Behind the Baltimore Bridge Collapse ◆ On India & Kashmir

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AGAINST THE CURRENT

A SOCIALIST JOURNAL

SOLIDARITY STRUGGLE CONTINUED!

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A Letter from the Editors

Solidarity with Gaza, continued!

WHILE THE GENOCIDAL Israeli-United States war on Gaza and Palestine continues — amidst all kinds of diplomatic posturing and UN resolution-splicing — the one really hopeful development is the outpouring of activism in many U.S. communities, most visibly the magnificent movement on college campuses organized in encampments demanding *an immediate permanent ceasefire, and divestment from corporations tied to Israel's machinery of massacre and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people.*

Because of this movement's moral authority and power in the face of a monstrous slaughter funded by U.S. tax dollars, it's not surprising that it has come under attack from multiple directions — including reprisals by campus administration and violent police action against students and sympathetic faculty members.

Other arenas of struggle include efforts in hundreds of communities for cease-fire resolutions in city councils and union locals. In view of "Genocide Joe" Biden administration's criminal complicity and cynical duplicity — calling for Israeli "restraint" while pouring in the ammunition and bombs that incinerate Gaza's displaced and starving population — the grassroots movement has also opened up critical space for some U.S. Congresspeople and Senators to speak out against the slaughter.

The Israeli army's June 8 rescue of four civilian captives, killing over 240 Gazans, symbolizes these eight months of insanity. *Seven* hostages in total have now been rescued by military action, *three* shot and killed "by mistake" earlier in the war, while *over 100 were released* in the first prisoner exchange; 120 remain in Gaza, of whom a third are believed to have died, some undoubtedly under Israel's bombs.

Hamas claims that three more captives were killed in the June 8 raid, which there is no way to immediately check. Palestinian deaths in Gaza, including unrecovered bodies and the growing toll from disease and famine, must now be close to 50,000. These figures say something about the murderous rampage of the past eight months. While this is a brutal war that Gaza and Palestine cannot militarily "win," it's increasingly evident that Israel is not "winning" either.

Acts of sadistic savagery by Israeli troops are already feeding back into the country's re-emerging political rupture. And statements by Netanyahu's national security advisor that the war will "continue through the rest of 2024" signal expanding horror with no "day after."

That prospect also ensures that the struggle will continue for a ceasefire, for boycott/divestment/sanctions (BDS) against corporate and military enablers of Israeli apartheid, and for Palestinian freedom. That requires thinking about the strategic potential and challenges facing the movement as it goes forward. For one contribution to the discussion, see Ivan Drury Zarin's article in this issue (and the longer version posted at https://againstthecurrent.org).

Encampments and Repression

College encampments resonated powerfully with the images of nearly two million now displaced and homeless people in Gaza. That's partly why they spread so rapidly from a few initial sites, like Columbia University, to dozens if not hundreds of others both nationally and globally.

After initial bewilderment, a few campus administrators turned to their standard efforts of cooptation ("take down the tents and then we'll talk to you") — and when those failed, to police repression on spurious grounds of "community safety."

Particularly egregious cases include the violent police assault on the encampment at UCLA — after standing back doing nothing to protect real campus safety the previous day, April 30, as a mob of both Zionist and neo-Nazi thugs attacked the encampment. Outraged unionized graduate students and faculty in the University of California system responded with Unfair Labor Practice strike action over the issue of campus workplace safety. The strike ended after the administration procured a dubious restraining order by a rightwing judge.

At the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor on May 21, a 6:00am violent raid by campus and city police on the completely nonviolent encampment included pepper spraying students in the face. (See "University of Michigan President Ono and the Pepper-Spray Gang" by Alan Wald, posted May 25 at https://solidarity-us.org.) This attack coincided neatly with the University's inauguration its 2024-25 "Year of Democracy and Civil Engagement" program.

At Wayne State University in Detroit, where a week-long campus mall encampment neither blocked nor barricaded anything, the administration closed down all activities for three days on an absurd "safety and health danger" pretext, then called on campus and city police to raid and dismantle the camp early in the morning of May 30. Indiana University administration also invited the State Police onto the Bloomington campus, where they positioned snipers on the roof of the Student Union.

At Harvard and the University of Chicago, graduating student activists have been denied their degrees. These are only a few examples of the crackdown against a movement protesting the genocidal responsibility of our own government.

Undoubtedly the movement will persist — as the crisis in Palestine and the global outcry escalate — and resume with redoubled effort when schools resume after the summer. While the forms of struggle are hard to predict, it seems unlikely that the encampment tactic will be easily replicated, particularly as administrators and police apparatuses won't be caught off guard as they were in the spring.

What does seem clear is that well-organized divestment campaigns will be taking off as part of the broadening BDS effort. Dr. Mustapha Barghouti, leader of the Palestinian National Initiative, in a powerful address by Zoom from Ramallah to the May 24-26 "Peoples Conference for Palestine" in Detroit, emphasized the importance of BDS in supporting the Palestinian people's resistance and struggle for their rights.

Arms manufacturers, Chevron, and the Maersk shipping company which transports weaponry to Israel's war machine, will be among the primary targets.

Exactly how the continuing war and antiwar resistance

continued on the inside back cover

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Cover: University of Michigan students and supporters march through downtown Ann Arbor, calling for ceasefire in Gaza and University divestment from companies profiting from Israel's apartheid system against Palestinians. IDZ

Above: The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor well-organized and non-violent encampment, was raided by campus and state police after nearly a month. Some students were arrested, others hopitalized and the camp destroyed. *ATC* editor Alan Wald desrcribed University President Ono's letter to the U-M community "a master class in political alchemy by which the repression of legitimate dissent was reframed and inverted into a rhetorical affirmation of democratic virtues to be fervidly championed while pepper-spray gushed on the faces those carrying out these principles in practice." https://jimwestphoto.com

Back Cover: Mass demonstration against the Citizenship Amendment Act. Countercurrents.org

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.

Behind Baltimore Bridge Collapse: **Negligence and Tragedy**

By Malik Miah

THE COLLAPSE OF the Francis Scott Key Bridge, after it was hit by the Dali cargo container ship in the Baltimore metropolitan area, was headline news. The background is less well publicized.

The 947-foot ship with four generators, lost all power, not once but twice, just before the crash that brought down the bridge. In mid-May, preliminary results by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) revealed that the cargo container had lost power four times over a 10-hour period.

The first blackout occurred during maintenance, when a crew member accidently closed an exhaust damper. As the backup generation kicked in, insufficient pressure shut it down. At that point the crew changed the ship's electrical configuration.

Although the system worked for hours before the ship left, once it cleared the harbor and the tug boats returned to port for their next assignment, electrical breakers tripped and the engine automatically shut down. While the crew manually restored the breakers and the ship's dispatcher alerted the Coast Guard and police, the main engine remained down. There was no propulsion to steer clear of the bridge.

According to Equasis, a shipping information system, "An inspection of the Dali last June at a port in Chile identified a problem with the ship's "propulsion and auxiliary machinery." The deficiency involved gauges and thermometers, but the website's online records didn't elaborate.

The 47-year-old bridge did not have pier protection to withstand the crash. It took 11 weeks to fully reopen the Baltimore port to commercial shipping, the ninth busiest in the country. But there was no announcement outlining a plan to ensure better safety regulations and working conditions.

Although the cargo ship was towed back to the Baltimore port May 20, the crew of 21, mostly from India, remain on board. Immediately following the accident they were tested for alcohol and drugs; all tested negative.

The FBI confiscated their cell phones and their major concern is having them returned so they can be in touch with their families. Meanwhile they are maintaining the ship's systems and must be available for further investigation.

The wreckage on March 28, 2024, two days after the crash. National Transportation Safety Board

Further, six of the eight maintenance workers repairing potholes on the bridge died, all immigrants from Mexico and Central America. The youngest were in their 20s, while the eldest was a 49-year-old grandfather.

Behind the Disaster

Why didn't tugboats stay with the ship and escort it into the channel and broader Chesapeake Bay? That isn't mandatory at the Baltimore port; if shippers request it, there is an additional charge. When the Dali first lost power, the captain frantically requested the tugboats, but they weren't able to arrive in time.

The crash indicates more precautions need to be taken. It is one thing for a small boat to hit a bridge, another for a massive ship. Cargo ships are essential to move goods worldwide. Profits drive decision making, not workers' welfare and safety.

In addition, there are unique Maritime Laws that limit ships' liability. The government looks the other way. Insurance companies can legally avoid massive payouts when sued.

Under 19th century legislation, the Singapore-based owner of Dali has already filed a court petition to limit their legal liability. Companies' "limitation of liability" petition is a routine but important procedure for cases litigated under U.S. maritime law.

A federal court in Maryland decides who is responsible — and how much they owe — for what could become one of the costliest catastrophes of its kind.

Bridges Needing Repair

Around 46,100 of the 617,000 bridges across the United States, or 7.5% are considered structurally deficient and in poor condition, according to the American Society of Civil Engineers' most recent infrastructure report cards released in 2021.

The 2023 report by ARTBA, American Road & Transportation Building Association, says there are 167 million crossings on 42,400 bridges rated in poor condition; one in three U.S. bridges needs repair or replacement.

As of June 2023, states have committed 30 per cent of the new bridge formula funds currently available through year two of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA).

While structurally deficient bridges are not inherently unsafe, they require substantial investment to maintain. They are at higher risk for closures or weight restrictions. While many of the country's older bridges are vulnerable to earthquakes, hurricanes or elevated heat.

Some 21,000 bridges were found to be susceptible to having their foundations threatened during extreme weather events, according to the American Society of Civil Engineers' 2021 report.

The seismic resilience of the U.S. highway system has improved in recent decades thanks to investments in new, more resilient infrastructure and the retrofitting of existing structures, a 2016 report from the Congressional Research Service found.

California, for example, has done major upgrades since the 1989, when the Lorna Prieta earthquake collapsed the top section of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge. (Not so on the East Coast, where a small 4.8 magnitude earthquake hit the New Jersey-New York region on April 5.)

Still, the report said, not every highway or bridge has been retrofitted, and there is not yet a way to build infrastructure in a way that is both cost effective and able to withstand

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the most intense earthquakes.

Additionally, bridges are strained by trucks that are heavier than those the bridges were designed for. These heavier trucks, which can surpass 40-ton loads, threaten to overstress bridge elements, cause metal fatigue and cracking, and decrease bridges' lifespans, according to the American Society of Civil Engineers report.

Aging infrastructure, extreme weather and bigger vehicles aren't the only concerns. There is an urgent need to improve or protect old bridges against larger and larger modern vessels. More than 17,000 bridges are vulnerable to collapse from a single hit, known as a "fracture critical" bridge. That means that if they are struck with enough force in just the right spot, a big section or the entire bridge could collapse.

According to the NTSB the Baltimore bridge was "fracture critical." In the first three months of 2024, along with the Francis Scott Key Bridge collapsing, a bridge in southern China was sliced in half, and in Argentina parts of a bridge were cut through after large commercial ships collided with them.

"Ships have gotten bigger, and container ports are focused on deepening their cargo. While we are encouraging bigger containers, we need to protect bridges in these one-off situations," Ananth Prasad, president of the Florida Transportation Builders' Association, told CNN. To minimize this potential, bridges need to be built with what are known as redundancies — protections around bridges' danger points.

These include "dolphins" — structures rooted in the seabed or riverbed, extending above the water, typically made from timber or steel — or "fenders," structures that move objects away from vulnerable points on the bridge to deflect some of the force if there is an impact.

The MSC Irina is the largest container ship in the world. It is 200 feet wide and 1312 feet long. For comparison, the Empire State building in New York is 1454 feet long.

The rise of massive ships has pressured ports to adapt. When an expansion of the Panama Canal in 2016 allowed larger ships to pass through, major Eastern Seaboard ports reacted by investing billions of dollars, said Jean-Paul Rodriguez, professor in the department of maritime business administration at Texas A&M University-Galveston.

The ports, including Baltimore, scrambled "to dredge, to expand the infrastructure, to buy new cranes to accommodate these ships," he said. The Ever Max, which is over 1200 feet long and can hold up to 15,432 20-foot containers, became the largest container ship to ever enter the port of Baltimore.

In the 1970s, when the Francis Scott Key Bridge was built, the average size for a ship or tanker was 66 by 705 feet. Bulk ships and tankers have been on the bigger side for decades and carry wet and dry goods that include oil and coal — a major export for the Baltimore port. Of the 4,680 containers on the Dali, 56 contained hazardous materials but none entered the water.

Size matters even when ships like the Dali, 157 feet wide by 947 feet long, and is equipped with four generators for one main engine. Except for the emergency generator, any one can feed the engine. Although it is still unclear why the generators failed, the pilots and crew worked to keep the ship away from hitting the bridge pillars.

Size also played a role when a 1,300-foot vessel got stuck in the Suez Canal in 2021, causing alarming shipping delays.

The Latino Workers

Who were the workers who died?

• **Maynor Yessir Suazo Sandoval**, 38, was the youngest of eight siblings. Suazo Sandoval grew up in Azacualpa, Honduras. He immigrated to the United States more than 17 years ago, and sent money back to his hometown, even sponsoring a soccer league.

He loved visiting parks and beaches with his wife and two children. Skilled with machinery, he dreamed of starting his own business, according to the immigrant support group CASA, of which he was a member.

• **Dorlian Ronial Castillo Cabrera**, 26, was born in Guatemala. A friend, Melvin Ruiz, told The *Baltimore Sun* that Castillo Cabrera was a kind and "genuinely selfless person" with a joyous sense of humor. Ruiz noted that Castillo routinely volunteered to drive fellow crew members to work and other Baltimore's Latino community members to the store or to various appointments as needed.

Castillo's body was recovered in the submerged truck, alongside Alejandro ("Alex") Hernández Fuentes, the crew's supervisor.

• **Jose Mynor Lopez**, in his 30s, described as a loving family man and an attentive father, emigrated to the United States 19 years ago from Guatemala in order to create better opportunities for his family.

He had four children, including a young daughter, his uncle Wilmer Raul Orellana said. His wife worked at Owls Corner Cafe in Dundalk, where a cafe co-owner set up a GoFundMe to raise money for his family.

• **Miguel Luna Gonzalez**, 49, was from El Salvador. He immigrated to the United States about 19 years ago and was also a member of CASA.

He became a welder but when not working construction, he often cooked alongside his wife, who operates a food truck called Pupuseria Y Antojitos Carmencita Luna.

One friend reminisced about their time playing professional soccer in El Salvador as young men; Luna was a skilled defender.

• The Mexican embassy told *The Sun* that three Mexicans were working on the bridge when it collapsed. Julio Hernández escaped through the window of a work vehicle and clung to debris until rescued. But **Carlos Hernández** 24, and **Alejandro Hernández Fuentes**, 35, — the three were related — did not.

Hernández Fuentes was the supervisor of the crew working on the bridge that night. Former coworkers described "Alex" as a "fireball" who took his job seriously and climbed the ranks at Brawner Builders, the company that employed the workers. He was started as a laborer and was promoted to driving a company truck.

Unions' Response

Roland "Rex" Rexha is the secretary-treasurer of the Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association. Established in 1875, it's the oldest maritime trade union in the U.S., representing licensed deck and engine officers.

Rexha told The *Portside Work-Bites* that the Dali disaster highlights the downside of not having ships escorted by tugboats until they are out on the open sea away from critical infrastructure — as well as the risks associated with building larger and larger vessels, using automation as justification for reducing crew size, and the wide variance between U.S. maritime safety standards and the rest of the world.

"As for having tug assistance when they are going under a bridge, these are changes of policy where we defer to what the mandatory policies are of the individual port; what they deem is the safest way to operate," Rexha says.

"When you are talking about a large cruise ship or a cargo ship like this one, if they are out of the harbor and they lose power they are not going to hit anything, they are in the middle of the ocean. But as they are operating in local waters, that's where you have to be really diligent."

As cargo ships have gotten bigger and technology advanced, Rexha points out, they have all gone to minimum crewing: "Where in the past you had ten officers per department, you have half that," Rexha noted.

"At that point, everything becomes more difficult when there is an issue, which is most likely going to happen when you are trying to maneuver the ship. That's the most dangerous part of any transit for any ship. That's when there's the potential hazard — that's where there's the potential for a real tragedy."

Glenn Corbett, associate professor of fire science and public management at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, observes: "It would have been a bargain to have tugboats escort that ship as opposed to having to spend $12 billion to replace this bridge, avoid the loss of life and the major hit to that region's economy."

The bottom line is clear: ship disasters and bridge collapses will happen again so long as the profit motive drives all corporate and government policy makers. ■

Two Directions Facing Campus Activists: **The Movement for Divestment**

By Ivan Drury Zarin

SIX MONTHS INTO Israel's escalated and open genocide in Palestine, there were signs that the global antiwar movement was beginning to flag. Rallies and marches had filled streets in hundreds of cities in the United States and Canada every week since October, and solidarity activists in many places were carrying out an impressive and diverse array of actions just as consistently.

Direct actions blocked rail lines, highways, ports, bridges, and all sorts of roads. An early morning action even blockaded the delivery of the *New York Times*. Campaigns to expand the Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) movement sprung up in labor unions and city council chambers and publishing houses.

Activists even interrupted the electoral field, usually sanitized against any mention of Palestinian solidarity, dividing the Democratic Party with the surprising success of the "uncommitted" or "uninstructed" primary votes against President Biden's unblinking Zionism.

But after two dozen weeks of constant activity, the demonstrations were no longer growing in size and some activists were beginning to complain of a certain "routinism" in the mobilizations.

Then — incredibly — the campus encampments kicked off and changed everything.

The Movement Surges

The great accomplishment of the campus encampments has been their radicalization of the movement for Gaza. Before the camps, the consensus of the movement was captured in its central "ceasefire now" slogan that communicated the urgency and also the spontaneity of the movement, which kicked off as suddenly as Israel's terrible bombings.

The strength of "ceasefire" was that it focused on the consensus across most of the movement, that the most urgent and indisputable task was to stop Israel's massacre of Palestinian people.

"Ceasefire" also allowed for articulations beyond the immediate moment — as anti-Zionist activists explained that the "fire" had not begun on October 7, and would not be extinguished simply by stopping the bombing while Israel's military blockade of Gaza and all its settler-colonial apartheid policies remained in place. But it also allowed for ambiguity on these points.

Then as Israel's genocide became increasingly visibly horrific, governments that arm, fund and "stand with" Israel generally began to pick at the corners of Netanyahu's war policy, eventually calling for a "temporary" ceasefire, with all the qualifiers that muddied the power of the initial demand.

It was in this context that the campus-based movement demand for divestment — as lever for a more enduring ceasefire — represented a radicalization. Demanding that universities divest from Israel-associated companies re-rooted the politics of the Gaza solidarity movement in ground at once local and international.

The divestment demand collapses the distance between Columbia University and Gaza with a genius inversion of the circulation of global capital. Israel's special relationship with the US means that any aid money it receives, it can redirect to the military, and as Israel receives billions of dollars in U.S. aid, those dollars circulate through the Israel occupation forces as freely and regularly as through Oregon.

Especially, Joel Beinin argues, in the realm of intellectual and technological commodities, where there is an "extraordinarily dense interpenetration" between the United States and Israel. "At the personnel level," Beinin says, "high tech people commute back and forth from Silicon Valley to Israel every two weeks."

The campus divestment demand reveals the intimacy of the U.S.-Israel entanglement, implicating local structures of U.S. power in Israel's endless war against Palestinians. This reaches down into everyday social life in the United States (as well as Canada, parts of Latin America, and Europe where campus actions are also underway in Germany, Austria, Netherlands and the UK) and excavates an international program for collective action.

But there is also a second direction in this slogan. If wrenched out the hands of the movement in the quad or the streets, divestment can be neutralized and turned into a "policy problem" best handled by bureaucrats seated around oak tables. On some campuses, this appropriation and neutralization of the divestment demand is already underway.

Choosing Violent Repression

The initial response to the campus movement from administration was brutal. It took only thirty hours for the president of Columbia University to call in the police and smash the first Gaza solidarity encampment.

But students responded by occupying Columbia's Hamilton Hall, renaming it Hind's Hall in honor of Hind Rajab, a six-year-old Palestinian girl who was murdered by Israeli fire while trapped in a car, "pleading for help into a cell phone, surrounded by dead family members," as occupiers wrote in a statement.

Members of the Columbia University encampment say that they decided to start the Hind's Hall action in order to respond to the university's escalation with their own. In their statement, they write, "By moving from the lawn and liberating a university building, we escalated our tactics to apply greater pressure on the administration and to inspire others to take bold action."

The tactic described here had a double target: the administration, which had refused to acknowledge the demands of the encampment on the lawn of the campus, and also the rest of the U.S. Gaza solidarity movement.

The first response came from the administration, which again sent the police to brutally arrest three hundred people. The Hind's Hall account of the police response is chilling:

"The NYPD's Strategic Response Group violently arrested those defending us outside the building, flinging one protester down the stairs and leaving them unconscious, dragging others away as they tried to help.

"Inside Hind's Hall, we faced stun grenades, a rogue gunshot from a trigger happy pig, batons and circular saws, face stomping, head trauma, fractured bones, sprains and cuts and bruises. Once we were in police custody, they stole hijabs off the heads of Muslim women, sexually harassed our gender-marginalized comrades, threatened and ridiculed us."

But then, after the occupation of Hind's Hall was smashed by police violence, students started encampments on dozens of univer-

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sity campuses in the United States, Canada, Europe and Mexico.

The decision of university presidents to respond to the encampment movement with violence is gratuitous and even would be a bit surprising — if this movement were for any other cause. Why attack students with such open and terrible force? Why not negotiate, offer token settlements, and wait for their forces to dissipate once the semester ends?

On the *New Left Review* Sidecar blog, Forrest Hylton argues that it has to do with the neoliberalization of universities. In the last two decades privatization has been "catastrophic for democratic principles and practices," both for students, who have to pay obscene tuitions, and for faculty, who have lost job security. Now two-thirds of U.S. college faculty are non-tenure, while the security of those with tenure are under attack.

This, along with the alignment of these corporatized universities with the radically intertwined U.S. and Israeli militaries, goes a long way to explain why university presidents lack the community controls and accountability that might hold them back from attacking students.

But this does not explain why they have chosen violence in these particular instances rather than negotiated settlements, which would likely be more effective for maintaining their control over their campuses.

This state violence is the language of a petulant oppressor in a corner, the spittled tantrum of a king. With each police raid on a Gaza solidarity encampment the imperialist state inks its red line, across which there is no recourse to reason; it is the boiling point where discourse evaporates and the instruments of violent force, crouching below the surface of the waters of liberal reason, are revealed.

Divestment as Wedge

Administrators choose violence because they find the political terms of discussion set by the Gaza solidarity encampments intolerable. It is self-evident that university presidents — whose job in the corporatized university is more financial asset manager and fundraiser than anything to do with academics — refuse to review their investment portfolios with student oversight and community accountability.

This is the economic and material challenge posed by the divestment encampments. But the divestment demand also cuts into reigning ideologies upheld by universities: lies that maintain bourgeois power in the United States and in the world imperialist system, of which Israel remains an important outpost.

On the level of domestic politics, divestment reveals the identity of liberal civil society institutions with the military and police state in both the USA and Israel. It drives a discursive wedge into the established Zionist claim that criticism of Israel is anti-Jewish.

Students at Wayne State University encampment questioned by the media over demands that the university divest. https://jimwestphoto.com

The front line role of Jewish students in the encampments has been an important part of the power of this challenge, and the danger administrators are afraid of has already happened — the ideological link between Israel and Jewish people in the United States has been fractured.

Now, every blow from a police club swung in defense of Zionism punctuates the artificiality of the linkage between the safety of Jewish people in the world and the "right of Israel to defend itself."

The goal of police repression is to terrorize students when they express these ideas: highlighting them as beyond the limit of acceptable speech. And that initial terror improvised by eager cops set loose on students by anxious administrators is now being structured and legally coded by state governments and university administrations, like Texas Governor Greg Abbott's March 27 executive order that requires universities to punish students who speak out against Zionism.

These legal prohibitions and the correlative cultural tightening of restrictions on speech are aided by the prior spectacle of police violence reframed as evidence of student radicalism and violence inherent to the Gaza solidarity movement, which requires exceptional measures to shut down.

Once the police terror began, every university administration acted in its shadow. Even when administrators that did not send in riot cops offered negotiated settlements, the threat of police violence lingered like a phantom behind them.

Dubious Agreements

A half dozen Gaza solidarity encampments have signed agreements with universities that have been described, mostly inaccurately, as divestment agreements or victories for the Boycott-Divestment-Sanctions campaign. The most clear and binding element of most of these agreements has been on the campus movement to demobilize and de-escalate their actions, and dismantle their encampments. The commitments of most university administrations are far less clear.

The agreement at Northwestern University stipulates that the Gaza solidarity movement on campus take down tents, not use a sound system for rallies, and that "only Northwestern students, faculty, and staff will be allowed in the demonstration area" for future rallies, including that protestors cooperate with ID-ing people at rallies.

In exchange, Northwestern University committed only to re-establishing its "Advisory Committee on Investment Responsibility," with an unspecified representation of students, faculty and staff, and providing information on its current investments.

At Brown University, the Brown Divest Coalition agreed to take down their encampment and "not resume any encampment activity" nor that "any leaders of the Coalition participate in any activities related to any encampment or any unauthorized protest activity this academic year, including during Commencement and Reunion Weekend."

In exchange, Brown University committed to having a subcommittee hear a divestment report from five students; that this sub-committee will then make a recommendation to the President, and "the matter will be placed on the agenda of the [University] Corporation business meeting for a vote in October 2024."

Brown also agreed to drop charges against forty students arrested at an action in December and that it will not retaliate further for past protest actions.

The agreements signed at Rutgers, University of Minnesota, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Chapman University in California all bear basically these same features: students will stop all disruptions immediately, and the university will hear a report, start a subcommittee, or create a new diversity provision to better include some Palestinian students in the school.

The exceptions have been at Evergreen College in Washington State and at University of California-Riverside, but even these relatively positive examples do not include divestment agreements.

At Riverside, negotiators representing the Gaza Solidarity Encampment agreed to decamp in exchange for the university's public disclosing of investments and to form a task force including students appointed by the school's diversity council "to explore the… investment of [Riverside's] endowment in a manner that will be financially and ethically sound for the university with consideration to the companies involved in arms manufacturing and delivery."

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A Blow to Erdogan: Municipal Landside in Turkey

By Daniel Johnson

TURKEY's RULING JUSTICE and Development Party (AKP) received a major defeat in municipal elections in March of 2024. In addition to losing the country's three largest cities — Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir — the party lost control of 195 municipalities, most of them to the People's Republican Party (CHP), a centrist social democratic party.

As a country of major strategic importance in Europe and the Middle East, and after more than two decades of authoritarian presidentialist rule, these results are worthy of international attention. While the municipal landslide of 2024 is good news for progressive forces in Turkey, as we'll see the significance of the CHP's triumph is as yet unclear.

Out of 81 provincial municipalities, the CHP now controls 35 while the AKP has just 24. Ruling party losses included traditional conservative strongholds like Bursa, Afyonkarahisar and Adıyaman.[1]

Though not unanticipated, the loss of Istanbul was especially painful for President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who began his political career as mayor of the megacity in 1994. And though the AKP had lost the mayoralties of Istanbul and the capital of Ankara after many years of rule in 2019, the CHP's margins of victory were substantially larger this year, while the party also won majorities on the cities' municipal councils.[2]

If the CHP's victory in Turkey's three biggest cities was not a major surprise, the party's success in the rest of the country certainly was. Widespread apathy among anti-government voters was expected after a poor performance by the oppositional Nation Alliance in general elections last year.

Many (this writer included) had mistakenly thought in the spring of 2023 that the AKP's long period of political dominance was coming to an end.[3] That was not to be. But this year, the primary factor in the AKP's drubbing was a worsening cost-of-living crisis (though the fielding of weak quisling candidates in Istanbul and Ankara didn't help.)

While the value of the Turkish lira has been falling for years, 2023 saw the imposition of austerity measures. Whereas Erdoğan had long been opposed to raising interest rates and depended on clientelist policies of redistribution (in addition to an explosion in personal debt) for continued support, last year saw the central bank hike interest rates while public expenditures were reduced.

Increases in pensions and the minimum wage did not keep pace with inflation, pushing many retirees and working-class voters to abandon the AKP.

Turnout was low by Turkish standards (78.53%, down 6% from 2023's general election). The other surprise of the election was the success of the New Welfare Party (YRP), an Islamist party founded in 2018 which came in third after the CHP and AKP. Many traditional AKP supporters stayed home; others voted for the YRP.

Who is the CHP?

As the scale of the CHP victory became clear, new party chair Özgür Özel commented that this was the first time his party had won the most votes in an election in Turkey since 1977.[4] Why, despite being the nation's oldest political party, has the CHP been historically unable to obtain popular support?

Since its founding in the early years of the Turkish republic, the base of the CHP's support has laid with the urban professional classes. The Kemalist revolution of the 1920s and '30s that sought to make Turkey a modern secular nation was an authoritarian one, whose economic and cultural policies generally failed to improve the lives of the rural majority.

The CHP took a left turn in the 1960s, however, after a new constitution made independent trade unionism and socialist (though not communist) parties legal. Industrialization and rural-urban migration created a new mass constituency for the labor movement, while university campuses became hotbeds of radical activism.

Social democracy in Turkey peaked in the 1970s, with the CHP for the first — and only — time able to obtain broad popular support. Despite the introduction of import-substitution policies that contributed to impressive growth in the previous decade, by the later '70s, an economic crisis moved CHP prime minister Bülent Ecevit (who had been largely responsible for the party's leftward shift) to negotiate with the IMF, World Bank, and OECD for credit in exchange for austerity measures.

