



WOMEN ON THE FRONT LINES

**THE PARTY WE NEED:
A SOCIALIST
REVOLUTIONARY PARTY**

**MARXISM AND MILITARY
STRATEGY**

A Resistance
Movement for the
Planet

John Bellamy Foster

The DSA in the
Democratic Party
Labyrinth

Trump and the New
Nationalist Era



LEFT VOICE

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{ This magazine was printed by WorldColor under worker control, Argentina, April 2017 }

Strike. It is an idea no longer confined to leftist politics, these days appearing occasionally on the CNN news ticker, winking at us unexpectedly from Teen Vogue. Shops fell silent and bosses scrambled to fill the void led by immigrant workers who stopped work on the “Day Without An Immigrant.” The flag of International Women’s Strike was flown high on March 8, by those who took cues from #NiUnaMenos. In Spain, Uruguay and Brazil, women workers struck.

Millions are taking to the streets to demand democracy, equality, and justice from within a neoliberal world order that has worn through its progressive guise, still stuck in the productive inertia from the crisis opened in 2008.

Debates that seemed old and forgotten are making a comeback: tactics and strategy, reform or revolution, the need for a political party. In the movements of women, people of color, and immigrants, we see a growing rejection of capitalism and capitalists’ laws for humanity. This radicalization takes place alongside the rise of nationalism, protectionism, and xenophobia represented by Trump, Le Pen, and the UKIP.

When we set out to publish the first print edition of *Left Voice*, we focused on trends of social and political polarization, the revival of the labor movement in France, and the crisis of the traditional capitalist parties. We discussed the end of Pink Tide governments in South America, the limits to neo-reformism á la Syriza and Podemos, and strategic questions for Black liberation in the United States.

This time around, we fixed our sights much closer. Trump’s first months have sharpened divisions within the warring factions of the ruling class, split over how to manage the economic crisis—some for the continuation of globalization and others for economic nationalism and protectionism.

Though the US has for a long time boasted a reactionary right, Trump’s election has completely shifted the terms of battle,

emboldening racism, imperialist protectionism and immigrant scapegoating, as well as sparking mass resistance the likes of which haven’t been seen in decades.

It is no surprise that women are on the front lines of the struggle. One hundred years ago, around the time of International Women’s Day, women workers in Petrograd went on strike, beginning the February Revolution in Russia that toppled the czar.

In these pages, we tackle what we believe are the most pressing strategic questions for the left. We discuss the need for the women’s movement to connect the struggle for women’s emancipation with the struggle to overcome capitalism.

The anti-Trump resistance in the US is already being claimed by the Democratic Party, a party of imperialist war and neoliberal cuts, responsible for the conditions that led to Trump’s rise to power.

Trump’s “America First” can only mean greater subjugation of oppressed people around the world to US imperialism. It is necessary that the left takes up the fight against xenophobia, racism, and the yoke of imperialism.

We must fight against the wall, deportations, and for immigrants’ rights, as well as the structural basis that enables imperialist control. We must fight against financial policies that hyper exploit workers in semi-colonies and against the US military that imposes the economic and political will of the US government by force.

Left Voice is part of the *La Izquierda Diario* news network, with outlets in 11 countries published in English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and German. Our writers are factory workers, students, immigrants, teachers, and healthcare workers.

We want to be a voice of the most exploited and oppressed sectors of society and a site of strategic debate where we can arm ourselves to fight not only Trump, but the entire capitalist system.

**TRUMP
AND A NEW
NATIONALIST
ERA**



BY ROBERT BELANO

The shocking election of Trump and the chaotic first months of his presidency have left many searching for an explanation of this unprecedented historical phenomenon. Is Trump a fascist? Is his win the result of some vast Russian conspiracy? How has the far right grown so quickly, from Britain to France to the U.S.? In this article, we will attempt to outline the forces that Trump represents and the possible trajectories of his presidency in the coming months and years.

From neoliberalism to a new nationalist era

For the past three decades, free trade was the order of the day. From the E.U. to NAFTA to numerous bilateral agreements with China, neoliberalism spanned the globe. Republicans and Democrats, European social democrats, conservatives and Communist parties all wholeheartedly embraced this ideology. Yet, in just the past year, we saw two major events that shook the foundations of the neoliberal order: Brexit and the election of Trump. In the face of a protracted world economic crisis and a lack of a true left alternative, economic nationalists have gained strength by threatening to withdraw from (or renegotiate on more favorable terms) the major trade pacts of the neoliberal era. The far right has earned its greatest victories with Trump's election and the rise of UKIP, but nationalists also have nearly won elections in Austria and the Netherlands, and they now threaten to do so in France. The common threads across all these phenomena have been escalated attacks on immigrants and refugees and a refutation of neoliberal trade policies.

This dramatic political shift directly results from the failure of neoliberalism, the dominant economic policy since the Reagan era, to continue delivering the profit rates it once had. With all the talk of record highs in the stock market, it is easy to forget that since the end of the recession in 2009, average growth in the U.S. has been only 2.1 percent, the lowest of any post-recession period since WWII. Productivity has also failed to return to pre-recession levels. In 2016, Federal Reserve chairwoman Janet Yellen noted that average productivity for the past five years was at a "miserable pace," at just 0.5 percent annually. Investment has fallen off significantly, as investors are weary of persistent low interest rates, high risk, and sluggish growth.

Similar trends are affecting Europe, South America, and other places. It was in this context

of world capitalist crisis and an as yet unorganized working class, that Trump was elected in the U.S. and Britons voted to withdraw from the E.U. amid campaigns of immigrant hatred and Islamophobia.

A shaky start for Trump

With Trump's election, Republicans now control the White House, both houses of Congress, a majority of governorships, and likely soon, the Supreme Court. Yet the widespread rejection of Trump and growing polarization in the country, deep divisions within the ruling class itself, and Trump's inability to form stable blocs even within his own party have prevented the Right from establishing hegemony.

Trump's current approval ratings are, historically speaking, abysmal. A recent poll put his approval at just 37 percent, a record low for a president in just his third month in office. And it is not just Trump the figure but his policies too that are widely rejected. Polls gathered by the Washington Post show that between 51 and 55 percent of Americans oppose the Muslim ban. According to Gallup, 66 percent of Americans oppose deporting all undocumented immigrants and 84 percent support a citizenship path. Further, according to a Quinnipiac Poll, a majority of Americans (61 percent) oppose "reducing regulations intended to combat climate change," and a plurality (50 percent) oppose restarting the Keystone XL and Dakota Access Pipelines.

That Trump faces widespread opposition should come as no surprise. It is well known that Trump lost the popular vote by 3 million votes. Somewhat less known is that only 26 percent of all eligible voters cast their votes for the arch-reactionary GOP candidate. In fact, when voters who chose third-party candidates or those who stayed away from the polls are considered, close to one-half of all eligible voters rejected both Clinton and Trump.

Resistance to Trump has been felt in the streets and the workplaces too. Since the first day of his presidency, a wave of mobilizations has occurred across the country, including one of the largest U.S. days of protest ever, the Women's March on Washington. Over a dozen cities saw protests at airports following the detentions of residents from seven majority-Muslim countries. At the University of Berkeley, students and youth rioted in response to the university's decision to invite Trump surrogate Milo Yiannopoulos to speak. The university was forced to rescind its invitation. Most recently, the Women's Strike on March 8

forced several school districts across the country to close.

Attempts to consolidate power

Since taking office, Trump has mostly put aside his rhetoric of “draining the swamp” in Washington and sought to build consensus with both the Tea Party’s representatives and establishment Republicans in Congress through corporate tax cuts, environmental de-regulation, attacks on abortion rights, increased military spending, and other traditional issues of the Right. He has even attempted to mend fences with former foes like Paul Ryan, whom he once publicly chastised for “disloyalty,” in his campaign to “repeal and replace” Obamacare.

Whereas Hillary Clinton was supported by the great majority of the big bourgeoisie, Trump attempts to represent the small to mid-sized corporations who have not seen the same windfalls in the neoliberal era, as well as a significant number of major, primarily exporting corporations. These include Boeing, G.E., Pfizer, Oracle and others who make up the American Made Coalition, a newly-formed group of businesses that have declared their support for a dramatically increased border adjustment tax. These contrast to the exponentially larger numbers of import-based corporations, particularly retailers like Walmart, Best Buy, Target, Costco and others, who fiercely oppose such taxes.

At the same time, Trump seeks to maintain his foothold with middle-class and, to a lesser extent, working-class whites through the cancellation of the TPP, talk of expanded infrastructure projects, and measures aimed at pressuring employers to keep jobs in the U.S. In these aspects, he represents a new phenomenon within the Republican party that attempts to create a social base from the growing number of middle class sectors and white “rust belt” workers who have turned against the free trade model.

Contradictions in the Trump presidency

However, in just his first three months, Trump has already faced major contradictions. Clashes between the Trump administration and the courts, the mainstream media (outside of Fox), the intelligence agencies, and many within the Republican party, reveal deep divisions among the American bourgeoisie.

Within the same week, FBI Director James Comey twice publicly undermined the president – a virtually unheard-of occurrence – first confirming

that there is an active bureau investigation into collusion between Trump’s campaign staff and the Russian government, and then contradicting the president’s claims that he’d been wiretapped by the Obama Administration during the presidential campaign, stating that he had “no information” to support the allegations. We cannot say whether the Russian cooperation allegations have any merit, but Comey’s public challenge to the president points to a rejection of the Trump agenda within the highest levels of the intelligence apparatus.

After the failure of Trump’s attempt to repeal Obamacare, there is talk of a “civil war” among Republicans – a hyperbole no doubt, but the metaphor speaks to the level of animosity between the many factions within the GOP. Despite being a Republican project for seven years, Repeal and Replace collapsed as the right wing of the party sought even fewer restrictions on the insurance companies, such as the requirement to cover maternity services, while the more moderate wing feared that further cuts to Medicaid and the elimination of all subsidies would mean that even higher healthcare premiums would permanently drive away working class and poor white voters from Republicans.

The TPP was dead on arrival when Trump took office, so a showdown over the agreement was avoided. However, further anti-free trade measures may well set off a true rebellion among establishment Republicans and the corporate elite. The Koch brothers have been famously anti-Trump throughout the election and frictions have continued after Trump has taken office. There is also a large pro-free trade bloc of Republicans within Congress. Only a year ago, Republican representatives in the House voted 190-50 in favor of allowing Obama to “fast track” the TPP agreement.

Concessions meant to shore up working class support, like Ivanka Trump’s paid childcare proposal, are sure to meet universal opposition from establishment and Tea Party Republicans alike as a new “entitlement program.” His plan to spend an additional \$1 trillion – an insufficient sum, no doubt – to rebuild roads, bridges, hospitals, and airports, will find relatively few supporters among the GOP and, furthermore, runs contrary to his proposal to slash taxes for corporations and the ultra-rich.

Trump’s cozying up to the Washington establishment and his creation of a billionaire cabinet, is not likely to sit well either with those who propelled him into office. Finally, his proposal to make state Right-to-Work laws into federal statutes, is certain to erase his support among unionized white workers. We can look to the

rebellion of union workers in Wisconsin, a state Trump won, as an example of what could happen should Trump attempt to implement a similar measure.

Weak Bonapartism

In this context, Trump's administration can be characterized as a weak form of Bonapartism, although still within the framework of a bourgeois democratic regime. Like all Bonapartist phenomena, Trump arose during a period of increasing polarization and expresses an attempt to resolve, through repressive measures, the social contradictions that have been steadily growing.

Since the recession of 2008, this polarization was felt, on the left, with the surprising success of Bernie Sanders and new progressive movements, such as Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, the Standing Rock resistance, the Fight for \$15, and the recent mobilizations of women against Trump. On the right, the GOP establishment has been increasingly displaced, first by the growth of the Tea Party in 2009, then by the Alt Right.

Trump's repressive response has included the Muslim and refugee ban, and stepped-up ICE raids and deportations of undocumented workers, each instituted just a few weeks after taking office. Bonapartist regimes are characterized by an increased concentration of power in a charismatic leader, who pretends to rise above class conflict, although still advancing the interests of capital. Trump's attempts to find a base of support in the military is also a typical feature of Bonapartist regimes. Trump's proposed budget to Congress included a \$54 billion dollar funding increase for the world's largest military, including a portion to further militarize the border. To accomplish this, he proposes the complete elimination of 19 federal agencies and deep cuts to the EPA, and the departments of State, Agriculture, Labor and Health and Human Services among others.

Bonapartism, however, differs from fascism in that it does not aim to liquidate workers' organizations and all democratic institutions. Although many individual fascists have been attracted to Trump, including the so-called Alt Right and white supremacists like Richard Spencer, the Trump administration, so far, cannot be characterized as a fascist government since he has made no attempt to dissolve the unions or suppress the institutions of American bourgeois democracy, like Congress, the media, the courts, etc. Symbolic measures, like preventing the New York Times and Washington Post from attending a press gaggle, are still far from fascist-style suppression. While a national

Right-to-Work law would certainly weaken the unions, it would not outlaw them. In fact, Trump has tried to remain on good terms with many of the most conservative top union bureaucrats, even inviting them to the White House in his first days in office. And he has sought to find common ground around the relaunch of pipeline construction, new infrastructure projects, and formal cancellation of negotiations around the TPP.

This does not mean we should underestimate the danger Trump poses for workers and oppressed people. Indeed, fascism is not a prerequisite for the deepening of war, oppression and misery. Neither does it mean that a fascist turn is out of the question, if the current Bonapartist strategy fails to achieve its aims and if there is an upsurge in workers' struggles.

America First

Trump also represents a reaction by the Right to what it sees as the diminished standing of the U.S. across the world. With "America First" as its slogan, the reactionaries behind Trump seek to correct the course undertaken by Obama such as the nuclear deal with Iran, the opening of relations with Cuba, and increased cooperation with the Chinese regime. Although no world power has yet been able to step into the place of the U.S. as a leading hegemon, it is indisputable that the U.S. has not been able to impose its will across the world as it did in decades past. The current balance of forces prevents Trump from launching a new military invasion in the Middle East, or elsewhere, but the possibility should not be ruled out given his expansion of the military and his recent deployment of Marines to Syria in the campaign against ISIS. Indeed, the characterization of Trump as an "isolationist" by the liberal mainstream media could not be further from the truth. Rather, he seeks a new unilateral defense of American interests, showing little regard for multilateral imperialist coalitions like NATO, which will intervene to protect those interests when necessary.

