mass action.

Paul Le Blanc states, however, that we must realize that Luxemburg or Lukács were referring to a context that no longer exists today. Something like the mass socialist workers movement influenced by Marxism remains to be rebuilt.

Karl Korsch was a leader of the left wing of the German Communist Party in the 1920s. In my opinion his 1923 *Marxism and Philosophy* stands out as a formidable critique of the mechanistic deformation of Marxism in the Second International. Korsch did not see Marxism as a philosophy, however, rather as the anti-philosophy.

Le Blanc identifies Korsch along with Lukács and Gramsci as the foundational trio of "western Marxism," but sees him as less of a political leader, less durable than either Gramsci or Lukács.

The odd person out in Paul Le Blanc's lineup seems to be James Burnham, a philosopher who became a Marxist around 1930 and broke with socialism after 1940 to become one of the leading intellectuals of the Right in the USA in the 1950s. So what is he doing here in a "revolutionary collective?"

Le Blanc wants to look at Burnham's combination of theory and practice. James Burnham was after all geared to political action, both in his Left and in his Right stages. So if we can wonder whether this should have been published in a collection dedicated to a revolutionary collective, it does result in a most interesting presentation of an Odyssey from a conservative background, to the far left, then taking some time to come home to the American Right.

The chapters on these contributions and trajectories are completed with two fine memoirs. I particularly liked the one on Dennis Brutus, who was unfamiliar to me. He paints a vivid image of Brutus, who Le Blanc got to know when the South African poet-activist-in-exile came to work and live in Pittsburgh.

A former African National Congress leader and political prisoner alongside Nelson Mandela, Brutus did not spare his comrades who compromised with the system after the apartheid regime collapsed. When the global justice movement gathered strength he was a passionate organizer and a striking speaker.

The memoir on Daniel Bensaïd is more distanced. Largely based on Bensaïd's own *An Impatient Life,* it shows Paul Le Blanc's appreciation of this many-sided French activist and writer. And it certainly fits in here, as shown by a quote from Bensaïd's *Marx for Our Times*: Marx's research program remains robust but "it only has a genuine future if, rather than seeking refuge in the academic fold, it succeeds in establishing an organic relationship with the revived practice of social movements — in particular, with the resistance to imperialist globalization."

Contemplating the Future

In the final chapter, Paul Le Blanc includes some of his personal experience as well as thoughts of "what are we to do." His comments are triggered by the "earthquake" that was the dissolution of the ISO but are meant to go beyond it. Other experiences are taken in consideration as well. In that sense it is worth reading not only for former ISO members.

After so many failures of the revolutionary movement, no single-factor explanation ("wrong program." "not Leninist," "wicked leaders") is sufficient. One must look at the specifics in each case. But some patterns are common to many of these experiences.

No organization existing today can possibly be the force we need to lead the struggle, so idealization and deification of any organization is a mistake. And organizational mistakes should be used as learning tools.

Paul Le Blanc makes a number of important points, but in my view steers around at least one question. We can agree with the need for a true democratic centralism. We should realize that only part of the working class is part of a broad vanguard layer, and that within that layer collectives of more experienced people are necessary: cadres.

And we should beware of errors made even by sophisticated leaderships. Do not try to get your organization and its cadres through difficult times by keeping it to the "sole truth." This only leads to self-ossification. And do not base your perspectives on sweeping predictions. We should know where we are and understand the human factor.

And here I wonder, is it not true that most revolutionary organizations (even if they are more than just a few dozen or a few hundred) are insufficiently rooted in the working classes and the social movements? So could it be that these organizations tend to see only part of reality, but act as if they understand all of it and can draw strategic perspectives?

I have sometimes called this micro-Leninism. It is a far cry from the Leninism that Le Blanc would like to see. But it is one of our challenges to understand this, to find adequate organizational forms, and to work together in rebuilding the workers' movement and the Left. ■

Chronicler — *cont'd from page 42*

The collection's greatest strength is in its interdisciplinary commitment to cover not only Babb's writing, but also her personal life and archived manuscripts, correspondences, and field notes through the lenses of history, women's and gender studies, literary studies, pedagogical theory, environmental studies and psychology.

Sanora Babb
University of Texas at Austin

This collection, thus, is a valuable addition to the current scholarship on Babb's life and work, and achieves the editors' goal to "investigate how Babb's lived experience gave rise to a unique voice that has been overlooked by earlier recovery projects." (2) It is a must-read for anyone interested in Babb's life, regionalist literature, nature writing, literature of the left and/or women's literature. ■

capitals and cultures to non-white, non-European suffering.

To repeat, Ukraine's war of national defense against Russia's invasion *is an absolutely legitimate and democratic struggle*. That truth is in no way negated by the oligarch-driven and corrupt character of Ukraine's factionalized politics since its emergence from the former Soviet Union, including the highly publicized presence of ultra-right nationalists in its state and military structures.