While the CHP had overseen a turn to austerity prior to a 1980 coup, the military banned the party for more than a decade.[5]

Since the AKP's ascension to power in 2002, the CHP has remained the largest party in a chronically weak opposition. Torn between Kemalist nationalists and a liberal social democratic wing, the party has been unable to obtain more than 25% in any election.

In the unprecedentedly favorable conditions of the 2023 general election, the CHP received just 22.6% of the vote while its leader and Nation Alliance coalition's candidate for president, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, was unable to break past 45% in the first round.

After that poor showing, Kılıçdaroğlu was ousted from the CHP leadership, with the pharmacist Özel taking over as party chair. Credited by many with orchestrating the party's 2024 results, Özel has presented a progressive public image with vocal support for organized labor and in criticism of Israel's genocidal war on Gaza.

Yet the CHP remains ideologically diverse. Istanbul mayor Ekrem Imamoğlu is a real estate developer and businessman; Ankara mayor Mansur Yavaş was long a member of the far-right National Movement Party (MHP) before joining the CHP in 2013. Despite Özel's apparent leftward push, historical divisions within the party remain.

The Party Political Map

The constellation and maneuverings of parties in Turkey are somewhat complex, but worth examining especially on the right wing.

In 2018, the year the Turkish lira began a plunge from which it has yet to recover, the AKP formed an alliance with the MHP. With its electoral support declining for years, the MHP did surprisingly well in the 2023 parliamentary elections. The AKP-led government had lowered the threshold for entering parliament from 10% to 7% to help its fascistic junior partner, but the MHP exceeded expectations with over 10%.

In 2024, however, the MHP was unable to obtain even 5% of the vote. The rightwing nationalist party is not going anywhere, however, as such slumps are not unusual and the MHP's presence extends deep into the ma-

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Turkey's election results have set back Erdoğan's party and its authoritarian rule.

chinery of the state. After the election, party leader Devlet Bahçeli ominously distinguished between democracy and the "Nation will," noting that the republic "wasn't founded through the ballot box."[6]

While the MHP's poor showing is nevertheless a good thing, as noted above a big winner of the election was the New Welfare Party (YRP), which received over 6% and took the southeastern city of Şanlıurfa (with a population of over two million) from the AKP.

The YRP is the successor to the Welfare Party (RP), an Islamist party that came to prominence in the 1990s that was closed by Turkey's Constitutional Court in 1998. Erdoğan was an early RP member, founding the AKP after the RP's closure. Like its predecessor, the YRP adheres to a "Nation Vision" (Milli Görüş) ideology, which promotes an Islamist Turkish nationalism in explicit opposition to "decadent" Western culture.

In contrast to 2023, in this year's election the YRP refused to join the People's Alliance and fielded its own candidates. Party leader Fatih Erbakan, son of RP founder Necmettin Erbakan, has a penchant for bizarre statements — for example claiming in 2021 that COVID-19 vaccines would lead to people giving birth to "half-human, half-monkey" children.[7]

Previously seen by many as a clownish fringe figure, Erbakan and his YRP must now be taken seriously. In addition to resentment over economic conditions, some social conservatives undoubtedly turned to the YRP because of the latter's more militant stand on Israel's war on Gaza.

President Erdoğan, as he has in the past, made significant noise about solidarity with Palestinian suffering in late 2023 and early 2024. However, despite popular demands, the Turkish government refused to alter trade relationships with Israel.

On April 9 — less than two weeks after the election — Turkey belatedly implemented export restrictions on 54 goods going to Israel, and at the beginning of May the trade ministry announced the suspension of all trade with the country.[8]

In the losing corner with the AKP and MHP was the IYI ("Good") Party. A conservative nationalist group that broke from the MHP in 2017 after the latter joined forces with the AKP, the IYI Party has provided hope for conservative Kemalists disdainful of Erdoğan. The party worked with the CHP in the 2019 municipal elections, with each fielding candidates in agreed upon cities.

This collaboration continued with the Nation Alliance, the group of six opposition parties created to contest the 2023 parliamentary elections. The IYI Party received just under 10% in that election, a respectable but not overwhelming showing.

IYI Party leader Merel Akşener vocally opposed the Nation Alliance's choice of the CHP's Kılıçdaroğlu to oppose Erdoğan for president. Akşener very publicly favored the mayors of Istanbul and Ankara over Kılıçdaroğlu, both of whom polled better than the CHP leader prior to the election.

Akşener even briefly pulled the IYI out of the Nation Alliance after it announced Kılıçdaroğlu's selection, though she quickly returned after an outcry within her own party.

In retrospect, Akşener's suspicion of Kılıçdaroğlu's ability to defeat Erdoğan proved correct—though she was far from alone in her unhappiness with the uninspiring Kılıçdaroğlu. In contrast to 2019, and no doubt in retaliation for not heeding Akşener's call, in 2024 the IYI Party decided to field its own candidates in cities like Istanbul, appearing to place incumbent CHP mayor Ekrem Imamoğlu in danger.

Any CHP worries were misplaced, for IYI Party took less than 4% of the vote in an abysmal performance. Akşener announced her resignation from the party leadership shortly after the election.

Struggles of the Left

Excepting the pro-Kurdish Democratic and Equality Party (DEM, formerly the HDP as explained below), parties to the left of the CHP fared badly. Particularly disappointing was the Workers' Party of Turkey (TIP), which played a prominent role in earthquake relief efforts in 2023, but whose opportunistic efforts to court celebrity candidates backfired at the polls in 2024.[9]

In what has become a familiar story, the government is attacking local democracy in majority Kurdish areas. Following an attempted military putsch in July of 2016, the Interior Ministry removed more than 90 mayors from the Democratic Regions Party (sister party to the People's Democracy Party, or HDP), mostly for alleged support of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).[10]

The mayors were replaced by government-appointed "trustees" *(kayyum)*, leading many to joke that they now lived in Kayyumistan, or "Land of the Trustees."[11]

In 2019 local elections, the HDP won back the overwhelming majority of the municipalities seized by Erdoğan's regime. However, while Turkish election law requires local election boards' pre-approval of candidates for office, close to a hundred winning HDP candidates were denied their certificates of election because of previous or pending investigations.

An additional 88 municipal council members were similarly denied certification. In addition to allegations of "terrorism," the Interior Ministry cited HDP's co-mayor system (the party pursues a co-chairship system in all organizations in the interest of gender parity) as a reason for the purge.[12]

Mired in legal action and under threat of closure, the HDP renamed itself the Equality and Democracy Party (DEM) in late 2023. While supporters largely voted for the CHP's Imamoğlu in Istanbul and in many cities the party didn't field candidates, an implicit endorsement of the CHP, DEM regained control of large eastern cities previously seized by the AKP.

True to form, evidence of meddling during the election has emerged, while the AKP contested DEM victories after. The day after the election, DEM claimed that thousands of security officers had been relocated to majority-Kurdish regions to vote in places they did not reside.

Two days after the election, protests in cities across the nation (notably supported by the CHP) followed authorities' refusal to allow DEM's Abdullah Zeydan (who won 55.5% of the votes) to take his position in Van, attempting to place the AKP's candidate (who won 27.2%) in the post instead. After a public outcry the Supreme Election Board overturned the regional election commission's removal of Zeydan.[13]

The Interior Ministry has also launched

investigations into the Mardin and Diyarbakır municipalities, both won by DEM. The party has responded to charges of not reciting the national anthem and removing the Turkish flag during inauguration ceremonies by focusing on real concerns, like the looting of provincial funds by trustee officials.[14]

At the beginning of June, police raided the Hakkari Municipality, in southeastern Turkey and detained co-mayor Mehmet Sıddık Akış of DEM. Following the party's call for protests against the appointment of a trustee to Hakkari municipality, the region's governor's office banned demonstrations for 10 days.[15]

Attacks on Democracy

Attacks on local democracy will continue in Kurdish regions, despite encouraging recent expressions of widespread support. Central to the state's hostility to DEM and the pro-Kurdish left is the concept of democratic confederalism, a system of local autonomy theorized by Abdullah Öcalan, imprisoned leader of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

Rooted in principles of direct democracy, political ecology, feminism and economic cooperation, Öcalan formulated the concept following his abandonment of Marxist-Leninism in the early 2000s. Strongly influenced by Murray Bookchin's libertarian municipalism, democratic confederalism is seen by nationalists seen as just another method of separatism.

The government also did not wait to attack labor and left activists after the election. In April trade unions and left parties announced, as they have for years, May 1 demonstrations in the iconic Taksim Square, site of a 1977 massacre in which dozens of leftwing activists were murdered and hundreds were injured.

There was a new spirit of defiance and determination in 2024, largely attributable to the election. The AKP therefore went to greater-than-usual lengths to prevent the election's symbolic victory from spreading to the labor movement.

The government deployed 42,000 police — more than double the number of the previous year — to prevent demonstrators' reaching Taksim with public transportation selectively shut down, streets closed, and barriers, checkpoints, and cordons blocking access to the square.

More than 200 were arrested, and on May 3, police raided a number of Istanbul residences and arrested 29 people associated with leftist groups for "participating in an illegal demonstration."[16]

Since the general election of 2023, a subject of considerable political debate has been whether Erdoğan will attempt to change the constitution to try to run for another term as president in 2028. The municipal election of 2024 has clearly weakened Erdoğan and his party. Whether activists can work within municipal contexts to shape the political future is an open question. ■

Notes

1. "Turkey's local election in numbers: AKP lost 195 municipalities, CHP doubled its presence," bianet, April 1, 2024.
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7. "Erbakan: 'Aşı olmadım, yarı insan yarı maymun çocuk doğmasına neden olabilir'," *Ileri Haber*, September 13, 2021.
8. "Turkey restricts exports of 54 products to Israel until Gaza ceasefire," *Aljazeera*, April 9, 2024.
9. For more detail see Hakan Yılmaz, "Erdoğan's colossal defeat in Turkey — and a new hope," *Tempest*, April 17, 2024.
10. The Democratic Regions Party was a local-level sister party to the People's Democracy Party (HDP).
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13. "Turkey's election authority reinstates pro-Kurdish mayoral election winner," *Al Jazeera*, April 3, 2024.
14. "DEM Party denounces Interior Ministry probe into municipalities," *Duvar English*, April 21, 2024.
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The Movement for Divestment — *continued from page 5*

Unlike most schools, Riverside has committed to review its investments, but only its endowment portfolio, not all investments, and is not targeting Israeli investments. Even if its agreement is carried out in full, any Riverside divestments will not economically or politically contribute to pressure on Israeli apartheid.

At Evergreen College, administration made probably the greatest concessions, creating four subcommittees with three student representatives on each committee, which will be appointed by the student union, not by the university. Two of these committees refer to Israeli apartheid, directly or indirectly, the others to policing.

The elephant in the negotiations rooms that produced these agreements had to have been the police violence at Columbia, CUNY, UCLA and Austin. In some cases that intimidation factor would also have coupled with a sense from negotiators, without the counterbalance of established democratic decision-making processes in camps that were often just a few days old, that taking some deal, any deal, was better than the camp getting broken up and demoralized by an inevitable police raid, or losing momentum as the semester ended — that this was as good as it was going to get.

Looking Ahead

The struggle ahead for the divestment movement on campuses is unclear. None of the agreements that took down encampments include any veto or oversight power for the Gaza solidarity movement. But how could it, when the movement is not an institution or state decision making body?

Lessons of the 2020 Movement for Black Lives should be illustrative here. Whatever defunding gestures or promises that cities made during the height of that powerful movement faded when the movement's momentum slowed.

Movements exist by the power of their momentum, and when that movement slows, the power is lost. University, city, and state administrators seem to have learned that lesson well, and we must too.

Some campus encampments have been steered into dead-end hopes of policy reform through administrator-controlled subcommittees. But we should not overstate the significance of this counterinsurgency.

Even if sectors are diverted into dead-end policy rooms, those will not hold the imagination and determination of the movement. The real motor force of the movement is the Palestinian resistance — and these policy discussions have nothing to do with stopping the war on Gaza or freeing Palestine.

As the spring semester drew to a close and campus encampments dealt with the threats of police repression and neutralization by policy room, some people in encampments called for "escalation" in order to renew the movement, refuse routinization, and continue to fight to defend Gaza.

Encampments have been spaces of a diversity of tactics in the very best ways. But tactics can sometimes be fetishized and romanticized. Unless tactics stem from a clear political focus, there is a risk of losing track of their situation within a general strategy. The lessons of the campus encampment movement should be absorbed and understood in order to uplift those principles into the next phase of the movement.

It was the politics of the encampments that has made them powerful — that simultaneously local and internationalist focus, the practical and programmatic divestment demand, with a clear focused local target that also never lost sight of the Palestinian struggle.

Whatever the next phase of the movement looks like, it will need to be guided by these principles in order to continue to build pressure against the Israel-U.S. war machine.■

References are in the longer version of this article at https://againstthecurrent.org/.

2023 BRICS Summit — alternative to imperialism or an expression of the southern transational capitalist class?

The Evolving Transnational Capitalist Class: **Multi-polarity: A New Non-Alignment?** By Jerry Harris

THE CRISIS OF globalization has created growing national tensions. No longer do we hear about the wonders of global free markets and world integration. Instead, talk has turned to "decoupling" from China, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and multi-polarity breaking up imperial Western leadership.

As multi-polarity grows, there are some who see this as a new stage of non-alignment, and even the creation of an anti-imperialist bloc. But the economic and political elites of the Global South are too deeply tied to transnational capitalism to be truly independent. Instead, multi-polarity is a struggle within global capitalism for a larger share of markets, profits and political power.

China has become the main proponent of a new world order based on "win-win" relationships. But a "common destiny for mankind" within global capitalism covers over the fundamental reality of capitalist competition and exploitation.

At the core of discontent have been the growing class disparities in the United States and Europe, creating a crisis of legitimacy for capitalist elites. And in the Global South, historic imperialist inequalities are clashing with the growing power and demands of the southern-based transnational capitalist class (STCC).

Some see this as a progressive new non-alignment. But the southern contingent of the transntional capitalist class (TCC) is far too integrated with northern capital to pursue nonalignment as some truly independent bloc. Whereas the Western working class wants out of globalization, the STCC wants further in.

After World War II a great wave of anti-colonial struggles swept what was then called the Third World. The period produced various political leaders from communists like Fidel Castro and Ho Chi Minh, to radical socialists such as Kwame Nkrumah and Nelson Mandela, and anti-colonial nationalists like Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser and Iran's Mohammad Mosaddegh.

During this time the oppressed national bourgeoisie joined with the masses of workers and peasants in the struggle for independence and self-determination. But those days have come and gone.

Non-Alignment or Integrated Capital?

The southern bourgeoisies long ago cut their populist ties and socialist rhetoric to join global capitalism — but not as subservient compradors. Rather, the most successful and powerful have become a contingent of the TCC.

As Bank of America reported, the BRICS (originally Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) combined gross domestic product surpassed that of the Group of 7 (G7) in terms of purchasing power parity.[1] And by 2028, the BRICS should account for 33.6% of global output, compared with 27% for the G7.[2]

In 2021, outflows from the Global South were 26% of world foreign direct investments (FDI), and had climbed to 21% of total FDI stock. This is the material basis for the STCC. In fact, 45 of the top 100 financial holding companies are in the Global South,[3] as well as 21 of the 100 largest TNCs.[4]

We can also examine the regional size and wealth of TCC contingents. Among the 3,194 global billionaires, 34.7% are in Asia, Africa, South America and the Middle East; together they hold 34% of billionaire wealth.[5]

The five top countries with billionaires are the United States, China, Germany, United Kingdom and India. Among ultra-high-net-worth individuals (between $30 million and $999 million), 32% are in the Global South with 30% of the wealth.

Because data for Asia include Japan, the actual totals would be a few percentage points smaller. But, overall, it's evident that the big bourgeoisies of the Global South are an important contingent of the TCC.

It's also important to understand that this accumulated wealth doesn't stand alone

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in some type of Global South silo. Rather, it is largely integrated with Northern capital through stocks, mergers, joint ventures and a plethora of financial devices. It's not the 30% of Global South capitalists *versus* the 70% of Global North capitalists.

To examine how integrated global capitalism has become under TCC direction, a key study by the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology needs to be considered. Its research group traced ownership of transnational corporations, examining a database of 37 million companies and investors.

The study focused on shareholding networks, and a core group of 147 predominantly financial institutions. Situated in these financial institutions were 47,819 individual and institutional shareholders from 190 countries holding principal positions within the world's largest transnational corporations. In other words, the TCC living in countries around the globe invest their wealth through world-spanning financial firms that hold positions of power in the 15,500 biggest companies.[6]

An excellent example is the world's largest asset holder ($9.4 trillion), U.S.-headquartered BlackRock. In 2022, it announced that foreign investors are the majority of its new clients.

Among BlackRock's top 10 investors are the sovereign wealth fund China Investment Corporation, Mizuho Financial group from Japan, the Singapore state investment firm Temasek Holdings, and Wellington from Boston. In turn, Wellington has 2,200 clients from over 60 countries.

An example of a smaller financial institution, but nonetheless rooted in integrated transnational finance and investment, is IFM Investors based in Australia. Much smaller than BlackRock, with assets just short of $200 billion, the firm invests on behalf of more than 640 institutions worldwide, including pensions, insurers, sovereign wealth funds (SWF), universities, endowment funds and foundations.

The fact that BlackRock, Wellington and IFM are headquartered in the United States and Australia is secondary to their representation of TCC investors. Finance capital is integrated global capital, from the largest to smaller-sized firms.

Daimler Truck Holding AG is an instructive illustration of how finance impacts industrial manufacturers considered "national champions." Daimler Truck has 823 million outstanding shares held around the world. Mercedes-Benz Group is the largest individual shareholder, but other major shareholders include Chinese BAIC Group, the Chinese investor Li Shufu, and the Kuwait Investment Authority, which is also a major holder of Mercedes-Benz shares.[7]

This example of co-invested Southern and Northern TCC contingents is common. On the production side of the picture, take Procter & Gamble with its 50,000 direct suppliers, each of which may use hundreds of other companies for parts. Such complex world-spanning relationships are common among transnational corporations (TNCs) and tie together the South and North.

Nor are sovereign wealth funds exempt from transnational financial relations. Although SWFs are state-owned and based on national capital, they are a major avenue of global investments.

The example of Norway's Norges Bank Investment Management is instructive; it holds $1.3 trillion in assets with stakes in 9,228 companies spanning 70 countries.[8] Among the top 16 holdings of Singapore's Temasek are five from the United States, four from China and two from India, as well as the Netherlands and UK.

To appreciate the study by the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, we need to consider how financial institutions function as organizational centers for transnational capital. Banks, asset managers, private equity firms, currency traders and numerous other financial institutions create thousands of different investment vehicles.

These are various ways to organize and invest capital, attracting transnational capitalists the world over. As capital is centralized into various funds it flows out to countries in every continent. It goes into stocks, bonds, equities, futures, real estate, money markets, venture capital (and on and on), making profits off the labor of working people, as well as from purely speculative activities.

The surplus value is re-centralized into these financial firms and distributed back to TCC investors until it's re-circulated once again. This is the essential process as revealed in the Swiss study, and what we see in BlackRock and other financial institutions.

This is clearly evident in U.S. corporate equities, about 40% of which are owned by foreign investors. Middle-class U.S. households own around 30%, mainly through retirement accounts, and five per cent are held by NGOs. Wealthy U.S. investors hold about 25%.

Since we are interested in decision-making power, we need to discount the millions of small households. As a single national group, U.S. capitalists have the largest holdings. However, *collectively* foreign transnational capitalists hold the greatest total amount of U.S. capital stock.[9]

Historic Inequalities

Taken together the above data point to why nonalignment is not possible, but limited to a set of inequalities linked to the historic hold Western imperialism has had on the global system. The so-called move to nonalignment is actually meant to bring about closer alignment and greater equality among capitalists, rather than a bloc of neutral powers.

Although the past 40 years have seen the construction of transnational capitalism, it has been established on the body of the older imperialist system. As the STCC has grown stronger its demands for fairer representation in transnational governance institutions such as the United Nations, International Monetary Fund and World Bank have also grown.

There are also other inequalities, such as the environmental burden and dominant position of the dollar in trade and finance. A greater balance of power would help broad sectors of the world's population — but the biggest winner will be the STCC.

For example, the de-dollarization of world trade (still far from any significant change) would mainly serve to increase the market power of the STTC. It may also create greater political room to avoid U.S. sanctions, which have hurt millions of people throughout the Global South.

Demands that de-center Western state power should be supported, particularly those that benefit the broad masses of people. But we must also be mindful of how these changes create a more powerful Southern bourgeoisie in a better position to exploit labor, buy more military equipment and consolidate its hold on the state.

For some, the expansion of BRICS (the trading bloc of Brazil/Russia/India/China/South Africa) is an historic step towards independence and nonalignment. Brazilian President Lula da Silva went so far as to state that the BRICS would be "the driving force of the new international order."[10]

But the intent to fully integrate with transnational capitalism was evident from the Johannesburg II Declaration, which marked the culmination of the fifteenth BRICS summit, in August 2023. In it, the BRICS reaffirmed their support for a "rules-based multilateral trading system with the World Trade Organization at its core … a market-oriented agricultural trading system … an adequately resourced International Monetary Fund … [and that] multilateral financial institutions and international organization play a constructive role building global consensus on economic policies."[11]

As Patrick Bond points out, "Instead of overturning the high table of Western economic power, the bloc is intent on stabilizing and relegitimizing that 'rules-based order.'"[12]

When the BRICS declare that the WTO is at the core of a global trading system, they are supporting a structure that elevates the rights of TNCs over the rights of states. This system privileges the power of transnational capitalists over state elites, because WTO trade courts are built to uphold the right of TNCs to sue governments over unfairly limiting profits or market access. While some court decisions have gone against the United States and Europe, a substantial majority have

punished countries in the Global South.

These dispute settlements courts are considered a core WTO activity. They have been used to overrule environmental and labor standards and policies that subsidize national corporations, in effect weakening the power of the state where progressive national elements have influence while strengthening the power of TNCs where Southern social democrats have little or no power.

In a major study of investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) procedures, Shawn Nichols wrote, "the struggle around ISDS represents a global project led by an increasingly dominant transnational capital class [that] has generated substantial opposition in recent years from environmental, labor, and other public interest groups."[13]

WTO trade courts have become a template for using ISDS mechanisms by individual countries. Massive volumes of transnational capital are channeled through the Netherlands because it uses such procedures in its bilateral investment agreements with many countries. In 2017, the Netherlands ranked number one in held stock of foreign direct investments abroad with $5.8 trillion, compared to $5.6 for the United States (third came the combined totals for China and Hong Kong at $3.1 trillion).[14]

The Netherlands' number-one ranking is stark evidence of how the TCC operates on a global, rather than national, scale. Perhaps the best example is the defense industry, the most "national" of all industries and financed through tax dollars. Nevertheless, six of the 10 largest arms companies maintain legal structures in the Netherlands, and the biggest with almost half of annual defense spending have financial operations.[15]

The irony of the BRICS supporting the WTO as a "core" of the international system is that the United States has undermined the trade court by blocking new appointments, thereby disrupting its ability to function. Problems began when the WTO ruled against the Trump White House imposing tariffs on Chinese steel and aluminum.

The United States appealed the case, but now there is no Appellate Body because there are no judges. Consequently, the judgement remains in limbo.

On a broader scale the Trump administration, as well as that of Biden, decided that the United States was in a stronger position when negotiating with countries one-on-one, rather than using a court of seven transnational judges.[16] Trade panels do continue to function, but 65% of all cases are followed by appeals, which now have nowhere to go.

Why then would BRICS state elites want to re-energize the WTO when that institution was the main target of the anti-globalization movement, and when the trade court is used most often against the Global South?

On the surface, it appears that BRICS

President Xi, architect of China's new capitalism.

constitutes an anti-U.S. bloc. But on a deeper level its members are fighting to defend institutional transnational authority, particularly as their own TNCs grow stronger and desire the power to force open markets and sue governments. And they don't stand alone.

The Council on Foreign Relations, the most important think-tank linked to U.S. grand strategy, accused the United States of "holding the murder weapon" that killed the WTO.[17] This reflects differences between U.S. state and economic elites during a period of upheaval and crisis. Corporate leaders prefer defending globalization, open borders and unrestricted capital flows, while state elites concerned with political instability pursue a partial retreat from globalization and the strengthening of state-centric control.

Between 2016 and September 2023, the Global North brought 30 cases against countries in the Global South, while the South initiated only 11 cases against the North. Additionally, there were 20 cases between countries of the Global South. The United States used the WTO court more than any other country, bringing 29 cases, while China brought nine and India, eight.[18]

The fact that U.S. corporations used the WTO more than any other is why transnational elites accused the U.S. government of "murdering" the trade court. Moreover, the high number of cases instigated between economic interests in the Global South reveals the lack of any cohesive anti-Western bloc, but rather typical inter-capitalist competition at the expense of the working class and poor.

The Johannesburg II Declaration was filled of course with rhetoric for a fair, inclusive and equitable world trading system based on sustainable development and inclusive growth. It goes on about protecting human rights, fostering peace and development and fighting corruption. But considering the Russian invasion of Ukraine and human rights violations in India, China and among new members Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Ethiopia and Egypt, the hypocrisy is deafening.

Beyond that hypocrisy there exists a deeper problem for socialists and anti-capitalist activists. This is the promotion of an ideology that rejects the basic antagonism between capital and labor, a type of right-wing social democracy that argues the better capitalism does, the better the working-class benefits — like the old slogan "What's good for General Motors is what's good for America."

There's the equally problematic belief that a widely shared global capitalism can transition to an ecologically sustainable world.

While BRICS declares its faith in creating "a fair competition market environment" it also commits to "workers' rights … decent work for all and social justice."[19]

But when in the history of capitalism has the system produced decent work and social justice for all? In fact, much of its success is based on the exact opposite.

Can capitalism create a world system which is no longer imperialistic, racist and exploitative? This is the delusional path the BRICS states have set off on — or perhaps, the state and corporate leaders who rule over business and trade know full well the need to create a discourse of equality and justice to maintain a shield of political legitimacy.

China and Global Capital

The most influential promoter of this ideology is the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Its strategy is put forth in terms of "a common destiny for humanity," a win-win transnational order of trade and investment, and that "all nations and countries should stick together, share weal and woe, live together in harmony, and engage in mutually beneficial cooperation."

Achieving this "visionary planning for the future: is not to be done through socialism but globalization, which "has improved the allocation of production factors worldwide, including capital, information, technology, labor and management … it draws nations out of isolation and away from the obsolete model of self-reliance, merging their individual markets into a global one."[20]

But the reality is that globalization has resulted in widespread exploitation of the working class and peasants of the Global South, and precarity for workers in the North. Yet the CCP reduces imperialism simply to the "hegemonic thinking of certain countries that seek supremacy," i.e. the United States.[21]

Evidently the CCP wants to spread its experience to the rest of the world. Without question, globalization has been a success for

China, leading to rapid economic development and a middle class of about 250 million people.

Its model includes Keynesian state-directed investments as well as neoliberal labor and financial policies. But the idea that global capitalism will create a middle-class world of peace and environmental sustainability, or even has the material capacity to do so, is badly misleading.

While acknowledging China's new middle class, we must recognize that Western capitalism also created a large middle class, although based on imperialism abroad, white supremacy at home and brutal exploitation of labor for many decades. Nevertheless, the room for civil society won by the masses in the American and French revolutions allowed just enough space for organization and struggle.

Advances were made particularly in the "Golden Age" of Keynesianism during the four decades following the Second World War. But neoliberal hegemony and globalization severely weakened those gains, undermining legitimacy and creating the deep political and social instability now rampant in the West.

Deindustrialization, job loss, weaker and smaller unions, precarity and deep cuts to the social contract produced a rejection of globalization. Blaming China's success for capitalists moving U.S. production abroad is a tactic to divert domestic anger and regain political legitimacy.

For the past 40 years the expansion of the Chinese middle class, compared to the shrinking middle class in the West, made China the winner in global restructuring. Its developmental model relied on opening up to massive amounts of foreign direct investments, adopting Western business practices and technology, becoming the world's workshop and exporting commodities around the globe.

This was done without old-style imperialist adventures abroad. But it did rely on 300 million rural migrants lacking decent housing, good educational opportunities or sufficient health care to fill the needs of the urban economy with cheap labor.[22]

It also meant closing tens of thousands of state-owned enterprises, consolidating the rest into powerful transnational corporations and encouraging private capital — resulting in the creation of a billionaire and multi-millionaire class contingent of the TCC. Cheap labor, long hours of work, large profits, state-controlled unions and a weak social safety net were a perfect neoliberal success story.

Part of this transformation was the creation of an entrepreneurial and professional middle class, based in both the private sector and among millions of CCP state functionaries. Furthermore, there was a rise in the living standards of core sectors of the working class. Much of this was achieved through the economic direction of the state and neo-Keynesian social policies, such as massive and repeated infrastructure investments.

But it also included neoliberal financial speculation, such as the largest and fastest real-estate expansion in history. This sector encompassed about 25% of the economy. Much of the construction was done on the backs of migrant labor and carried out by private corporations, creating riches for many of the new bourgeoisie.

Hong Kong, rich and repressive.

The industry was built largely on debt and speculation, much like the U.S. housing crisis that exploded in 2008. Millions of middle-class Chinese bought multiple homes, betting on future resale. This was very similar to middle-class Americans who bought and flipped house after house until the real-estate party imploded.

Real-estate corporations overbuilt, middle-class Chinese over bought, and now this speculative market with millions of empty units and no buyers is causing big problems. Some estimates of empty housing units equal the Chinese population of 1.4 billion.

With the largest real-estate corporations sunk into debt, they were unable to pay back their loans, much of which is held by foreign investors. Among the two biggest real estate corporations, Country Garden had $9.4 billion of offshore debt, and Evergrande Group holds $26.7 billion in offshore debt.[23]

Starting in 2021 through to October 2022, sixty-six real estate developers defaulted, with two-thirds of their debt held in foreign currency. Thirty-nine of these developers alone owed $117 billion of foreign debt[24] — evidence of how deeply transnational capital is involved in China's property market.