A new rapprochement with Russia

In this scenario, Trump's attempts at a rapprochement with Russia begin to make more sense. Decades of isolating Russia together with NATO partners have not only failed to consolidate US hegemony but have failed even to contain Russian influence in the Middle East, the Baltic states, and elsewhere. Evidence of this

is Russia's preservation of the Assad regime in Syria, effective suppression of the pro-Western movement in Ukraine, and its incursions into Crimea. In the wake of a failed strategy toward Russia, Trump has instead attempted to undertake a realignment, seeking improved relations with Russia, to the chagrin of both Republicans and Democrats, and focused his efforts at undermining China, and even traditional allies like Germany. Trump has suggested that Germany is benefiting from currency manipulation through a "a grossly undervalued" Euro and that the country owes the U.S. "vast sums of money" for its defense.

It is too early to say how closely the Trump administration will collaborate with the Kremlin, but we can safely say that Russian interventions in U.S. politics have been greatly exaggerated by the Democrats, who want to return to a more hawkish position on Russia. At worst, Russia's supposed hacking of the DNC only led to the release of factual information that could have been surmised anyway, that the party's apparatchiks favored the candidacy of Hillary Clinton over Bernie Sanders, and was actively seeking out ways to ensure her victory. However, the intelligence agencies have so far failed to prove even this link and Wikileaks, which distributed the hacked emails, has denied that the source was the Russian government.

What is to come?

Throughout the world, capital is increasingly unable to overcome its contradictions. In the imperialist countries, and especially the U.S., this is expressed by immense pressure of capital to produce globally, use foreign labor, open borders

for capital and finance, and on the other hand, protect national industry. Highlighting these contradictions is the prolonged world economic crisis that has dragged on since 2008. The inability to resolve these contradictions through normal means, leads to what Gramsci called "organic crisis," as opposed to "conjunctural crisis." Organic crisis is not limited to political, social, or economic crisis – it encompasses all of them. We are already seeing elements of "organic crises" in the central countries (the U.S., Britain, France, etc) and full-scale organic crises in the peripheral countries, like Brazil or South Korea.

Around the world, the traditional parties and figures are in decline (social democratic and conservatives in Europe, establishment Democrats and Republicans in the U.S.). Politicians in the political center, like Obama, have proven completely incapable of providing solutions to the needs of working class and poor people. This has given rise to new populist phenomena, not only on the right and but on the center-left as well (for example, Sanders, Corbyn). Meanwhile there is an increasingly convulsive international situation in which tensions between the imperialist powers (for example, the U.S. and Germany) are growing.

These factors can potentially offer openings for an upsurge in the class struggle, including the radicalization of workers and youth and the development of new and dynamic revolutionary organizations. The enormous protests following Trump's election and rapid growth of parties to the left of the Democrats like the DSA, while still showing major limitations, give us hope for the development of new progressive phenomena not seen since the Vietnam War. Let's get started building the resistance.

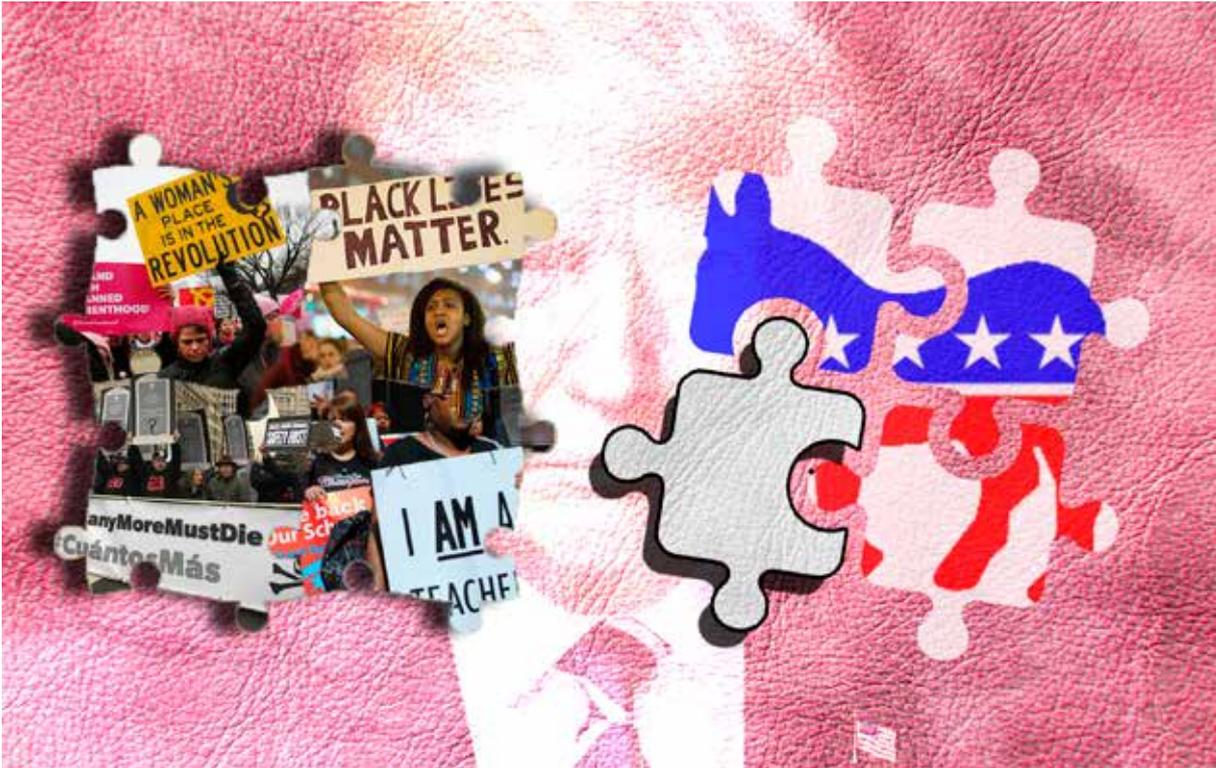


Illustration: Luigi Morris.

THE DSA IN THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY LABYRINTH

“When you going to stop selling us out?” Days after police officer Darren Wilson gunned down Michael Brown in August 2014, activists cornered Rev. Jesse Jackson at a McDonald’s in Ferguson. Turning from the urgings of old leaders (to register to vote, write their representatives, support progressive Democrats), radical youth instead drove a movement of mass demonstrations, blocked highways, die-ins, commercial disruption, and riots—all during the first Black president’s second term.

BY JIMENA VERGARA AND TRACY KWON

The US bourgeoisie's decades-long failure to ameliorate the fallout from the 2008 economic crisis has struck hard in the heartland. Expanding sectors of the American populace are turning right and left for solutions to their discontents, forcibly altering the country's political terrain.

Millions of youth and students backed Bernie Sanders' campaign, seeing in him an alternative to the ruling political order. When he ended his run by endorsing Hillary and diving into the Democratic Party fold, many of his supporters went on in search of socialist organizations, study groups, and protest movements.

The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) has perhaps been most successful in capturing the rising interest in socialism, in large part because of their clear alignments with Sanders' wildly popular social democratic program. *Jacobin Magazine*, arguably the main window into the DSA's politics, has also served as an important recruitment tool. The organization has tripled in size since Trump's election, with 18,000 dues-paying members as of March 2017. This impressive growth poses important opportunities and problems for the group and the broader left.

The DSA has attracted a wide range of people—from disaffected liberals, to social democrats, to some who consider themselves revolutionary socialists. Despite this marked heterogeneity, their rapidly expanding ranks show a practical rejection of both bourgeois parties.

At the same time, the more seasoned, consolidated national leadership fastens the organization to the project of the Democratic Party, making no clear class delimitations. As their argument goes, socialists can maintain political autonomy and keep their anti-capitalist aims intact while making conditional alignments with progressive (“anti-corporate”) Democrats: voting, campaigning for Democratic politicians, and even running socialists on their slate. It is thought that empowering “left-wing” Democrats and supporting their progressive demands in the short-term will help *break the monopoly* of the two-party system and potentiate a *left alternative* to the Democratic Party.

These electoral maneuvers are often passed off as tactical considerations. But can calling your base to vote for a capitalist party be passed off as “tactic”? Does putting imperialist politicians into government have no bearing on the path to revolution? And how can a socialist organization that works closely with Democrats today fight against the same Democrats tomorrow when they repress, co-opt, and betray workers' interests?

This, while the Democrats can already be seen shimmying to the front of the anti-Trump movement. Posing as “resistance leaders,” their progressive avatars—Elizabeth Warren, Chuck Schumer, and Maxine Waters—have appeared at protests and even called for mobilizations against GOP policies. Once again, the Dems are taking up the “people's party” mantle to close the gap between the party and base—to recover their legislative majorities and shake off the Obama presidency's domestic failures.

The DSA's “realist” electoral tactics, when examined closely, make up a dead-end strategy for socialists, radicals, and movements that will only result in strengthening the Democratic Party.

Insurgency from within?

The DSA leadership has reiterated on various occasions that the Democratic Party is not the political instrument of the US working class, is tied to capitalist interests, is part of a two-party monopoly, etc. However, their politics point in a different direction.

The DSA has historically tagged along with politicians in the Democratic camp—radical, socialist, or not—as long as they were seen as part of a nebulous *progressive bloc*.

Today, with the Democratic Party scattered by its recent series of catastrophes (the DNC's mucking-up of the primaries, Clinton's defeat, and the loss of both chambers), the DSA's prescriptions have proven immutable: “Great change is needed within the Democratic Party. The DNC's gross mishandling of the primary election between Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton demonstrates the need for a reinvigorated party that appeals to working-class voters of all races, ethnicities and genders.” [1]

Economic hardship and social contradictions inherent in bourgeois democracy are causing cracks in the ruling parties. When it appears the Democratic Party is going up in flames, revolutionaries and socialists should give their all to make the fire burn hotter. They should be pointing towards the absolute need for working-class organizations and a political party independent of capitalists, on the path towards socialist revolution and a classless society.

The DSA buries this perspective, instead promoting the idea that the Democratic Party will, one day, respond to the needs of the working class, the poor, people of color, etc. And, significantly, they see the *left's role* in encouraging this possibility.

Ahead of the February 2017 DNC elections, the DSA openly supported Minnesota Representative Keith Ellison's bid against Former Labor Secretary Thomas Perez. In doing so, they endorsed a long-term Democrat who in no real terms differentiated himself from his opponent, thus reinvigorating the notion that the Democrats' path may be corrected by switching out individual figureheads. Upon his defeat, Ellison was appointed Deputy Chair by Tom Perez.

On the other hand, the DSA's approach also includes bringing socialist leadership *into* the Democratic fold, with the aim of improving the balance in favor of reforming the party.

At the Michigan Democratic Convention in February 2017, the DSA elected several members to the Democratic Party state central committee. David Green, DSA Detroit chapter leader and National Political Committee member said, "We need a party that's open to progressive forces, and that's why we have to elect progressive leadership within the party,"

The myth of rainbows

At the time of Ronald Reagan's 1980 election, the political situation was moving rapidly to the right. The Democratic Party was in retreat, trying to find the way to recover from the blows. In 1984, the left wing of the Democratic Party and its satellite organizations attempted to win the primaries through the Rainbow Coalition, headed by known Civil Rights Movement figure, Jesse Jackson. The goals of the campaign were to oppose Reaganomics and gain support from Blacks, working-class people, immigrants, women, and the LGBT community.

A significant portion of the left found it necessary to back Jackson's campaign, or risk missing out on an important political opportunity. Organizations like the US League of Revolutionary Struggle (M-L), Communist Party USA (CPUSA), Line of March (LOM), the Communist Workers Party (CWP) and the DSA endorsed Jackson's candidacy.

During the '84 primaries, Jackson came away with three million votes, including an unexpectedly strong showing from southern states like Mississippi. He lost the Democratic primaries to the establishment pick Walter Mondale, whose candidacy he ended up supporting with the "lesser evil" argument.

In a statement released in November 2016, the DSA National Political Committee referred to the Rainbow Coalition as a model for today's anti-Trump resistance: "Under Reagan, similar acts of resistance eventually created a powerful rainbow

coalition that advanced a multiracial politics of economic and racial justice. If we fully commit ourselves to these struggles over the next four years there is no reason why a new, even more powerful multiracial coalition for social and economic justice cannot emerge."

The Rainbow Coalition was an example of *popular front politics* that ultimately breathed life back into the Democratic Party, setting the stage for Bill Clinton's victory in 1993. Jesse Jackson at the time told the press, "Clinton and a Congress controlled by the Democrats have the opportunity to put America back to work and rebuild America with jobs, education, housing, health care and cleaning up the environment." Once in office, Bill Clinton thrust neoliberalism down the throats of the working class. Among other things, he dismantled welfare programs and passed the 1994 Crime Bill that exponentially increased the incarceration of predominantly Black people.

Rather than drawing lessons from these errors, the DSA's glowing appraisal of the anti-Reagan coalition points to strategic conclusions that weaken the potential for a socialist movement to emerge. This strategy aids the Democratic Party's recovery of its historical role as diffuser of mass uprising, and blockade the growth of left political alternatives and the political independence of the working class.

A left in coalition with Democrats can not maintain its political autonomy and determination. Allying with "progressive" capitalist politicians will only lead to the absorption of the left into the political project of big capital.

In bed with the enemy

In January 2017, DSA National Director Maria Svart wrote, "We are strategic about elections and about building power, which means being flexible. We can work with anti-corporate Democrats—and use the Democratic Party ballot line when it makes sense to run democratic socialist local candidates."

Underlying their practice of sharing slates with the Democratic Party is the electoral pragmatism that has dominated the US left since the 1930s: due to the two-party lock, it is nearly impossible to construct a class-independent alternative. Instead, as the common-sense thinking goes, the left must take a two-stage approach, wherein the first stage permits rapprochement and electoral support of bourgeois politicians to build a progressive base that is sympathetic to socialist ideas. Another aspect of this is the uncritical embrace of "third parties" with no clear class delimitations.

In 1948, Socialist Workers Party leader James P. Cannon criticized this approach and pushed for revolutionaries to focus their immediate efforts on advancing the political independence of the working class *outside* bourgeois parties: “Now, a break-up of the two party parliamentary system in America is undoubtedly a good thing...But this break-up of the two-party system and splits in the bourgeois parties come about under the pressure of social crisis. These are not our tasks. Bourgeois parties are not the arena for our operation. Our specific task is the class mobilization of the workers against not only the two old parties, but any other capitalist parties which might appear.”