Crisis of Imperial Democracy

But while Ukraine, assuming it wins its struggle to survive, *might* emerge with enhanced national unity and an invigorated democratic political culture, the same can hardly be said of verbal champions of "defending democracy," least of all the United States.

In addition to the U.S. filthy petro-dalliance with the Saudi crown prince, in a less-publicized gesture, Biden — for the very first time — extended official U.S. recognition to the Moroccan kingdom's annexation of Western Sahara.

In its brutality and denial of self-determination of the Sahrawi people, Morocco's 47-year occupation of this territory (which it seized when the former colonial power of Spain departed in 1975) matches every bit of Israel's colonial-apartheid occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in Palestine.

Even while Ukraine fights for its freedom, democracy is a casualty elsewhere. Before the present war erupted, there was some European Union pressure on Poland's right-wing government, which has seized control of the judiciary and criminalized abortion, with already fatal results. That criticism is deeply buried now.

The doctrines of "illiberal democracy" and presidential dictatorship are also promulgated respectively by the rulers of NATO members Hungary and Turkey.

But more than any other place, the crumbling of democracy seems true of the United States itself, where structures of representative democracy are dissolving before our very eyes in an acid bath of racism, reactionary court-packing, gerrymandering and yes, American-style oligarchy. In broad daylight, plans are being put in place by right-wing state legislatures to overturn the next presidential election if they can't win it outright.

Disorderly Consequences

The crisis of representative institutions and legitimacy in the United States does have implications. We can surmise, for example, that Vladimir Putin's ambitions to subjugate Ukraine were encouraged by viewing the disarray of the U.S. administration's domestic agenda, and the advance of white Christian nationalist politics which are openly quite compatible to his own.

Putin might also have been encouraged by the fulsome praise he was receiving from the highest-rated U.S. cable news personality, Tucker Carlson. (Perhaps he failed to understand that Fox News, quite like Stalinist parties of bygone times, is entirely capable of changing its line instantaneously.)

But the ability of the United States to dictate terms to the world never actually depended on the state of "our democracy," such as it is. U.S. authority has rested on the twin pillars of military might and the power it wields with the dollar as the untouchable world reserve currency.

That power is how the United States is able to impose and enforce "crippling sanctions" of various kinds. Those include sadistic sanctions on Cuba — which don't even serve a strategic purpose, but pander to right-wing voters in a few U.S. swing states — or on Nicaragua and Venezuela that do nothing to advance "democracy" or human rights in those tortured nations.

They include Trump's enhanced sanctions on Iran canceling the 2015 nuclear deal — brilliantly bringing Iran closer than before to nuclear weapons capability — and on Iraq, in the 1990s, to soften it up to be conquered. The U.S. conquest of Iraq of course succeeded, with the delightful results we've basked in since 2003.

The sanctions imposed on Russia today are unprecedented in their scope, including the ban on critical technology transfer, the size of the targeted state, and the attempt to deploy U.S. financial power in an all-out drive to isolate Russia from world commerce and finance. How long and how far these measures ultimately reach are big open questions.

We don't know (i) how much China will be prepared to do to assist Russia, (ii) how much pain the Russian regime is prepared to impose on its people for its imperial ambitions, and (iii) most importantly, what the full intentions of U.S. imperialism might be in regard to crippling Russia and the risks of overthrowing the Putin regime.

We do know already that parts of the global economy are being reconfigured, including just-in-time supply chains with weaknesses already revealed during the COVID pandemic, and potential tests of U.S. dollar supremacy.

The forced-pace drive to end European dependence on Russian gas and oil exports *could* entail a rapid transition to renewable energy. That's the direction the world needs to go in any case. More likely, however, is *enhanced* North American ecocidal fossil fuel production, besides the appeal to the likes of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to pump more oil.

These are emergent features of the new imperialist complex, with more to come.

Where then is the hope? We saw it in the antiwar demonstrations in Russia with thousands of people, most of whose names we don't know, going into the streets in the face of police-state repression (with Putin now demanding "self-purification" of Russian society).

One name we do know is Marina Ovsyannikova, the TV producer who stormed the live TV news broadcast with her "no war" sign. Her bravery equals that of those two great living Americans, Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning, both examples of people who never intended to become heroes — but didn't leave their morals at the door when they signed up for the intelligence and military services.

We know the brutality with which American "democracy" and "justice" treated Snowden and Manning. An antiwar movement worthy of the name will lift up and stand with all three of these heroes and what they represent.

The greatest immediate hope lies with the Ukrainian people and their communities abroad, performing miracles in mobilizing both humanitarian and military material aid.

That energy and purpose show what popular organization can accomplish— the kind of organization that on a global scale might win humanity's existential struggles for equality, justice and environmental survival. If that seems a lot to hope for, there really is no other option. ■

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