In addition to offshore real-estate debt, $84.2 billion in foreign debt is owed by local governments. This debt is in Local Government Financial Vehicles (LGFVs), used to borrow capital for local infrastructure and public projects, issued as bonds mainly as private equity and commercial bills.[25] As yet another example of transnational integration, it reveals why the Chinese economy is vital to the entire financial structure of global capitalism.

Although political elites have been pushing corporations to avoid over-reliance on Chinese supply chains, or even fully decoupling, transnational capitalists show no real inclination to do so. The irony of the situation is that a large part of the problem is situated between the Western TCC and its own state elites, rather than between Western and Southern transnational capitalists.

There has been a constant pushback by corporate lobbies against trade and investment restriction. Between 2019 and 2022, U.S. companies paid out more than $150 billion on Chinese import duties, and over 6,000 have sued the U.S. government for reimbursement.[26] On her trip to China, US Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo stated, "I did, myself, personally, talk to over a hundred CEOs of US businesses before going to China, and to say they were desperate for some kind of a dialogue is not an exaggeration."[27]

Moreover, coinciding closely with Secretary of Treasury Janet Yellin's China visit were high-profile trips by Bill Gates, Elon Musk and Tim Cook, with Cook stating that Apple had a "symbiotic" relationship with China.

As the Chinese middle and capitalist classes grew and the state grew rich, Western middle and working classes were moving in the opposite direction. The resulting political and economic tension is the basis for much of the deterioration in the U.S.-China state-to-state relationship. But the transnational economic relationship has been highly successful for the TCC hierarchy, North and South.

While state elites are concerned with political legitimacy, corporate elites are concerned with profits. Most of the time, political and economic contingents of the ruling class work in unison. But in times of crisis, contradictions can erupt over their primary interests.

To understand the China/Western TCC relationship we can examine some basic data. In 2022, the top 100 largest foreign firms in China employed three million people, had revenues of one trillion and accounted for seven per cent of the country's GDP.

Among the top five firms were Foxconn,

Volkswagen, Apple, General Motors, HSBC and the Thai agriculture conglomerate Charoen Pokphand Foods. German automakers sell more cars in China than in all of Western Europe; Apple sells more phones in China than the United States.

In fact, the revenues gathered by U.S. TNCs in China are more than their combined revenues from Japan, Britain and Germany.[28] Among the top 100 foreign corporations, the United States had the largest presence with 36, followed by Japan, UK, Germany and France.[29]

Total FDI through 2021 was $2.282 trillion. And those firms that have diversified from China haven't retreated back to their Western home, but have gone to Vietnam, Malaysia and other countries in the Global South. So while there has been a small geospatial shift, the result has been to strengthen STCC contingents outside of China.

Table 1. Yearly FDI flows into China 2016–2021[30]

Year	$US (billions)
2016	126.00
2017	131.04
2018	134.97
2019	138.13
2020	144.37
2021	173.50

It's also important to investigate how TCC contingents in China and abroad use the transnational financial system to work to their mutual advantage. The Cayman Islands is the main channel that Chinese TNCs use to raise capital by selling equity to foreign investors. In fact, Chinese shell companies in the Caymans and Bermuda account for 60% of outstanding equity issued through all tax havens, and 70% of foreign funds invested in China.

Such investments get around decoupling in a complex set of maneuvers. Shell companies don't represent direct ownership in Chinese TNCs; in fact the shell doesn't even own shares in the operating company. Instead, it will own a unit in China called a wholly foreign-owned enterprise (WFOE), which has contracts with the Chinese corporation, shares in the profits and has a voice in operations.

The WFOE sends its profits back to the tax haven shell in the Cayman Islands, which can then pass them to TCC investors in New York, London or anywhere else in the world. The structure is known as a variable-interest entity and counts as equity by international accounting standards.

Stanford researcher Matteo Maggiori writes, "When you mention who uses tax havens, you think of wealthy individuals and large firms from very developed countries. But the picture has changed substantially over the last 10 or 15 years."[31]

These are examples of how closely linked global capitalism has become, and must balance any analysis that privileges state-centric tensions as the sole motivating force of international relations. The Chinese and STCC don't want to undermine global capitalism; their success is dependent on their integration.

As China's capital surplus grew from billions into trillions, it began a policy of outward-bound expansion, necessary not only as an outlet for accumulated capital, but also as an outlet for its overcapacity in industrial commodities.

Whose Choices?

As previously mentioned, the Chinese are exporting their model of development through their trillion-dollar Belt and Road investments. The policy is wrapped in the rhetoric of "win-win," and that countries have the right to "freely choose" their social system. This narrative lays the basis for non-alignment.

But is there truly such a thing as a "win-win" scenario under capitalism, a system based on the exploitation of labor and on imperialism?

China is doing business with bourgeois state elites and private corporations, based on capitalist market principles. This is a win for Chinese corporations that need to export excess capital and deal with the overproduction of goods.

It also is a mutual win for state and corporate elites in the Global South who profit from the relationship. In addition, the development of infrastructure increases economic activity and therefore benefits trickle down to workers through jobs, an expanded economy, as well as the creation of a managerial middle class.

Capitalism has always based its legitimacy on such an expansion. But the heart of the entire system is still based on the expropriation of surplus value from labor, and its oppressive apparatus. The growth in China, made possible by its previous socialist base, will not be possible in smaller countries.

The Left should avoid sinking into right-wing social democracy, arguing for the common interests of capital and labor, or that capitalism can lead to a "common destiny for humanity." If our vision has been reduced to supporting efforts by the STCC to become richer and stronger within global capitalism, our strategy for human liberation has gone seriously off track.

What about the Chinese principle that countries have the right to "freely choose" their social system? Given the historic imposition of Western imperialism, often through violence, the right of people to determine their own social system is absolutely correct. But this isn't truly what China means.

The CCP is speaking about state-to-state relationships in today's global system. States dominated by the capitalist ruling class take many forms, including bourgeois-democratic, authoritarian, neo-fascist and reactionary theocratic regimes. China's all-inclusive rhetoric gives cover for authoritarian and theocratic states of the worst kind.

China doesn't really mean that "people" have the right to choose, but that states have the right to determine how to organize and use their power. When the police and military violently repress mass movements, as in Iran, Sudan, Egypt, Burma or Belarus, exactly whose "country" is it? The language of "countries" means supporting the state and whoever controls it.

The principle sounds great compared to imperialist history, but whatever happened to "people want revolution" or even, people want democracy?

There may be a certain rationale in state-to-state diplomacy in Chinese policy. Under Chou En-lai and Mao, China upheld independence and self-determination and the right to rebel.

The right of people to organize and overthrow reactionary regimes doesn't mean supporting the right of imperialists to do so. Upholding independence and opposing foreign invasions are socialist principles. But that is different from the Left respecting the "right to choose" a fascist government.

Conclusion

Much of the Global South sees China as a success story, as indeed it is for many. But can its relatively broad-based success be repeated among developing countries?

Is there economic and environmental room within capitalism to produce a sustainable middle-class global society? Or is that narrative, liberally laced with anti-colonial rhetoric constructed to gain legitimacy, cover oppressive policies and serve to open a path to increased wealth and power for the STTC?

With the historic juncture of traditional imperialism alongside the emergence of a transnational capitalist class based in the North and South, we have a complex mix of nationalist and transnational rhetoric and conflict.

Globalization is a re-division of the world through the integration and mixing of national capital, rather than the re-division of colonial territory, or the establishment of a strategic space of independence and non-alignment. Multi-polarity is basically a fight for equality among capitalists of different types and ideologies. It may de-center the old U.S.-dominated system, but in that process we must distinguish what is historically progressive and what isn't.

Does the drive for multi-polarity enhance the ability of states to develop in a way that benefits all classes or a drive for equality among capitalists and the freedom to establish authoritarian regimes as accepted and respected alternatives to U.S. imperialism?

For the Left, working-class internationalism seems more appropriate than multi-polarity as our guide.

In the American Revolution independence and self-determination were, from the capitalist viewpoint, all about property rights. Civil society and popular democracy were concessions to the revolutionary masses, the foot soldiers who defeated British colonialism.

Is a democratic civil society the type of concession offered today by Saudi Arabia, Iran, Russia and other authoritarian states? During the post-World War II anti-colonial era, national bourgeoisies were often swept up in patriotic, socialist and democratic rhetoric. Some of that came to fruition, while other countries sank into corruption and the consolidation of capitalist relations.

We are well past the non-aligned promise of Bandung. Southern capitalists have matured, their leading elements are contingents of the TCC, and multi-polarity is based on this new stage of development. ■

Notes

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G7 Summit during the era of Merkel and Trump. This year Ukraine, Gaza and the far right are major ruling-class concerns.

Dual Crises of Capitalism & Global Labor: On Imperialism, Lenin & Today

By Marcel van der Linden

"If you do not expect the unexpected you will not discover it; for it is hard to track down and difficult to approach."
—Heraclitus, c. 500 BCE

WORLD WAR I was a turning point in many ways. One important change became visible in the economic analyses of the revolutionary left. Very clear was this with Lenin: building on the work of Bukharin, Hilferding and Hobson, he saw an extensive and probably irreversible decline of world capitalism.

The rapidly increasing power of the monopolies since the 1880s began, in his view, to culminate in a new stage of development, namely imperialism. The "essence of imperialism," he wrote in 1917, is a "combination of antagonistic principles, viz., competition and monopoly."

Monopolistic competition leads to incessant global expansion of commodity production and competition and results in an intensified struggle for raw materials and sales areas. "[An] increasing number of small or weak nations" is exploited "by a handful of the richest or most powerful nations."

But monopolist tendencies simultaneously engender "a tendency to stagnation and decay." Indeed as soon as monopoly prices are established, "even temporarily, the motive cause of technical and, consequently, of all other progress disappears to a certain extent and, further, the economic possibility arises of deliberately retarding technical progress."

One of the consequences of this is that "the bourgeoisie to an ever-increasing degree lives on the proceeds of capital exports and by 'clipping coupons.'" Therefore, imperialism has the be characterized as "parasitic or decaying capitalism," "moribund capitalism, capitalism which is dying but not dead."

However, Lenin warned against seeing this development as a homogeneous tendency. It does *not transform* capitalism from top to bottom, but sharpens its contradictions of capitalism; and it does *not* preclude the rapid growth of capitalism.

With his analysis, Lenin initiated the debate on the general crisis of capitalism that was to dominate left-wing thinking on the development of capitalism for decades — a debate to which, of course, his early death (1924) meant he could contribute little further later.

As early as 1922, Jenő (Eugen) Varga — who would later become Stalin's chief economist — published *The Period of Capitalist Decline.* In the years that followed, numerous contributions followed in which the theme was further developed by Marxists of various persuasions.

In 1930, for example, Henryk Grossmann published his influential study on *The Law of Accumulation and Breakdown of Capitalism* (1930), and a few years later Leon Trotsky spoke in his "Transitional Program" (1938) of the "death agony of capitalism."

Even non-Marxists felt that capitalism's collapse might be approaching. Shortly after the end of the Second World War, the liberal economist Joseph Schumpeter said that there was a tendency towards decomposition in capitalist society that would inevitably lead to its dissolution. Up until the early 1950s, almost no one believed in a longer upswing as a real possibility.

Theory and Strategy

I do not want to go into the numerous theoretical variants developed over time. Rather, I want to say something more about the links between theory as such and strategic discussion in the labor movement: how was the connection between economics and revolutionary politics seen in the movements?

According to the Marxist tradition, it is taken for granted that all modes of production and social formations have a beginning and an end. That is also why capitalism does not have an eternal life. But how will capitalism find its Waterloo?

Marx himself worked with two different theoretical approaches that we can call

Table 1: Union Membership as a Percentage of the Labor Force

Country	1908	1913	Postwar Peak	1930	1939-40	1950
Australia	10	25	30	38	35	50
Austria	3	3	39	25	–	40
Belgium	2	7	27	18	24	36
Canada	–	6	12	8	8	19
Denmark	7	13	27	21	28	33
Finland	–	2	11	1	3	17
France	4	5	8	7	17	22
Germany	6	11	30	18	–	29
Italy	1	2	12	–	–	37
Netherlands	–	11	15	20	22	31
New Zealand	8	15	19	17	39	38
Norway	2	7	13	12	26	34
Sweden	5	6	11	20	36	51
Switzerland	–	5	12	17	19	29
United Kingdom	11	22	43	23	31	40
United States	6	7	11	7	16	22

Source: J.D. Stephens, *The Transition from Capitalism to Socialism* (London and Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1979, 115.

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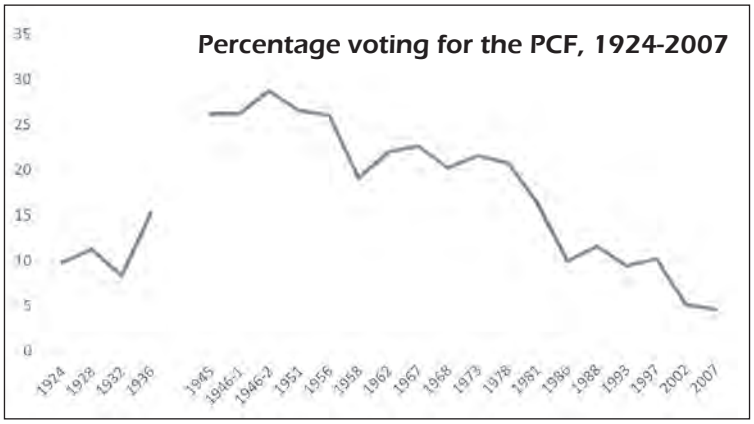
esoteric and exoteric argumentations. According to the *esoteric* approach, capitalism will finish itself: "the true barrier to capitalist production is capital itself."

With respect to the precise nature of this impediment, Marx had different ideas. In the *Grundrisse,* he said that the progressing reduction of living labor in productive processes leads to the breakdown of exchange. Elsewhere (letter to Engels, 1858), he argued that the creation of the world market would be capitalism's endpoint.



The *exoteric* Marx, on the other hand, considered "the proletariat" as the class whose "historic task" involved "the overthrow of the capitalist mode of production and the final abolition of all classes."

Marx sought to depict both approaches in a logical context. And as the labor movements began to flourish during his life, this became more plausible.

During the revolutionary wave that washed over the world between 1916 and 1921, the socialist movements also did not feel they had to choose between the two perspectives. Precisely during the years when imperialism emerged, the labor movement also began to gain considerable strength. This is clearly evident, for example, in the growth of the trade union movement (Table 1).

Precisely from the point of view of the general crisis of capitalism, the esoteric perspective of collapse and the exoteric perspective of the insurrectionary push seemed to more or less coincide. Only in such a short historical period can a genuinely revolutionary organization achieve the allegiance of large masses whose struggle for immediate, indispensable interests also goes beyond the framework of the capitalist system.

Walking the Tightrope

In the years that followed, however, this changed. In the absence of an acutely revolutionary situation, revolutionaries are faced with the task of walking a tightrope between two abysses — the "right" abyss of reformist opportunism and the "left" abyss of sectarianism.

In the developed industrialised countries, the working masses are generally reformist. If the communist party wants to gain their trust, it must legitimise itself as a successful champion of reform. In doing so, it all too easily becomes a mere part of the system it has set out to destroy, its "left" wing.

If, on the other hand, the party renounces a long and serious struggle for reforms, it will either become a sect that disguises its powerlessness with revolutionary phraseology, or, driven by impatience, it will fall into putschist adventures.

In line with this, Lenin viewed the proletarian revolution from a double perspective. When there was evidence of mass radicalism, as in Russia in the autumn of 1917, he opted for an immediate seizure of power. But when popular revolutionary ferment was on the decline, as in Europe in 1921-1922, he adopted a strategy in which piecemeal reforms became acceptable in the short run as the most expedient means of winning mass support.

The debate on the gradualist strategy was held in several places towards the end of the 1920s, for example in the Italian Communist Party.

Even after World War II, the vast majority of Marxists initially remained convinced that the decline of capitalism would continue. As late as 1948, the German KPD assumed that the increased power of the Soviet Union, the emergence of other socialist countries, the crisis of the colonial system, and the contradictions within the capitalist camp had led to "an extraordinary deepening of the general crisis of world capitalism."

However, there were certainly Marxists who thought that the decline of capitalism did not have to be inevitable. They included supporters of Nikolai Kondratiev's theory of the long waves, and for example Edward Sard, an American Trotskyist economist, who in early 1944 had already prophesied that an arms race would begin after the war, implying a rapid growth of the U.S. economy and a drastic reduction of unemployment. (For background see "Sard's Permanent War Economy, " a short political biography of Sard by Marcel van der Linden in *Against the Current* 198, January-February 2019 —ed.)

Traditional Labor in Retreat

It took until the early 1950s before such theories were taken seriously in wider circles. The long postwar boom necessitated a reconsideration of the general capitalist crisis. However, the period the French so eloquently call *Les Trente Glorieuses* also heralded the beginning of the end of the traditional labor movements.

This first became visible in the 1940s or 1950s with consumer cooperatives. Like all businesses under capitalism, they were increasingly forced to centralize and to concentrate capital, due to improved transportation facilities and new retail forms.

This trend manifested itself partly in the declining number of cooperatives. Often the average age of members rose, as elderly members remained loyal to their cooperatives, while younger ones failed to materialize.

A downward trend could also be observed early on in some workers' parties, for example the French Communist Party.

After the long boom ended, the decline of the unions and workers' parties began to become more general. In most countries with independent workers' organizations, union density (union members as percentage of the total labor force) has been declining and on a global scale union density is almost insignificant.

Independent trade unions organize only a small percentage of their target group worldwide, and the majority of them live in the relatively wealthy North Atlantic region.

According to an estimate of the International Trade Union Confederation, 10 years ago global union density amounted to no more than 7%. Since then unions in most parts of the world have continued to lose members, so that global union density may by now approach 6%!

Labor, Social Democratic, and Communist parties are not doing very well electorally. Table 2 (on page 8) indicates that, of 18 social democratic and labor parties listed, 14 reached their apex before 1990.

Communist parties in non-communist countries are the second major political form. Most of them are having a hard time. In quite a few countries the parties have been dissolved after electoral decline, splits or financial bankruptcy.

Even the CPI-M (the Communist Party of India Marxist) in West-Bengal, which received a majority of the votes in a whole series of elections from the 1970s until 2011, has now been reduced to a minor player because of its violent neoliberal policies. All in all, the downturn of the old labor movements seems to be almost all-embracing.

Systemic Capitalist Decline

At the same time, global capitalism is in trouble. Since the beginning of the great recession of 2008, awareness has generally taken hold that the years of rapid economic growth are over. In 2016, *Foreign Affairs* magazine devoted an entire issue to how to survive slow economic growth.

Even earlier, a report published by the OECD argued that growth expectations for

the coming decades appeared to be "rather mediocre." While growth continued more in emerging economies than in the OECD, it would be slowed by gradual exhaustion in the race to catch up and the less favorable demographics in all other countries.

Moreover, influential authors such as Meghnad Desai, Robert Gordon, Paul Mason and Wolfgang Streeck are of the opinion that capitalism has lost its momentum or even reached its final phase.

Surveying the period since Lenin wrote *Imperialism: The Highest Stage*, it seems that the thesis contained in that work has become curiously inverted by the reality of the last century. To see that, we must first of all note that the period between the Wall Street Crash in 1929 and the crisis of 1974 was historically extraordinary.

"The entire period from 1929 until the 1970s constitutes a significant divergence from the trends unleashed by the industrial and transportation revolution of the nineteenth century. The post-1970s period returned the world to nineteenth-century trends and their associated financial turbulence, culminating in the 2007-9 systemic crisis." Herman M. Schwartz, *States versus Markets. The Emegency of a Global Economy,* 3rd edition, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 181.

The changes of 1929-1974 obviously had a prelude and aftereffect, so that the periodization is less sharp than these years suggest. What made this time so special? Interpretations vary widely, but historians generally point out that capitalism in the North Atlantic underwent a number of important changes in the early 20th century.

The First World War is often mentioned as a turning point. I just mention here the social democratic theory of organized capitalism developed by Rudolf Hilferding from 1915; the communist theory of state monopoly capitalism; authors emphasizing the rise of Fordism; and authors who saw corporatism as the most important characteristic of the new situation.

I cannot evaluate all of these theories here, but they agree that in the early decades of the last century, there had been major changes in the structure of advanced capitalism. After about half a century it became clear that the new form of capitalism was coming to an end. One spoke of the "crisis of Fordism" or the "end of organized capitalism."

So it seems that the general crisis Lenin spoke of in 1916 was interrupted for half a century. But in the meantime, the balance of power between capital and labor changed dramatically. Around 1916-21, the inevitable decline of capitalism seemed to have begun, while workers' movements grew significantly in strength and revolutionary possibilities also grew.

From the 1980s onwards, the decline of capitalism is beginning to take hold again, but this time the workers' movements have weakened and the revolutionary possibilities seem slim for the time being. We now face a double crisis: not only of capitalism, but also of the workers' movements.

Lenin Revisited and Reconsidered

In any case, Lenin's theory of the general crisis must be re-examined. Lenin would certainly have had no problem with that. He never hesitated to modify his positions whenever he deemed it necessary.

Between 1893 and 1924 he changed his theoretical thoughts on the agrarian question, the tactic of the proletarian party, the state and the dictatorship of the proletariat in capitalist underdeveloped countries. If he were alive today, he would also have reconsidered the theory of the generalized crisis.

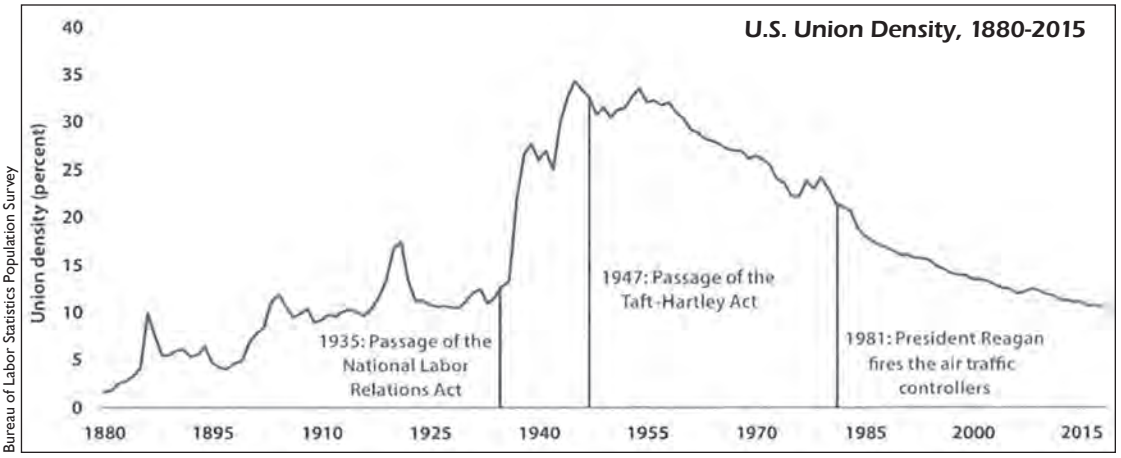
It is now up to us to re-analyze socialist perspectives on a global scale especially as regards *the enduring necessity and opportunity of workers' movements.*

The crisis of the labor movements is particularly worrisome because there is still a very great need among working people for effective economic and political advocacy,

Table 2: Average Parliamentary Electoral Results of Social Democratic and Labor Parties, 1920-2019

Country	1920-29	1930-39	1940-49	1950-59	1960-69	1970-79	1980-89	1990-99	2000-09	2010-19
Australia	45.2	32.4	46.5	46.3	45.1	45.4	47.0	40.8	39.2	34.9
Austria	39.3	41.1	41.7	43.3	50.0	45.4	47.6*	37.3	33.7	25.0
Belgium	36.7	33.1	30.7	35.9	31.0	26.6	28.0	23.2	24.0	13.9
Brazil	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	12.1	16.8	15.4
Canada	—	—	—	—	15.4	17.1	19.7	9.0	15.0	22.1
Denmark	34.5	43.9	39.1	40.2	39.1	33.6	30.9	36.0	26.8	25.7
Finland	27.4	37.5	25.7	25.3	23.4	24.5	25.4	24.4	23.0	17.8
France	19.1	20.2	20.9	15.1	15.9	21.0	35.3	34.6	38.8	18.4
Germany	29.3	21.2	29.2	30.3#	39.4#	44.2#	39.4#	36.9	31.9	23.1
Italy	24.7*	—	[20.7]	13.5	13.8	9.7	12.9	7.9**	—	22.1***
Netherlands	22.0	21.7	27.0	30.7	25.8	28.6	31.0	26.5	21.2	16.7
New Zealand	25.7	45.4	48.7	46.1	43.2	42.8	43.3	34.2¶	38.8¶	29.8¶
Norway	25.5	38.0	43.4	47.5	45.5	38.8	27.4	36.0	30.8	29.1
Portugal	—	—	—	—	—	35.2	27.6	39.0	39.8	32.7
Spain	—	23.1	—	—	—	30.4	44.1	38.2	40.2	25.4
Sweden	36.0	43.8	48.8	45.6	48.4	43.7	44.5	39.8	37.5	30.0
Switzerland	25.5	27.5	27.4	26.5	25.1	24.1	20.7	20.9	21.4	18.1
United Kingdom	37.7	34.4	49.7*	46.3	46.1	39.1	29.2	38.7	38.0	32.9

* Only one election
** Party disbanded in November 1994
*** Result for the "new" Democratic Party
# Figures between 1950 and 1990 refer to West Germany
¶ In 1993 the first-past-the-post electoral system was replaced by a mixed-member proportional voting system



Bureau of Labor Statistics Population Survey

especially at a time of capitalist decline.

In these circumstances, what are the prospects for workers' movements? In the long run, things may not be as gloomy as they seem today. A number of factors may change, thus enabling a more optimistic future.

Old and New Movements

The weakening of the workers' movements has made it possible for other movements to appropriate a part of the sphere of activity of those missing workers' movements.

Religious and nationalist movements partly fill the currently existing social void by deflecting class conflicts. They offer their supporters elementary forms of social security and trust networks, as well as self-esteem and clear life goals.

Many poor people are drawn into such movements, in all their variants — from the Pentecostalist movements of Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, to Salafism in North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia. Precarious youth in capitalist industrial cities likewise appear sometimes to be attracted to groups offering a new religious certainty.

Second, class conflicts will not diminish and workers all over the world will continue to feel the ever-present need for effective organizations and forms of struggle. Let us just have a quick look at the last two years.

Interesting things are happening on the strike front, including in the two superpowers. The Hong Kong based *China Labour Bulletin* collects strike data for the Chinese People's Republic. In its 2023 report, the magazine concluded that there had been 1,794 "incidents," more than double that of the 2022 total (831 incidents) and exceeding pre-pandemic levels of worker collective actions, with the main sectors being construction and manufacturing.

The background here is the current recession, as the editors note:

"The high youth unemployment rate has led more university students to accept unemployment, or seek part-time jobs and other means to make ends meet. As for those workers who were directly laid off and whose benefits were reduced, many more launched strikes and protests. Under such circumstances, China's workers need trade unions that can represent them before and after rights are violated."

The United States has seen a resurgence in collective action among workers. According to Cornell ILR's Labor Action Tracker, there were 354 strikes in 2023 involving roughly 492,000 workers — nearly eight times the number involved in strikes for the same period in 2021 and nearly four times the number for the same period 2022.

Mass protests took place in Europe, for example in France between January and June 2023 against the pension reform by the Borne government [Elizabeth Borne was President Macron's previous prime minister. — ed.] Huge public transport strikes took place in Germany and the Spanish state, among other places.

In 2022, in India more than 200 million workers joined the two-day nationwide strike on 28-29 March [2022], in protest of the government's anti-worker, anti-farmer and anti-people policies. In Vietnam, a wave of wildcat strikes erupted in 2005, a wave that reached a temporary peak in 2011 but is still continuing.

Third, we should not forget that the global labor force is larger and more interconnected than ever before. The number of employees (wage earners) worldwide increased from 2.33 billion in 1991 to 3.55 billion in 2022, an increase of about 1.2 billion people.

Simultaneously, enormous shifts are taking place within separate regions. An historic migration from the countryside to swelling megacities is under way. In 1960, the total number of international migrants worldwide was about 72 million, by 2015 it had tripled to 243 million.

Internal migrations have also become significantly more extensive. In 2000, the National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China estimated that there were 113 million rural migrant workers in the country. In 2020 this had expanded to 376 million.

Fourth, there are also explicit signs of a renewal. Organizing drives for previously unorganized workers in hospitals and the care sector in general have been increasing over the past few years. The rise of the International Domestic Workers Network since 2009, and their campaign resulting in International Labor Organization Convention 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers (ILO, 2011) has been an inspiration for many.

The current strike wave of incarcerated workers in the United States reveals that new segments of the working class are beginning to be mobilized. In many countries trade unions are trying to open up to "informal" and "illegal" workers.

In recent years, the Ugandan Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union succeeded in affiliating a mass membership of informal transport workers. Quite spectacular is India's New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI), founded in 2006, which recognizes the importance of both paid and unpaid women's work.

NTUI attempts to organize not only the "formal" sector, but also contract workers, casual workers, household workers, the self-employed, and the urban and rural poor; it also tries to restructure collective bargaining frameworks accordingly.

It is also remarkable that in many places in the world we see a re-invention of forms of organization that played a major role in the early classical labor movements. Think, for example, of mutual aid funds, i.e. forms of mutual insurance against illness or unemployment — a form of self-protection that dates back to the eighteenth century at the latest, but is now being reintroduced by precarious and informal workers.

Also noteworthy are the housing cooperatives and the small consumer coops, e.g. the Solidarity Purchase Groups which have since 1990 seen the light of day in several countries. But we can also think of new types of cooperatives that build on older models, for example energy production cooperatives.