At one point in US history, as even DSA Vice-Chair Bhaskar Sunkara pointed out, “Socialism used to be more than a pejorative; it used to be a real political force espousing radical democracy and egalitarian redistribution. In 1912, the Socialist Party of America had 118,000 members and boasted 1,200 elected state officials, including 79 mayors.”

A glimmer of opportunity appeared in 2013 when Kshama Sawant ran as a member of Socialist Alternative and won a seat in the Seattle City Council. She was re-elected for her second term a few years later. This somewhat singular yet recent example points to the potential for the left to boldly advance socialist candidacies and politics instead of settling for running alongside or campaigning behind capitalist politicians.

Opportunities for the left

The current rise in political militancy—seen in a new generation that sympathizes with socialism and the persistence of struggles led by Black people, women, precarious and immigrant workers—has crystallized in the anti-Trump sentiment and opened historic opportunities for the emergence of a revolutionary left. While the DSA is correct in speaking to the millions who voted for Bernie Sanders, it does so while blurring the boundaries between the inside and the outside of the Democratic Party, between the capitalist parties and the working class.

A key problem with the DSA’s approach is their dichotomy of “movements” (for workers’, immigrants’ and women’s rights) on the one hand, and battles in the political superstructure,

or elections, on the other. This is shown in their approach to building a mass movement made up of the working class and the oppressed while simultaneously supporting left-wing Democrats: “Positive change never comes from politicians acting alone, but always from masses of ordinary people taking politics into their own hands. We will get the party we need when we build a majoritarian progressive movement...of trade unions, women’s groups, immigrant’s rights organizations, organizations of people of color, with a visible and independent organized socialist movement at its core.” Despite the emphasis on movement-building in their statements and branch meetings, “street heat” serves mainly as a pressure to push Democratic leaders to the left.

Socialists must fight audaciously to influence mass movements and win over the most radical elements to revolutionary perspectives. Specifically, they must prevent the opposition against Trump from being funneled entirely into capitalist parties or even multi-class formations like the Green Party. The necessary intervention in the anti-Trump movement is to raise an independent politics, especially in relation to the Democratic Party.

The Democrat’s goal is to reconstitute itself in a way that will prevent the escalation of class struggle. Ultimately, diminishing the influence of the Democratic Party on the mass movement and preventing it from rebuilding its social base is the best way to break illusions in bourgeois democracy and prepare mass working class movements for the coming battles.

Developing the resistance against Trump’s attacks with a revolutionary perspective is one and the same as raising the need for the American working class (torn by racism and sexism) to take on the struggle against multiple oppressions that reproduce capitalist domination.

The capitalist parties uphold the American regime and thus are the main enemies of the exploited and oppressed, while the working class has enormous allies in the Black movement against police violence and racism, women who struggle for their emancipation, immigrant workers, and the middle class hit hard by the economic crisis. It is the task of the socialist left to establish the bridge between the need for the US working class to identify itself as a class, clearly distinguish its allies and enemies, and the need to conquer hegemony among the oppressed.

DELIVER US TO THE LESSER EVIL

*How Social Movements
Bury Themselves in the
Democratic Party*

Illustration: Luigi Morris.



BY HART EAGLEBURGER AND JACK RUSK

The Democratic Party has often been called “the graveyard of social movements,” and more often than not the social struggles in the United States end their useful lives digging their own graves in the DP, the alternative party of the capitalists. Self-appointed leaders shut down the anti-war movement when Barack Obama started his presidential campaign, even though Obama was never going to end the United States’ multiple wars. The strike movement against Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker was dismantled when the labor unions and the Democratic Party supported a campaign to recall the Republican governor and replace him with a Democrat. The recall, of course, failed and Walker is still in power. The Democratic Party seems to exert a magnetic attraction on social movements regardless of what Democrats actually do for them in the end.

Movements that work with the Republicans (e.g. the Tea Party) do get institutionalized, but for them institutionalization means they get more attention, money and capacity—without being forced to moderate or demobilize their base. But movements with progressive movements aims that look toward Democratic Party institutions, become more restrained, more concerned with keeping their leaders happy, less confrontational, and less powerful. Eventually their supporters figure out that these organizations have already died as progressive movements and walk away.

What is it that makes right-wing social movements stronger when they work their way into establishment institutions, and leftist movements weaker? And why do all the movements that support the oppressed end up next to the Democrats exclusively, when the Democrats are so resistant to an actual challenge to power? As we will see, this dynamic has a long history.

Marx and Engels wrote in the Communist Manifesto, “The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.” Democrats are a part of that managing committee, a place where capitalists figure out how to govern their exploitation and explore different ways to manage society. The capitalists actually do well with two parties, because the two-party system supplies some variation and a little healthy competition of policies. Capitalism certainly does operate under one-party dictatorships, but these kinds of regimes tend to make mistakes, lose legitimacy and get overthrown. A better gameplan for capitalists is to use different parties to try out different strategies, and then go with the strategy that is working better.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi recently said that the Democratic Party is a capitalist party. Socialists would definitely agree, since it’s a party made up of capitalists including Pelosi herself and the numerous millionaires in Congress, paid for by capitalists, and a party for capitalists, particularly when it runs the executive administration—for example with presidents Clinton and Obama—and their considerable efforts to create good conditions for profitability and financial sector growth.

So it is very strange that a capitalist party, which is of, by and for capitalists, would be the place progressive social movements always turn, even though it always turns out badly. And it would not fair to say they are poorly informed or make bad decisions—there must be a very strong reason, a structural reason for why the Democratic Party is the party that always outmaneuvers labor and social movements and for why, no matter how many times leftists try to influence the Democrats, they stay capitalist and move back to the right.

Some tombstones in the graveyard

For most of its history, the Democratic Party was a party of slaveowners and racist one-party rule, at least in its most consistent territory, the “Solid South.” Jim Crow was the product of a campaign of lynchings and political terrorism by forces like the Ku Klux Klan that operated like fascists would in the 20th century, to suppress democratic rights. Even so, in the North the Republicans became the party of big business, so that the Democrats could posture as a party more to the left, though largely on the basis of corrupt city machine politics. While both parties had a ‘progressive’ capitalist wing, there was also an independent Socialist Party to compete with, the Industrial Workers of the World and other militant unions, and huge immigrant-led radical organizations that eventually helped form the Communist Party. The two parties certainly preserved capitalist rule, but they could not convince workers that there was no alternative to working inside a capitalist party.

When the country lurched into the Great Depression after an extended period of Republican-administered capitalism, the Democrats returned to power with the support of capitalists who wanted the government to help organize economic recovery. This led to Roosevelt’s adoption of the New Deal—although, because it was done through the Democratic Party in Congress, it was designed in a thoroughly racist manner that shut many Black workers out of Social Security and set up housing

policies that institutionalized neighborhood segregation, with the government codifying the lines of division.

Yet, the New Deal represented concessions to a rising working class movement. Even with the Democratic Party being as far to the left as it had ever been, workers were making much better progress by refusing its control, fighting directly against the capitalists and gaining institutional power, often organized within independent socialist parties.

Communists formed councils of the unemployed that pressed directly for jobs through protests, rather than negotiations. Socialists, Communists, and Trotskyists led general strikes in three major US cities and a wave of sit down strikes in auto plants that were met by the national guard. In the South, as documented in Robin Kelley's *Hammer and Hoe*, communists organized interracial unions in the Birmingham Steel mills under Jim Crow oppression.

The strikes set up the strongest working class institution the US had ever seen, the Congress of Industrial Organizations. It had severe weaknesses—domination of some of its unions by bureaucrats, a failure to fight consistently for integration or unionization of the South—and these weaknesses derived ultimately from a lack of political unity on the basis of uniting the whole working class to fight the capitalists. Mike Davis writes in “The Barren Marriage of American Labour and the Democratic Party”:

“The original Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO) was an alliance of dissident trade union bureaucrats, with important financial resources and friends in high places, created for the purpose of capturing an already existent mass movement of industrial shop committees and rebel locals-- a movement with dangerous embryonic proclivities toward an anti-Gompersian model of ‘class struggle unionism.’”

The problem was made worse when the Communist Party received orders to collaborate with the Democrats as part of a Popular Front, intended to help the Democrats mobilize support for a future war in Europe. They ended up taking the side of the bureaucrats to get control over (and really against) the socialist agitators who had done the actual organizing in very oppressive Midwestern factory towns.

The CIO was built upon strikes, many of them illegal, and all of them disruptive to capitalists, but its workers faced an acute choice: could they make their institution stronger by making a compromise

with the bosses? In the Union of Automobile Workers, historian Nelson Lichtenstein shows, the union leaders faced a choice when the strike wave of 1936-37 was exhausted.¹ They could continue mobilizing workers and leading strikes, with the risk that they would sometimes be shut out of negotiations by the capitalists, and that the leaders might personally be out of office in the unions. Or, they could take contracts that would not require them to carry out continuous worker mobilization, while guaranteeing management a stable workforce that wouldn't be building up more resentment and energy in future strikes. Of course they went for the latter, and if they hadn't, some other set of conservative union bureaucrats probably would have.

This is the classic bargain of a social movement, and always a very tricky question, because after all unions definitely want contracts. Taking enough control from the bosses to have a stable union is a major step that helps with defense and solidarity, but union leaders do get into a position that is easier for them to sit in comfortably if workers are not mobilized to take more. But if the union officials are not accountable to union democracy and, optimally, a revolutionary socialist party, it is all too inevitable that their actions will come to reflect their own self interest, whatever their speeches may profess. A link up with the Democratic Party helps the union officials divert member militancy into hopeless political pressure campaigns, and thereby solidify their own position. It also drives the unions further from the socialist political orientation that would both mobilize action and subject the bureaucrats to democratic control or replacement.

This demobilization was the start of a pattern, however. During World War II, unions agreed to a no-strike pledge and support for the war, and got the government's protection to unionize huge numbers of workers who had never managed to get a union through striking. But the unions didn't stop strikes permanently (actually, WWII was a strong time for wildcat strikes, to the consternation of both Democrats and Stalinists), and after the war these newly unionized workers launched the largest strike wave in US history. This was a high point in terms of numbers on the picket line, and from there the unions could have gone very far.

Instead, CIO bureaucrats collaborated with the Democrats to purge their unions of Communists, many of them the more active organizers and strikers, and then submitted to the Taft-Hartley Act banning revolutionaries in the unions. The CIO signed on for long contracts with no-strike clauses that would continue to be the capitalists

profitable, and keep the workers from gaining new experience and strength by winning strikes.

Perhaps most ominously, the CIO failed to organize in the South and with Black workers, as it promised to do under 'Operation Dixie.' Of course, the Communists who had been expelled would have been some of the best prepared for the task. In the thirties, they had success combining the civil rights struggle with unionizing drives in Memphis, as shown by Michael Honey in *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights*, but the CIO was not only unwilling to fight the political battle, but expelled the organizers who would have done it.

So Operation Dixie was secretly undermined by bureaucrats, effectively sabotaging both the labor movement and civil rights for decades. Organizing the South would have meant breaking through the authority of the southern capitalists, sheriffs, and of course the KKK, and undermining the racist authoritarianism of segregation through the power of the working class. In other words, it would have undermined the Democratic Party, and the CIO's alliance with the Democrats at the national level, in which they hoped southern white votes would win national majorities for their preferred party. For the CIO bureaucrats, this was fine, as they continued to have easy positions winning consistent contracts in the already-unionized sectors. And who would ever expect them to do otherwise, with all their institutional links to the Democrats, and no significant revolutionary socialist party to make fighting capitalists and segregation the priority?

But not without a fight

With training and experience from labor struggles and socialist movements in previous decades, the Civil Rights movement started out very independent and disruptive, with an obvious antipathy for the only governing party in the South, the Democrats. In many ways, the Black struggle shows the efficacy of a principled united front of different approaches on basic demands of democracy, but independent in practice from the capitalist parties. Of course, some players in civil rights did cooperate extensively with the Democrats, such as the NAACP, but this was simply not possible for the civil disobedience campaigns that pried open the contradictions between federal and state power, and so effectively exposed the Democratic Party that it was forced to implement concessions.

Civil disobedience effectively combined large masses of demonstrators prepared for nonviolent resistance with activists like the Deacons for Defense and Robert F. Williams taking up arms for protection of rights, while sheriffs and white

terrorists were using violence to suppress the movement. This tends to be downplayed, because it is inconsistent with the story of nonviolence smoothly transitioning into electoral politics, but that alone would not have worked. To the extent Eisenhower, Kennedy or Johnson limited the abuses of the Southern Democrats, it was to maintain state power on their own terms.

Parts of the movement began to express the radicalism already being seen in direct action at the base, from Malcolm X to the revamped SNCC and CORE. Rebellions against conditions in the cities of the North showed that the parts of the Civil Rights movement aligning themselves with President Johnson could not take the steps necessary to organize a resistance to racism and segregation in the strongholds of the 'liberal' Democratic Party.

And though pacifists like Martin Luther King abhorred the violence of rioting, he was willing to use it as an argument in private communications² with the mass murderer Lyndon Johnson. If concessions weren't granted, King's case went, the militant struggle would escape any possible control and lead to "social disintegration... [and] tragic destruction of life and property." Whether or not there is any defense for King's telegram, it is clear that he knew that those acting outside the Democratic Party were doing the difficult work to bring about change.

Civil Rights leaders who called for using the Democrats as a vehicle ultimately were drawn into defending its reprehensible policies, for example the sometime-socialist and pacifist Bayard Rustin who ended up defending the continuation of the Vietnam War, opposing the antiwar movement, and collaborating with the CIA. In the end, the question of working with the Democrats split the Civil Rights movement on an entirely appropriate line, with many leaders becoming Democratic politicians who did little and progressively less of a positive nature over the years.

The tragedy is, the militants in the struggle who turned to revolutionary and socialist ideas did not find the strategies to give their movement further success. The Black Panther Party clearly recognized the need to build up power that would remain outside the control of the Democrats—so much so that, whatever the BPP's other inadequacies, it was the construction of independent power that motivated the state's brutal repression. To really succeed, however, would have required a longer term strategy of gaining revolutionary leadership within the labor struggle, something the League of Revolutionary Black Workers pointed to in Detroit. The fact that the labor unions were (and are) run by conservative bureaucrats, supporting

and supported by the Democrats. The CIO's lack of class conscious (socialist) education to overcome white racism, meant they failed to provide solidarity with Black workers and the oppressed, and therefore are ultimately responsible for the failure of united labor-Black struggle.