To conclude, we are confronted with two crises: the crisis of capitalism, and the crisis of workers' movements. One definition of "crisis" is "the turning point of a disease when an important change takes place, indicating either recovery or death."

Nobody can be certain that capitalism will once more revive. But neither is it impossible that the workers' movements regain their vitality, and this would obviously have direct consequences for the development of capitalism. ■

The Menace of Hindutva

Abhish K. Bose interviews Achin Vanaik

RENOWNED POLITICAL SCIENTIST, academic and writer, Achin Vanaik (b.1947) is a well-known scholar and commentator on global politics and international relations. He graduated in economics and statistics from the University of Bristol, England in 1970. Subsequently, he became actively involved (1971-1974) with the Free University of Black Studies for promoting political awareness of non-white immigrant communities in Britain.

From 1978-1990 he was an assistant editor with the Times of India, *where Vanaik wrote extensively as a critic of nuclear weapons and advocated disarmament. Since 1988 Vanaik has been associated with the Transnational Institute (TNI), Amsterdam, Netherlands and has held various academic positions at the Academy of the Third World Studies, Jamia Milia Islamia University, New Delhi, the University of Delhi and Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.*

He was interviewed by Abhish K Bose, who has been a journalist for 15 years. He was on staff at The Times of India *and* The Deccan Chronicle-Asian Age. *He has published interviews and articles in* Frontline magazine, The Wire, The Print, The Telegraph, The Federal, The News Minute, Scroll, The Kochi Post *and the* Asian Lite International.

Here are edited excerpts from an exclusive interview after Achin Vanaik's speech at the Jindal Global University on India's foreign policy and its impact on education. The interview makes frequent references to the Bharatiya Janta Party [BJP], a right-wing political party which has been in power since 2014 under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The BJP promotes "Hindutva," Hindu nationalism and has organizational ties to the paramilitary Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh [RSS]. Party leaders encourage discrimination and violence against religious minorities, seeking to make India a homeland for Hindus. In the interview, "Sangh Parivar" refers to the group of Hindutva organizations affiliated with the RSS, including the BJP, Vishva Hindu Parishad, and the Bajrang Dal among other organizations.

UPDATE: Well after this April interview, the BJP failed to win a majority in the 2024 parliamentary election. Going into its third term in government, the BJP has been forced to form a coalition government.

Map of India (2001).

[Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency. https://www.loc.gov/item/2001629019/

Abhish K. Bose: *Your speech on Palestine stirred up a controversy when you compared Zionism and Hindutva nationalism. The University asked you to apologize. What is now going through your mind?*

Achin Vanaik: I am standing by what I said. I have also written on Hindutva-Zionism and its similarities and contrasts. Over the past 10 years many universities, public and private, have a section of students who are not just pro-Hindutva but are very active in their social media messaging and denigration. Then there are teachers similarly ideologically inclined, and finally, senior administrators who are prepared to accommodate the government's wishes. This informal tripartite network is of great use to the BJP/Sangh.

The overall result is the dramatic shrinking of respect for the exercise of free speech if it criticizes this government's policies and practices. Even on a foreign policy issue like Israel and Palestine, both for myself and others who have been invited to talk on the subject at different universities, permission has been denied. Public demonstrations on the issue have been curtailed or banned depending on which party is in power at the state level or in the center. Such harassment can come about because of pressure from government bodies or by academic administrations anticipating official disapproval.

All this expresses the larger project at play. This government, whether operating directly or through its affiliated civil society organizations, cadre activists and sympathizers, aims to send a warning to universities and colleges. They must be controlled as much as possible about what they teach, especially in the social sciences. What gets disseminated in public events should not be antithetical to the ideology of this government and the Sangh Parivar more generally. Individuals like me are not so important; controlling the universities and colleges is!

Israel as a Model

AKB: *Are the BJP modeling key aspects of its Israeli policy in order to use the United States' need to rely on India as a counterweight to China? What are possible outcomes of such a strategy?*

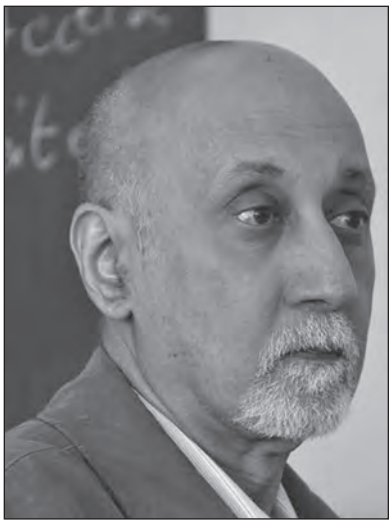
AV: The BJP and the Sangh are modeling their domestic policy on what Israel is doing. Here the evidence is very strong. Police and other security personnel are sent to Israel for training in crowd control, border management and "counterterrorism."

The latter term helps to justify forms of official terrorism against non-state actors claimed, rightly or wrongly, to be terrorists. Don't forget that it is Israel that has so frequently used bulldozers to eject Palestinians and destroy their homes.

That has set the example for what has then happened here. In November 2019, an Indian Consul General in New York City, S. Chakravorty, let the cat out of the bag when

he declared that Israel — through its illegal settlements in the West Bank — has provided a model for resettling Hindu Pandits in the Kashmir Valley.

Both under the Congress (the former governing party —ed.) and the BJP, India has dramatically increased purchase of "defense" equipment of all kinds. But this is not the same as emulating Israel in foreign policy matters. There are two areas where you can say that Israeli behavior has had an impact on Modi government's foreign policy behavior:



Achin Vanaik

First is the promulgation of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). Where Israel has a "right of return" policy for Jews all over the world. India has not gone so far as but its CAA is a "qualified neighborhood right of return" for Hindus and those religions considered indigenous.

That policy fast tracks naturalization for Parsis and Christians, but this simply provides a cover since few members of these communities in Afghanistan, Pakistan or Bangladesh would want to rush to a Hindutva India.

Also, the CAA is more anti-Muslim than pro-Hindu, because Jaffna Tamils don't get this benefit. What lies behind both these policies of religious discrimination is the belief in the myth of the perpetual victimhood of Jews and Hindus — and that these countries are their "natural homelands."

Second is the construction of a pro-Hindutva political lobby that can strongly influence Washington's attitude in favor of India.

The Indian equivalents of a Political Action Committee for Israel are much weaker — and indeed seek to learn as much as possible from — their Israeli counterparts. But Israel is dominant in the Middle East in a way that India, faced with hostility from both Pakistan and China, is not dominant in South Asia. In fact, China is increasingly influential among its smaller neighbors, whether Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan or Myanmar.

Yes, the United States sees India as important in its effort to contain China, but it has to rely on a host of other countries throughout Southeast and East Asia as well as in Oceania.

India cannot emulate the primacy that Israel has in its region, nor get the same kind of U.S. diplomatic and military support. Nor can India defy Washington in the way Israel from time to time can and does.

Furthermore, the extent to which in the Western public domain, Israel can claim that criticism of Zionism is a form of antisemitism has no parallel. Though Hindutva-wadis are pushing the discourse of "Hinduphobia," this is nowhere near successful as in the case of Israel. But the Sangh and the Modi government keep trying to promote this dishonest discourse of "Hinduphobia."

The Education We Need

AKB: *Academicians affiliated to the government-funded institutions are hesitant to criticize government policies as they need government patronage for their future prospects. Even foreign academics working in social science disciplines are intimidated by the government's menacing posture in denying them visas. Is it worthwhile to think of people-funded academic institutions like people-funded media for maintaining academic independence?*

AV: What do we mean by people-funded academic institutions? Government schools, colleges and universities are people funded in that the funding comes from taxpayer money. The best system of schooling would be the neighborhood Common School system, where the overwhelming majority of children would be going to the same neighborhood school and getting the same education. Public funds should be distributed on an equal per student basis.

The main issue is that these schools must be well funded at all levels — teacher salaries, facilities and minimal or even free tuition. In the schools of many West European countries, there is such a Common Schools system where well over 90% of all children attend.

The United States is a negative outlier in that funding is not based on central disbursement but by local municipal or district-level taxes. This means richer and better-off neighborhoods have better schools.

In India only 69% attend public schools run by the central or state governments or local municipalities. In 2023 India ranked 155 out of 198 countries, representing only 2.9% of our gross domestic product (GDP) spent on education.

The problem is that far too little funding is provided. There is no adequate system of monitoring to prevent inequalities in disbursement, no check against teacher absenteeism or a way to ensure a quality of teaching across the rural-urban divide. Additionally, there is no mechanism to count attendance or guarantee a uniformity of facilities.

There are huge disparities even in the urban areas between public schools catering to children from families of higher-level government employees and poorer families.

There are similar disparities between the different states of the Indian Union, with some performing much better. The result is that more families are sending their children to private schools, although many of them are inadequate. The problem is that far too little funding is provided.

In a Common School system of primary, secondary and tertiary education, students of all social, economic, cultural, racial, religious and ethnic backgrounds intermingle and form friendships and associations.

This remains the ideal approach. But with the neoliberal turn in the advanced western countries, this kind of inexpensive or free universally available quality educational system has been weakened. There should also be vocational courses and decently paid employment prospects for those not interested in tertiary education.

The responsibility for ensuring quality education up to and including the college level cannot be left to the private sector. Protecting a system of common schooling and a widely available decent college-university level of education from government manipulation cannot be separated from the much larger issue of having and sustaining a strongly liberal and democratic polity.

This means institutionalizing a system of powerful checks and balances on executive power through an independent judiciary, control over the executive by the legislature, an independent media, powerful and progressive unions and civil society associations.

As for maintaining independence from the central government in India, that depends on the more liberal and democratic character of the polity itself. This is particularly so for teaching and studying at the humanities and social science levels.

The Common Schools system is still the goal to strive for in India and elsewhere. There can be some small space for private education, which either cater to the children of the rich or where a few quality schools based on principles of social concern and funded by philanthropic bodies or perhaps have a progressive social conscience inspired by particular religious or secular doctrines. But these would be few and far between.

An independent, humane and worthwhile education system of the kind that is needed is embedded within the character of the Indian polity and its generally improving or deteriorating character. A struggle primarily or purely at the educational level against government manipulation cannot be separated from, and indeed is subordinated to, this much wider struggle to preserve and deepen a liberal, democratic and egalitarian social order.

Spreading Hindutva Ideology

AKB: *Could you explain how the BJP's revising*

of the syllabi in the education sector over the last ten years favored their agenda?

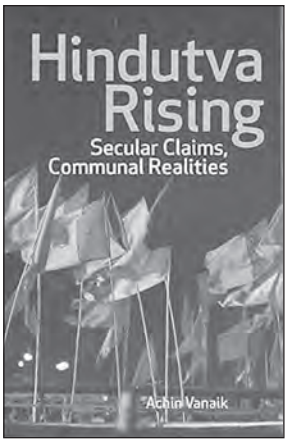
AV: Since 2014, the Modi government has sought to expand the teaching and influence of Hindutva ideology.

Under a general neoliberal policy of promoting the privatization of tertiary level education, colleges under the umbrella of an overarching university system are receiving much greater autonomy to frame their own courses.

Meanwhile, central universities (like Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University) and public universities in states controlled by the BJP have undergone a dramatic overhaul. This is true especially in the social science and history departments where students would otherwise tend to become more critical of Hindutva-type thought.

The BJP has carried out this transformation from the top, first by having their own people appointed at the higher administrative levels, then by manipulation in selecting and promoting teachers, making curriculum and course changes, and imposing a general degeneration in the democratic character of campus political-cultural life.

The BJP government has given the role of monitoring the universities to the RSS, which identifies unwanted books and articles, these are then removed from university syllabi and reading lists. Publishers of such university texts hired lawyers to check on what might be considered problematic.



Even scholars in their research and writing became worried about possible controversies and how this might affect their careers.

All this led to self-censorship. The idea that universities are the sites for the pursuit of knowledge and the search for truth for its own sake becomes not just an anachronism but something to avoid given the risk that it will politically offend the powers that be.

Education starts at the primary school level. Most schools, public and private, follow the syllabus and the final board exams set by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). The CBSE bases its teaching courses on textbooks published by the National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT) for classes up to the 12th grade.

Unsurprisingly, there have been curriculum changes and substantial rewriting of textbooks to promote erroneous and dishonest Hindutva views of Indian history and politics, both ancient and modern.

In late 2021 a new policy emerged. Public-private partnerships and shared funding now help set up 100 secondary level "Army Schools." These are different from the 33 existing publicly funded schools that under the Ministry of Defense prepare students for taking and passing the National Defense Academy entrance exams. This enables them to eventually become officers in the Indian Armed Forces.

> *"The responsibility for ensuring quality education up to and including the college level cannot be left to the private sector. Protecting a system of common schooling and a widely available decent college-university level of education from government manipulation cannot be separated from the much larger issue of having and sustaining a strongly liberal and democratic polity."*

Between May 2022 and December 2023, 40 privately-owned schools with differing fee structures signed memoranda of agreement with the government along the new policy lines. It now transpires that 60% of these schools are run by the RSS and allied organizations as well as BJP politicians, Hindu religious bodies, and other Hindutva soulmates. The determination of the BJP/Sangh to ideologically transform the officer corps within the armed forces in their own image should be obvious.

Hindutva and Hatred

AKB: *What is the future of Hindutva nationalism? India has a sizeable population of minorities — is Hindutva anchoring its politics in hatred against Muslims and other minorities?*

AV: The Hindutva message to Muslims is to "know your place" and accept it. This means accepting your subordination and your status as second-class citizens and as a community that will be more and more ghettoized. Hindutva does not want proselytizing of Islam, nor conversions to it, yet the reverse is absolutely fine. Muslim families should not have a large number of children.

There should not be interfaith marriages between Muslim men and Hindu women. The reverse is okay since in true patriarchal understanding, it brings women into the Hindu faith. In ghettos Muslims will be largely left free to carry on with their practices, but on the condition that they politically support the BJP, give it funds when required and don't make trouble.

In many respects this is what is being done in Gujarat state; it is the model to be followed for the rest of the country. Furthermore, opportunities for Muslim employment in government services, police and in the armed forces — certainly at the higher levels — will decline.

Once the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) comes into operation there will be a significant increase in the number of Muslims denied citizenship. But since there are no extradition treaties with Pakistan and Bangladesh, they cannot be deported. Instead they will be put in internment camps to serve as a labor force for various projects.

Given the size of the Muslim population overall, such policies are going to lead to resistance. It will not be a surprise, given the increasingly institutionalized biases against Muslims. [The Muslim population is 200 million out of a total population of 1.4 billion. — ed.] Another factor is the violent vigilantism of groups inspired by Hindutva.

Making the Hindu identity the most important prism through which one looks at the world will generate a similar identification with Islam as one's primary prism to achieve self-worth and dignity in the face of growing oppression. In short, there can be a growing religious polarization that can lead to an ever-stronger divide on Hindu-Muslim lines.

Fundamentalism on both sides can reinforce each other. Even as one must not make a moral distinction between Hindu and Muslim communal [sectarian] behavior — both are to be condemned — one must understand that while the dynamic of minority communalism is towards greater separation from the social and political order, the dynamic of majority communalism is more dangerous.

Majority communalism adopts the mantle of a nationalism that imposes itself on others, negatively transforming the whole of Indian society in a way that minority communalism can never do.

This is already happening. More members of the Muslim minority now recognize the need to promote a secular India. This is why so many Muslim men and women came out against the CAA, declaring themselves Indian citizens and demanding equality of treatment.

They need support from other sections of society, including secular associations and political parties that will not compromise with Hindutva. A secular state need not be democratic but there can be no democratic state if it is not secular!

Politics and Caste

AKV: *The BJP did alter its approach to Christians and even Dalits. Will they mend ways with the Muslim community?*

AV: Regarding Dalits, the Sangh Parivar want to incorporate them in their Hindu unity project, but without disturbing the Varna

system. [Traditional Hindu society's Varna system comprises four hierarchical social classes —ed.] Indeed, this is the case even as the BJP/Sangh seek to expand their OBC ["Other Backward Castes," an official government category for disenfranchised castes —ed.] base.

Politically-electorally the BJP has succeeded in making inroads into Dalit sub-castes, below the otherwise dominant Jatavs and Mahars. There is also the appeal to their sense of dignity by the assimilation of their cultural idols, deities and myths as part of the wider Hindu pantheon of worship. In the absence of serious change in the material well-being of most Dalits, this serves as a distinctive attraction provided by the Sangh.

AKV: *What does one mean by the lack of material improvement? The near majority, if not the majority, of Dalits are landless poor — but the majority of the landless poor are not Dalits. This means a cross-caste class alliance is one key way to advance the condition of Dalits. But who is pursuing this?*

AV: Fighting discrimination against Dalits is necessary as are reservations [affirmative action quotas] in government jobs and tertiary education.

These can be extended to the private sector. But there is a difference in fighting against discrimination and fighting to finish off the caste system itself. The former represents an effort to achieve upward mobility and respect and to join existing elites. But most members of all oppressed groups or communities cannot reach elite status.

The end result is that while a growing number and a higher proportion of Dalits, women and Blacks (in the United States) do become part of the middle, upper middle class or even higher, the bulk of Dalits, women and Blacks remain among the poor and most discriminated against.

Indeed, the greater social and cultural diversity of the ruling classes and of their most important social base — the middle- and upper-middle classes — is strengthened because then many more Dalits and women will support the casteist, patriarchal and racist nature of the system as a whole.

The fight against discrimination must be conjoined to the struggle to change capitalism and class nature of society as a whole; to move towards destroying the caste system and of Varna.

As for how the Sangh deals with Christians, the pattern differs from its approach towards Muslims. Christians are only 2.3% of the population. In the south they are better off, while Adivasi Christians are in the central forest regions. Then there are the Christian populations in the northeast, where in the states of Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya they are a majority. They are a substantial minority in Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur.

The BJP as a minority party in those states seeks coalition partners even as it seeks to independently strengthen its electoral base. It has to be careful when it comes to criticizing the Christian faith and the lived practices of that community. The Sangh's own efforts at conversion and expanding its implantation in civil society is more restrained. But the longer-term effort remains a process of cumulative, if slow, Hindtva-ization.

In the states of Jammu and Kashmir, the BJP annulled Article 370 because it opposes the very principle of an asymmetrical federalism. But in Nagaland, to negotiate an end to the insurgency it would have to temporarily accept some kind of asymmetric federalist arrangement. Later it could work to finish that off. In Manipur, it has given a glimpse of what may lie in store elsewhere, once the BJP/Sangh considers it is strong enough and the time is right.

In Central India, the BJP/Sangh is strongly pushing an anti-conversion line both through direct repression and ameliorative measures in order to win over tribal people. It needs to create a pro-Hindutva elite within Adivasis. Taking a cue from earlier Christian missionaries, there is a wide and growing network of schools for Adivasis as well as other forms of regularized welfare provisions.

Although the Christian community is proportionately small, Christian-owned and controlled institutions in the health and education sectors are among the best medical institutions and colleges/universities in the country.

Christian controlled at the top, these institutions are secular in their character and operations. They recruit qualified teachers and medical staff without regard to faith and belief. Likewise, they are open to all patients and students. Thus they generate considerable good will although this is not something the forces of Hindutva are happy about.

Furthermore, the Sangh and the BJP have to be more careful about how they treat Christians since Western governments react much more strongly to injustices to Indian Christians than repression against Muslims.

This does not mean that Christians who oppose the Modi government and the Sangh more generally will get a free pass. They will not witness the tragedy of Stan Swamy [an elderly Catholic priest and tribal rights activist, who died in detention —ed.]. But they do have to be more cautious, especially given the foreign policy orientation towards consolidating and deepening India's relationship with the West, particularly with the United States.

The Fruits of Neoliberalism

AKB: *You wrote that "What led with the meteoric rise of RSS-BJP's hegemony was the contradictory legacy of the Congress. A bad record in lifting the standards of living of the masses and the push towards neoliberalism led to the combustible situation which no other national opposition could make good of apart from the BJP."*

Students in India have protested for years against the Hindu-su

Do you think if neoliberalist policies were not implemented by the Congress government, the BJP would not have emerged as a political force ruling the country? What about the Mandal report or the Ramjanmabhoomi movement, which also precipitated the emergence of BJP?

AV: Historically, independent India has seen two kinds of socio-political hegemony — that of the Congress and, closer to our times, of the BJP and Hindutva.

I have written about this in detail in my 2020 book *Nationalist Dangers, Secular Failings* (Aakar Publishers). Hegemony means successfully forging a national-popular will, i.e. getting widespread and stable acceptance of one's particular construction of nationalism and its cultural-political content.

Congress was the leader of the anti-colonial struggle and therefore won mass support. A democratic polity is to be valued in itself, but will be open to authoritarian degeneration if there is not a movement towards a minimal level of mass prosperity for all.

The failure of this developmental promise to provide greater economic and social equality laid the ground for the historical decline of the Congress party.

In fact, after the late 1960s when a host of regional parties emerged, there was a prolonged political interregnum of great instability. No force was capable of securing stability. It was some 30-odd years before the BJP became the single most important party in the country.

Before this there were splits in the Con-

upremacist "Citizenship Amendment Act." Hindustan Times archive

gress, the rise and fall of Emergency Rule and the assassinations of two prime ministers. There were three central governments headed by coalitions of non-BJP and non-Congress centrist parties, none lasting a full term.

It is this longer-term decline and the failure of other regional parties, including the Left, to fill the vacuum that explains the rise of the BJP. It is quite wrong to say that the neoliberal turn was a major factor in explaining its rise.

The Congress Party's turn towards neoliberal economic globalization, in the beginning of the 1990s, was supposed to bring about mass prosperity. But it made matters worse by sharpening inequalities of income, wealth and of power, thereby undermining existing democratic structures.

In fact, the BJP itself adopted this neoliberal turn when it gained power, Today the economy remains the main weak spot in the otherwise broader hegemony enjoyed by Hindutva forces.

More than anything else it was the Ramjanmabhoomi movement that propelled the BJP to national prominence. This was aided, of course by the expanding implantation of the cadres and associations of the Sangh Parivar that established its cultural-political hegemony.

[The Ramjanmabhoomi movement cohered around the belief that a 16th century mosque, the Babri Masjid, was built on the site in Ayodhya where Hindus believed their god Rama had been born. The mosque became a rallying cry for Hindu nationalists, who destroyed it in 1992. Subsequently, the Ram Mandir (Temple to Rama) was constructed on that site and ostentatiously inaugurated in January 2024 —ed.]

In this new phase in capitalism, neoliberal globalization is a rightwing shift from an earlier Keynesianist approach. Gone is state-led developmentalism that characterized the developing world. But this rightwing economic shift cannot stabilize itself without a rightwing shift in politics and ideology.

Since we live in a world of multiple nation-states, these political-ideological shifts will be nationally and regionally specific. These will depend on the particular kind and power of different rightwing formations in different countries.

Because they are rightwing, their particular forms of cultural and political nationalism will be strongly exclusivist, but they identify and oppose the "excluded" differently.

"First Past the Post"

AKB: *The BJP received only 31% of the votes in the 2014 general election and 37.36% in the 2019 election. Apparently, a large majority of the Indian voters do not support the BJP. Despite this seeming difference, how do they succeed in elections?*

AV: The First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system is a disgrace and far inferior to the best forms of Proportional Representation (PR). That ensures a much higher proportion of seats in the legislature than its proportion of the popular votes. In Lok Sabha elections [LS: Literally, "House of the People," the house of parliament selected through direct elections —ed.], no party has ever obtained 50% or more of the popular vote.

Yet one party gets a majority of seats, sometimes by a large margin. [Of course this is the same system in U.S. elections —ed.]

Before the BJP, the Congress got a majority of LS seats, with somewhere between 42% and 49% of the vote. The BJP gets a majority of seats with a vote tally even less because of its dominance in the Hindi heartland states of north and central India, and in the western states of Gujarat and Maharashtra.

But opposition parties don't want to change this FTPT system because it would apply to both national and state elections. This would weaken their capacity to come to power in state assembly elections either on their own or in coalitions.

Bringing in a PR replacement for the FTPT system would in any case require a Constitutional Amendment, requiring two-thirds majorities in both houses of parliament and probably ratification by half of the states.

No party or bloc of parties has ever been willing to entertain this. Had a PR electoral system been operative, the political-electoral and not just the cultural-linguistic diversity of the country would have limited the power of the BJP/Sangh. It could not have taken governmental measures to consolidate and expand its hegemonizing efforts.

The BJP/Sangh wants to move towards a more centralized system of voting that would weaken the federal character of the Union.

The BJP. with the help of the RSS and other bodies, has developed an unmatched grassroots machine for electoral mobilizational purposes at various levels.

Its influence on the Election Commission of India (ECI), and the likely manipulation of the electric voting machine counting system in certain constituencies, has also given it both special advantages at polling time and also a willingness to maintain the electoral system even as it systematically hollows out the other institutions (above all the judiciary) of democracy and federalism.

Theocracy on the Agenda?

AKB: *Given the successive electoral victories of the BJP and the subsequent transition of most of its institutions, how far are we from becoming a Hindu theocratic state?*

AV: We are certainly moving towards a Hindu Rashtra [a Hindu State and Nation —ed.]. Some say we are *de facto* already there. But because of the continental size and diversity of India we are not there so far.

But there is a distinction between a Hindu State and a Hindu *theocratic* state, which means rule by some kind of priestly or religious elite cabal.

The goal of Hindutva forces is not domination by a religious cabal. Iran is a Muslim theocratic state, but the Islamic states of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Malaysia are not theocracies. And notice here too, the variation in the degrees of civil liberties available for its citizens in these three countries.

None can be considered democracies despite periodic elections in Pakistan and Malaysia. But the degree of democratic degeneration that has already taken place in India is frightening.

Worse is to come if the BJP and Sangh come to power again. No wonder that terms like "electoral autocracy" or "ethnocracy" or "illiberal democracy" or worse are being used to describe the current Indian situation. ■

"Failure of the Current Global System"

Kashmir Today, Part 2

Interview with Hafsa Kanjwal

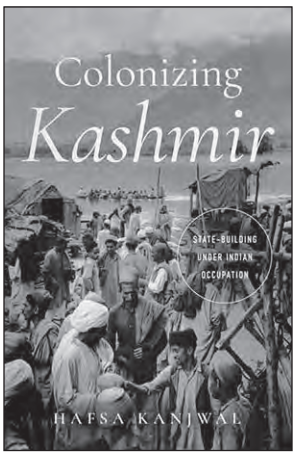
THIS INTERVIEW WITH Kashmiri Historian, Hafsa Kanjwal is reprinted from the valuable Ukrainian online journal COMMONS. *To support their important work, visit https://comons.com.ua/en/donate/.*

*The first part of the interview, which appeared in our previous issue (*Against the Current *230, May-June 2024), focuses on the general history of the Kashmir Issue — the Kashmiri people's struggle for self-determination against the Indian State. It examines key historical moments in Kashmir's modern history, various political responses to India's forced rule over the region, and the impact of the struggle against India's occupation on Kashmiri identity, culture, and life.*

This second segment analyses three distinct periods of upheaval and political change in Kashmir: Bakshi Ghulam Muhammad's puppet regime from 1953-63; the armed insurgency of the 1990s; and Narendra Modi's governance especially in the aftermath of the abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. It will underscore the concrete organizational struggle for self-determination of the Kashmiri people against the Indian State, the role of censorship, Kashmiri cultural resistance, and broader geo-political connections, particularly regarding the Ukrainian and Palestinian questions.

Hafsa Kanjwal is an Assistant Professor of South Asian History at Lafayette College (Easton, Pennsylvania) and the author of Colonizing Kashmir: State-Building Under Indian Occupation *(Stanford University Press, 2023). Her work offers readers a historiographical account and thorough analysis of India's settler colonial and state-building practices during the 1950s-1960s in Kashmir. The interview is conducted by Salik Basharat Geelani, a Kashmiri doctoral student in the Department of English Literature at Vanderbilt University, USA; and Yuliia Kulish, a doctoral student in the Department of Literature, Kyiv-Mohyla Academy.*

COMMONS: *You've recently published a book titled* Colonizing Kashmir: State-building under Indian Occupation*, which follows the major political, legislative, and cultural events of 1953-1963 in Kashmir under Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad's governance. Could you tell us a bit about your book and its object of study?*



Hafsa Kanjwal: When I was in the field doing my archival work, I was very curious about the decades in between partition, which happened in 1947, when there's a lot of material written about Kashmir's history, and the 1980s/90s when the armed rebellion, militarization, and human rights violations took place, which have been studied. I felt that there was a big gap in terms of the history of the '50s, '60s and '70s in Kashmir and I wanted to focus on that.

But I focused particularly on Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad's reign of power, which lasted from 1953 to 1963, because in my oral interviews with people in Kashmir, I was very curious by how his reign in particular was depicted.

On the one hand, he was depicted as a traitor because he had aligned with the Indian State and led a coup against Sheikh Abdullah, the first client politician, and so was seen as someone who had further entrenched India's occupation in Kashmir. During his time, the Kashmiri Legislative Assembly had affirmed the Constitution for the state, which confirmed the accession of Kashmir to India.

On the other hand, a lot of people gave him credit for developing Kashmir and in particular, empowering Kashmiri Muslims by providing them with jobs and education and the prospect of upward social mobility. I was really interested in the paradox of this individual.

One of the things that I argue in the book is that India's colonial occupation took place in Kashmir through the installation of client regimes like Bakshi's and through the particular forms of state-building and development that these regimes helped implement.

Despotic states often manage political aspirations or develop certain modalities of control in colonial or settler-colonial contexts through a kind of direct manifest violence that they engage in, or necropolitical forms of violence that the States implement.

While direct and necropolitical violence is foregrounded even in Kashmir, one of the things that I think this time period in Kashmir's history shows is that the rhetoric of "development" or what I call the politics of life — a term borrowed from Neve Gordon (an analyst of the Israeli occupation —ed.) — can also play a role in entrenching colonial occupation. Even though in this time period India's occupation looked very different from what would later happen with the militarization and armed rebellion, it was still meant to subjugate Kashmiri political aspirations.

In terms of how Bakshi's reign and power transforms the Kashmir State and its relation to the Indian Republic, I focus on how his rule fully entrenches the legal, cultural, political, economic, financial and educational spheres of Kashmiri life into the Indian Union even as it does not succeed in emotionally integrating Kashmiris into India — so that a decade after Bakshi's rule is over, there are mass mobilizations again for self-determination in Kashmir.

One of the main events of the period I study in the book, and the Soviet Union plays an important role in this, is the high profile visit to Kashmir in 1956 by the Soviet premiers Khrushchev and Bulganin.

Khrushchev and Bulganin officially visit Kashmir to see the "development" that's happening in the state, and they're shown a good time and are taken to various state projects and tourist sites. At the end of their visit they announce that it seems to them that Kashmir has chosen to join with India! They also claim that it's for the good of the Kashmiri people that they've done this.

So on the international stage, the Soviet Union plays an important role in vetoing any subsequent resolutions that would come up on Kashmir and in many ways contributes to the domestication of what was otherwise still considered an international dispute.

Insurgency and Murderous Repression

COMMONS: *The armed insurgency of the 1990s is perhaps the most significant period (and symbol) of Kashmir's resistance to the*

Hafsa Kanjwal was interviewed by Yuliia Kulish and Salik Basharat Geelani. The interview appeared in two parts, the first on February 2, 2024 in the Ukrainian journal Commons *(https://commons.com.ua/en/kashmir-indiya-intervyu-z-istorikineyu-gafsoyu-kandzhval/)*

Indian State's tyranny and oppression. Could you explain some of the mechanisms and apparatuses of Statist oppression (like torture institutes, cordon-and-search operations, mass killings, army rapes, enforced disappearances, unmarked graves and disposal of bodies) that were employed in the '90s in Kashmir?

HK: During this period, Kashmiris took up arms and significant mass mobilizations unfolded against India's rule in the late '80s and '90s. The focus on how the Indian state manages this uprising shifts toward more necropolitical forms of governance. High-profile protests characterize the early '90s in Kashmir, spanning different towns, cities and villages. In response, the Indian Army resorts to firing live ammunition into crowds, which results in a series of high-profile massacres.

The idea was to make it very difficult for the general population to resist, to punish them both for resisting and supporting the armed uprising and making the cost of this resistance extremely high.

During this era, stories abound of young men being apprehended or disappeared on suspicion of being militants. The army would cordon off entire areas, concentrating all forces in one zone, and go into people's homes. They would sift through all belongings, even inspected containers of rice, spilling the contents to check for concealed guns or other hidden items, as I've heard from accounts.

Several people in Kashmir were reportedly injured by rubber pellets used by the security forces. These pellets, which are presently categorized under "non-lethal" weapons, are fired through a pump-action gun.

Furthermore, there was a practice of forcing people to congregate in local parks. Informers played a crucial role in pinpointing those perceived to be linked to militancy and similar activities. This is also a time when sexual violence and rape was used again, not just against Kashmiri women but also against men. Thousands of them were imprisoned and tortured. There were torture centers like Papa I and Papa II; homes of former bureaucrats, as well as schools, which also served this purpose.

Around 10,000 individuals disappeared, with many likely ending up in mass graves discovered in the early 2000s. There even emerged a category of something called "a half widow." These were women who didn't know whether their husbands were dead or alive. Their eligibility for remarriage, and essentially their marital status, was unclear. This term basically represents the kind of limbo that many women had to deal with.

Extrajudicial killings and assassinations of high-profile Kashmiri leaders and intellectuals were rampant. It was an incredibly violent time, strategically designed to tire the people out from wanting to resist and to emphasize that the cost of resistance was just too high.

COMMONS: *Apart from armed resistance, what other forms of opposition and refusal were employed by Kashmiris in the 1990s?*

HK: Kashmiris have consistently employed various forms of civil disobedience, including strikes known as "Hartaals." Particularly after incidents like killings or massacres, they would close businesses, shops and schools, and halt transportation for days or even months. Despite facing economic and financial hardships, people sacrificed to sustain the momentum of the movement. There were curfews imposed by the government as well.

I recall learning about protests where hundreds of thousands gathered in front of the United Nations office in Srinagar, submitting petitions and letters urging the UN to act and pay attention to the situation. While not much was accomplished, they attempted both local forms of resistance and appealed to the international community.

Additionally, Kashmiri photographers and journalists played a crucial role in documenting the extent of the violence. They demonstrated remarkable journalistic skills, risking their lives. This documentation extended well beyond the 1990s.

I think that's important because part of what the Indian state relies on is this narrative of normalization or that everything is fine, or things are normal. For people to actually bear witness to the kinds of things that Kashmiris were subjected to was a really important form of opposition and refusal.

COMMONS: *Today, censorship and violent crackdowns on dissent seem to be major themes in the Indian State's approach to Kashmir. Further, Indian state violence is often masked by a rhetoric of progress aimed at portraying an illusion of normalcy to a general national and international public.*

What can you tell us about the functioning of India's propaganda machinery and how it has developed over the decades to maintain these illusions of order in Kashmir? And considering the ever-shrinking space of dissent in Kashmir, how have dissenters adapted and responded to these challenges hoisted at free speech and expression?

HK: I would argue that all forms of Indian society cohere on this one point, emphasizing the significance of their occupation of Kashmir. Whether it's politicians, civil society, academia or the media, all agree that Kashmir is an integral part of India, its people are happy with India, and it's just Pakistan-sponsored terrorism that is causing issues. Kashmiris are fundamentally denied any political agency of their own.

The rationale presented for India's military presence and actions in Kashmir hinges on the need to maintain a firm hand to protect Kashmir from Pakistan.

Regarding the propaganda machinery, there's so much of it: for example, the role of Indian cinema in shaping perceptions of Kashmir over the decades.

Tourism, too, plays an important role in this narrative. Various spectacles of cultural events become instrumental. Take India's Republic Day celebration, for example, with its attempt to cultivate consent on the ground. The Indian Army is involved in these events too, contributing to cultural and development projects with the aim of influencing the hearts and minds of the people.

Criminalizing Dissent

I believe an incident earlier this year vividly illustrates how crazy things truly are on the ground in terms of the shrinking space of dissent. Any form of speech or writing that directly documents the situation in Kashmir or critiques the Indian state has been criminalized. There's been immense self-censorship in Kashmir, especially since 2019.

Earlier this year, a G20 meeting took place in Kashmir, marking the first international event with representatives from around the world after the abrogation. India hosted it in Kashmir to showcase control and normalcy to the international community.

In response, young people in Kashmir used social media, employing both humor and memes to challenge this narrative of normalcy. For example, the state claimed Srinagar was a smart city with ongoing development, and in response, these young individuals posted pictures of various global landmarks, like Big Ben in London, juxtaposed with a caption suggesting India's development of Kashmir's own Clock Tower.

This served as a subtle critique of the normalization and development narrative. And yet even this form of expression was not allowed. Within hours of posting, many of these images were taken down, revealing the state's extensive surveillance capabilities in identifying and tracking the content creators. So people felt threatened and took it down. At present, it seems impossible to identify spaces where Kashmiris can exercise even subtle forms of critique, as the available space for such expression has clamped down.

COMMONS (Yuliia): *Except for fleeing Kashmir and doing something from the outside.*

HK: Exactly. That also poses challenges because, in many ways, it means that you are probably not going to be allowed back in. Many people also can't leave because they are on travel bans or their passports have been suspended. If people end up leaving, their families get threatened back in Kashmir. Everyone must think twice about the implications for their families.

COMMONS: *Civil societies have played an important role in highlighting and bringing to light the excesses of the Indian State. Could you explain the history of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons as well as the Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Societies, both of whom are under constant surveillance and*

threat today?

HK: These two organizations have been instrumental in documenting various human rights abuses over the past few decades. Parveena Ahanger, the founder of APDP herself, experienced the disappearance of her son in the '90s. She did everything, appealed to different legal entities to at least uncover what had happened to him.

She connected with other people whose relatives had also disappeared. Together, they formed a network of families affected by disappearances and have undertaken crucial documentation. Before 2019, they regularly organized monthly protests, gathering in a park with photographs of their family members, engaging in a demonstration to demand accountability from the state.

The Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society, led by Khurram Pervez and Parvez Imroz, played a pivotal role too. Khurram is currently under arrest on charges related to terrorism or abetting terrorism. The JKCC's work has been crucial in documenting various violations such as torture, the enactment of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), the impunity of Indian soldiers, and environmental degradation caused by the Indian state.

Unfortunately, since 2019 they have become a major target of state repression. Much of this work has come to a standstill, as both the groups and the individuals associated with them have been systematically targeted. And that's quite frightening because whatever steps India takes in Kashmir, it's not being documented, and there's no way to even conduct that kind of work. What unfolds in the next 5-10 years? Many of us are concerned about how we'll be able to track those developments.

COMMONS: *From the abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution in 2019 to the Supreme Court hearings on the matter, a lot seems to have legislatively changed in Kashmir over the past few years. Considering the nature of the legislative system in India and the precedents of rulings against the desires of the Kashmiri public, what realistically can a Kashmiri expect from the Indian Legal System?*

HK: Sadly the Indian legal system has played a role in entrenching this, from the Constitution itself to the Supreme Court and the lower courts. An important example I can share with you is from 2013, involving the execution of Afzal Guru by the Indian Supreme Court. He was falsely accused of participating in the 2001 Parliament attack in Delhi. Despite a lack of evidence, the state insisted on his execution, citing the need to alleviate the collective conscience of the Indian public to redeem the attack.

This illustrates how the Indian legal system treats Kashmiris. Additionally, laws like the Public Safety Act, Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (PSA, UAPA, and AFSPA) allow the state to detain people for years without charge, and further enable the excesses of the Indian state rather than restraining them.

Hafsa Kanjwaal

Cultural Resistance vs. Fear

COMMONS: *Cultural and artistic expressions play a vital role in preserving a political entity. How would you describe the role of Kashmiri cultural and artistic resistance in the broad context of the struggle?*

HK: I believe it has consistently played a role, even if sometimes understated or not explicitly emphasized. Even in 1947, Kashmiri poets like Mehjoor and Abdul Ahad Azad were addressing the conditions and political challenges faced by Kashmiris.

In my examination of the 1950s and '60s, I argued in one of my chapters that many artists and cultural producers had been co-opted by the state. However, in their non-affiliated writings, critiques of the state's normalization narratives were evident. Cultural and artistic expressions, particularly those directed towards an international audience in English, gained prominence after the 2010 summer protests.

Various forms such as hip hop, memoirs, short stories, novels, art, photography and film played a crucial role. Young Kashmiris tried to articulate their narrative to the world. Much of this expression has been curtailed and criminalized today. Looking ahead, we'll need to observe how cultural production evolves in this current moment.

COMMONS: *Can you paint a portrait of a typical contemporary supporter of Kashmir's freedom movement? What are the common characteristics of individuals who advocate for this cause? Has there been a shift in a Kashmiri's notion of and response to forms of resistance?*

HK: It is hard to paint a portrait, as not much information comes out. But the ways in which Kashmiris express their resistance, given the limited scope of traditional resistance activities, include elements integrated into their everyday lives. This might manifest through subtle actions or exchanges, like a shared look while passing an army bunker.

One of my colleagues, Mohamad Junaid, explores how even the way Kashmiris walk around the city is influenced by their resistance to the military's gaze. This embodied resistance is deeply ingrained in most people, although, unfortunately, there are individuals belonging to the collaborator or "comprador" class who have benefited from the occupation. Consequently, they don't see themselves as part of the movement, as their societal status is intricately linked to India's presence.

However, there is a prevailing sense of embodied resistance, but expressing this resistance has become more challenging due to heightened fear. The increased number of informers, local spies, has made people wary of discussing their views.

People are so nervous to even talk to their own friends about what they or even family members do, because they don't know whether they can trust them.

COMMONS: *Our project "Dialogues of the Peripheries" focuses on regions like Kashmir that have chronically been politically, economically and culturally marginalized and oppressed. We can draw parallels between Kashmir and other regions such as Palestine, Iran, the Kurds who are also denied statehood, some Russian territories that have their own vision of political future, certain Latin American states, and Ukraine among others. However, Kashmir's narrative appears to be less prominent on the global stage. Why do you think Kashmir's story is often overlooked, while the narratives of Palestine and Ukraine receive more attention internationally?*

HK: In the book, I examine the internationalization of the Kashmir issue in the 1950s and '60s, which later became more domesticated, perceived merely as a dispute between India and Pakistan—an interstate dispute.

There was no recognition that it was also an anticolonial movement or a people's struggle for freedom. This lack of understanding stemmed from its association with the interstate dispute, where the focus was on the territories and the two countries, rather than on what the people wanted.

Also, the idea of India as a colonial power was challenging for many to grasp, given its significant role in global anti-colonial movements. India had a valorized history of resistance against the British, positioning itself as the leader of the nonaligned world and the Third World. The fact that a country championing other liberation struggles was now involved in its occupation was difficult for people to comprehend.

The overlooking of this story is not only by the West, driven by its interests in the region and business deals with India but also due to the broader Cold War dynamics with China. India, seen as a rival to China, becomes a perceived safer ally. Additionally, Muslim-majority countries, except for Pakistan, historically have not said much about

the issue, because they enjoy these close ties with India.

COMMONS: *What role does Indian propaganda play in shaping the Kashmiri narrative globally, and how does this impact the perceptions and experiences of the Kashmiri people living/working in India?*

HK: India holds significant soft power due to the way it's perceived in the West and historically understood as a culturally rich and enigmatic place. The allure stems from Indian spirituality, attracting many in the West, figures like Gandhi, positive associations with Bollywood cinema and yoga.

This positive image makes it challenging for people to see India as engaging in colonial domination. Moreover, the substantial Indian diaspora in business, tech, academia and media plays a role in shaping the narrative on the world stage, contributing to the propagation of certain ideas.

In terms of how this impacts perceptions, I haven't lived or worked in India as a Kashmiri, but I can share the experiences of my friends. We've discussed how certain leftist segments see them as victims but in general there is immense discrimination. However, there are also instances of discrimination, as Kashmiri Muslim identity is viewed as a threat, reinforcing the broader logic of the War on Terror.

COMMONS (Salik): *Yes, and I'd like to add that the sexualization of Kashmiris, particularly Kashmiri women (being compared to apples and fairies) is a persistent trope in India's cultural imagination. This symbolic interplay, between typecasting Kashmiris as violent threats to the nation and then simultaneously as erotically charged bodies to be possessed, clarifies and confuses the idea of a Kashmiri, manipulating the overall perception of Kashmir for the local Indian population as well as for an international audience. In other words, Kashmiris as they are wanted by the Indian Other actively erase Kashmiris themselves.*

HK: The unequal distribution of global attention to wars and long-standing conflicts has given rise to a particular trend. Instead of developing strategies for collective action against global imperial power, there is a tendency to halt discussions when highlighting individuals or groups who might be seen as more privileged among the oppressed.

For example, we may observe this phenomenon on social media platforms where there is a growing resentment towards certain groups, such as Ukrainians, receiving more international support from the West in comparison to others, like Syrians.

Similarly, one can speculate that a similar situation applies to Kashmiris, who receive even less global attention. While recognizing these disparities is a crucial aspect of social critique, it's important to acknowledge that they can also be manipulated to create divisions.

COMMONS: *What arguments could foster unity among these communities? On what shared principles should solidarity be built?*

HK: I try to be positive, but I find it challenging to envision unity or shared principles in the current world order. It's not only about the attention given to specific causes; rather, it's rooted in the unequal support some communities receive from the West, creating divisions. Besieged communities often must accept support from any available source, but when these supporting countries contribute to oppression elsewhere, building solidarity becomes exceedingly difficult.

An illustrative example is the current situation with Ukraine and Palestine. The U.S. President's expressed support for Israel has given the broader Palestine solidarity movement pause in extending support to Ukraine. Part of the challenge is that the kinds of state-centric dependencies that occupied communities around the world rely on are those very dependencies that enable these tensions.

Perhaps we should contemplate cultivating an ethic of solidarity that dismantles state-centric dependencies and focuses on the shared history of colonization or the inability to exercise sovereignty. However, this shift cannot occur until we fundamentally challenge both the contemporary liberal international order and the nation-state form itself.

COMMONS: *The Russian invasion of Ukraine provoked a discussion about non-Western imperialisms. How do you see the role of Russia, China and India in the modern world from a Kashmiri perspective?*

HK: I believe some individuals still shape their political views based on the politics of nation-states, seeing it as their way out of their current situations.

An example is how, due to China's rivalry with India, some Kashmiris may desire a greater role for China on the international stage, thinking it could counterbalance India's power, despite China's Islamophobia and its own colony in East Turkistan, with the Uyghurs. Unfortunately, these state-centric dependencies are what colonized communities are sometimes tied to.

When facing Greater Western imperialisms, even within leftist movements, there's a tendency to romanticize countries like Russia, China and India, imagining their potential role in creating a more multipolar world. It's crucial to push back against this, as I fundamentally believe that nation-states won't save us. Besieged communities worldwide often end up in body bags in cold wars. So, it's essential to envision new possibilities and solidarities beyond these different imperialisms.

COMMONS: *Hamas' October 7th attack on Israel and the genocide in Gaza that the Israeli State responded with has led to the death of over 30,000 Palestinians (around 70% of which are women and children) and around 1500 Israelis, and the displacement of 1.4 Million Palestinians. Several states, such as Bolivia, Chile, Columbia, Turkey, Bahrain, Jordan and others have either severed diplomatic ties or pulled back their representatives from Israel, and hundreds of thousands of people worldwide have registered protests against Israel's war crimes, indicating the grave excesses executed on Palestinian lives. However, despite growing international pressure, the Israeli State seems to follow through with its blatant disregard of international humanitarian laws. How do you understand and envision the role of a global legal and political system in this historical moment when nation-states like Israel or Russia or India seem to be implementing, with a growing sense of impunity, intentional demographic changes, settler-colonialism, and genocide?*

HK: Israel's actions in Gaza, Russia's in Ukraine, or India's in Kashmir, underscore the failure of the current global system.

It's evident that this order was established solely to safeguard the interests of powerful governments, and these laws and norms are selectively enforced on countries that challenge this order. What concerns me is the growing issue of impunity, where a country can blatantly violate existing international laws and be given a blank check to do so.

I fear how this impunity might further embolden a country like India, which had already become more assertive after fully annexing Kashmir in 2019 with little international outcry and is currently engaged in immense persecution of Muslims.

I'm concerned about the potential bold steps India might take next. However, it's also crucial to recognize the role global people and solidarity movements can play in holding their own countries accountable and building connections across different contexts.

Seeing some of these connections gives me hope, but the level of impunity exercised by these governments is frightening. I fear that Gaza may become a test case for many other parts of the world.

COMMONS: What do you envision the future of Kashmiri resistance to be?

HK: It's hard to say, considering international factors and the unfolding of India's settler-colonial project in Kashmir. The extent to which people can move beyond self-censorship and recognize the implications will shape the situation. Historically, resistance movements and mobilizations ebb and flow, taking different forms. The current high level of repression and attempts to garner consent for India's latest settler-colonial move create uncertainty, and we must wait and see.

I want to remain hopeful for greater awareness and solidarity on Kashmir. As we see today with Gaza, people around the world need to mobilize to disrupt these colonial entities and work to end their own state's complicities. ■

What Exactly Does It Mean to Vote?

Lenin's Perspective — Part 1

By August H. Nimtz

"Universal suffrage [provided] the terrain for the proletariat's revolutionary emancipation, but by no means the emancipation itself." —Marx, 1850

". . . universal suffrage . . . indicates with the most perfect accuracy the day when a call to armed revolution has to be made." —Engels, 1891

"Voting for socialism is not socialism any more than a menu is a meal." —Eugene V. Debs, 1911

". . . those who imagine that extremely important political matters can be solved , , , merely by voting." —Lenin, 1919

IN LAUNCHING HIS reelection bid President Joseph Biden declared: "America, as we begin this election year, we must be clear: Democracy is on the ballot. Your freedom is on the ballot."[1]

Apparently — as this is being written — many of his supporters embrace the claim of an existential threat to democracy the centerpiece of the campaign. That goes a long way in explaining the sentiment expressed by liberal *New York Times* columnist Gail Collins in this exchange with her conservative colleague Bret Stephens 17 months before the presidential election.

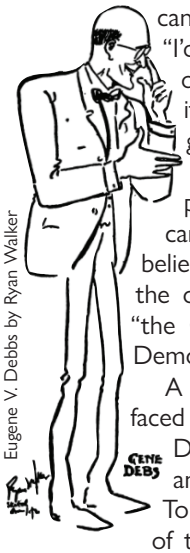
"No, no Bret. Even if you vote for a third party that perfectly represents your views — or at least your view on a favorite issue — if it isn't going to win, you're throwing away your vote. A vote for the Green Party, for instance, is a vote that Biden would probably have gotten otherwise. Which means the Green Party is helping Trump."

The context, summer 2023, was the growing debate in ruling-class circles about the No Labels electoral phenomenon, the possibility of there being a mainstream presidential campaign as an alternative to both Biden and Trump should they be their party's candidates.

Collins voiced the timeworn view that because such campaigns are not likely to succeed, voting for their candidates would be tantamount to "throwing away" one's vote and, more ominously, enabling the victory for an undesired candidate — "splitting the vote," or, the "spoiler effect."

With the announcement shortly later of the academic Cornel West running for the Green Party nomination, Collins now had a face for "the spoiler."[2] (West subsequently announced an independent campaign —ed.)

The issue has bedeviled progressive forces as well for probably a century. The traditional left response comes from Eugene V. Debs, five-time socialist presidential candidate in the beginning of the 20th century. "I'd rather vote," he quipped on a number of occasions, "for something I want and not get it than vote for something I don't want, and get it."[3]



Eugene V. Debbs by Ryan Walker

Exhibit A for Debs was Democratic Party president Woodrow Wilson, whose 1916 campaign slogan, "He kept us out of war," was belied by Wilson's decision in 1918 to do exactly the opposite — sending U.S. troops to fight in "the Great War" to "Make the World Safe for Democracy."

A couple of generations later, progressives faced a similar dilemma: the 1964 contest between Democratic Party candidate Lyndon Johnson and Republican opponent Barry Goldwater. To advocate for a third-party option, most of the left thought, would enable a victory for Goldwater, someone deemed irrational, who would ignite a nuclear war and, thus, an Armageddon.

Johnson, the "peace candidate" and victor, soon proved to be Wilson redux — his escalation of the war in Vietnam, Exhibit A+, in other words, for Debs' warning. If the Democratic Party bogey for 1964, Goldwater-the-existential-threat-to humanity, challenged progressives then, their 2024 slogan, Trump-the-existential-threat-to-Democracy, is guaranteed to do the same six-decades later.

In the world's relatively brief experience with competitive electoral politics, it's not clear when consciousness about "the spoiler effect" first took hold. Another U.S. presidential campaign may have prompted the issue, in 1848. Anti-slavery forces mounted a third-party campaign to split the vote in order to deny victory to the more pro-slavery candidate Democratic Party candidate, to assure the victory of the less pro-slavery slave-owning Whig Party candidate — lesser-evilism politics par excellence.

The following year saw the first competitive elections in Germany owing to the German edition of the 1848-1849 Revolutions, the European Spring as they are often known. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, leaders of the most radical wing in the German movement, the communists, were obligated for the first time to address "the spoiler effect."

But is it true that democracy's fate will be decided at the ballot box? Or that an election would decide slavery's fate? Or that such contests determine when wars occur? Subscription to the lesser/evil voting conundrum might suggest as much in each case. The "spoiler effect" claim, however, awards an unwarranted premium to the import of voting. The kernels of wisdom Marx and Engels bequeathed about how to respond

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to the "splitting the vote" charge, and enriched with the lessons that Lenin distilled about the Bolshevik experience with the electoral/parliamentary process, reveal why. Together they offer an answer to the timeworn conundrum.

Inextricably linked to that solution is the thesis that all three communists subscribed to about voting itself — its actuality as opposed to its repute, which this essay purports to demonstrate. Not likely to be palatable to Collins and Stephens, what's proposed here could be invaluable for progressives, an improvement on Debs' retort about the conundrum.

Lessons of the European Spring

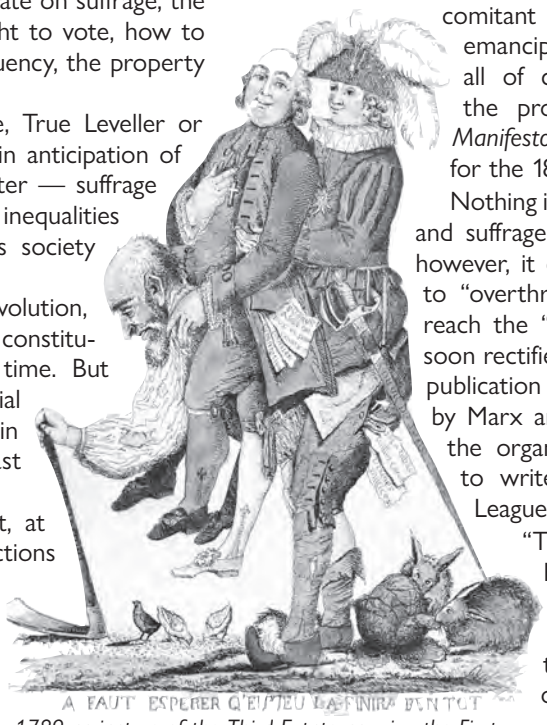
Violence — or the threat of violence — is the most likely means, as history has shown, for obtaining the right to vote.[4]

Not coincidentally, it was the English Civil Wars that gave humanity its first detailed documented debate on suffrage, the 1647 Putney Debates — who had the right to vote, how to determine an electoral unit and its constituency, the property question, etc.[5]

But as the debate's most radical voice, True Leveller or Digger Gerard Winstanley, .cautioned — in anticipation of the *Communist Manifesto* two centuries later — suffrage could not guarantee democracy as long as inequalities in wealth were existent. Only a classless society could do so.

Fast forward to 1789, the French Revolution, when universal manhood suffrage was constitutionally enshrined in 1793 for the first time. But its realization would require another social explosion, a half-century later, the uprising in Paris in February 1848 that sent France's last monarch packing.[6]

In the following April, the world's first, at least in a major country, nationwide elections based on universal manhood suffrage took place, for a constituent assembly. Within weeks of the upheavals in Paris, Berlin exploded and for the first time Germany's ruling class was forced to concede a constitution and parliamentary elections.



1789 caricature of the Third Estate carrying the First Estate (clergy) and Second Estate (nobility) on its back — and leading to the demand for a constituent assembly.

Five years earlier, the young pre-communist Marx underscored one of the "defects" in Hegel's political ideal, constitutional monarchy. More important than whether or not, as the philosopher erroneously thought, civil society [*bürgerliche Gesellschaft* in the original, literally bourgeois society] was represented in the legislature either "through representatives or by all individually; the question is rather one of the *extension* and greatest possible *generalization of election* both of the right to vote and the right to be *elected*."

In anticipation of the European Spring, "this is the real point of dispute concerning political reform in France as in England." The young radical democrat, in other words, was an ardent advocate for universal suffrage.[7] And for that and other reasons he was not impressed with Great Britain, the model of constitutional monarchy for Hegel.

Marx, like many of his fellow Rhinelanders. chafed under the monarchical rule of the Hohenzollern Prussian dynasty and sought an alternative. To enable his quest for an alternative, he called for "making criticism of politics, participation in politics, and therefore real struggles, the starting point of our criticism." (*MECW*, 3: 144)

His journey prompted him to take a close look at the best that liberal democracy in that era had to offer. Underappreciated is how the American reality informed Marx's route to communism. Research revealed that the country's political system "allows private property, education, occupation, to act in their way . . . to exert the influence of their special nature. Far from abolishing these real distinctions, the state only exists on the presupposition of their existence." (*MECW*, 3: 153)

If America was the best that liberal democracy could offer, then clearly something more radical, the young Marx concluded, was needed for "human emancipation." (*MECW*, 3: 152)

America's class-ridden reality, in other words, rendered impossible "true democracy" — a proposition that Winstanley would have agreed with. That epiphany, along with the concomitant discovery of the class that could emancipate itself only by emancipating all of class society's oppressed, namely the proletariat, birthed the *Communist Manifesto* in February 1848 — just in time for the 1848 Revolutions.

Nothing in the *Manifesto* addressed elections and suffrage. In four places in the document, however, it did say that it would take "force" to "overthrow the bourgeoisie" in order to reach the "ultimate goal." The omission was soon rectified within weeks of the document's publication with a new one quickly composed by Marx and Engels, the effective leaders of the organization that commissioned them to write the *Manifesto*, the Communist League.

"The Demands of the Communist Party in Germany" constituted the organization's guide for concrete daily work. None of the 17 demands were communist or socialist but rather basic bourgeois democratic ones, what the "real" situation in Germany at that moment required.

Following the first, a demand for "a single and indivisible republic," the second called for "the right to vote and to be elected" for "every German having reached the age of 21 . . . provided he has not been convicted of a criminal offence" — in other words, universal male suffrage.

The third demand stated that "representatives of the people shall receive payments so that workers, too, shall be able to become members of the German parliament." (*MECW*, 7: 3-5) The rest of the demands were mostly to end semi-feudal relations in Germany.