The Sixties, as the second great peak of social struggle in the history of the United States, saw an increasing understanding that the institutions offered by the parties supporting the capitalist system were poisoned chalices. It was no mystery that the capitalists could be forced to grant more by struggling in opposition to their rule than by attempting to gain influence with their mealy-mouthed, left liberal hangers-on. A politicized and socialist labor movement could have done real damage to the Vietnam War effort while winning strikes, but since labor bureaucrats were entirely tied to the Democratic Party and their own despotic control over the unions, the strikes that did break out—in very large numbers—were generally wildcats without union or legal sanction.

Meanwhile, the antiwar and student movements grasped after some kind of effective politics opposed to capitalism and effective organizations for it. The travails of the Students for a Democratic Society, and the several attempted versions of revolutionary politics that came out of it, certainly could have done much more with a coherent revolutionary perspective and party, based on the independence of the working class (and a rejection of Maoist fantasies), but at least at that time they had little confusion about the Democratic Party being a pied piper of social movements. Were they wrong not to try to organize primaries against the more hateful Democratic politicians, when mass demonstrations and resistance by conscript soldiers were forcing even Richard Nixon's hand?

There is one particular "concession" that the Democratic Party is always willing to grant social movements, which is the opportunity to run a nominee in its presidential primary. Realistically, the Party does not concede anything by this strategy and, on the contrary, gains quite a bit. The primary is conducted among voters that are already largely wedded to the Democratic Party machine, and if that does not prove to be sufficient to elect the favored candidate, Party insiders can always put their thumbs on the scale to ensure the desired result. By participating, social movements not only give the Democratic Party legitimacy and divert their members from more radical ends, but also give the Democrats the opportunity to sweep up the wreckage of the demoralized and confused movement once the inevitable primary loss occurs.

Jesse Jackson's presidential runs in the 1980s are a case in point. Jackson pulled various social groups

into his "Rainbow Coalition"—including many Marxists who should have known better—that ran aground on the shoals of the Democratic Party primaries. Before that, Eugene McCarthy cynically appealed to the anti-Vietnam War movement to bolster his candidacy in the 1968 primary. Those who were taken in by McCarthy's overtures were rewarded with police batons outside of the convention center. Naturally, McCarthy was never again to appear as an opponent of the war, and the best that could be said for his erstwhile supporters was that they had foolishly wasted their time in supporting him.

Whom do the Democrats serve? Whom do they represent?

The way the U.S. capitalist parties work is through a division of labor. The Republicans represent the hard line capitalist strategy, best used whenever the social movements are weak or too dependent on the Democrats. Social movements that try to substitute a Democrat election campaign for actual organizing end up in the situation of thinking they have to help the Democrats win by moderating the struggle. But when social movements are moderate, they get demoralized, and whether the Democrats or Republicans win, the movements don't have the mobilization to resist. By turning his supporters in the direction of Hillary Clinton, Sanders (who has always been effectively a Democrat in Congress) prevented his agitated base from preparing in any way to resist Trump—or Clinton for that matter. Sanders almost succeeded in getting a generation to wait and see about Clinton like they did with Obama. And that waiting and seeing got us into the disastrous situation we now find ourselves in.

So the Democrats represent the strategy of cooptation. When people are forming new social movements, fighting independently, and beginning to threaten capitalism, the hard line strategy of the Republicans doesn't work as well. More capitalists backed Clinton because they valued the stable management of capitalism, like under Obama, and Democratic Party management of social movements as well. Campaign promises mean nothing to the Democrats, but a sincere progressive faction that continues to support them means they don't even have to worry about those people becoming opponents.

The Democratic Party offers an institution to the movements, whether it's an elected official, a spot on a ballot, nonprofit funding from billionaires, the support of some city councillors or mayors, or a permit to march, but with conditions. It's not that our social movements are dumb and are taken in.

There are very real benefits to using the existing institutions, and the Democrats will offer a reform as compensation. When the Democrats offer a reform, the best explanation is not that they shifted left to welcome new people coming in. They offer reforms to deal with the possibility that an anti-Democratic Party movement would arise. If that did happen, the Democrats would have to make much bigger concessions to convince people to come back their way. When US capitalism was at its height of profitability after WWII, it was easy for the Democrats to justify the expense of reforms in order to keep production running smoothly, but today's crisis-wracked capitalism turns ever more to austerity. Concessions to the workers would now cut into capitalism's reduced profits, not restore health to the system, and that explains capitalists—and Democrats'—fierce resistance to such policies.

Still, reforms can be real, and because the institutions the Democrats offer are real, workers will have access to more resources the second they go for the Democratic Party strategy. Socialists are feeling this pressure when they look at the chance to get ballot access through the Democratic Party. But without breaking from the Democrats, a union or a social movement is not going to build the power of the working class in the long run (if it did, the Democrats would instantly cut off support).

As Lenin wrote 100 years ago in *State and Revolution*, while a Russian government of socialists allied with liberals was continuing a war to send millions of soldiers to their deaths,

“A democratic republic is the best possible political shell for capitalism, and, therefore, once capital has gained possession of this very best shell... it establishes its power so securely, so firmly, that no change of persons, institutions or parties in the bourgeois-democratic republic can shake it.”

Of course, back then the workers had institutions of their own independent of the capitalists, and by denying the liberal government all support, they were able to make their committees and councils into a new state of the workers.

The Democrats are with us for a reason. They tried running this country as a dictatorship of slaveowners. They tried running half this country as an apartheid state. Again and again, social movements saw that Democrats were a primary obstacle to actually gaining ground, and took the struggle directly to the capitalists and their politicians. In each case, when the struggle had exhausted part of its energy, someone suggested that an institutional link up with the Democrats would keep things going more smoothly for a while. The record of that strategy is the graveyard in which social movement have buried themselves. Why does it keep happening if it has such bad results? Movement leaders have limited options, and interests of their own, and sooner or later the faction that is willing to compromise gets some resources from the capitalist-aligned institutions. We need our own organizations to defeat the capitalists, but more centrally we need a revolutionary socialist party so that our unions and movements don't succumb to capitalism's very well prepared trap-- the Democratic Party.

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The Party We Need

A REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALIST PARTY



Illustration: Luigi Morris.

BY JUAN CRUZ FERRE

We are living in turbulent times. President Trump and the rise of the alt-right are not the only news. Thousands of people have become politically active in the past year, galvanized by the Bernie Sanders campaign and now joining organizations on the left, such as the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), the International Socialist Organization, or Socialist Alternative. Ten years ago, both of these movements would have been thought to be out of the realm of possibility. These developments signal the potential for seismic shifts in the political scene and an opening for revolutionaries after years of retreat.

It is in this context that the question of the party as a political tool for advancing socialism inspires renewed interest. What is needed to undertake the fight for socialism and stand a chance to win?

Jacobin editor Seth Ackerman recently put forth a “blueprint” for a party that, although with some merits, misses the central questions that socialists should be discussing today.¹

We don't need to start from zero

A party for the working class will have to draw from the experiences of past political organizations. The rise and drift of European social democratic parties and the degeneration of the Communist Parties (Spain, France, Germany, etc.) provide valuable lessons for today. The same can be said of the short yet rich experience of neo-reformist formations like Syriza and Podemos.

Every party has a program, whether explicit or not, and every party represents the interests of either the working class or the bourgeoisie. Capitalist parties such as the Democratic and Republican parties have slightly different programs, serving different but overlapping factions of the bourgeoisie. Although Sanders had a much more radical program than Hillary Clinton, his explicit goal was still to *reform* (rather than dismantle) capitalism, in effect, saving capitalism from itself.

For working class parties, the program is the party's principal tool. At the same time, the program needs to be based on a strategy. While an electoral campaign or a strike against layoffs are tactics to win specific battles, the strategy is the sum of those battles toward the final goal, the overthrow of capitalism.

European social democratic parties (and the short-lived experience of the Socialist Party in the US) took the position that it was possible to achieve socialism by enacting reforms through parliamentary means. This meant running in

elections and using seats in congress to present bills that would benefit workers. However, social democratic parties in Europe did not have a unified *strategy* for achieving socialism. Inevitably, the push for achievable demands (what they considered *minimum program*) was detached from the fight for socialism (ie., *maximum program*).

Workers of the world?

The Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) was the largest of these parties that ever existed. It grew exponentially around the turn of the twentieth century, received over four million votes in 1912, and by 1914 it had over one million active members.

On August 4, 1914, only a few days after pledging to resist the war and unite with workers in other countries in the fight for socialism, the SPD—as well as socialist parties in Austria-Hungary, France, Belgium and Britain—caved to nationalist pressures and supported their government's war efforts in World War I. Shedding any pretense of internationalism, social democratic parties became accomplice to the capitalist class in a war waged by domestic workers against foreign workers for the benefit of their national bourgeoisies. Thus, the Second International crumbled.

During the remainder of the 20th century, social democratic parties fought for reforms *within* capitalism under the illusion that each reform was one more step toward socialism. However, the moment for socialist transformation never came. Late reformism eventually abandoned all expectations of ending capitalism and focused on the *minimum program*.

Overreliance on electoral politics is central to why social democracies have failed to bring us any closer to socialism.

By the end of the nineteenth century, a revisionist wing led by Eduard Bernstein claimed to discover a “civilized” form of government within parliamentary democracy that superseded the “despotism of class dictatorships.” Karl Kautsky later joined him in this strategic turn and crafted his “strategy of attrition,” which Rosa Luxemburg dubbed “Nothing-but-Parliamentarianism.”

According to Kautsky, the German working class could lead a warfare of attrition against the bourgeoisie, undermine its power, and gradually take over the state. The faith in bourgeois democracy and acceptance of parliamentarianism as the only means of advancing workers' politics proved disastrous to the proletariat in key historical moments.

When revolutionary situations arose, socialist parties unwilling and unprepared to take power strove to constrain the working class to what was possible under capitalism. This happened in Germany in 1919 and 1923, during the Spanish Civil War in 1936-1939, and in Chile in 1973 when Salvador Allende refused to arm the working class to resist the counterrevolution. In all three examples, the final outcome was the bloody massacre of militant workers and revolutionaries.

Race to the Center

When neoliberalism became the order of the day, social democracies succumbed to its appeal. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, the British Labour Party, the French Socialist Party and the Workers' Socialist Party of Spain (PSOE), among others, embraced the *Third Way* and implemented austerity policies demanded by capital. They morphed from alleged champions of workers' interests into agents of finance capital and neoliberalism.

A scan-through of the parties that today make up the Socialist International feels like a flip-book horror story: François Hollande's French Socialist Party, Enrique Peña Nieto's PRI in Mexico, the UCR in Argentina—now in government, in coalition with President Mauricio Macri's PRO Party. The DSA in the United States continues to be a full member of the Socialist International.

Social democracies were not the only parties that moved to the center. In the late 70s, Communist Parties in Europe—particularly the Spanish, Italian and French CPs—broke ties with the Soviet Union and officially shed the “dictatorship of the proletariat” from their program, although they had long given up any prospects of a socialist revolution. This movement, dubbed *Eurocommunism*, embraced parliamentarianism as the path to socialism in advanced countries. In practice, they abandoned both the perspective and the fight for socialism.

The Problem with Shortcuts

A few years after the 2008 economic crisis, a wave of uprisings shook the Arab world and mass protests sprang up in the US (Occupy Wall Street) and Europe. In the context of the bankruptcy of classical reformist parties, Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain arose on the shoulders of strong anti-austerity movements.

Left parties and radical activism around the world turned their eyes toward these new formations with

high hopes. It seemed that the left had once again returned to a position of leverage and influence after a long retreat.

Syriza took power in January 2015 with the promise of fighting the austerity imposed by the EU. For some, Syriza's victory signaled the possibility that socialism could be achieved through elections. However, only a few months later, Tsipras' government signed a draconian agreement with the EU—going against a referendum that rejected the deal with 60 percent of the vote, as well as privatizing the largest seaport (Piraeus), cutting pensions, and repressing protesters and workers who went on strike.

Podemos in Spain showed its true colors before even taking office at the national level: first by stripping the most radical demands from their program such as the call for a popular scrutiny of the foreign debt and replacing it with proposals for a *restructuring* of the debt; and second, by trying to form a coalition with the PSOE, which they had repeatedly denounced as part of the *political caste*. Podemos has governed five major cities (including Madrid and Barcelona) for almost two years and has provided no solutions to foreclosures, unemployment, and the energy crisis.

Both Syriza and Podemos emphasized the need for institutional mechanisms to supersede the struggle “in the streets.” The prescription was to vote and stay home. Podemos' unremarkable performance in local governments and its eagerness to reach the presidential seat at any cost has revealed its political bankruptcy.

Without a mass implantation in the working class, these new reformist parties have focused their efforts on conquering the state to counter austerity. Socialism is not on the horizon. Furthermore, as the example of Syriza shows, the enduring economic downturn seriously undermines the ability of any government to grant concessions, and renders their social democratic program an anachronistic utopia.

A Party of Workers

The main source of conflict in our times is, as it has always been, the division of society in classes: one class is exploited while another reaps the profits, with some shades in between. Nothing defines our lives and interests as strongly as the social class we belong to. A party that welcomes workers as well as capitalists will always be controlled by capital. This is why workers need our own political tool to advance our interests.

The party we need is composed of, led by, and funded by workers. If a party relies on funds donated

by liberal non-profits or big donors, it cannot even pretend to have working-class independence.

Social movement activists and liberals have far too often chosen to work with the Democratic Party—a full capitalist party—either by pushing for a progressive wing to emerge, taking over the party or by plainly voting Democrat as a lesser evil against Republicans. As other authors explain in this issue, this path is a dead end.²

Following this pattern, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) has consistently supported progressive figureheads within the Democratic Party. Bernie Sanders was not the only one; they have also endorsed Keith Ellison for chair of the DNC, a lukewarm liberal whose program didn't differ much from that of Tom Perez.

Socialist Alternative has committed the same mistake by endorsing local Democrats in Seattle, and more blatantly when they campaigned for Bernie Sanders in the primaries and *registered people* to the Democratic Party. As if this was not enough, members of Socialist Alternative attended the 2016 DNC in Philadelphia as delegates of the Democratic Party, only to lead a “walk out” after the votes were cast and Hillary had won the nomination. It is difficult to come back from such deep involvement with a capitalist party.

Once Bernie was out of the race, some of his supporters turned to the Greens looking for a progressive candidate. Socialist Alternative then switched gears to endorse Green Party candidate Jill Stein.