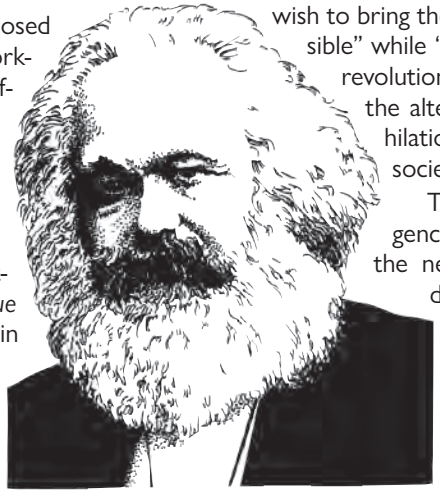
But developments in France would prove in the long run to be determinant. The April/May 1848 elections to the constituent assembly, again, the first universal male suffrage elections, were conducted by the Provisional Government that issued from the February Revolution, the first iteration of a social-democratic regime.

Its establishment of the world's first unemployment program for workers, the National Workshops, explains the "social" component of the label. In June, just six weeks later,

Paris' proletarian masses received their first object and sober lesson about social democracy. When they rose up again, this time to protest the ending of the jobs program, their revolt was crushed in blood.

Thousands were killed and wounded by government-backed troops, and even more were deported to France's colonies. The bloodbath grimly taught that the right to vote should never be confused with the actual exercise of political power — a lesson Marx and Engels would later codify.[8]

Though not as sanguinary and starkly posed as the lessons from France, German working-class experience with suffrage also offered a reality check. As the Communist League's "Demands" anticipated, Marx and Engels were vigilant from the very beginning about Germany's first experiment in the electoral/parliamentary process.



Karl Marx Lisa Lyons

The two did so largely from the outside through their newspaper, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, and their activism in two mass organizations where they were based, the Cologne Workers Association and the mostly petit-bourgeois republican Cologne Democratic Association.

Initially they employed the League to direct that effort but at a certain moment, Marx, who had the authority to do so, decided to suspend its operations — a decision that he and Engels would later criticize (more about shortly).

When in January 1849 the first opportunity for organized German working-class participation in parliamentary elections presented itself where he was based, Marx had to grapple with the question of whether the workers' movement should run its own candidates and risk the "spoiler effect" or rather support the more moderate liberal party candidates.[9]

Marx, according to the minutes of the January 15 meeting of the Workers Association, concurred with the opinion of a more experienced League member in the workers' movement in Cologne.

"Citizen Marx is also of the opinion that the Workers' Association as such would not be able to get candidates elected now; nor is it for the moment a question of doing anything with regard to principle, but of opposing the Government, absolutism, and the rule of feudalism, and for that, simple democrats, so-called liberals, who are also far from satisfied with the present Government, are sufficient. Things have to be taken as they are. Since it is now important to offer the strongest possible opposition to the absolutist system, plain common sense demands that if we realise that we cannot get our own view of principle accepted in the elections, we should unite with another party, also in opposition, so as not to allow our common enemy, the absolute monarchy, to win." (*MECW*, 8:514)

Marx, then, when first confronted with the all-too familiar dilemma for most progressives today, opted for the lesser/evil liberals in order to avoid victory for the greater evil, the spoiler feudal "absolute monarchy."[10] However, his "participation in politics, and therefore real struggles" soon taught otherwise.

Once it became clear that the German edition of the European Spring had ebbed, Marx and Engels were forced to retreat from the battlefield, draw balance sheets and regroup. Most relevant for purposes here is their 11-page "Address of the Central Authority of the League, March 1850."

The document begins with a self-criticism of the decision to suspend, sometime in summer or fall 1848, the organization. The result was that "the workers' party . . . came completely under the domination and leadership of the petit bourgeois democrats. An end must be put to this state of affairs, the independence of the workers must be restored."

Two years had taught that "the democratic petit bourgeois wish to bring the revolution to a conclusion as quickly as possible" while "it is in our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent . . . For us the issue cannot be the alteration of private property but only its annihilation . . . not the improvement of the existing society but the foundation of a new one."[11]

The premise of the document was that a resurgence of the revolution was imminent and, thus, the need for preparation. The call for "independent," or some variant of, working-class political action rings out on virtually each page.

In unambiguous rejection of Marx's position for the 1849 elections, the document directed "that everywhere workers' candidates are put up alongside bourgeois-democratic candidates" in the next elections, "that they are as far as possible members of the League, and that their election is promoted by all possible means."

"Even where there is no prospect whatever of their being elected, the workers must put up their own candidates in order to preserve their independence, to count their forces and to lay before the public their revolutionary attitude and party standpoint. *In this connection they must not allow themselves to be bribed by such arguments of the democrats as, for example, that by so doing they are splitting the democratic party and giving the reactionaries the possibility of victory. The ultimate purpose of all such phrases is to dupe the proletariat. The advance which the proletarian party is bound to make by such independent action is infinitely more important than the disadvantage that might be incurred by the presence of a few reactionaries in the representative body."* [emphasis added] (*MECW*, 10:281, 284)

Here, then, for the first time was Marx and Engels' opinion about "splitting" the vote, or the "spoiler effect." It was of more value, they argued, for the working-class movement to risk a "few reactionaries in the representative body" by running an independent campaign than not to have done so — the opportunity "to count their forces" and "to lay before the public their revolutionary attitude and party standpoint," that is, political education.

Implied in that directive was the premise that elections best serve the working class not as an end in themselves but rather as a means to an end.

But what about the "few reactionaries in the representative body"? How were they to be treated? "If from the outset the democrats come out resolutely and terroristically against the reactionaries, the influence of the latter in the elections will be destroyed in advance." Without any further elaboration in the document the reader can only speculate on the meaning of the sentence.

Though neither Marx nor Engels lived long enough to see the next German revolution, the "Address" forever informed their approach to elections. Engels, at the appropriate moment, would later teach the significance of being able "to count their forces." Lenin, as we'll see, singularly and consequentially instantiated Engels's point.

Experiences of 1848 Summed Up

As Marx and Engels were issuing their "Address," Marx was composing his analysis of the recently transpired French events, since known as *The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850*. Relevant here were his comments on the suffrage question.

The key takeaway for him about the February 1848 uprising was the plebeian proletarian masses in the streets of Paris imposing their will, "dictating," to make possible universal suffrage in a major country for the first time. They did so, he argued, only for the purpose of providing "the terrain for its revolutionary emancipation, but by no means the emancipation itself." (*MECW*, 10: 54)

Their demand for universal manhood suffrage was for Marx, therefore, a means for "emancipation" rather than "emancipation itself." And when the ruling class grew tired of the proletariat employing those means and had the ability and confidence to do so — their slaughter of the rebellious Parisian proletariat in June 1848 proved to be a decisive turning point — they effectively ended universal manhood suffrage by the end of May 1850.

"Universal suffrage," as Marx in clinical-like fashion explained, "had fulfilled its mission. The majority of the people had passed through the school of development, which is all that universal suffrage can serve for in a revolutionary period. It had to be set aside by a revolution or by the reaction." (*MECW,* 10: 137) Again, for Marx elections were a means rather than an end — in complement to the "Address of March 1850."

Another post-revolutionary balance sheet was Engels' *Revolution and Counterrevolution* about the German Revolution. As for the petit-bourgeois liberals who had been elected to the Frankfurt Assembly to write a constitution for a unified Germany, many of whom were academics, Engels was unsparing.

"They had from the beginning of their legislative career been more imbued than any other fraction of the Assembly with that incurable malady, parliamentary cretinism, *a disorder which penetrates its unfortunate victims with the solemn conviction that the whole world, its history and future, are governed and determined by a majority of votes in that particular representative body which has the honor to count them among its members, and that all and everything going on outside the walls of their house — wars, revolutions . . . and whatever else may have some little claim to influence upon the destinies of mankind — is nothing compared to the incommensurable events hinging upon the important question, whatever it may be, just at that moment occupying the attention of their honorable House."* [emphasis added] (*MECW*, 11: 79)

Contrary to what those afflicted with "parliamentary cretinism" believed, determinant in politics, Engels posited, is what took place "outside" the legislative arena.

Marx seconded Engels's insight shortly afterward in his more famous *The Eighteenth Brumaire.* The affliction, "which since 1848 has raged all over the Continent, *parliamentary cretinism,* which holds those infected by it fast in an imaginary world and robs them of all sense, all memory, all understanding of the rude external world." (*MECW*, 11: 161)

Exactly because the two communists prioritized developments beyond the "honorable House" they were willing to risk for the sake of independent working class political action "a few reactionaries in the representative body" and not be frightened about the "spoiler effect." The benefits of being able "to count forces" and to carry out political education outweighed the potential costs.

Two decades later political conditions in Germany and elsewhere in Europe allowed Marx and Engels to opine once more on a working-class perspective on the electoral and parliamentary processes. Along the way, Marx led, with the founding in 1864 of the International Workingmen's Association, or First International, the campaign for forming mass working-class political parties. He codified in the organization's founding documents the chief lesson of the European Spring: only if organized for political action independently of the bourgeoisie could the working class emancipate itself.

With the German party in the vanguard of the process, Marx and Engels, owing to their historic ties to the movement there, had license to offer frank and sober advice. Engels, for example, criticized one of the party's candidates for the 1874 Reichstag elections who rejected the use of "force" in the political process "even though we all know that when it comes down to it, nothing can be achieved without force" — one of the essential lessons of the 1848-1849 upheavals. (*MECW*, 45: 9)

Marx, four years later, pointed out that one of the lessons of the United States Civil War — a revolution that he devoted considerable attention to — was that "a 'peaceful' movement might be transformed into a 'forcible' one by resistance on the part of those interested in the former state of affairs," that is, the slave oligarchy.[12] The point qualified a comment he had made in a speech in 1872 — often quoted out of context by voices who seek to defang Marx — which suggested that he exempted America from armed revolutions. The Civil War's staggering toll in human lives demonstrated otherwise.

After Marx's death in 1883 it fell to Engels alone to advise the fledgling working-class parties in Europe about how to conduct themselves in the electoral/parliamentary arenas. With an eye on German state censors, Engels could only metaphorically iterate his and his deceased partner's revolutionary position on elections in his *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* the following year.

In the same sober and clinical-like tone rendered by his partner three decades earlier in *The Class Struggles in France,* "universal suffrage is the gauge of the maturity of the working class. It cannot and never will be anything more in the present-day state, but that," he continued, "is sufficient. On the day the thermometer of universal suffrage registers boiling point among the workers, both they and the capitalists will know where they stand." (*MECW,* 26: 272)

Nine years later, Engels could be more transparent about the meaning of his point in a letter to Marx's son-in-law and a leader of the French party about the recent gains it had made in an election:

"Do you realize now what a splendid weapon you in France have had in your hands for forty years in universal suffrage; if only people had known how to use it! It's slower and more boring than the call

to revolution, but it's ten times more sure, and what is even better, it indicates with the most perfect accuracy the day when a call to armed revolution has to be made; it's even ten to one that universal suffrage, intelligently used by the workers, will drive the rulers to overthrow legality, that is, to put us in the most favorable position to make the revolution." (*MECW*, 50: 29)

Nothing better in the Marx-Engels arsenal made clearer than this passage the intent of those kernels of wisdom in their "Address of March 1850" about the revolutionary value of independent working-class political action in the electoral arena. It was a position he still defended four decades later.

Such action would allow the workers' movement "to count their forces and to lay before the public their revolutionary attitude and party standpoint" in order — what they could only hint at in 1850 — to "make the revolution." To repeat, elections for Engels and his partner were an invaluable means rather than an end in themselves.

When a critic, also in 1892, accused the two communists of being dismissive of bourgeois democracy, Engels objected.

"Marx and I, for forty years, repeated ad nauseam, that for us the democratic republic is the only political form in which the struggle between the working class and the capitalist class can first be universalized and then culminate in the decisive victory of the proletariat." (*MECW,* 27: 271)

Just as the electoral and parliamentary arenas were only for both of them a means to the end of proletarian ascent, so too, therefore, the same for bourgeois democracy itself.

This exposed the fundamental incompatibility between class society and democracy. Only with the proletariat in power could the process begin for dismantling class societies and, thus, the realization for the first time of true democracy and, hence, human emancipation. Lenin, as we'll soon see, absorbed that perspective to his very political core.

Engels, who died in 1895, didn't live long enough to see what later became of universal suffrage on a global scale. Not until after the Second World War did that become a reality and along with it, therefore, all of the illusions that were shattered about elections as an end in themselves for achieving true democracy.[13]

This distillation of Marx's and Engels's views on the electoral and parliamentary processes would be remiss without a recognition of the campaign to rob them of their revolutionary content even before their deaths in respectively 1883 and 1895 — a campaign from within the movement they both nurtured.

No individual's role in that development was as consequential as that of Karl Kautsky, the so-called "Pope of Marxism." His 1892 *The Class Struggle,* which he dubbed a "catechism of Social-Democracy," was widely read including by Eugene V. Debs (about which more later).

Relevant here is Kautsky's claim that "Great capitalists can influence rulers and legislators directly, but the workers can do so *only* through parliamentary activity . . . By electing representatives to parliament, therefore, the working class can exercise an influence over the governmental powers"[italics added].[14]

"*Only* through parliamentary activity"? That's exactly the stance Engels and Marx derisively labeled "parliamentary cretinism." In hindsight, Kautsky's claim registered a larger development in the German Social-Democratic Party, the growth of reformism. Engels' last and ultimately unsuccessful struggle to arrest it had a tragic outcome that still resonates in world politics.[15] Lenin, to segue and to be seen, had good reason to later label Kautsky a "parliamentary cretin."

Lessons from Revolutionary Russia

Three years after the Bolshevik-led revolution that brought Russia's workers and peasants to power in October 1917, Lenin declared his party's "participation . . . in parliaments . . . was not only useful but indispensable" in its success.[16] If true — and there is no reason to doubt him — it suggests that Lenin employed the parliamentary road to realize working-class state power, the first and only time since then.

But of utmost importance for Lenin, the electoral and parliamentary arenas were, as his two mentors had taught, a means rather than an end for proletarian ascendancy. This was what distinguished him from what later became 20th-century Social Democracy. "Revolutionary parliamentarism" is the label he employed for what he advocated in distinction to the "reformist parliamentarism" of the latter.

When the opportunity presented itself for the first time to partake in the electoral and parliamentary processes, Lenin seized the moment with relish. Czar Nicholas II, as monarchs had done before — including his Hohenzollern cousin in Berlin in 1848 — sought to end the mass strikes in the 1905 Revolution with the promise of liberal democracy.

To hold the Czar's feet to the fire, Lenin counseled his Bolshevik comrades, "we must fight in a revolutionary way *for* a parliament but not in a parliamentary way for a revolution." (*LCW,* 9: 258-61) Only when the mobilizations began to run out of steam did Lenin advocate for working-class participation in the Czar's proposals, despite their severe democratic limitations.

No founding document of the modern communist movement informed Lenin's practice as much as Marx and Engels' "Address of March 1850," which he "knew by heart" and "used to delight in quoting."[17] It served, I argue, as Lenin's playbook for Bolshevik ascendancy in 1917.[18]

To understand why, between 1906 and 1914 Lenin directed Bolshevik election campaigns for participation of its elected deputies in Russia's four state Dumas.[19] The "Address" taught that elections, to repeat for the umpteenth time, were only a means for the Bolsheviks — "to count their forces and to lay before the public their revolutionary attitude and party standpoint."

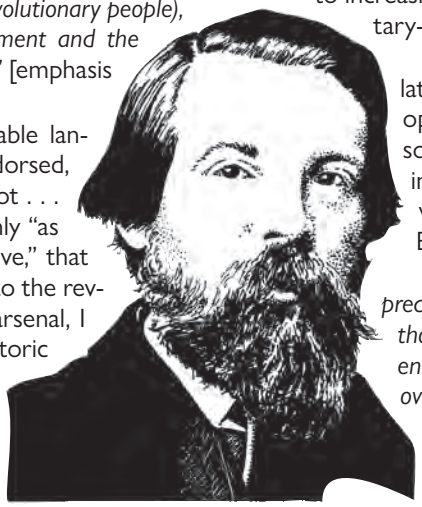
The document also informed Lenin's stance on the ever present lesser-evil/splitting the vote issue. Engels' *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* taught as well to regard elections as a "thermometer" that "registers boiling point among workers."

In his single most detailed writing on non-party elections, an assessment of those for the First Duma in 1906 — an 80-page text that's as long as his more famous *Left-Wing Communism* — Lenin previewed in broad strokes exactly what he led in 1917.[20] His instructions to the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) deputies who were elected to the Duma in which the liberal Cadet party was hegemonic are all-so revealing:

"Our task is not to support the Cadet Duma, but to use the conflicts within this Duma, or connected with it, for choosing the right moment to attack the enemy, the right moment for an insurrection against the autocracy. . . As a means of testing public opinion and defining as correctly and precisely as possible the moment when

"boiling point" *is reached . . . but only as a symptom, not as the real field of struggle. . . . Our task is to use the respite that will be provided by an opposition Duma (and as the proletariat needs time to rally its forces properly, this respite will be very much to our advantage), to organise the workers, to expose constitutional illusions, and to prepare for a military offensive. Our task is to be at our post when the Duma farce develops into a new great political crisis; and our aim then will be, not support for the Cadets (at best they will be only a weak mouthpiece of the revolutionary people), but the overthrow of the autocratic government and the transfer of power to the revolutionary people."* [emphasis added] (*LCW*, 10: 237-38)

Nota bene "boiling point." In unmistakable language that Marx and Engels would have endorsed, electoral and parliamentary work were "not . . . the real field of struggle" but to be seen only "as a means" to "prepare for a military offensive," that is, an armed action to "transfer . . . power to the revolutionary people." Nothing in the Lenin arsenal, I contend, so accurately anticipated the historic events of October 1917.



Frederick Engels Lisa Lyons

For the first time Lenin spoke to the lesser/evil/splitting the vote issue. In preparation for the Second Duma elections, at the beginning of 1907, he had to address the call by the Menshevik wing of the RSDLP to support the liberal Cadet candidates: the reason, to avoid splitting the vote of the left and allowing, supposedly, the proto-fascist Black Hundreds to win.

Given the indirect system of elections in four different electoral colleges or curiae for the different social classes of the population, Lenin had his work cut out to make his case against the Menshevik argument. It required him, for example, to do a detailed analysis of election returns to the First Duma to calculate the probability of Black Hundred success as the Mensheviks, echoing the Cadets, claimed.

Lenin in two detailed articles essentially concretized, for the specific conditions he faced, Marx and Engels' advice that the workers' movement not be persuaded by the claim of the petit-bourgeois Democrats that in running their own candidates "they are splitting the democratic party and giving the reactionaries the possibility of victory."[21]

To not run their own campaign, he replied, would deny the RSDLP the opportunity to know its true strength within the proletariat, in other words, its *raison d'être*. Also, according to his calculations, the Cadets were exaggerating the probability of Black Hundred victory.

In the final analysis, lastly and most importantly, the only place, he contended, where the Black Hundred danger could be effectively dealt with was outside the parliamentary arena, in the streets. To believe otherwise, he charged, was to succumb to "parliamentary cretinism" — not the last time he would employ Engels' and Marx's label.

Though Lenin couldn't persuade his Menshevik comrades with his arguments, he felt vindicated when the election results revealed that indeed a Black Hundred victory was unlikely. In retrospect, his debate with the Mensheviks may have been the beginning of the end of the Bolshevik-Menshevik coalition.

That the Bolsheviks proved eventually to be more influential than the Mensheviks with Russia's proletariat was not coincidental. Lenin's 1906-1907 writings constitute the Marxist movement's first, and maybe only, detailed response to the lesser/evil/splitting-the-vote conundrum.

Fast forward to 1917. A unique feature of the 1905 upheaval were the mass democratic councils that workers formed to coordinate their strikes — soviets. When they reappeared in the February Revolution of 1917, the soviets began to increasingly function as an alternative to the parliamentary-like Duma bodies.

Because they were more democratic than the latter and thus more representative of public opinion, Lenin immediately recognized that the soviets could be more effective than the Dumas in realizing his vision for working-class ascent via "a military offensive." Five months after the Bolshevik victory, he explained their success:

"As matters stood in October, we had made a precise calculation of the mass forces. We not only thought, we knew with certainty, from the experience of the mass elections to the Soviets that the overwhelming majority of the workers and soldiers had already come over to our side in September and in early October. We knew . . . that the [provisional government] had also lost the support of the peasantry — and that meant that our cause had already won." (*LCW*, 27: 25)

It was as if Lenin had actually read and taken heed of Engels' advice to his French comrade in 1892 about the unique value of elections for determining when "to make the revolution."[22] Lenin could easily read between the lines of the thermometer metaphor in the *Origins* text to know what Engels meant by "the boiling point." The almost decade-long experience in the electoral/parliamentary arenas — learning how "to count forces" and do political education — goes a long way in explaining why Lenin deemed that work to be "indispensable" in Bolshevik ascent in 1917.

After the Bolshevik victory in 1917, Lenin was obligated to defend from its detractors what they had accomplished. Again, as Lenin had sketched out in 1906, electoral and parliamentary work was only a means to prepare for an armed revolution — exactly what happened in October/November 11 years later.

A key difference between 1906 and 1917 was the presence of the soviets, capped by the national one for the country as a whole, the Soviet of Workers and Soldiers Deputies. That was the body the Bolsheviks employed for organizing the workers and peasants to overthrow the Duma-based Provisional Government. The insurrection was relatively peaceful precisely because the Soviet was more representative of public opinion than the Duma.

With state power, the new Bolshevik-led coalition government began immediately to act on its campaign promises for the Soviet elections noted above — "peace, land, and bread."

The first two pledges, extracting Russia from the bloodbath of the First World War and enactment of a land reform, proved relatively speaking the easiest of the three to meet.

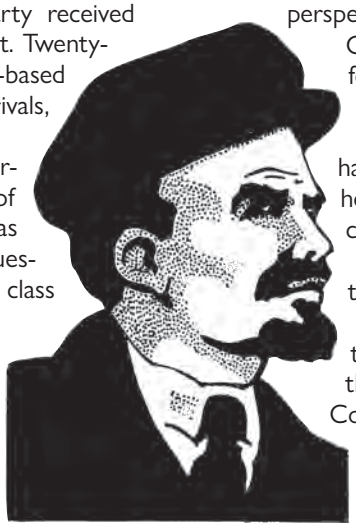
Realization of the second promise ensured support for the new government from Russia's largest constituency, the peasantry. It was why, basically, the Bolsheviks defeated their class enemies in the civil war, a bloodletting that Lenin accurately anticipated.

The new Bolshevik-led government also organized and held three weeks later elections for the Constituent Assembly, long-promised but never realized by the Provisional Government. Historian Adam Tooze, no friend of Lenin, admits that the elections were "a milestone in the history of 20th-century democracy. At least 44 million Russians cast a vote. To date it was the largest expression of, in his opinion, "popular will in history."[23]

The peasant-based Socialist-Revolutionary Party received the largest share of the vote, thirty-eight per cent. Twenty-four percent went to the proletarian and urban-based Bolsheviks, three per cent to their Menshevik rivals, and five per cent to the liberal Cadets.

The results brought to a head the long simmering and unresolved political issue of 1917: which of the two forms of representative democracy was more legitimate, soviet or parliamentary? The question was in fact a proxy for the real issue: which class should rule Russia?

An answer was finally rendered on January 6, 1918, when the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, where the Bolsheviks were hegemonic, voted at Lenin's initiative to dissolve the two-day old Constituent Assembly for not recognizing its supreme authority. Lenin's decision to unceremoniously send the Assembly packing has never been forgiven by his liberal detractors.[24]



V.I. Lenin Lisa Lyons

Lenin's definitive defense of his actions came almost two years later when the detailed results of the November 1917 elections finally became available. Written in 1920, the last stages of Russia's devastating civil war, and three years before his final stroke, "The Constituent Assembly Elections and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat" constitutes his last word on the electoral process.[25] Not to be forgotten, again, is that he previewed his position in 1906.

What Kind of Democracy?

The essence of Lenin's argument, first, was that by the time the Constituent Assembly met in January, the revolutionary train had already left the station. In seizing state power in October, the proletariat under Bolshevik leadership immediately began to enact measures, particularly the land reform, to win the peasant majority to its side. Russia's effective majority, in other words, voted with its feet.

Second, there could never be democratic elections under conditions based on private property and other capitalist relations of production — Russia's reality on November 7. Third, "extremely important political matters" could never be settled "*merely by voting*. Such problems are actually solved by *civil war* if they are acute and aggravated by struggle." To claim otherwise was "crass stupidity, or else, sheer deception of the workers." (*LCW*, 30: 265-67)

The Bolshevik triumph, Lenin argued in conclusion, taught a profound lesson. Rather than rely on an election for "the majority of the population . . . to express themselves in favor of the party of the proletariat . . . [l]et the revolutionary party first overthrow the bourgeoisie, break the yoke of capital, and smash the bourgeois state apparatus."

Armed with that victory, "the victorious proletariat will be able rapidly to gain the sympathy and support of the majority of the non-proletarian working people by satisfying their needs at the expense of the exploiters."

Lenin's strategy was to first win a majority of the proletariat — what the soviet elections registered in September 1917 — in order to overthrow the bourgeois government. Then employ state power to win over a majority of the peasantry to end the power of the bourgeoisie. The almost decade-long Duma experience had taught the Bolsheviks that only with deeds rather than words would the countryside be won to their perspective.

Could socialist transformation be done differently as the Second International Social Democrats contended, that is, by relying on elections beforehand? For Lenin that would have been "[the] rare exception." And besides, he continued, "the bourgeoisie can resort to civil war, as the example of Finland showed."[26]

Another civil war, to be seen shortly, instantiated his point.

As evidence for his strategy, Lenin pointed to the progress the Red Army was making in the civil war, and employed the newly available Constituent Assembly election to make his case. They largely predicted, he convincingly argued, the course of the war and eventual Bolshevik victory. Areas where the Bolsheviks did well in the elections anticipated military victories.

As for the reality of "democratic" elections under capitalist relations of production, Exhibit A for Lenin was the United States. Had he lived long enough, he could have added the SCOTUS 2012 *Citizens United* decision.

But by no means did Lenin dismiss U.S. elections. To the contrary, as he argued most tellingly in a 1912 article in defense of them — against a Russian monarchist voice that sought to impugn them owing to the unmistakable influence of money in their conduct (*LCW*, 18:3350 — elections under bourgeois conditions were preferable to none at all or under semi-feudal conditions.

As for "civil war," Lenin likely had in mind the foremost example of the 19th century, the U.S. Civil War. Sixteen months earlier he pointed out in his famous "Letter to American Workers" (1918) that only through a very bloody and destructive war, not unlike the one then in progress in Russia, could America's version of feudalism, chattel slavery, be ended.[27]

Neither a Supreme Court decision, the infamous 1857 Dred Scott ruling, nor the 1860 presidential election that brought Lincoln into the White House, settled the most contentious issue the nation had ever faced. If ever there was an example of how "extremely important political matters" can only be "solved by *civil war*," then surely the conflagration in America must qualify as Exhibit A.

So important for Lenin were his arguments that he ended the article with 10 theses. "The Constituent Assembly Elections" article constitutes the bookend to his definitive writings on the Marxist approach to the electoral/parliamentary process — his definitive statement.

The invaluable lessons that Marx and Engels bequeathed to Lenin help explain why at the Revolution's arguably most decisive moment he proved to be more effective

than his peasant-based Right Social Revolutionary opponents who won more votes than the Bolsheviks in the Constituent Assembly elections. As the historian Orlando Figes, another mainstream Lenin opponent, admits:

"The Right SRs were hypnotized by the 'sanctity' and the 'dignity' of the Constituent Assembly. the first democratic parliament in the history of Russia, and by the 'honour' which this bestowed upon them as representatives. Carried away by such ideals, they deluded themselves into believing that Russia was firmly set on the same path as England or America, and that the 'will of the people' was alone enough to defend its democratic institutions . . . . There was [in fact] no mass reaction to the closure of the Constituent Assembly."[28]

The Right SRs, in other words, as Engels would have explained, were afflicted "with that incurable malady, parliamentary cretinism" and deluded, as Lenin would have put it, to think that "extremely important political matters" could be settled "merely by voting." Such faulty thinking doomed their fate.

For Marx and Engels, and Lenin as well, the parliamentary and electoral arenas were only a means rather than an end for "making a revolution." As Lenin argued in his final pronouncement on the topic in *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, that's what most distinguished "revolutionary parliamentarism" from "reformist parliamentarism."

For Lenin, no individual represented the stance of reformist parliamentarism more than the one-time "Pope of Marxism," Karl Kautsky. His objection to the Bolsheviks' revolutionary road to power earned him Lenin's opprobrium and, as noted earlier, the label of being a "parliamentary cretin." (*LCW*, 28: 241)

Four decades later the essence of Russia's revolutionary course would be duplicated on an island 9,000 miles away in the Caribbean.

Lenin's perspective about elections, to conclude, also applied to the revolutionary party itself. This is what he was alluding to in the last of his ten theses in the "Constitutional Assembly" article. "Bolshevism would not have defeated the bourgeoisie in 1917-1919, if before that, in 1903-17, it had not learned to defeat the Mensheviks, i.e., the opportunists, reformists, social-chauvinists, and ruthlessly expel them from the party of the proletariat vanguard." (*LCW*, 30: 275)

1917 Petrograd Soviet

Political experience had taught, beginning in 1903, that just as "important political questions" in the larger world couldn't be settled "merely by voting," the same was true for a real proletariat party — "inevitable, since the proletariat is operating in a capitalist environment."

The problem of trying to get the minority of the Russian Socialist Democratic Labor Party, the official party that Lenin belonged to until 1914, to carry out the perspective democratically voted on by majority surfaced quickly after its unity congress in 1903.

To prevent that from happening in the future, the principle of democratic centralism was adopted as the party's *modus operandi* (initiated, by the way, by the Menshevik wing). It would become the defining principle of a "Leninist" party. Membership, in other words, would now depend on whether a member carried out the line democratically adopted by the party majority — the only way in which the majority could impose discipline, i.e. its will, namely to make voting meaningful. ■

(To be continued in the next issue of *Against the Current,* September-October 2024,)

Notes

1. Jan 5, 2024, Valley Forge, PA, (AP News)
2. https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/13/us/politics/cornel-west-campaign-manager-peter-daou-green-party-democrats.html. West's Green Party candidacy proved to be short lived. As of this writing, he will run as the newly Justice For All party candidate.
3. Ray Ginger, *The Bending Cross: A Biography of Eugene V. Debs,* originally published 1947.
4. Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, "Why Did the West Extend the Franchise? Democracy, Inequality, and Growth in Historical Perspective," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics,* November 2000.
5. Paul Foot, *The Vote: How It Was Won and How It Was Undermined* (New York, 2005).
6. Christopher Clark's *Revolutionary Spring: Europe Aflame and The Fight For a New World, 1848-1849* (New York, 2023) is arguably the new one-volume definitive account of the entire episode.
7. Marx planned in 1844 to write a volume or two devoted just to the state in which "suffrage" was slated to be the last topic. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, 50 vols. (New York, 1975–2005), vol. 4, p. 666 (hereafter *MECW*, 4: 666).
8. For details see Clark, 557-65.
9. For the larger context of the elections, see Jonathan Sperber, *Rhineland Radicals: The Democratic Movement and the Revolution of 1848-1849* (Princeton, N.J.1991), 337-46.
10. Jonathan Sperber, *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life* (New York, 2013), 233, claims that Marx was motivated by opposition to a rival in the workers movement — a possibility but only speculation.
11. According to Sperber 2013, 251, "the revolution permanent" was "coined by [Andreas] Gottschalk, in an article he wrote in January 1849 denouncing Marx for opposing Gottschalk's plan to put up workers' candidates against the democrats in the elections to the Prussian parliament."
12. *MECW*, 24: 248. For details on Marx's attention to the Civil War, see August Nimtz and Kyle Edwards, *The Communist and the Revolutionary LIberal in the Second American Revolution: Comparing Karl Marx and Frederick Douglass in Real-Time* (forthcoming). . . .
13. Nimtz 2021, "' Putting weapons into the hands of the proletariat': Marx on the contradiction between capitalism and liberal democracy," *Research Handbook on Law and Marxism,* eds. Paul O'Connell and Umut Ozsu (Cheltenham, U.K,. 2021), 57-60.
14. Karl Kautsky, *The Class Struggle* (Erfurt Program), New York, 1971): 186.
15. Nimtz, *The Ballot, the Streets, or Both?: From Marx and Engels to Lenin and the* October Revolution (Chicago, 2019): 32-35.
16. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works* (Moscow, 1977), vol. 31: 61; hereafter, *LCW*, 31: 61. . . .
17. David Riazanov, *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: An Introduction to Their Lives and Work* (New York, 1973): 99.
18. Nimtz, "'The Bolsheviks Come To Power': A New Interpretation" *Science & Society* (81:4).
19. For the rich details, see Nimtz, *The Ballot, the Streets, or Both?*, Chapters 3 to 6. . .
20. This is the first recognition in print, as far as I can tell, of that preview. I certainly missed it in my *The Ballot*, 98-99. Lenin spilled as much ink, if not more, on party elections, specifically, for example, his pamphlet *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back, LCW*, 7.
21. For details, see Nimtz, *The Ballot, the Streets, or Both?*: 132-35, 138-40.
22. Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War, America and the Remaking of the Global Order, 1916-1931* (New York, 2014): 84-85.
23. Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War, America and the Remaking of the Global Order, 1916-1931* (New York, 2014): 84-85.
24. In real-time, however, Lenin's actions were greeted with mixed and ambiguous reactions by liberals. In his famous Fourteen Points Speech of January 8, 1918, President Woodrow Wilson, for example, praised "Russia's leaders for their democratic . . . " Then later in March he sent a letter of encouragement to the Congress of Soviets in implicit acknowledgement that it was the sovereign authority in Russia. See Nimtz, *Marxism versus Liberalism: Comparative Real-Time Political Analysis* (New York, 2019): 213-17.
25. An unexpected reward awaits today's reader of the article — Lenin's endorsement of Ukrainian self-determination.
26. *LCW*, 30: 273. Eminent Russian Revolution scholar Alexander Rabinowitch, I'm told on good authority, claims that Lenin "didn't trust elections" (Nimtz, *The Ballot*, 2019: 463). But that claim flies in the face of the evidence distilled here.
27. https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/aug/20.htm
28. Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: A History of the Russian Revolution* (New York,1996): 518.

REVIEW

Whose River? Whose Sea?

Time Traveling in Palestine

By Merry Maisel

ONCE UPON A time, I was a graduate student in Science Studies, a program at the University of California, San Diego, that is shared among the departments of Sociology, History, and Philosophy.

I was 48 years old when I entered the program as a part-time student, and I was told that I must choose one of the three departments as my home department and then pass their qualifying exams.

Since I knew nothing of Sociology except that (a) it was contentious and (b) as a Marxist I was guaranteed much contention, Sociology did not seem a good choice.

.History wanted everyone to familiarize themselves with The Reading List, which contained about 300 books totalling many tens of thousands of pages. I supposed that a qualifying exam question might be something on the order of "Give us a day-by-day, blow-by-blow account of the Hundred Years' War."

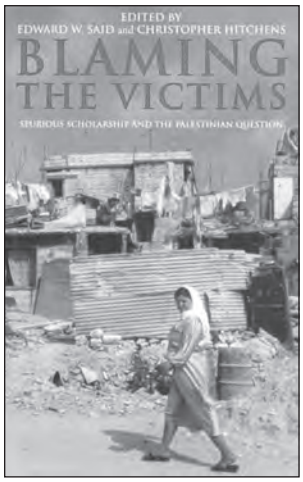
My memory was still pretty good back then. But even so, it seemed the better part of wisdom to choose Philosophy as my home department. All they wanted was an exam in a foreign language, a long conversation with some philosophers, and, in a manner of speaking, one's firstborn child.

A cinch, I guessed, especially since I had no issue.

Eventually, my entire attempt to join Academia landed in history's dustbin. I realize today that I should've stuck with the Hundred Years' War. Then I would have had at least one such war under my belt when approaching the difficult, fraught and soul-wrenching 100-year conflict of our own era, that between the Zionist entity of Israel and the nation of Palestine.

Unlike most of you, perhaps, I had always been anti-Zionist. That said, I knew little more. What should I read to back up my stand?

If you, also, are wondering what to read while encamped in front of your institution's Administration or asking how to argue with someone who has been filled with Israeli *hasbara* (propaganda) since birth, I now rush to your aid with a reading list that reaches from 1880 to roughly yesterday, will take far less time than graduate study, and will give you a firm platform on which to stand and fight for Palestinian freedom.



This reading list is 97 per cent shorter than the one for UC San Diego History and guaranteed more palatable in several ways.

October 7 in Perspective

Highly recommended among the eight books listed in the accompanying box is *From the River to the Sea (FRS),* which takes its title from that highly contested phrase.

Issued at the end of December 2023, when the Israel-Hamas war had yet to reach its 100th day, *FRS* is both a *cri-de-coeur* of the first victims of the Israeli onslaught and a cache of serious attempts to answer many of the questions that you might have asked on October 7 or 8.

Turn first to the excellent essay by Tareq Baconi (from ForeignPolicy.com) titled "What was Hamas thinking?" Baconi argues that the initial incursion mounted by armed Hamas fighters was in fact the culmination of a series of moves by the organization to involve larger masses in the struggle, beginning with the Great March of Return and continuing with the mobilizations against the Israeli attempts to expel Palestinians from the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of Jerusalem.

"Underpinning these tactics," Baconi writes, "was a clear shift by the movement to transition away from acquiescence to its containment to a more explicit challenge to Israeli domination — over sixteen years" since Israel's "withdrawal" from Gaza in 2005. [For further background see Baconi's *Hamas Contained* reviewed by Samuel Farber in our previous issue, ATC 230 —ed.]

Baconi goes on to show a great deal more to the strategic thinking of Hamas than the instant condemners might have known about. Giving thought to these questions is particularly important for those on the left as they weigh the issue of critical or conditional support for the current leadership of the Palestinian resistance.

Baconi goes on to note that "Whether or not Hamas survives in its current incarnation is a red herring: Palestinian resistance against

Book Cited in this Review

FRS: From the River to the Sea: Essays for a Free Palestine, Chicago and London/New York (a collaboration between Haymarket Publishers and Verso Books): 2023, 237 pages. Edited by Sai Englert, Michal Schatz, and Rosie Warren.

BV: Blaming the Victims, London/New York: Verso Books 1988, 304 pages. Still a highly valuable collection. Edited by Christopher Hitchens and Edward Said, paperback + new free e-book $23.96, e-book only $8.

PG: The Punishment of Gaza, by Gideon Levy, London/New York: Verso Books 2010, 160 pages. Paperback + free e-book $19.96, e-book only $8.

CS: The Case for Sanctions Against Israel, London/New York: Verso Books 2012, 244 pages. Edited by Audrea Lim, paperback + free e-book $23.96, e-book only $8.

TM: Ten Myths About Israel, by Ilan Pappe, London/New York: Verso Books. 1st ed. 2017 (192 pages, paper, $14.96 while copies last) or 2nd ed. 9/2024 (208 pages, paper, preorder at $15.96) or e-book only, $8.

BDS: Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions: The Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights, by Omar Barghouti, Chicago, Haymarket Books 2011, paperback + free e-book $15.96, e-book only free until further notice (while students protest or until after ceasefire).

PSI: Palestine: A Socialist Introduction, Haymarket Books 2020, edited by Sumaya Awad and Brian Bean, paperback + free e-book $15.16, e-book only free until further notice (while students protest or until after ceasefire). Reviewed in *Against the Current* 213, July/August 2021,.

LG: Light in Gaza: Writings Born of Fire, Haymarket Books 2022, edited by Jehad Abusalim, Jennifer Bing, and Mike Merryman-Lotze, paperback + free e-book, $19.96, e-book only free until further notice (while students protest or until after ceasefire). ■

continued on page 39

Merry Maisel is a retired editor and a "not-yet-dead revolutionary socialist" in San Diego.

REVIEW

Prisons and Resistance:
The "Long Attica Revolt"

By Robert J. Boyle

Tip of the Spear
Black Radicalism, Prison Repression and the Long Attica Revolt
By Orisanmi Burton
University of California Press, 2023, 328 pages, $29.95 paperback.

PRISONS, ACCORDING TO Dr. Orisanmi Burton, "are war. They are state strategies of race war, class war, colonization and counterinsurgency."

In his meticulously researched and fascinating *Tip of the Spear*, Dr. Burton sets himself apart from the great majority of books and films on U.S. prisons that primarily focus on prison conditions, guard brutality and efforts at reform.

Rather, the author emphasizes the political nature of prison rebellions. Prisons are "domains of militant contestation, where captive populations reject … white supremacist systems of power and invent zones of autonomy, freedom and liberation."

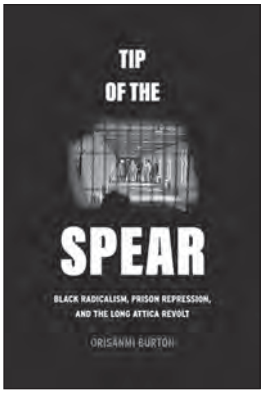
With such a thesis the reader should not expect a litany of brutality and injustice followed by reform. Dr. Burton argues that the resistance inside prisons is an integral part of the struggle against white supremacy and for Black liberation beyond the walls.

Moreover, although he uses the term "prison abolition," Dr. Burton is careful to point out that the term, as used in the book, means the elimination of the social conditions that feed the prisons. It diminishes the revolutionary significance of what he terms the "Long Attica Revolt," he argues, if one focuses on reform rather than societal change.

Dr. Burton draws his lessons from the most rebellious time in U.S.prison history: the New York State and City prison rebellions of the 1970s. Dr. Burton labels this period as the time of the "Long Attica Revolt," which spanned New York State and which existed before and after the September 1971 rebellion at Attica State prison.

Fueling the Rebellions

Influenced in part by the wave of militant political activity of organizations such as the Black Panther Party and the Young Lords Party in the late 1960s, captives in New York State and New York City prisons became



increasingly politicized. They began to see jails as tools of white supremacy and social control.

Fueling this feeling were the arrests in April 1969 of the leadership of the New York Black Panther Party known as the Panther 21. Most were held on exorbitant bail and housed in city prisons.

Over the next several months, social prisoners and Black Panther defendants organized each other, placing the struggle over prison conditions in the context of the anti-white supremacist movement in the streets.

When negotiations with prison authorities failed, inmates at several city prisons rebelled and seized hostages. These include rebellions at the Tombs in lower Manhattan, Branch Queens in Long Island City, and the Queens House of Detention.

The rebellions were not geographically limited to city jails. In November 1970, inmates at Auburn State Prison seized hostages and freed prisoners from solitary confinement. And, of course, there was the Attica rebellion itself from September 9 to 13, 1971.

According to Dr. Burton, these rebellions were not solely or even predominantly about prison conditions. In the author's words, the revolts and the demands developed in "dialectical relation" to repression on the street.

The captives rebelling at Branch Queens demanded an end to censorship including the right to read *The Black Panther* and *Palante*, the newspaper of the Young Lords Party. The Auburn captives demanded the right to "control our own destinies."

Rebelling captives at Branch Queens demanded bail review for the thousands of individuals incarcerated pre-trial. In response to the latter demand, three judges went to Branch Queens and conducted bail hearings that resulted in the release of several defendants. The hearings themselves became a form of political theater that illustrated the gross inequities of that system.

COINTELPRO and Attica

Further illustrating the political nature of the uprisings and the state's response to them, Dr. Burton notes that while these rebellions were brewing or taking place, the Federal Bureau of Investigation was intensifying its covert campaign of repression known as COINTELPRO.

According to FBI documents released years later, COINTELPRO was designed to "neutralize" Black organizations and their leadership. The FBI also recognized that prisons could be breeding grounds for revolutionaries and gave special attention to political activity behind the wall.

This demonstrates the warlike struggle being waged. Included in the book and footnoted materials are references to and quotes from FBI documents released years later bluntly setting forth the goals of COINTELPRO. The book contains no fewer than 40 pages of footnotes and a nearly 30-page bibliography for those who want to learn more.

(Disclosure: I was interviewed by Dr. Burton and provided him with archival materials, including FBI files on COINTELPRO and other FBI programs obtained through litigation on behalf of BPP leader and Panther 21 defendant Dhoruba Bin-Wahad.).

One of the most fascinating and heretofore unexamined aspects of the Attica uprising is Dr. Burton's descriptions of Attica's D-Yard during the four days of the rebellion.

D-Yard, according to Dr. Burton, became a kind of "commune." Freed from the literal and figurative control of prison guards, Attica's D-yard "became an exuberant space of desalination and oneness." It served — and serves — "as an example of what solidarity and revolutionary struggle could produce."

A new political order was put in place. Spokespeople were elected. A security system was established. Captives assigned to that squad were responsible for the distribution of food and water and the safety of the hostages. Disputes were settled by majority vote.

This is not to say that D-Yard became a utopian enclave. But neither was it the "dictatorial" regime later described by state officials. Based upon interviews with survivors and archival material, Dr. Burton describes how "humanness" among the captives emerged in D-yard.

Captives walked D-yard in twos and

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threes talking and reminiscing. Leader Roger Champion recalled inmates helping each other and even "tucking some brothers in for the night." There was "a profound desire for genuine connection for other people, the natural environment" and even the cosmos.

One of the most moving passages in the book is the story of how one inmate saw another crying in the yard. He asked what was wrong. The sobbing inmate told him how he had not seen the stars in 23 years.

Describing his and others' feelings, Attica brother and security team leader Frank "Big Black" Smith stated "I felt good, ya know. I felt relieved. I felt, I guess, liberated."

One of the demands put forward by the rebels was for "speedy and safe transportation to a non-imperialist country." Those who argue that the rebellion was primarily about conditions and not fundamental societal change point to the fact that this demand was not taken seriously, even among most of the captives.

But according to Dr. Burton, once it is understood that this was an *internal* demand made to the Black underground, specifically the Black Liberation Army, it becomes plausible as a way of generating international solidarity. Rebelling inmates were telling warriors on the outside that the rebellion was part of what they were doing.

Following the rebellion, Attica brother Akil Al-Jundi wrote that when global anti-colonial struggles take a stand against imperialism they are taking a stand for the benefit of prisoners.

The Attica brothers "liberated themselves from an acute zone of war and, for a time, lived in a world of their own making. The world was provisional, incomplete and imperfect and yet rooted in radical principles of justice, equality, and mutuality that were more capacious than those of the world beyond the walls."

Massacre and "Pacification"

Much has already been written about the September 13, 1971 retaking of D-yard and the massacre that followed. State actors fired 2,000 rounds of ammunition in less than 15 minutes killing 29 inmates and 10 of the hostages. What followed was, in the words of a federal court an "orgy of brutality."

It is to the psychological underpinnings of that brutality that Dr. Burton turns. The Black insurgency presented in the Long Attica Revolt, states Dr. Burton, "hurled the symbolic White Man into a crisis and divested it of a core pillar: the politically, culturally and sexually subordinated Black male."

The Black captives did not merely seize a prison: by doing so they sexually violated the White Man, exposed his political and sexual impotence. The acts of sexual revenge against captives that occurred later, the author writes, were designed to stabilize the gendered racial… taxonomy through which the White Man is formed and without which he vanishes into oblivion."

Dr. Burton details only a few instances of the brutality and then only to illustrate the foregoing points. The reader is instead referred to other books on the rebellion and its aftermath and to the state archives.

If the point of the violent retaking was to dissuade captives in other facilities to engage in protests, it failed dramatically. As the author points out, there were more prison rebellions in 1972 than in any other year on record. To reassert control over the bodies and minds of the captives, a new prison strategy was necessary.

This new "pacification" strategy had four stages: expansion, humanization, diversification and programming. Following Attica, DOCS recognized that the physical layout of its prisons, reminiscent of the Jimmy Cagney movies of the 1930s, was woefully outdated.

In 1971 DOCS operated five maximum security prisons: Attica, Auburn, Great Meadow (Comstock), Green Haven and Clinton. Each facility housed 1500-2000 inmates. Each had one big yard. DOCS recognized that this design enabled captives from all parts of the prison to meet and talk. DOCS believed this could lead to another Attica.

Thus the system required "expansion." This included construction of smaller, maximum security prisons where inmate movement — and access to other prisoners — was tightly controlled. The state government presented the plan as a boon to the economies of economically depressed areas of upstate New York.

Expansion dispersed the population across a wide geographic area, to increase the numbers of walls dividing the captives and eliminate the potential for rebellion.

"Humanization" involved instituting — or appearing to institute — internal reforms. The Attica rebellion brought to light the racist, brutal and inequitable conditions inside New York's prisons. Large segments of the population, including those who had no sympathy for the captives' actions, were horrified by these revelations.

The reforms served to assuage some of the hostility toward the prison system by creating an atmosphere that was safer for captives and employees alike. Captives were supplied with better clothes, food and educational possibilities. Contact visits were instituted. The inmate disciplinary system was modernized.

Dr. Burton describes how political prisoner Martin Sostre decried "showcase reforms" that were nothing more than attempts to induce the desired inmate behavior through ultimately frivolous institutional reconfigurations."

"Central Monitoring"

Under "diversification," the third prong of the pacification plan, power was taken from prison wardens and given to DOCS Central Office. To keep track of captives labeled "troublemakers," DOCS instituted the Central Monitoring Case (CMC) program.

Many inmates, including virtually all of the political prisoners, were designated "Central Monitoring Cases." While DOCS maintained that the CMC program was benign, it was used as a basis for excluding certain captives from programs and prison jobs, especially those prison jobs that brought them into regular contact with other prisoners.

This writer was the attorney in a civil rights lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the Central Monitoring Case program. The case was dismissed on the ground that the captive had no constitutional right to procedural due process when designated a CMC. The program continues today.

Dr. Burton points out that DOCS' diversification strategy was occurring at the same time as a federal program called PRISACTS. Under it, the FBI conducted surveillance and kept track of politically conscious prisoners especially those who were organizing behind and walls. Although characterized by DOCS as an information liaison program, it operated as COINTELPRO behind the wall.

Prior to Attica, the citizenry had virtually no access to state prisons except inside of the facility's visiting room. Part of the post-Attica pacification program included the participation of students, social workers, religious organizations, and others in educational, religious and civic programs. The programs included outdoor picnics in the prison's main yard, art classes, advocacy for criminal justice reforms and even courses in child-rearing.

The political prisoners and politicized prisoners faced a conundrum: Should they participate in programs that did not have abolition as a goal, and were being used by prison administrators to falsely portray that "reform" and rehabilitation worked"?

Dr. Burton notes that most of the political prisoners chose to participate. But they did so under no illusion that these programs would make a positive difference. They participated in the program system because they presented an opportunity for organizing other prisoners and community volunteers.

Without Illusions

When in college I was a volunteer in the Black Studies Program inside Green Haven Prison. I can state unequivocally that most if not all of the captives I worked with had no illusions about their chances for success on proposed reforms.

Nor did they believe that if reforms were instituted that the system would fundamentally change. Indeed, those who argued for

genuine change were often removed from programs based upon fabricated disciplinary charges.

While volunteering in the Black Studies Program, I met Dhoruba Bin Wahad, an acquitted defendant in the Panther 21 case then serving a life sentence on a conviction that would be later overturned. One night, after arriving at the prison for one of the weekly meetings we learned that Dhoruba was in solitary confinement and scheduled to be transferred to Attica.

We would later learn that an inmate-informant falsely claimed that there was an escape plot. After protests by attorneys and even elected officials, Dhoruba was returned to Green Haven. But later Dhoruba was moved to Clinton on what DOCS claimed was an "administrative" transfer that under federal law could not be legally challenged.

Dr. Burton recounts similar violations committed against BPP/BLA captives Albert Nuh Washington and Jalil Muntaquin.

War on Prisoners' Minds

The book's final chapter is titled "The War on Black Revolutionaries' Minds" and reads like a gothic novel. It details behavior modification techniques and experiments used by the system in the mid-1970s that prison officials hoped would force prisoners to abandon revolutionary thinking.

It specifically and graphically details the ordeal inflicted on Masai Mugmuk who was involuntarily placed in DOCS 3x program. Through isolation and administration of drugs to "cure" his revolutionary beliefs, the system hoped that it would change Mugmuk.

Yet Dr. Burton stresses that once again, the system underestimated the captives. They recognized the program for what it was and to fought against it even while participating in it.

The captives' resistance to this war on Black revolutionary minds "illuminates Attica as a metonym of protracted struggle." These "prisoncrats," according to Dr. Burton, "are inimically opposed to the idea that ordinary people are capable of thinking for themselves, deciding what is in their own best interest or autonomously acting on their own thoughts."

Attica is not simply historical. "Attica *Is*."

For political prisoners, the failure of the 3x programs and other behavior modification tactics resulted in DOCS' old standby: increased isolation. Dr. Burton notes that DOCS had an unofficial policy that no two prisoners with ties to the BPP/BLA would be kept at the same prison.

It was the prison expansion boom started by Gov. Mario Cuomo in 1980 that made this possible. When one of the political prisoners had to be moved, others in turn were moved to create room. This type of "musical chairs" was utilized regularly.

Dr. Burton states that the lesson to be learned from the violence inflicted at Attica, and the "humanizing" reforms instituted thereafter, is that counterinsurgency tactics "are constantly being weaponized against the capacity for radical thought."

To portray prison rebellions and the state's response as struggles over "conditions," therefore, widely misses the mark. The revolutionary character of the rebellions — which include the demand for better conditions — truly represents the nature of the prison struggle.

As Dr. Burton states in the Introduction, "[b]y recasting the prison war and tracing the collision of the Long Attica Revolt against imperial technologies of pacification *Tip of the Spear* provides a counter history of the contemporary carceral landscape."

Dr. Burton offers no solutions, acknowledging that to do so would be a "fool's errand." But by placing the prison struggle as part of a domestic war, this book makes an enormous contribution to efforts to fight against prison expansion and for true abolition. ■

Time Traveling in Palestine — *continued from page 36*

Israeli apartheid, armed and otherwise, will persist as long as the regime of domination continues."

Also of great interest in *FRS* is an essay by Samera Esmair, "The end of colonial government," which argues that *apartheid* and *genocide*, strong terminology for Israel's crimes, fail woefully to point ahead to the ultimate aim of Zionist ideology and practice — for which the most accurate term would be *obliteration*.

The e-Book Collection

The other seven books in my list come from, first, a deal on five e-books that was briefly available from Haymarket in March 2024, and second, a deal on four e-books available today (June 1) from Verso.

Similar to *FRS* are *BV, CS, PSI*, and *LG*, all collections of short pieces (from one to about 50 pages) by a wide selection of the then- or now-current experts on the topic of Palestine/Israel.

Each grouping of writings attends most closely to the particular episode of "mowing the lawn" (as Israel calls its wars on Gaza) closest in time to the date of publication. Here is some very cogent and memorable time travel.

The other three books, *PG, BDS*, and *TM,* are long-form essays by individual authors. They might deserve a great deal more attention than there is room for here, but I can at least point to the virtues of each one.

Gideon Levy's *Punishment of Gaza (PG)* was pulled together in response to Operation Cast Lead, the 2009 lawn-mowing that was first and best at illustrating the disadvantages under which Gaza's imprisoned population has labored while resisting.

Levy's sharp perceptions, particularly of the hypocrisies of Israeli leaders, ministers and functionaries, are his strongest suit, making personal testimony the stuff of history.

Omar Barghouti's *Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS)* is a full description of the tactical approach to changing world opinion that has very quietly continued to do its work since it was first articulated in 2006. The work has been done very well indeed, especially in "Western democracies."

Far beyond a mere borrowing of the strategy that helped to break apartheid in South Africa, *BDS* gives a primary and full explanation of the importance of showing through action that Israel has become a pariah among nations.

This aspect of the struggle we carry on from outside has been vital, and perhaps we can chalk up to its credit the recent decisions of the International Court of Justice and pending indictments by the International Criminal Court.

It should therefore be no surprise that, in the United States alone, dozens of laws have been proposed and tens enacted attempting to render the good ol' American tactic of peaceful economic or cultural boycott unlawful. All "laws" to be honored in the breach!

Finally, everyone can profit by a reading of Ilan Pappe's *Ten Myths About Israel (TM)*. In the listing of these you will immediately recognize most of the slogans hurled at you by those unfortunates soaked in Israel-rooting:

1. Palestine was an empty land.
2. The Jews were "a people without land"
3. Zionism is Judaism
4. Zionism is not colonialism
5. The Palestinians voluntarily left their homelands in 1948
6. The June 1967 War was a war of "No Choice"
7. Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East
8. The wonders of the Oslo Agreement
9. The lies about Gaza
10. The two-state solution is the only way forward

This 10th myth has been said to be on its deathbed, but beware: the power of resurrection is as unevenly distributed as all of the real-world divisions between and among suffering humanity.

Enjoy your reading. The exam will be administered in some other venue. ■

REVIEW

Egypt: Revolution & Counterrevolution By Joel Beinin

Revolution Squared:
Tahrir, Political Possibilities, and Counterrevolution in Egypt
By Atef Shahat Said
Durham: Duke University Press, 2024, 360 pages, $29.95 paperback.

THE INSIGHTS THAT Atef Shahat Said gained into Egypt's politics of protest and mobilization — through his work and political activities before he embarked on an academic career — deeply enrich *Revolution Squared,* a participant-observer account of what is widely called Egypt's January 25, 2011 revolution.

From 1995 to 2004 Said was a human rights attorney, a researcher directing projects at human rights organizations, and the author of two books (in Arabic) about the ubiquitous practice of torture by the police. That was the issue that fueled the demonstration which launched the movement that overthrew Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on February 11, 2011, after only 18 days of sustained protest.

Atef Said began practicing politically engaged scholarship in the early 2000s when he joined the Revolutionary Socialists, the sister organization of the British Socialist Workers Party, while pursuing an MA in Sociology and Anthropology at the American University in Cairo.

Roots of the 2011 Revolution

Said's personal engagement with the protests of the 2000s reinforces the ample evidence, concisely cataloged in an appendix to *Revolution Squared* on "Major Political Coalitions in Egypt, 2000-2010." The popular uprising against the rule of President Hosni Mubarak that emerged from the January 25, 2011 demonstration in Cairo's Tahrir Square built on a decade of oppositional mobilizations.

There were sustained campaigns around the issues of solidarity with the second Palestinian Intifada (2000-2005), opposition to the U.S. imperialist invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, independence of the universities, democracy, and the neoliberal restructuring of the economy.

A burgeoning strike movement throughout the 2000s gathered steam in 2004 with the installation of the "government of businessmen" led by cronies of President Mubarak's younger son, Gamal. Workers' collective actions targeted the neoliberal threat to the living standards and employment security of millions of Egyptian families.

The political coalitions of the 2000s that focused on anti-imperialist solidarity with Palestinians, Afghanis and Iraqis, and domestic democratic demands were largely comprised of educated, urban middle classes, especially youth.

As in Poland during the 1970s and 1980s, the collective actions and strikes of Egyptian workers began as a defensive response to threats and violations of the moral economy led by a declining sector of the working class: public sector textile workers threatened with privatization of their workplaces, loss of job security, and poorer working conditions.

The neoliberal economic restructuring program sought to replace their central position in the working class (along with other "uncompetitive" public sector workers in steel, cement, etc.) with unorganized, private sector garment assembly workers (especially young women) and others whose jobs depended on the export economy and who were less active in the strike movement.

While public sector textile workers were in the forefront of the strike movement, by 2007 workers in every sector of the economy were participating in strikes, sit-ins and other collective actions. The social movements of workers and the urban intelligentsia contributed to normalizing a culture of protest that made it possible to imagine significant political changes in Egypt.