The ISO, too, has repeatedly thrown their support behind the Greens in an attempt to break the two-party system. They even ran a joint candidacy for the state of New York in 2014 (Howie Hawkins-Brian Jones).

In a 2013 editorial in the *Socialist Worker*, Paul D'Amato writes at length about the need to build a workers' party, drawing from Marx and Engels' writings.³ In the same article, however, he justifies support for Ralph Nader's Green Party campaign in 2000—“an anti-corporate, if not anti-capitalist agenda”—as a means to “begin the process of building a broader left that is independent of the Democratic Party.” D'Amato makes no mention of the class character of the Green Party. In his and similar analyses, class delimitation is replaced by a “broader left” that is so broad as to include environmentally-friendly (“green”) entrepreneurs. (*see below*)

The height of contradiction comes when, after justifying the ISO's support of the Greens, D'Amato quotes Engels' appraisal of the New York Independent Labor Party candidacy of 1886: “In a country that has newly entered the movement, the first really crucial step is the formation by the workers of an independent political party, no matter

how, *so long as it is distinguishable as a labor party*” [emphasis added].

Paul D'Amato and the ISO decided to overlook the last few words.

Although there are some self-described socialists in their ranks, the Green Party USA is nothing but a middle-class party with a middle-class program: “*Invest in green business (...) with an emphasis on small, locally-based companies*” reads Jill Stein's 2016 platform. Despite passing an amendment (# 835, June 2016) rejecting the “capitalist system,” the same statement also condemns state ownership of the means of production, supports small enterprises, and puts forward *communalism* and the vague idea of *decentralization of power* as key tenets for social justice.

So if the Green Party is neither socialist nor a workers' party, why is it even worth supporting? Is it really a step toward the formation of a revolutionary socialist party? Examples of past efforts show clearly that it is not. The Green Party serves as a diversion from working-class politics that will only bring confusion and disappointment among workers and socialist activists.

In the past year and half, Socialist Alternative has been repeating *ad nauseam* that we need a “*Party of the 99%*.” The slogan itself is problematic, since it blurs the class divide and opens the door for cross-class electoral coalitions. This generous 99% would leave out *only* the most concentrated bourgeoisie (those who make over \$350,000 a year or who have accumulated over \$8 million in wealth), but would include the petty bourgeoisie in its full, including some small capitalists. Even though this may sound like nit-picking, the story comes full circle when we see that it's Bernie Sanders and Jill Stein who they've called to form this *party of the 99%*.

Kshama Sawant and Socialist Alternative have gained popularity since she took office as Seattle Councilmember, running as a socialist. The efforts to appeal to moderate voters and the eagerness to collaborate with progressive Democrats such as Bernie Sanders is the fastest way to squander the political capital that no other left organization has enjoyed in the past few years.

As basic as it may sound, refraining from participating in or endorsing any multi-class or plainly bourgeois electoral option would be a major step forward for the DSA, Socialist Alternative, and the ISO.

A Party of Combat

All the terrain gained by working-class organizations until the 1970s was reversed in the half century that came afterwards. We are in such

a dire state that even the idea of a mass working-class reformist organization would be a progressive development. However, as the experience of social democracy shows, this is not enough to take on capitalism.

It is clear that capitalist democracy is deeply flawed. Multiple mechanisms skew the results of elections, suppress undesired political forces, and ultimately guarantee the rule of capital through its politicians in the government.

If Seth Ackerman's article in *Jacobin* has one virtue, it is that it shows how undemocratic the US electoral system is.

"One lesson from this history is clear: We have to stop approaching our task as if the problems we face were akin to those faced by the organizers of, say, the British Labour Party in 1900 or Canada's New Democratic Party in 1961. Instead, we need to realize that our situation is more like that facing opposition parties in soft-authoritarian systems, like those of Russia or Singapore."

However, the plan he puts forward is nothing but electoral politics. Since he only conceives of politics in the narrow scope of an electoral strategy, his proposal ends up being yet another way of working with one foot in and one foot out of the Democratic Party.

Any collective effort in the fight for socialism needs to acknowledge the need for a revolutionary strategy.

Reformism has failed time and again and only revolutions have severed the chains of class exploitation. Despite its later bureaucratization and repressive drift, the Russian Revolution broke the power of the Czar and the bourgeoisie and provided immediate relief to millions of workers and peasants, distributed the land, paved the way for women's emancipation and sexual freedom and established the most democratic system that has ever existed.

All this was possible only through the coordinated action of the working masses through bodies of self-organization: the *soviets* (or workers' councils). These councils were crucial for asserting and channeling workers' power and, very importantly, planning the insurrection. The Bolsheviks fought within the *soviets* and won the majority in them to a revolutionary strategy.

Of course, revolutionaries cannot *make* a revolution nor, despite Che Guevara's theorizations, create the subjective conditions for it. Yet, a minority of militant workers can play an important role in a larger movement of workers and oppressed people by fostering the creation

of united front organizations and advancing revolutionary politics.

The Fight for the United Front Begins Today

The *soviets* were nothing but united front organizations. As Emilio Albamonte and Matías Maiello convincingly argue, the same united front organizations that wage a defensive fight against the attacks of capital and the state will serve to organize the offensive when conditions are favorable.⁴

A central task for a revolutionary party, then, is the development of these bodies of workers' self-organization. And this can only be done if the party is part and parcel of the working class, if it manages to "*merge itself with the broadest masses of the toilers.*"⁵

Furthermore, the ranks of the party must be filled with the workers who are politically most advanced, those who are active in the fights against bosses and the union bureaucracy, against racism and gender oppression, and who see the need to overthrow capitalism.⁶

In this way, members of the party will have their character and politics forged in the struggle. Marxist propaganda and theory are the scaffolding, but the participation in class struggles is the necessary catalyst for cadre formation. Every strike, picket line, roadblock, every conflict serves as a *school of war*, and the party tempers its character in the heat of these struggles: it becomes a party of combat.

Although forgotten by most of the left, the fight against the union bureaucracy is of paramount importance today. The approach of most of the US left has been to try to secure positions in unions, oftentimes sharing a slate with the bureaucracy.

The union bureaucrats are agents of capital in the labor movement. They reproduce racism and sexism and systematically tame workers' outrage to reach a compromise with the bosses. The union bureaucracy is the main hurdle workers need to fight to enjoy democracy in their organizations and advance their interests.⁷

Since there is barely any discussion on union bureaucracy within the existing left, there is little understanding of what it is and how to fight it. An analysis of the union bureaucracy is beyond the scope of this article, but for now let's say the leadership is bureaucratic if decisions are not taken democratically through assemblies, delegates are not recallable, and participation of the rank and file is weak; if the leadership does not fight relentlessly against racism, sexism, and national chauvinism; or if the union endorses Democrats

(or any bourgeois party). Any of the above is an unequivocal sign that the union leadership is not advancing workers' interests.

Left parties in the US should contest union leadership with oppositional caucuses instead of putting differences aside and joining them in a slate in order to secure a position.

Democratic Demands and Workers' Hegemony

The members of a revolutionary party not only need to advance struggles for economic justice or workers' demands. Individual racism and bigotry must be fought at the workplace and at every level. But most importantly, we need to build up a fight against these oppressions from a working-class perspective. The initiatives *Strike Against Police Terror* and *No Cops in Our Unions*, both advanced by Left Voice collaborators, are attempts to link workers' power with the fight against racism.⁸

The mobilization of women in the US and across the globe for reproductive rights, gender equality and against all kinds of gender violence has reopened the discussion about what kind of women's movement we need.

It is not on moral grounds that we argue for putting up these struggles for democratic demands: they are a key element in a revolutionary strategy. Workers will lead the socialist revolution. But to do so, they need to show themselves as the class that will achieve emancipation for the rest: the poor and disenfranchised, students, the middle class; and, across all social strata, to the most oppressed. The fight for their demands strengthens working-class hegemony, that is, its capacity to wage struggles for the benefit of all.

At the same time, the party will only be truly revolutionary if it includes radical militants honed by struggles against racism, sexism, and other oppressions.

Dispute the Superstructure

This is not to say that electoral activity should be dismissed or belittled. Elections are not merely "a gauge of the maturity of the working class" as Marx and Engels famously put it, but are also an opportunity for socialists to spread their ideas, show their politics, and engage in conversations with those who are looking for answers to the social and economic needs of the working people.

Seats in congress, legislatures, or local councils should serve as a loudspeaker for workers' demands and workers' struggles, as a platform to

denounce the abuses of the state and the bosses and an opportunity to indict capitalist democracy.

In 1920 the Second Congress of the Comintern stated bluntly what communists should make of the positions in a bourgeois parliament:

"[The] activity in parliament, which consists mainly in revolutionary agitation from the parliamentary platform, in unmasking opponents, in the ideological unification of the masses who still, particularly in backward areas, are captivated by democratic ideas, look towards the parliamentary platform, etc., should be totally and completely subordinated to the aims and tasks of the mass struggle outside parliament."

In Argentina, the Left and Workers' Front holds four seats in the national congress and dozens of seats in province legislatures and city councils. Apart from using these positions to present a large number of bills to advance workers' interests—such as the emergency bill to ban layoffs during the economic downturn or the project to expropriate MadyGraf, a worker-controlled factory⁹—the representatives of the Left Front have gained national attention for being in the front lines of workers' struggles, enduring repression by the police and voicing a ruthless critique of bourgeois democracy and its parties. In a country where corruption is rampant and the pockets of elected officials are bloated (MPs make almost \$10,000 USD per month) all Left Front MPs are committed to earning a teachers' salary (now around \$650 monthly) and donating the remainder to workers' struggles, strike funds, and solidarity campaigns.

The Weight of the Dead

Setbacks in class struggle bring about a retrocession in the theory and politics of the working class and the left. Successive defeats under neoliberalism have taken a toll on left parties' politics. The forty-plus years without revolutions all but erased the "hypothesis of revolution," that is, the perspective that a revolution will ever take place. But revolutions have happened throughout history and will continue to happen. The challenge is to lead them to a socialist outcome.

It is difficult to overstate the counter-revolutionary role of Stalinism in the twentieth century. The purges inside the Soviet Union swiftly crushed all left opposition to Stalinist rule. By 1934, 70 percent of the members of the 1921 Central Committee had been either shot or arrested. The doctrine of "socialism in one country" devastated

the communist left outside the USSR, dealt a death blow to the Spanish revolution, and foreclosed prospects for socialist revolutions elsewhere in the world.

Condemned to exile after leading the Russian Revolution, Trotsky wrote the most accurate and compelling critique of the bureaucratization of the USSR. Trotskyism remains today a necessary tool, in the words of Daniel Bensaid, “to undo the blend between Stalinism and communism, free the living from the weight of the dead.”¹⁰

Immediate Tasks

In the age of Trump, attacks on workers and oppressed minorities are multiplying. Unity in the struggle against racism, sexism, and xenophobia is critical and can consolidate a working class resistance. The tactic of united front is as relevant as ever. The national response against the travel ban on Muslims and wide mobilization in support of immigrant workers are promising developments.

With the appalling rise of national chauvinism in the US and Europe, the left has to embrace the most radical anti-imperialist program, oppose military interventions abroad, denounce and oppose the looting of natural resources and oppression in Mexico and the rest of the world, and fight for the freedom of movement and migration for all people.

The revitalized women’s movement has reopened the debate among different currents of feminism. Revolutionaries must intervene in this movement and try to forge a left wing that fights for gender equality and for socialism. The Black movement against police brutality poses a similar challenge and opportunity for the left.

The fight against the union bureaucracy is essential to reclaiming working-class organizations for workers and their interests.

In the electoral arena, organizations that fight for socialism must start by advancing working-class politics, drawing sharp delimitations with the Democratic Party or any other organizations that are not exclusively based in the working class.

One hundred years after the Russian Revolution, it is worth rescuing its legacy from the ashes of Stalinism, opportunism and oblivion, and rebuild a revolutionary party for socialism.

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OUR DUTY TO WIN

Strategy and Anti-Capitalist Feminism



Illustration: laizquierdadiario.com.

BY TATIANA COZZARELLI

Guadalupe García De Rayos moved to the US when she was fourteen and lived there for a total of two decades. She is the mother of two kids who were born and grew up in the US. After being convicted of using a false social security number, she appeared for her annual check-in with immigration officers in February and was deported to Mexico.

Nawar al-Awlaki was eight years old when she was killed by an American drone in Yemen in early February. She was one of ten women and children who were killed in the attack. Years earlier, her older brother was killed in one of Obama's drone strikes while he was eating dinner in an outdoor restaurant. He was sixteen years old.

These stories reflect the suffering of millions of women in the US and around the world. As has become patently clear, Trump and his administration have launched a massive attack on immigrants, the environment, and women's rights. Numerous protests have made these attacks visible and serve to build the resistance against them. Although there were fewer demonstrations under the Obama administration and those of the Democrats before him, it is important to understand that the Democratic Party has been pursuing the same policies of misery and death for decades.

The resistance movement in the US has slowly gathered steam. From Occupy Wall Street to Black Lives Matter and the Dakota Access Pipeline protests, we've seen people organizing to resist the attacks on their rights. Women have been central leaders of these important social movements and carried out the largest American march in decades: the January 21 Women's March on Washington. This mobilization did not have a strong or coherent political message but still expressed the growth of a women's movement ready to fight Trump. From the massive energy built up by this march, there emerged a call for the International Women's Strike, which began to articulate the need to organize a left women's movement that is anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist—a "Feminism of the 99%."

The call for a Feminism of the 99% (F99%) correctly differentiates itself from the *neoliberal feminism* that has been hegemonic in the past decades. Its strongest points are connecting the fight for women's rights to a critique of the capitalist system, highlighting the oppression of the

working class and poor- especially Black, Latina, trans and disabled women- and departing from a feminism that supports the Democratic Party. The call for an International Women's Strike built a large women's mobilization in New York City on March 8, an impressive demonstration that stands in stark contrast to small leftist gatherings that have marked the date in the U.S. in the past several years. This protest was one among many in the 50 countries, which echoed the call for a strike.

At the same time, F99% has the limitation of not clearly articulating the strategy that the women's movement must embrace in order to strike at the heart of the system that exploits and oppresses the vast majority. This discussion is particularly urgent in the face of increasingly brutal attacks on the working class and oppressed under the Trump administration that has strengthened a radical right wing. Yet, Trump is only the tip of the iceberg- the attacks against us have been going on for decades. Feminism of the 99% and the call for a strike on March 8 open a fundamental debate about the direction the women's movement must take in this moment of increased politicization and right-wing attacks.