However, even though leading elements of both movements understood them to be "allied," they never developed the kind of organizational linkages and common practices that might have enabled them to act in a coordinated fashion, as the Polish Solidarity union and its intellectual allies in the Committee for Defense of Workers (KOR) did in the decade and a half preceding the demise of communism.

Relatively few participants in the occupation of Tahrir Square had a high level of consciousness about the structural conditions of Egypt's society and economy. The successive mobilizations of the urban intelligentsia rarely addressed political economy issues. The collective actions of the labor movement rarely addressed political questions.

Mohamed ElBaradei's National Association for Change began calling for democratic elections for the presidency less than a year before Mubarak's demise. Very few people openly called for regime change until Tunisia's longtime autocratic president, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, was deposed by a revolutionary uprising on January 14, 2011.

"Lived Contingency"

Because the January 25 popular uprising built on a decade of previous social mobilizations in such a diffuse and indeterminate way, Said's conceptual innovation of revolution as "lived contingency" is key to understanding how participants acted and experienced the events.

Lived contingency helps us to understand why people chanting "The people want the fall of the regime" and "Bread, Freedom, Social Justice" thought they were participating in a revolution, even though they had no plan to seize state power and most of them thought that "the regime" consisted of Hosni Mubarak and leading members of his ruling National Democratic Party.

Lived contingency focuses on the actions the revolutionaries did or did not take, the ways that they did and did not form alternative centers of power to the state, and the unpredictable possibilities created by those choices.

According to Said, the matrix determining these uncertainties was comprised of three sectors. First was the liberated zones in Cairo's Tahrir Square and a small number of other urban centers, especially Suez (but much less so, Alexandria).

Second was the army, which was never an ally of the popular movement although the hegemony of a particular nationalist narrative, centering its role in the creation and preser-

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vation of an independent Egyptian state, led many participants in the uprising to believe that at least its conscripts might be.

Third were the popular committees that formed in some 152 neighborhoods in greater Cairo, Alexandria, and smaller urban centers throughout the country to protect property and provide security.

Said devotes particular attention to Cairo's popular committees because they emerged to fill the vacuum created by the retreat of the police from public spaces after the crowd defeated them in the course of reoccupying Tahrir Square and then torching the headquarters of the National Democratic Party on January 28.

He argues that the popular committees seized some portion of the powers and functions of the state, despite their having an ambivalent relationship to the revolutionaries in Tahrir and no common political outlook or organization beyond the micro-level.

All revolutions are characterized by the participation of many actors with competing and even contradictory political agendas. Perhaps this is more pronounced, or at least more immediately visible due to the ubiquity of digital media, in 21st century revolutionary movements. Said argues that this variation on Trotsky's conception of dual power explains the nuances of practicing power on the ground.

Ambiguous Revolutionary "Center"

The title, *Revolution Squared*, embodies an important conceptual question that has, with some exceptions, hitherto not been carefully examined.

Those who occupied Tahrir Square, and most Egyptians and foreigners observing the events, understood Tahrir as the epicenter of a revolution. Said asks if centering Tahrir was a blessing or a curse for the Egyptian revolutionaries, or both simultaneously?

Tahrir Square had been an iconic site for political protest since the 1960s, including legendary brief occupations in 1972, 2003 and 2006. These prior events were the building blocks in the mytho-spatial conceptualization of Tahrir. Its centrality for oppositional political movements mirrored the centrality of Cairo for Egyptian regimes for centuries.

Centering Tahrir rendered it a readily understandable focal point for both revolutionaries and the global media. Yet that necessarily diminished the visibility of protests in other urban centers and throughout Egypt as well as the popular committees in Cairo and elsewhere.

Actions outside Tahrir were not immediately perceived as part of the revolution. This allowed Cairo-centered political actors to overlook the importance of building a nationwide network of support and consultation.

Said argues that the biggest mistake of Egypt's revolutionaries was not that they left Tahrir Square on February 11, 2011, the day Mubarak relinquished the presidency and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces assumed power. Neither was it that they trusted the military in this moment.

Rather, it was that they did not believe enough in their own power.

The masses of the population of any country have the potential power to withdraw their consent, overthrow governments, and reshape the social order. This does not happen very often, because people typically learn that they have this power only by participating in repeated anti-systemic struggles through which they develop tactics, alliances and political demands to radically alter existing structures of power.

It was not a "mistake" of Egyptian revolutionaries that this did not happen. The mobilizations of the preceding decade had not (yet?) cohered into a social movement with a consensual answer to the famous question Mao Zedong posed to the Communist Party of China in 1926, "Who are our friends and who are our enemies?" The 18 days of Tahrir were not a sufficient amount of time to answer the question for Egypt.

The Military's Role

Lack of clarity about the central role of the military in Egypt's post-1952 "officers republic" led some some of the sharpest political minds among secularist leftists, including Said as he acknowledges, to believe that the Muslim Brotherhood represented a more regressive force than the nominally secular military.

Consequently, many revolutionaries accepted the role of the army and military intelligence in what Said calls the "infiltrated mobilization" begun by Nasserist youth on April 26, 2013. This mobilization, the Tamarrod movement, paved the way for the military coup of July 3, 2013 that removed Egypt's first democratically elected president, Muhammad Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, from power.

Said convincingly argues that this outcome was not predetermined. He characterizes Egypt as experiencing a revolutionary situation defined by an acute regime crisis with some elite defection, the formation of a strong opposition that challenged state power, and a mass mobilization.

The value of *Revolution Squared* is not so much its contribution to the debate over whether or not this is an appropriate definition of a revolutionary situation. Rather, Said invites us to follow him as he guides us through the day-to-day struggles among the leftists, Islamists and liberals whose only point of agreement — embraced tactically by the military when its commanders felt there was no better choice — was the removal of President Hosni Mubarak.

For two years between the ouster of Mubarak on February 18, 2011 and the military coup of July 3, 2013, the outcome was undetermined, although constrained by social and political structures that most revolutionaries had not deeply interrogated.

Large numbers of people who saw themselves as revolutionaries contended for political power. The military took them seriously enough to undermine every form of popular political expression, even the not particularly democratic rule of Muhammad Morsi — culminating in the installation of the praetorian dictatorship that has crushed public culture and political life and has remained in power since then. ■

"UNJUST BUT NOT UNEXPECTED" — this is how Suzi Weissman, spokesperson for the Boris Kagarlitsky International Solidarity Campaign, described the June 5 decision of a Russian court to reject Boris Kagarlitsky's appeal against a five-year jail term for supposedly "justifying terrorism." The "justifying terrorism" charge has been widely used against antiwar activists in the Russian Federation. It was brought against Kagarlitsky on July 25, 2023 well after he made an ironical remark following the Ukrainian Navy's July 17 attack on the bridge connecting Crimea to Russia.

The refusal of the Judicial Collegium for Military Personnel of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation to reject the appeal means that Kagarlitsky remains confined in a penal settlement in Torzhok (Tver region). According to his lawyer, Sergey Erokhov, the appeal process continues.

Weissman remarked that "The judges' draconian decision was no great surprise since all recent appeals against sentences brought down under Russia's catch-all anti-terrorism legislation have been rejected." She noted that Boris Kagarlitsky has become a "courageous champion of peace and symbol of the struggle for the right to freedom of expression, who has been the victim of a gross but entirely deliberate miscarriage of justice."

The appeals court judges refused to budge on Kagarlitsky's sentence despite a special appeal from 37 internationally prominent progressive political figures and intellectuals, including Yanis Varoufakis, Jeremy Corbyn and Jean-Luc Mélenchon, as well as ministers in the Spanish government and MPs from France, Portugal, Ireland, Belgium and Brazil. Since his jailing Kagarlitsky has also received offers of university postings in Brazil and South Africa.

The Boris Kagarlitsky International Solidarity Campaign will now redouble its efforts for his release. Sign the petition, which already has thousands of signatures, at https://www.change.org/p/free-boris-kagarlitsky-and-all-russian-anti-war-political-prisoners/u/32496530.

REVIEW

Archiving the Unfinished:
Reading Muriel Rukeyser Now

By Sarah Ehlers

Unfinished Spirit:
Muriel Rukeyser's Twentieth Century
By Rowena Kennedy-Epstein
Cornell University Press, 2022, 228 pages,
$32.95 hardcover, $15.99 E-book.

IN 1971 THE literary scholar Hugh Kenner published a tome titled *The Pound Era* that instituted the poet Ezra Pound as a figure for the category of "modernism," and set in motion a narrative that proved remarkably persistent about how modernism should be studied and taught. The version of modern U.S. poetry invented in *The Pound Era*, based in Pound's dictum to "make it new," was part of a narrative of modernist poetic experimentation that equated revolutions in form with revolutionary content.

Published at a moment when the New Critical methods that dominated academic institutions during the Cold War had become diffuse, Kenner's study established Pound as a synecdoche for a specific version of modernist aesthetics that focused on the poet's formal innovations — while sidelining his fascist politics.

Since the 1960s and 1970s, scholars of the U.S. literary left have challenged canonical narratives like Kenner's by recovering the work of left writers repressed by the Cold War New Critical hegemony. More recently, scholars have demonstrated how the recovery of left literary traditions allows us to think anew about how we read and teach — and the institutional dynamics that condition those practices — amidst the political struggles of the present.

From within such historical and critical contexts, Rowena Kennedy-Epstein asks in her enthralling and auspicious study *Unfinished Spirit: Muriel Rukeyser's Twentieth Century*: "What if it had been the *Rukeyser era* and not the Pound era?" (160, emphasis added)

An accomplished and prolific writer, Rukeyser, as Kennedy-Epstein points out, remains relatively understudied in comparison to other writers of her generation and, when she is studied, is mostly appreciated as a poet rather than an activist writer who experimented across diverse genres and media.

As *Unfinished Spirit* demonstrates, to pose the "what if" question of naming a literary-historical era for Rukeyser instead of Pound is also to ask: What if our imagination of the modernist period merged with the figure of a radical left, bisexual, Jewish-American woman poet who fought fascism rather than defended it?

Or as Kennedy-Epstein puts it: "What if the spirit of our age is an 'unfinishing' one, neither fixed nor closed but polyphonic and polymorphous? And what if we thought and taught through that?" (161)

Loss and Recovery

Kennedy-Epstein is a major scholar of Rukeyser. She has published a critical edition of Rukeyser's previously undiscovered 1930s-era Spanish Civil War novel *Savage Coast* (Feminist Press, 2013) and coedited with Eric Keenaghan *The Muriel Rukeyser Era: Selected Prose* (Cornell, 2023). She is currently at work on a critical biography of Rukeyser.

As scholar and editor, Kennedy-Epstein demonstrates a commitment to rigorous archival research that in many ways is in the spirit of Rukeyser's own political and artistic commitments. In the introductory chapter of *Unfinished Spirit,* Kennedy-Epstein repeats a line from Rukeyser's 1949 book of essays *The Life of Poetry*: "When the books do not exist, we must visit the houses for the papers themselves" (*Life*, 95)

In *The Life of Poetry,* this line opens to Ruketser's meditation on how easily art is lost and on the rights of the reader to what might be saved. She references, among other fragments of literary history, geographer and Emily Dickinson scholar Millicent Todd Bingham turning the key to the camphor-wood chest that held bundles of Dickinson's undiscovered poems, as well as the obstacles Rukeyser herself encountered while researching for her experimental biography of the scientist Willard Gibbs.

"How much shall we leave to natural waste here?" Rukeyser asks. "How much of the loss is the story of our art….?" (95)

The recovery of Rukeyser's work is nested in her own urgent call, as she writes elsewhere in *The Life of Poetry,* to acknowledge the "buried, wasted, and lost" that exists within "any history." (85) As Kennedy-Epstein writes in reference to Rukeyser's instruction to "visit the houses for the papers":

"Aware of the ways in which people refuse to see and to connect, Rukeyser asks us to look beyond what is most easily visible — the published text, for example, whose very existence as an object that we can hold means we already accept, to some degree, the value judgment of a literary and cultural marketplace invested in upholding (or, at times, breaking) norms — and go to the archives." (*Unfinished Spirit*, 23-24)

Kennedy-Epstein carries out this instruction, generating a new biographical and literary historical account of Rukeyser through analyses of previously unearthed, or at the very least seldom analyzed, archival materials. In so doing, she presents valuable arguments about the methods and stakes of archival work, of literary historical recovery, and of received ways of interpreting modern American poetry and its legacies.

Muriel Rukeyser's Trajectory

Born in New York City in 1913, Muriel Rukeyser's literary and political commitments were activated while an undergraduate at Vassar College in the early 1930s. Rukeyser left Vassar at eighteen and, in 1932, traveled to Alabama where she reported on the trial of the Scottsboro Boys, nine young African American men who were wrongly convicted of raping two white women.

"Not Sappho, Sacco," Rukeyser wrote in *Poem Out of Childhood* — a poem included in her first book, *Theory of Flight* (1935), which won the prestigious Yale Younger Poets Prize.

The shift from Sappho to Sacco [i.e. from ancient Greek lyric poet to martyred 1920s anarchist — ed.] indicates Rukeyser's Depression-era shift to a poetic shaped in terms

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of subject matter and style by the historical horizon of capitalist crisis. In her poems from the 1930s, Rukeyser would innovatively combine poetic lyricism with documentary modes and materials.

Perhaps the most well-known example of Rukeyser's innovative poetic practice is her groundbreaking documentary poem sequence *The Book of the Dead* (1938), composed from materials she gathered during her 1936 travels to Gauley, West Virginia, to document the deaths of hundreds of workers, most of whom were Black migrant laborers, from the lung disease, silicosis.

Later that same year, Rukeyser traveled to Barcelona, Spain, to cover the People's Olympiad, an antifascist alternative to the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin, where she witnessed the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and fell in love with the German antifascist runner, Otto Boch.

In *Unfinished Spirit,* Kennedy-Epstein forgoes readings of oft-studied works such as *The Book of the Dead* to illuminate the diversity of Rukeyser's political commitments as well as her experiments in prose genres such as the novel, the essay, and biography.

The first three chapters focus on the significance of Rukeyser's writing about Spain. Together, they suggest that Rukeyser's experiences of the Spanish Civil War reverberate across her work and are thus central to a comprehensive understanding of her political and artistic commitments.

"Rukeyser's texts on Spain refract and interconnect, recurring and proliferating across her life, creating a history that encompasses, intertwines, and documents a changing twentieth century," Kennedy-Epstein writes:

"… The 'moment of proof' she experienced in Spain is a call to action, something somatic, a personal history, and the story of the multitude; it is also a line that appears in a poem, a novel, an essay, a prologue, winding its way across literary time." (32)

Spanish Civil War Archives

Chapter 1, "Costa Brava," begins not with Rukeyser in Spain but with Kennedy-Epstein immersed in archival materials at the Library of Congress, where she discovered Rukeyser's unpublished Spanish Civil War novel *Savage Coast*. (An edition of *Savage Coast*, edited and with an introduction by Kennedy-Epstein, was published by Feminist Press in 2013.)

Kennedy-Epstein's account of her experience in Rukeyser's Library of Congress archive establishes an effective and sometimes moving entry point for the analyses that follow, reinforcing the book's over-arching argument that Rukeyser's experimental texts are at once finished and unfinished, located in specific histories and open to radical possibilities in the present.

The second chapter concentrates on *Savage Coast*, situating its analyses of the novel (which, as Kennedy-Epstein notes, Rukeyser also asserted was "not a novel") within its contemporaneous reception by publishers and friends. (59)

Combining deft analyses of the multigenre and multimodal aspects of *Savage Coast* with exacting examinations of archival materials, Kennedy-Epstein shows how gender and literary politics suppressed Rukeyser's initial attempts to publish the book.

The multiple afterlives of *Savage Coast* are the subject of Chapter 3, "Mother of Exiles: Spanish Civil War Writing." With reference to a range of published and unpublished work, Kennedy-Epstein traces the evolution of Rukeyser's Spanish Civil War writing in the politically committed and formally experimental poems Rukeyser would compose in subsequent decades, and demonstrates how specific techniques, lines, and figures recur across Rukeyser's literary career.

For example, the moment when Rukeyser is told that she must "go back to America and tell of what she saw in Spain" recurs in different ways across her body of work, as does the figure of Otto Boch. (77)

In this chapter Kennedy-Epstein makes important claims for Rukeyser as an experimental writer who — by challenging the definitional boundaries of documentary, lyric and epic — also expands conceptions of the political work of the poem.

For Rukeyser, poems might serve an archiving function, "archiving resources that she wants us to know and engage with." But as Kennedy-Epstein observes, Rukyser's poems also assert new ways of "making visible the process of constructing history through the fragmented, documentary, and open-ended nature of the works."

In so doing, Rukeyser goes further than writing a "revisionist" history by creating "a formal structure that disrupts notions of linear or hegemonic time." (79)

Spirit of Collaboration

Unfinished Spirit is an exemplary book-length, single-author study. It is notable not just for its deep engagement with Rukeyser's archive but for its suggestive use of archival materials as interventions in the politics of the present.

Even while the book is centered on Rukeyser, its second half focuses on Rukeyser's collaborations with women artists to illuminate new aspects of Rukeyser's modernist and left-feminist milieu. Placing literary texts and archival documents in conversation with contemporary feminist theory, *Unfinished Spirit* also suggests possibilities for collaborations across time.

If *Savage Coast* was in many ways the guiding text of *Unfinished Spirit*'s first half, then Rukeyser's 1959 *The Life of Poetry* is perhaps the guiding text of the second.

Chapter 4, "Bad Influences and Willful Subjects: *The Life of Poetry*, 'Many Keys,' and Sunday at Nine," demonstrates how the gender politics of *The Life of Poetry* "become fully legible" when read in conversation with unpublished materials in Rukeyser's archive — specifically her 1940s "The Usable Truth" lectures.

These would become the basis for *The Life of Poetry,* the radio series "Sunday at Nine" developed for KDFC in San Francisco concomitant with the publication of *The Life of Poetry,* and the unpublished 1957 essay about women poets, "Many Keys." (91) Kennedy-Epstein situates Rukeyser's lectures and radio scripts in relation to *The Life of Poetry*, to think through how Rukeyser transgressed the boundaries of forms, disciplines and media in her resistance to the conservative gender politics of the Cold War.

To make this argument, Kennedy-Epstein uses the feminist theorist Sara Ahmed's concept of the "willful subject" (a subject who stubbornly keeps going in the face of being brought down) and of the "willfulness archive" (documents handed down where willfulness appears as a trait).

Kennedy-Epstein suggests that the "willful subject" is found in Rukeyser's archive and in documents that act as archives. Interpreting texts this way, she also argues, requires the reader to act as a "willful subject." (111-112)

Chapter 5 turns to Rukeyser's collaborations with the photographer Berenice Abbott to highlight the significance of women's collaborations — especially interdisciplinary collaborations between the arts and sciences — to expand scholarly thought on Rukeyser's engagements with science and on the role of collaboration in modernism more broadly.

Abbott, like Rukeyser, was engaged in documentary projects during the Depression, and produced the photographic series *Changing New York* (1939) under the auspices of the Federal Art Project.

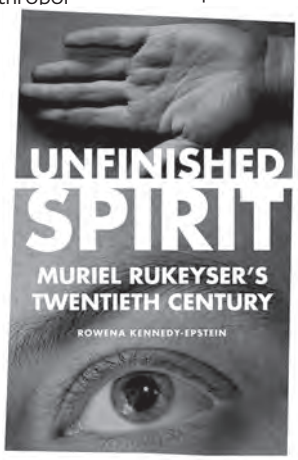
In the 1940s and 1950s, Kennedy-Epstein shows, both Rukeyser and Abbott aimed "to develop new methods for demonstrating the uses of and relationships between the arts and sciences." (115) To illustrate, *Unfinished Spirit* reproduces the 1940s photograph of Rukeyser's eye Abbott made with her Super-Sight camera, a photographic method she developed to create highly realist images.

Kennedy-Epstein analyzes the incomplete record of Rukeyser's and Abbott's collaborations on the photo-text project *So Easy to See* — the final version was either never completed or has been lost — using drafts and correspondence to illuminate how these women artists troubled the bifurcation of the arts and sciences.

By reading the collaborations between Rukeyser and Abbott in terms of queer desire, this chapter also continues the fourth chapter's arguments about the sexual politics of Rukeyser's work.

Unfinished Work

Some of the conceptual limits of *Unfinished Spirit* are apparent in the book's final chapter, which attends to Rukeyser's unfinished biography of the influential anthropologist Franz Boas and the related archive she began to construct from Boas materials she collected, now housed at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia.



Despite decades of research, sometimes interrupted by the responsibilities of new motherhood and economic difficulty, Rukeyser never completed the Boas biography. She did, however, travel to Vancouver Island, where she lived with and interviewed the Kwakwaka'wakw people, whose "artistic practices, myths, and lives were foundational to Boas's theories." (136)

Like the previous chapters, this chapter provides valuable new insight into Rukeyser's biography, political commitments, and artistic practices. Yet it sometimes strains to make the case for the place of Rukeyser's Boas project within the context of Rukeyser's career and the legacy Kennedy-Epstein wishes to construct.

Kennedy-Epstein notes that Rukeyser was "aware of her position as an outsider" while on Vancouver Island, and she acknowledges that Rukeyser's engagements with Indigenous peoples are part of "a long legacy of cultural appropriation and engagement with the narratives and artistic practices of the Pacific Northwest Coast." Yet the chapter does not dwell much on this realization before proceeding to argue for the "groundbreaking effect" such experiences had on Rukeyser's subsequent work. (150)

In the same way that other chapters argue for the centrality of antifascist activism and feminist collaboration for expanding the rubrics of modernism, this chapter might have addressed the ways in which modernism is also marked by forms of cultural appropriation.

Whose Era?

In the conclusion to *Unfinished Spirit*, Kennedy-Epstein posits the question with which this review opened, "what if" the modernist era had been named for Rukeyser. The concluding chapter is fittingly titled "The Rukeyser Era," and the volume of Rukeyser's selected prose that Kennedy-Epstein subsequently coedited with Eric Keenaghan is titled *The Muriel Rukeyser Era.*

The very question of "whose era," Keenaghan and Kennedy-Epstein suggest in the Editors' Introduction to *The Muriel Rukeyser Era,* begins to "reorient our position to hierarchies of literary and cultural influence and to teach and read a more expansive version of the twentieth century into our present." (6)

The importance of Kennedy-Epstein's archival research and her recovery of Rukeyser's unpublished and unfinished work — in *Unfinished Spirit* as well as in her present and future work on Rukeyser — cannot be overstated. Most striking to me about the book's "what if" questions, however, is not how they prompt thinking about the literary-historical past, but rather how they ask us to imagine the relation of that past to the present and future.

In her book *The Zukofsky Era*, Ruth Jennison meditates on what it means for a poet's name to signify an era, and she observes that "an era might describe an aleatory field, where any moment possesses the potential to generate alternative historical narratives striving toward the transformation of the present." (10)

Such a transformational spirit, encapsulated in the idea of the unfinished is (at least to this hopefully willful reader) is the strength of Kennedy-Epstein's study of Rukeyser.

Unfinished Spirit will be essential to the study of Rukeyser and to left women's writing going forward. It is a major contribution to recent book-length studies of Rukeyser such as Catherine Gander's *Muriel Rukeyser and Documentary: The Poetics of Connection* (Edinburgh, 2013) as well as new scholarship on the legacies of early-twentieth century left women's writing, such as Rosemary Hennessey's *In the Company of Radical Women Writers* (Minnesota, 2023).

The book at its best when, immersed in archival materials, it draws connections across texts and contexts to demonstrate a conception of history that counters familiar repression and recovery schematics. At moments, however, I found myself wanting Kennedy-Epstein to reckon a bit more with the distance between the past and present.

For example, the book might have given more attention to the nuanced historical differences in how early-twentieth-century left women writers deployed the terms of feminism, as well as to some of the potential blind spots in Rukeyser's approach to questions of cultural appropriation.

In the final pages of *Unfinished Spirit*, Kennedy-Epstein evokes Walter Benjamin's image of the angel of history, turned toward the past and watching wreckage pile at his feet, as a way to understand Rukeyser's own "vision for how we might engage the waste and ruins of total war and explore the 'state of emergency' that is not 'the exception, but the rule,' as Benjamin wrote." (161)

Indeed, one might imagine Rukeyser facing this debris of history — but perhaps she sees the piling of waste in a completely different way. The piling of debris is not just a quantitative marker of grand disaster, but sedimented layers of materials re- and decomposing toward other possible arrangements and political means. "This," Kennedy-Epstein concludes, "is the Rukeyser era."

And might we also begin to imagine Rukeyser turned the other way? Back to the wreckage, she tries not to gather the debris, but brings it with her toward another possible horizon. ■

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might impact the U.S. election is also an open question. What does seem likely is pressure from the wretched Democratic party establishment for the movement to hold back on mass actions that might embarrass the administration and harm its election prospects.

The answer to this, at least, must be clear: *no letup in the struggle* to stop the genocide, independent of cynical electoral considerations! Supporters of Palestinian freedom, together with activists for reproductive, civil, voting and workers' rights, will be in the streets outside both capitalist parties' conventions. That's as it should be — no back seat for Palestine in 2024 or any other time.

"Antisemitism" Smear Weaponized

We also need to focus on a specific smear against the movement: that it is "antisemitic" or advocates "genocide of the Jewish people." This lie is endlessly cycled through much of the media, in the spectacle of Congressional hearings and now legislation mandating "antisemitism watch" offices at universities, and of course through the "pro-Israel" lobby groups spearheaded by AIPAC (America Israel Public Affairs Committee) and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL).

Much of the hysteria in Congress and media is propelled by the same far-right MAGA elements who had little to say about the torch-carrying "Jews will not replace us" white-supremacist marchers in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017. It's a wedge in a broader Republican offensive to discredit and ultimately crush any progressive expressions in college education, especially liberal arts.

The "antisemitism" smear against Palestine solidarity makes a convenient opportunist addition to existing targets such as Diversity-Equity-Inclusion programs, Critical Race Theory, gender studies, anything "woke" and other perceived threats to what the right wing regards as western civilization. Not coincidentally, it's also a pretext to slash huge holes in protections of free speech and to purge academic institutions.

This includes a drive to literally criminalize slogans of "Free, free Palestine" and "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free." (No one proposes to outlaw the statement from Israel's ruling Likud party and prime minister Netanyahu, "from the river to the sea, total Israeli sovereignty.")

Whatever these phrases might mean to different people in different places, there can be no excuse for banning them as so-called hate speech or "genocide of the Jewish people." The U.S. Congress's enshrinement of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism, to include "claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor," is both absurd and a blatant violation of the First Amendment.

In this climate it's necessary both to defend Palestine solidarity activism and to state clearly what antisemitism is — and isn't. Antisemitism is an *ideology of hatred and contempt for Jews,* as a people and as individuals. While it has centuries-old roots in religious bigotry, for the past 150 or so years, beginning in Europe, antisemitism has taken the form of pseudo-scientific racial theory. Like all forms of racism it is irrational, and in the specific case of antisemitism it ascribes to Jews schemes to control finance, politics, and the media.

In its most extreme forms, antisemitic ideology and myth fueled the Nazi extermination machinery that almost wiped out Jewish life in much of Europe. At less visible levels it persists and tends to arise at moments when racism in general raises its ugly head — as for example in the United States in the anti-Black backlash following the election of president Obama and the ascendancy of Donald Trump.

Antisemitism as a set of racial anti-Jewish stereotypes is not to be confused with critical analysis of the Israeli state. Israel's "crimes of apartheid and persecution" (as called by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch) against the Palestinian people are no more immune from scrutiny than those of the United States in Vietnam and Iraq, Russia in Ukraine or China against the Uyghur people, the Indian government's Hindutva campaign against Muslims, etc.

Israel's ideological claim to act as the "nation-state of the Jewish people" falsely — and dangerously — seeks to make all Jews responsible for its criminal acts. Palestinians become guilty of "antisemitism" by virtue of their very existence.

Under these conditions, and with live-streamed genocidal atrocities in Gaza growing by the day, it may be surprising and encouraging that relatively few actual antisemitic incidents have occurred. More of these have occurred off campus than on, such as the Proud Boys gathering near Columbia or one hate-speech ranter outside the gate. (One campus protest organizer musing about "killing Zionists" was immediately repudiated.)

In the notorious case of Northeastern University in Boston, administration called police onto campus after "Kill the Jews" chanting was reported — which video footage showed coming from an apparent counter-demonstrator carrying an Israeli flag.

There have been many more physical attacks and threats against Palestinian, Arab and Muslim than against Jewish students. *All of these* are vicious and absolutely unacceptable on campus or anywhere else. Attacks on Jewish students are both morally repugnant, and damaging to the Palestine solidarity movement.

It's important however to emphasize a point made by Columbia and Barnard professor Nadia Abu el-Haj, who herself has been a target of Zionist smear campaigns during her academic career. Everyone on campus, she states, has an absolute right to *be* safe. That doesn't mean a right to shut down speech or protest just because they don't *feel* safe.

In fact, part of the purpose of the rightwing attack — joined deplorably by much of the center-liberal establishment — on the pro-Palestine campus struggle is aimed to *make* Jews feel unsafe. Weaponizing Jewish insecurity in this way, as a tool against an anti-genocide struggle, can be seen itself as a manipulation of antisemitism. That's one reason why the prominent presence of Jewish students and faculty supporters in the encampments and divestment fights is of great political as well as ethical importance.

Is real antisemitism increasing in the United States today? Almost surely so (although unfortunately the statistics compiled by the ADL are entirely unreliable since it now acts as a propaganda and intelligence outpost of the Israeli state). Antisemitism needs to be resolutely fought, along with all other expressions of racism. It is not to be confused with denunciation of what we insist, again, is the *joint Israeli-U.S. genocide in Palestine.*

There can be no rest in the struggle to halt that genocide and the slide to Palestinian, Israeli, Middle East and global catastrophe. ■

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