We've been losing for years

Women, other oppressed groups, and the working class have been losing the battle for years. It has been four decades since the world has seen a revolution. The fall of the Soviet Union opened up new markets for capitalism, inaugurating a period of near total capitalist hegemony around the world, both as an economic system and as an ideology. While some rights were won as a result of the radical movements of the 60's and 70's, the late 80s and 90s announced the victory of capitalism as not just the most preferable system but as the only system possible. Individualism reigned. Unionization rates plummeted. Labor unions implemented a "business unionism" model that was completely divorced from the rank and file, and they put their weight and money behind the Democratic Party. Meanwhile, both capitalist parties took away workers' rights, including, in many states, the right to strike, effectively stripping workers of their most powerful weapon.

Gone were the radical movements of the 1960s and 1970s. With the onset of the AIDS epidemic,

the radicalism of Stonewall and the LGBT movement gave way to various alliances between LGBT leaders and the Democratic Party, which would not even support marriage equality.

The imprisonment, repression, and murder of political activists in the Black Power movement allowed Democratic Party proxies to defend the racist power structure while paying lip service to issues affecting Black people's lives. Figures like Jesse Jackson emerged in the wake of the political vacuum created by the racist and repressive attacks on Black revolutionary movements.

Similarly, where the radicalized women's movement of the 60s and 70s was able to address the connections between the patriarchal system, capitalism, state violence and imperialism, we have since seen the rise of a new kind of feminism—a liberal feminism that sought first and foremost to increase the number of women in positions of power, as explained in the article *March 8: When the Earth Shook*. The primary goal of this “lean-in feminism” has been to attain legal recognition and rights so that a few women are able to achieve success within the capitalist system.

In other words, despite the major differences between them, these three movements underwent a similar co-optation that transformed them from radical movements that fought for systemic change to reformist movements that upheld the status quo. They were ultimately siphoned back into the confines of the capitalist system, advocating for greater participation in the existing power structures and class system while placing their faith in the Democratic Party.

The late 80s and 90s were also characterized by the eradication of what little remained of the safety net for poor people in the US. Reagan used the myth of the “welfare queen” to justify significant cuts to social programs for the poor and the expansion of a racist ideology against Black women that further divided the working class.

Labor unions and social movements co-opted and tamed by the Democratic Party did not put up an effective fight against these measures. Instead, non-profits stepped in to administer band-aids that attempted to fill in for the services that the government no longer provided.

Several of these non-profits address racial justice and gender equity while receiving money from corporations and the government which exploit and imprison women and people of color. The proliferation of those “social justice” organizations only perpetuates the perception that revolution is unnecessary and ties those who fight for social justice to the interests of the government and corporations.

Identity politics and the non-profitization of the women's movement

Identity politics mirrors some of the contradictions of the non-profit industrial complex because it reduces oppression to a series of individual problems that are combatted on an individual basis. The prevailing expressions of identity politics—discourse, policy agendas and institutions, activist-leaderships—do not strike at the link between individual bigotry, sexist behavior and the capitalist system that maintains structural oppression.

At the same time, identity politics was an important response to dominant political spheres that erased the importance of oppressed groups. It helped develop an understanding of the different ways in which people are oppressed, particularly examining the diverse experiences within the working class (which includes queer, disabled, immigrant, and Black people). Additionally, identity politics provided a language to discuss oppression and brought visibility to some social groups that had long been relegated to the margins.

However, the ideology of identity politics does not acknowledge that this oppression is a mechanism that helps to guarantee capitalist profits. These politics are ideal for the non-profit industrial complex, which targets and divides parts of the population to fight for crumbs in the neoliberal world order. Rather than fighting capitalism, many strands of identity politics end up seeking representation *within* capitalism.

Capitalism and women's oppression

The dominant narrative in the neoliberal era is that equality for women will come about through the passage of laws and policies, ignoring the fact that capitalism actively prevents full equality. While it's true that we must fight for equal pay, trans rights, against employment discrimination and for other progressive laws, we should not see such achievements as simply steps on a ladder to liberation. Full liberation requires a different strategy, one that is not limited to racking up democratic victories, but aims at tearing down capitalism.

While some may attribute women's subordination to the sexism of individual people, misogyny does not merely exist in the minds of individuals; it is first and foremost a system of material inequality. Capitalism benefits from the wage gap and the continuous downward drive of wages. Capitalism also benefits when domestic labor is viewed as natural, intrinsically female and thus remains unpaid.

Although sexism existed before capitalism, and the end of capitalism is not the same as the end of sexism, this system garners massive profits from sexism, racism, homophobia and transphobia. For every woman CEO, there is a woman who is paid miserable wages to clean her bathroom. Within this system, there can be no equality, and even steps forward are deeply contradictory.

Beyond “lean-in,” beyond identity politics

More and more people see the flaws inherent in the fight for advances within a capitalist paradigm. Millions of young Americans are no longer afraid of the word *socialism* and see it as a system “more human” than capitalism, expressed by the votes for Bernie Sanders, the “socialist.”

Although Sanders certainly does not propose to destroy capitalism, the 13 million who voted for him demonstrated openness to more radical ideas. Unfortunately, this radicalization also took place on the right, as expressed by Trump, who championed a politics of racism and misogyny as well as promising to solve the economic problems of those devastated by years of neoliberalism. His victory marked a turning point for thousands of progressive people who are disillusioned with both political parties and are beginning to take into their own hands the fight for their rights.

These radical ideas are also expressed by Feminism of the 99%, which goes beyond neoliberal or “lean-in” feminism, which seeks representation in the highest positions of the current system. A call for a women’s strike in the US¹ signed by prominent feminists such as Angela Davis, Nancy Fraser and Cinzia Arruzza stated, “Lean-in feminism and other variants of corporate feminism have failed the overwhelming majority of us, who do not have access to individual self-promotion and advancement and whose conditions of life can be improved only through policies that defend social reproduction, secure reproductive justice and guarantee labor rights.”

Implicitly, F99% rejects the individualization and fragmentation of the politics of identity, and instead fights for a feminist movement in the interests of the vast majority of the population that has been hard-hit by neoliberalism and with those who stand in solidarity with the most oppressed.

One of the effects of neoliberalism, patriarchy and white supremacy was the fragmentation of social movements into hundreds of groups that rarely work or act together. F99% seeks to bring together these groups, recognizing differences and fighting against all oppression.

This incipient left wing of the women’s movement also rejects the fragmentation created by national borders which only serve to divide the oppressed and the working class. As a political trend born out of the call for the International Women’s Strike organized in over 50 countries, there is a strong basis for internationalism.

While understanding differences, our struggles must be united and decisively anti-imperialist. We must make alliances across national borders to fight imperialism, not ally ourselves with either of the two political parties that carry out imperialist policies.

Limits to the feminism of the 99%

Unfortunately, “Feminism of the 99%” does not see society as divided into bosses and workers, but rather into an ultra-rich elite and everyone else. The concept of “the 99%” does not point to our role in production, rooted as it is in a critique of the excesses of capitalism as opposed to a critique of the entire capitalist system. Furthermore, if anti-capitalism is a real, achievable goal as opposed to a decorative slogan, we must think about how to end capitalism. This brings us to the central role of the working class.

The basis for the critique of the “99%” slogan is not a fetishization of the working class, but rather a concern with the urgent task to win. We see the working class as the heart of capitalist society—it is the sector that turns the gears on the entire capitalist state. Without the working class, there are neither profits nor products. The ruling class knows this and throughout history has gone to great lengths to divide the working class using racism, sexism and LGBTQ-phobia.

If the heart of capitalism is the exploitation of working class labor, then it is the working class, taking up and fighting for the demands of all oppressed sectors of society, that can bring an end to capitalism and begin the work of creating real equality.

The strike as a working-class weapon

The International Women’s Strike and growing anti-Trump sentiment have brought to the fore the necessity of organizing a strike. At the same time the International Women’s Strike correctly called for a strike for women’s rights and against Trump. The reality is that no sector of US labor actually went on strike March 8. This is in stark contrast to Argentina, where socialist feminist organizations rooted in the working

class successfully carried out important work stoppages.

As anti-capitalist feminists, reviving US labor is of crucial strategic importance. In the context of an imminent increase in *right-to-work* legislation, putting forward the idea of a strike could breathe life into a dying labor movement. In *On Strikes*² Lenin wrote,

“Strikes, which arise out of the very nature of capitalist society, signify the beginning of the working-class struggle against that system of society. When the rich capitalists are confronted by individual, propertyless workers, this signifies the utter enslavement of the workers. But when those propertyless workers unite, the situation changes. There is no wealth that can be of benefit to the capitalists if they cannot find workers willing to apply their labour-power to the instruments and materials belonging to the capitalists and produce new wealth.”

Strikes differ from rallies and protests because they shut down capitalist production and demonstrate to the boss, the government and the worker that the working class is in fact the most powerful enemy of the capitalists.

Some of the organizers of the Women’s Strike argued that labor strikes were unrealistic because the American working class is weak. They can perhaps cite many elements of truth, the labor movement is demolished and the union bureaucracy has sold out. However, it is essential to challenge and turn around these characteristics of the US labor movement, not adapt to them.

A key question for 99%, then, is: how do working-class women who make up the movement organize a strike in their workplaces?

We have seen some important clues that point to a way forward. Although Randi Weingarten from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) takes a hard stance against Trump and spoke at the Women’s March on Washington, the AFT did not call meetings to discuss work stoppages on March 8. Yet, so many teachers planned to call out on International Women’s Day that three school districts were forced to close. These teachers demonstrate that there is a will to resist, but that the union bureaucracy refuses to organize a collective struggle.

A new, anti-capitalist feminism should help create, support and organize these rank-and-file demands and at the same time denounce the hypocrisy and bankruptcy of unions that do not fight for their members or for the working class as a whole.

In many states, the right to strike has been stolen from the working class. Rather than adapting

ourselves to this harsh reality, the left, the workers, women and all oppressed people must be on the front lines of fighting to get this right back. It will not be easy, but we must fight using the example of the women who organized the 1908 strikes, the strikes that inspired International Women’s Day, under terribly harsh conditions. We do not, however, have to go back as far as 1908 for other examples. As internationalists, we should look at the struggles the struggles taking place in other countries. For example, in Argentina, because women from the socialist women’s group *Pan y Rosas* (Bread and Roses) pushed for assemblies at all workplaces, in universities and in some sectors of teaching staff and Pepsico, a food distributor, workers were able to organize a strike on March 8.

A feminism that can win

Organizing a strategy that is likely to win is no easy task. After all, the enemies of the working class are more powerful today than ever before; they have control over the military, the media, the courts, the politicians and even the unions. The fight against the patriarchal capitalist system, therefore, must be strategic and effective.

The utmost example of this is the Russian Revolution, when the working class took power, led by the Bolsheviks. Despite the poverty of war-torn USSR, they were able to provide women more rights than most capitalist democracies today. The resistance to Trump cannot stay within the narrow scope of defending women’s rights. It is necessary that from the most radical sector of the women’s movement emerge a sector that roots itself in the working class and fight for the working class to embrace the fight for women’s emancipation.

Women in different parts of the world who were able to organize work stoppages alongside their male co-workers provide an example that can serve all workers to take up the fight for women’s emancipation. And the women who are willing to fight for their emancipation should embrace the struggle of the working class and its historical role, the socialist revolution.

We must get to work because it is our duty to fight with all that we have—because it is our duty to win.

Notes

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MARCH 8: WHEN THE EARTH SHOOK



Illustration: Luigi Morris.

“The socialist who is not a feminist lacks breadth.
The feminist who is not a socialist lacks strategy.”

Louise Kneeland

BY ANDREA D'ATRI AND CELESTE MURILLO

On March 8, women around the world marched through the largest metropolitan centers. The call for a global strike revived International Women's Day – long relegated to a largely symbolic, celebratory formality for a small group of feminists and leftists. This year, millions claimed the day as their own. They organized actions in workplaces and schools and attended massive demonstrations. Protests large and small took place in 50 countries around the world – from the US to Nigeria to Indonesia.

Madrid's Gran Vía was entirely shut down hours before the marches began, and almost all of the capital cities in Europe participated in these international mobilizations. In Montevideo, Uruguay, thousands took to the streets and there was a six-hour work stoppage called for by the trade union confederation PIT-CNT.

In the US, after the record-breaking women's marches on January 21 that mobilized an estimated three million people across the country, there was an upsurge of protests on March 8, reviving a tradition that had long been lost in the heart of imperialism.

Even without having read the declarations of feminist organizations, trade unions, and political parties, women around the world expressed their rage against sexist violence, precarious labor conditions that condemn them to misery, the irrational inequality that keeps women subordinate, and the constant fear that molds women's existence.

In Argentina, this rage fed into large-scale participation in strikes-- far greater participation than the union bureaucracy had intended. At the PepsiCo factory, work stoppages began at 5:00 am, based on a vote by a workers' assembly called for by the shop council, which stands in opposition to the current union leadership. At the Buenos Aires airport, LATAM airlines workers stopped check-in services, once again bolstered by assemblies organized by the opposition to the union leadership. Women from the socialist women's organization Pan y Rosas (Bread and Roses) formed part of the oppositional caucus in both of these work stoppages, and along with other male and female coworkers, were integral in the fight for a strike on March 8. In addition, there were countless partial work stoppages and protests in hospitals. Teachers also played an important role, forcing several unions to engage in strikes in the midst of a struggle between the teachers and the national and state governments.

Equality in Law is Not Equality in Life

What is the explanation for the renewal of mass demonstrations and protests on March 8? There are

many who criticized the marches, saying women have already achieved equality. The reality is that, with the capitalist crisis underway, there are deepening contradictions between the rights that have been won (at least in the imperialist countries and some semi-colonies like Uruguay, which has legalized abortion and same-sex marriage) and the material conditions of the majority of women, as austerity measures and cuts affect large sectors of the population. These economic realities are compounded by interminable sexist violence, in which the state and its institutions are complicit.

However, the expansion of rights has opened the eyes of millions of women and elevated their aspirations for a better life. The harsh realities that hold women back have kindled a sense of rage. After decades of neoliberalism, the economic crisis and all of its social consequences demonstrate more and more clearly that "equality in law is not equality in life."

These enormous March 8 demonstrations didn't appear overnight. They were preceded by recent actions around the world, including the massive Ni Una Menos (Not One Less) mobilizations in Argentina demanding that the state allocate money and take other measures to prevent femicides; the strikes in Iceland and France against the gender pay gap; the protest under torrential rain where hundreds of thousands of women stopped the further criminalization of abortion in Poland; and the massive women's protests against Trump in the United States.

The widespread support that these protests generate among ordinary citizens is evidence that they express not only the demand for women's rights but also the discontent of millions of workers and students with austerity, cuts, and precarious working conditions caused by the capitalist class and the governments that forced workers to pay for the crisis in order to maintain their profits. This unity between workers and students is the seed of an alliance that will be essential for defeating capitalist patriarchy.

Nothing is Achieved Without Struggle

This new wave of women's mobilizations is international and more radical in character, breaking with decades of liberal feminist hegemony. In previous years, it became common sense to think of individual free choice as the horizon of emancipation, without challenging capitalist democracies – without questioning the fact that the rights that were won were only available to a small number of women.

According to this de-politicized and de-politicizing framework, women's emancipation is simply a question of gradually gaining rights within the existing political regime. Once these rights have been written into law, each woman will individually be responsible for the life she "chooses" to live.

The flaw in this reformist logic is the separation between the fight for democratic rights and the struggle against the social system. By fighting for rights within bourgeois democracy without questioning the capitalist structure that maintains and profits from sexism, reformist feminism implicitly or explicitly approves of the system that signifies, legitimizes and reproduces women's subordination. This "feminism" does not take into account that these rights are inscribed in a limited, circumstantial and temporal way in the social system. It does not take into account that many of these rights were won in a moment when capitalism in imperialist countries was not in crisis. What the capitalist governments give with one hand, when there is prosperity, they take with the other when there is a crisis.

What gives women's demands a political character is not lobbying congress, which is a path to co-optation for many sectors of the movement. Rather, their political character comes from uncovering the intrinsic relation between basic rights that are still denied to us (like the right to not be murdered for being women) and the social system that is based on exploitation by a parasitic class of capitalists.

The liberal discourse transformed feminism, like other social movements of the oppressed, into something so harmless that it could be easily appropriated by the right. This liberal feminism stripped the women's movement of deeper social criticism and opened the doors to right-wing women. The fact that Ivanka Trump can be presented as a representative of "conservative feminism" shows what a quagmire liberal feminism is trapped in. Sectors of the ruling classes do not have any problem arguing that women, ethnic minorities, and LGBT people should have positions of power in capitalist society. This is how Hillary Clinton presented herself in the elections, the clearest example of imperialist or neoliberal feminism as described by Nancy Fraser and Zillah Eisenstein.

But Clinton failed to convince enough women to vote for her in order to break the glass ceiling and be an effective alternative to the Republican candidate, who epitomized modern misogyny. Her corporate feminism fell flat in the face of the problems affecting millions of wage laborers, unemployed workers, Black people, and immigrants.

Today, the Democratic Party hopes to use the reemergence of the women's movement throughout the world to rebuild itself after the defeat at the hands of the right. It is no coincidence that many

of the women who organized the International Women's Strike in the US warned of the danger of the Democratic Party attempting to capitalize on this enormous movement. Democrats hope to rebuild themselves after their enormous electoral defeat and at the same time are attempting to control the most radical aspects of the women's movement. *Neoliberal Feminism in Crisis*

The US, as the most important imperialist power, exported liberal feminism to the rest of the globe by imposing a neoliberal world order and corresponding policies towards women in health, education and social welfare using the IMF and the World Bank. This means that in many semi-colonies, these international organisms demanded that countries create gender and sexuality ministries. They even promoted laws to end sexist violence.

This allowed the capitalist state to wash its hands of responsibility for the precarious conditions that most women face. One of the most emblematic examples is in Mexico. Although many laws to prevent sexist violence have been passed, the state continues to be complicit in violence against women, especially workers on the border and Central American immigrants making their way to the US. The United States also disseminated liberal feminist ideology through global non-profits and the export of American academic works in colleges and universities.

Activist Ella Mahony of Jacobin explains "It's become axiomatic in left feminist spaces that there's a 'neoliberal' feminism against which all new forms of feminism must develop. What's less often articulated is the political character and origins of this corporate feminism. The key catalyst for neoliberal feminism's rise was the slow asphyxiation of left political alternatives from the 1980s onwards"¹.

Liberal feminism began to show its weakness in its inability to combat Trump. As we saw in the recent mobilizations of women around the world who contest the myth that we have already achieved equality, as well as in the discussions brought about by Clinton's loss, neoliberal feminism is being increasingly questioned.

In this sense, the call to build a "Feminism of the 99%" is symptomatic of a changing consciousness that sees the connection between capitalism and patriarchy as the source of many of the problems affecting the majority of women.

The Fight Against Patriarchy Must be Anti-Capitalist

The urge to revive an alliance between the women's movement and the working class in a country like the US speaks to the possibilities of strengthening an anti-capitalist wing inside the new women's

movement. Similarly, in Argentina, Chile and other countries, the language of anti-capitalism is heard at the meetings of the women's movement, in their manifestos, and in their mobilizations.

For socialist revolutionaries, the discussion of anti-capitalism opens the doors to a fruitful debate about what strategy and political program should be implemented against patriarchal capitalism. It forces us to think of the alliances we must build to fight for our own emancipation and how we could try to mobilize the working class to take up these demands.

Imagining an anti-capitalist feminism forces us to consider the question of the political subject: without working women, who make up half of the class that is the immense majority of society, there is no future. We fight for a movement of the working class – a movement of the majority, which is antagonistic to the rights of the few capitalists who control our lives. Furthermore, if it is not the working class (both women and men) who fly the banners of emancipation of the most oppressed sectors, then anti-capitalism becomes mere wishful thinking.

This alliance between the working class and women fighting for their rights goes back to the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, when women were able to win the right to vote and to fight against imperialist wars. The Bolsheviks were able to achieve hitherto unimaginable rights by bringing the working class to power. Many of the rights that existed in the USSR in the early 20th century have not yet been won in many capitalist countries.

Since then, this alliance between the working class and women has been perversely annihilated by the ruling classes, by the betrayal of union leaders who immerse the working class in pro-business unionism, and by the co-optation of social movements into the state and their de-politicized fragmentation in nonprofits.

Rebuilding the historic alliance between the working class and the women's movement is a central task in the rebuilding of a truly anti-capitalist feminism. Only when there is a real stoppage of the production and circulation of goods, of the service sector and of communications, can the more precarious and marginalized people--the housewives being hidden away in individual homes, the women in prostitution, and all of those who are worthless to this ignominious system--make their voices echo in the silence. This alliance is not a given. We must build it.

Building this alliance does not mean overlooking sexism within the working class. Some sectors of the left refuse to confront workers' prejudices – ideologies fomented by the ruling classes using the institutions under their control, such as the media and schools. These sectors also refuse to put themselves on the front lines of fighting for the most basic democratic rights, arguing that the problem of women's oppression is

only an expression of capitalist exploitation. At the same time, this kind of class reductionism absolves the most conscious members of the working class and even their own militants from responsibility for the reproduction of sexism. When female workers take the front lines of the struggle, like the women at PepsiCo and LATAM, this creates better conditions to both fight against sexism within the working class, but also to fight against the sexism of the bosses. The struggle against class reductionism cannot take the socialist women's movement to the opposite extreme, taking up individualistic notions of sexism that equate verbal harassment on the street with state sponsored terrorism against women.

The massive mobilization of women around the world gives a new relevance to the debate about the course that the women's movement should take in order to avoid ending up like the women's movement of the 70's. In a contradictory manner, the movement brought about partial triumphs and the expansion of rights. On the other hand, the movement was domesticated and the idea of a radical transformation of the capitalist system was buried. The current movement puts this debate on the table: Is the ultimate goal going to be occasional resistance to right-wing attacks, or are we going to finally build a strategy to win?

The international women's organization Pan y Rosas (Bread and Roses), of which the authors of this piece are members exists in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Uruguay, México, Venezuela, the Spanish State, France, and Germany. The organization actively intervenes in and builds this new women's movement in workplaces, schools and universities with a socialist perspective. We fight for the women's movement to build roots in the working class and give examples of the revolutionary potential of this alliance.

Our ideas, program and strategy are based on the accumulated lessons learned from previous generations of revolutionary Marxists. We believe in a feminism that seeks to be a political movement of the masses, where the struggle for democratic rights and liberties is connected to a denunciation of this regime of exploitation and misery for the majority. Only a movement that seeks to defeat this system can be truly emancipatory.

TRANSLATED BY TATIANA COZZARELLI

Notes

1 E. Mahony, "A Feminism That Takes to the Streets", *Jacobin*, 08/03/2017.

A RESISTANCE MOVEMENT FOR THE PLANET



Illustration:Luigi Morris.

Climate change is out of control. It is already too late to avoid soaring temperatures, scarce water, and extreme weather. But the financial structure of capitalism is tied to fossil fuels. Market-based solutions are ineffectual. John Bellamy Foster, a professor of sociology at the University of Oregon and the editor of *Monthly Review*, speaks about the kind of program necessary to stop this catastrophe.

BY JOHN BELLAMY FOSTER

LV: There is overwhelming evidence that demonstrates how anthropogenic climate change is out of control and will lead to global environmental catastrophe—without a major overhaul of energy production. In the February 2017 issue of the Monthly Review, you point out that although we have been presented with precise and indisputable estimations, science and social science institutions have failed to come up with effective solutions. Why do you think this is the case?

JBF: We are in an emergency situation in the Anthropocene epoch in which the disruption of the Earth system, particularly the climate, is threatening the planet as a place of human habitation. However, our political-economic system, capitalism, is geared primarily to the accumulation of capital, which prevents us from addressing this enormous challenge and accelerates the destruction. Natural scientists have done an excellent and courageous job of sounding the alarm on the enormous dangers of the continuation of business as usual with respect to carbon emissions and other planetary boundaries. But mainstream social science as it exists today has almost completely internalized capitalist ideology; so much so that conventional social scientists are completely unable to address the problem on the scale and in the historical terms that are necessary. They are accustomed to the view that society long ago “conquered” nature and that social science concerns only people-people relations, never people-nature relations. This feeds a denialism where Earth system-scale problems are concerned. Those mainstream social scientists who do address environmental issues more often than not do so as if we are dealing with fairly normal conditions, and not a planetary emergency, not a *no-analogue situation*. There can be no gradualist, ecomodernist answer to the dire ecological problems we face, because when looking at the human effect on the planet there is nothing gradual about it; it is a Great Acceleration and a rift in the Earth system. The problem is rising exponentially, while worsening even faster than that would suggest, because we are in the process of crossing all sorts of critical thresholds and facing a bewildering number of tipping points.

LV: If conversion to renewable energy could halt or reverse the march of

environmental crisis, why aren't we moving in that direction at the right pace?

JBF: The short answer is “profits.” The long answer goes something like this: There are two major barriers: (1) vested interests that are tied into the fossil-fuel financial complex, and (2) the higher rate of profitability in the economy to be obtained from the fossil-fuel economy. It is not just a question of energy return on energy investment. The fossil-fuel infrastructure already exists, giving fossil fuels a decisive advantage in terms of profitability and capital accumulation over alternative energy. Any alternative energy system requires that a whole new energy infrastructure be built up practically from scratch before it can really compete. There are also far greater subsidies for fossil fuels. And fossil fuels represent, in capitalist accounting, a kind of “free gift” of nature to capital, more so than even solar power. The financial structure, including the largest banks and Wall Street are very tightly connected to the fossil fuel economy. The below ground fossil fuel reserves represent trillions of dollars in assets that already have a real effect in today's economy in the sense that they appear on the financial books of corporations—even if burning all of these reserves, which would break the climate budget 5 or 6 times over, would send us to climate hell. But these trillions of dollars in assets associated with fossil fuel reserves would simply vanish if fossil fuel burning were to cease. There is no equivalent with respect to solar or wind in terms of assets. My colleague, Richard York, one of the world's leading environmental sociologists, has demonstrated empirically in an article *Nature Climate Change* that right now alternative energy is still treated as a supplement rather than a substitute for fossil fuels within the energy industry as presently constituted. The rapid growth of alternative energy should not therefore be seen as a radical break with the domination of fossil fuels. That still needs to occur.

LV: You have argued that the expansion of financial capital, patterns of economic stagnation, along with the decline of U.S. hegemony are underlying causes of greater impact on the environment. Can you elaborate on this?

JBF: From the standpoint of the so-called “masters of the universe”—today six men (a few

months ago it was eight) have as much wealth as half the world's population—who increasingly run the world economy, the chief problem at present is not climate change but the stagnation of the world economy. This stagnation is deepest in the advanced capitalist economies. The U.S. economy grew at a 1.6 percent rate last year and has experienced more than a decade of below 3 percent growth for the first time in recorded history. The growth rate of Europe over the last decade was about 1.7 percent. Compare that to the 1.3 percent growth rate in the United States in the depression decade from 1929-1939. Monopoly-finance capital, as we have been arguing in *Monthly Review* for decades, has a strong tendency toward overaccumulation and stagnation. What mainly lifted the economy in the 1980s and '90s was financialization (the growth of finance relative to production and financial bubbles). With financialization no longer able to stimulate the economy to the same extent in the period since the Great Financial Crisis stagnation has set in indefinitely. This was in fact the thesis of two books that I wrote with others—*The Great Financial Crisis* (with Fred Magdoff) in 2009 and *The Endless Crisis* (with Robert W. McChesney) in 2012.

Everything today is geared to getting the economy going again. It is true that stagnation in some ways helps the ecology, since economic growth places more pressure on the environment, increases carbon dioxide emissions, etc. But as York empirically demonstrated in another article in *Nature Climate Change* the system does not reduce climate emissions at the same rate when the economy goes down as it raises them when the economy goes up. Moreover, the focus of all the advanced capitalist economies on economic growth above all else has left the whole question of the planet to one side where it is marginalized. Hence, there is a new drive to remove environmental regulations in order to propel the economy forward. We are on a runaway train headed over the climate cliff as we stoke the engine with more coal to increase its speed.

LV: The Paris Climate Agreement was hailed as Obama's environmental legacy. How effective is it as a tool to prevent and reverse the advance of environmental catastrophe?

JBF: It is perfectly ineffectual. It requires voluntary agreements. At best, it represents simply the good intentions of world governments. The voluntary plans by individual countries would take us almost all the way to the 4° C which is thought to mark the end of civilization, in the assessment

of many scientists. The U.S. proposal was based on Obama's Clean Power Plan, which was too little too late and relied on market mechanisms which would not do the job. It is now being dismantled by Trump's climate-denial administration. With Washington abandoning the Paris Agreement either de facto or de jure, there is the danger it will all crumble. The one element most appealing in the Paris Agreement from a climate movement standpoint was the formal recognition of staying below a 1.5° C increase in global temperature as a goal. But almost everything else in the agreement belied that. And we have already seen a 1.2° C increase with more in the offing. Of course, now that Trump is setting aside Obama's Clean Power Plan we are learning what a difference there is between measures that are simply insufficient but do not cut off the possibility of still ramping up our actions to contain climate change, and policies that will actually take us backward and threaten to eliminate altogether what James Hansen has called "the last chance for humanity."

LV: How much can we affect climate change through choices in our consumption and daily life (i.e., composting, recycling, saving water)?

JBF: Unfortunately, we can't have very much effect in that way—apart from a massive national movement to conserve, which would require the mobilization of the entire population and would have to be part of an attempt to alter production as well. That is, a normal consumption-based strategy that is simply rooted in individual action is incapable of solving the problem or moving fast enough. To get an idea of the dimensions of the problem, if one were to eliminate all municipal waste coming out of all households in the United States that would only cut the total material waste (refuse) in the society by about 3 percent. The rest is in the hands of corporations.

This is not to say we should not be doing all the things you mention. Unless we change ourselves as individuals and our culture—the way we relate to the earth—we can't expect to make the overall changes in society that our necessary. So removing waste and taking responsibility for the damage we inflict on nature in our everyday lives is essential. When you use of a plastic fork made on the other side of the world and then eat your take-away salad and throw it along with the packaging in the garbage (after maybe a minute's use), so that an identical plastic fork has to be produced with petrochemicals and shipped across the world for your next takeaway meal, you are definitely feeding into a destructive and wasteful system—one that grows by means of destruction and

waste. But it has been long understood that “consumer sovereignty” is a myth. To make fundamental changes in the commodity economy it is necessary to have power over production.

One thing we could do if we were truly serious is to go after the more than \$1 trillion a year that is spent in the United States alone on marketing, i.e., targeting, motivation research, product development, packaging, sales promotion, advertising, direct marketing, etc., persuading the population to buy things that they don’t truly want or need. But to address marketing would also require a political response. Marx once said that workers (and this would perhaps go for consumers even more) are in their purely economic action in a capitalist society always the weaker side, and therefore they need to organize politically.

LV: David Harvey, Naomi Klein, yourself and many others share the idea that it’s either capitalism or the planet. Explain more.

JBF: Yes, there is increasing recognition on the left generally of the fact that humanity is now dirtying its own nest on a planetary level. Socialists have all too often failed to take ecological issues seriously enough. However, this is not a fault of socialists alone, as the fault applies even more to the liberal tradition taken as a whole. But whatever we choose to say about socialism in the twentieth century, it has to be emphasized that no one can be truly socialist and indeed Marxist in the twenty-first century and fail to acknowledge the full severity of the planetary ecological crisis. We are either at the forefront of the struggle to protect the earth as a place of human habitation (and as a home for innumerable species) or we are on the side of the system’s creative exterminism of the Earth system as we know it.

You are right though in singling out Naomi Klein in this respect since she has done more than anyone else in recent years outside of the scientific community to sound the alarm. She is, in my opinion, the leading intellectual-activist in the radical climate movement in the United States and Canada. As opposed to a figure like Bill McKibben, she doesn’t avoid the issue of where the dog is buried. The subtitle of her book *The Changes Everything* is explicit: it is question of *Capitalism vs. the Climate*. She is aligned with ecosocialism, which is the most important new development in socialist and ecological thought, and in the environmental movement. A good example is Ian Angus’s *Facing the Anthropocene: Fossil Capitalism and the Crisis of the Earth System*, which appeared last year.

As for my own contributions on this question, I have written a number of works on the subject, such as *The Vulnerable Planet, Ecology Against Capitalism*, and (with Brett Clark and Richard York) *The Ecological Rift: Capitalism’s War on the Planet*. The issue is clear. Capitalism is a system geared to unlimited capital accumulation and hence exponential economic growth. It therefore constantly increases in scale. With a 3 percent rate of growth, the economy would expand by sixteen times in a century, 250 times in two centuries, and 4000 times in three centuries. While the planet’s capacity with respect to what we call the tap (the resource end) and the sink (the waste end) would essentially remain the same. The reality of ecological limits and the pressure that the economy places on them cannot therefore be denied. Of course, the problem is much more serious than the above suggests. More important is the fact capitalism imposes its laws of motion on the environment, irrespective of the biogeochemical cycles of the planet and the earth’s metabolism, so that it creates rifts or ruptures in the biogeochemical cycles of the Earth system, disrupting ecosystem relations in ways that transcend the mere scale-effects of economic growth. It is this problem of the metabolic rift that is our deepest challenge. Sustainability is more and more compromised at ever higher levels—a continually accelerating threat to civilization and life itself.

Marx’s theory of metabolic rift, or the “irreparable rift in the interdependent process of social metabolism” was the first analysis to lay out a truly comprehensive social-science view of systemic ecological crisis, *encompassing both society and nature and their dialectical interrelations*, and connecting this to production. Indeed, so powerful were these insights that they are crucial to how we see the Earth system crisis today. This is evident in an article in the March 2017 issue of *Nature*, one of the world’s top scientific journals, which explicitly draws on Marx’s concept, citing Marx’s *Capital*.

When we talk today about the Anthropocene from a scientific perspective we are explicitly recognizing that the Great Acceleration in the human impact on the planet since 1945 has created an anthropogenic rift in the Earth system, forever dividing off the present ecologically from previous stages in history (both geological and human). This rift in the human relation to the plane is already catastrophic and could soon reach the point of no return (if we increase global average temperatures by 2° C), leading to bigger catastrophes and threatening humanity itself.

LV: If you had to guess, do you think humanity will be able to stop this polluting madness before it's too late? Or do you find it easier to foresee a dystopian future with scarce water, toxic fumes and roasting temperatures?

JBF: We are already facing growing catastrophes due to climate change. It is too late to avoid soaring temperatures, scarce water, and extreme weather. That ship has in many ways already sailed. The earth is going to be much less hospitable to human beings in the future. What we are trying to avoid at this point is something else: as James Hansen says, and as I quote in my article on “Trump and Climate Catastrophe”: “a dynamic situation that is out of [human] control” propelling us to a global temperature of 4° C or even higher, which would threaten the very existence of human civilization, and countless human beings. Even worse it would point to the possible extinction of our species. In this sense, dystopian views don’t quite get at the severity of the threat, which is greater than even the most dystopian novel could project—after all a dystopian novel has to have at least one human remaining at least temporarily. We have to imagine a and a great die down on earth (scientists are now saying we could lose half of all living species this century alone in the Sixth Extinction) and a world, if we project far enough into the future that is possibly stripped of human beings—perhaps even what Hansen calls the “Venus Syndrome.” But long before that we will see hundreds of millions, even billions, of people affected in disastrous ways. This is what science is telling us. All we have to do to destroy the planet as a place of human habitation is to continue as we are at present with capitalist business as usual.

It is still possible to avoid this—or the most catastrophic effects, like sea level rising not feet but yards, the death of the Amazon, the death of most ocean life, etc. But it would require revolutionary ecological change in the system of production, i.e. in the metabolism between human beings and the earth. We need to reduce carbon emissions, Hansen tells us, by about 5 percent a year across the entire planet, beginning in just a few years, which means that the rich countries have to reduce theirs by something like double digits. And on top of that we have to find a way to remove gargantuan amounts of carbon, maybe as much as 150 gigatons, from the atmosphere—the problem of negative emissions—if we still want to stabilize the climate at a 1.5° in global average temperature. (Just to avoid going over the 2° guardrail would require 3 percent annual reductions in carbon emissions annual.) It can all be done with the means we have available, including alternative energies, social-structural

change, and conservation, but it would require a vast movement of humanity and we would have to oppose the logic of not only the fossil fuel economy, but of capitalism itself. As Kevin Anderson of Tyndall Institute for Climate Change in the UK tells us, we would have to go against “the political-economic hegemony.”

In such situations optimism or pessimism are not the point. What we need is courage and determination in facing up to seemingly insurmountable odds. What we have to do is not so difficult on the face of it, if we just look at the direct ecological measures that we need to take. What makes it seem like an insurmountable problem is the monstrosity of global capitalist society.

LV: Today, with climate change deniers in the White House and at the head of the EPA, do you think it's enough to explain that need to fight capitalism to prevent climate change? What are the prospects for scaling up the struggle for the planet?

JBF: With Trump neofascism has entered the White House—its aim is a different way of managing the capitalist economy. It is both a break with neoliberalism and at the same time its successor on the right—a sign of the deep crisis of our times. Not only does the administration stand for climate denialism and has declared environmentalist enemies of the people, it is also threatening to undermine liberal democracy, and is attacking the racially oppressed, immigrants, women, LGBTQ people, environmentalists, and workers. The resistance movement to this thus needs to be a defense of humanity itself in all of its aspects. If we can combine in what Harvey calls a co-revolutionary movement geared to the needs of social reproduction and sustainable human development, with the fight to save the earth as a place of human habitation, then we can get somewhere. But this has to be a giant movement, it has to unite with workers all over the world, it has to oppose imperialism and war. All of these things are connected. The climate movement is central in the sense of triage, but we can only get somewhere if we fight on all fronts, or make it one big front. The model is perhaps the environmental justice movement worldwide, and what Naomi Klein calls “Blockadia” standing for the barricades of our time. I argue that it depends on the emergence of an environmental proletariat (most visible today in the global South) where it is recognized that our material struggles over the environment in which we live and breathe and work are really the same. We have to recognize who the enemy is. The eight

largest fossil fuel corporations in the world emit more carbon dioxide than does the United States, which accounts for 15 percent of the world total. We need to focus on capital and corporations.

LV: The fight against the Dakota pipeline received widespread support from all over the country, and even from indigenous peoples outside the US. Although the conflict is still open and the Trump administration is preparing to go on the offensive again, a great battle was won in December. What lessons can we learn from the struggle to defend Standing Rock?

JBF: The struggle at Standing Rock has left an indelible imprint on today's environmental struggle. It was a great victory, even though with Trump's election the conditions were set for the overriding of what had been won. Indigenous peoples once again demonstrated, as they have over and over in recent years, their leadership in the struggle to protect the environment. The water protectors stood fast while they were hosed in subfreezing weather, subjected to non-lethal bullets and tear gas, and dogs set on them. The whole world gasped. It was difficult not to recall the struggles of the civil rights era in the Jim Crow South. The

battle was primarily to protect the water which was threatened by drilling the pipeline under the Missouri River. But everyone understood—and not just environmentalists that joined them, but especially the Indigenous peoples themselves—that this was a battle for the whole earth.

For me, though, the high point was near the end when thousands of U.S. veterans arrived en masse, approaching Standing Rock in long winding lines of vehicles strung out over miles, to provide a “human shield” for the water protectors. They declared that they were standing with the Indigenous peoples—and even taking it upon themselves to apologize on bended knees for the history of U.S. treatment of Native Americans. It is no accident that the government gave in a couple of days after that. The conflict that would have ensued would have drawn untold numbers of people to the environmental resistance and, in that sense, would have been a full-scale disaster for the powers that be. So they chose to pull back at that point. But what really made this so important was that it represented an act of solidarity cutting across the lines that have historically divided us. It is the emergence of human solidarity in the hour of need in this way that tells us that we can win.

INTERVIEWED BY JUAN CRUZ FERRE

MARXISM AND MILITARY STRATEGY



Illustration: laizquierdadiario.com.

“He who thinks of renouncing ‘physical’ struggle must renounce all struggle, for the spirit does not live without flesh.”
(León Trotsky, Whither France?)

BY EMILIO ALBAMONTE AND MATIAS MAIELLO

In the early 1960s, the reactionary German jurist Carl Schmitt stated in his *Theory of the Partisan*: “Lenin was a great expert on and admirer of Clausewitz. He had studied *On War* intensively during World War I (1915). (...) In this way, he created one of the most remarkable documents of world history and intellectual history.”¹

A similar assertion with the opposite result was made by “post-Marxist” theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, they highlight the relationship between Marxism and Clausewitz in order to oppose revolutionary Marxism. “In the end, political struggle,” they say, “is still a zero-sum game among classes (...). It would be no exaggeration to say that, from Kautsky to Lenin, the Marxist conception of politics rested upon an imagery owing a great deal to Clausewitz.”²

Invoking Clausewitz, the declarations of Schmitt and of Laclau and Mouffe point to a central idea of revolutionary Marxism. Marx and Engels acquired a broad knowledge of military topics. Their studies and readings extended far beyond the author of *On War*, including a whole range of authors from Machiavelli to Montecuccoli, Jomini to Chahrmützel, Surorov to von Hofstetter and Barclay de Tolly, from Willisen to Küntzel and Napier.³ Engels, for his part, would be especially prolific in this field, in addition to having had the experience of the military confrontations of 1849 in Baden and the Palatinate.⁴

In the early 20th century, in the Second International, Jean Jaurès and Franz Mehring were the first to develop comprehensive works on military topics. But it would be Lenin and Trotsky who would use Clausewitz’s work to enrich the development of revolutionary strategy in action, in the class struggle. Both Lenin and Trotsky⁵ sought answers to the questions raised by the Russian Revolution of 1905 in the works of military theorists. The course of World War I would only increase this interest in the face of the renewed immediacy of a confrontation between revolution and counter-revolution.

Karl Kautsky, as indicated by Laclau and Mouffe, also took lessons from these theorists. But unlike Lenin and Trotsky, Kautsky viewed military strategy primarily as a source of metaphors for politics.

Lenin’s innovation, beginning with his 1915 notebooks, consists of a critical appropriation of Clausewitz that encompasses the relationship between war and politics for revolutionary strategy. The consequences of this innovation first led to the victory of the Russian Revolution, and then to the development of a tactical and strategic arsenal of revolutionary Marxism to confront the challenges of revolution in the much more complex sociopolitical structures of the West.

Leon Trotsky said retrospectively: “The conception of revolutionary strategy took root only in the post-war years, and in the beginning undoubtedly under the influence of military terminology. But it did not by any means take root accidentally. Prior to the war we spoke only of the tactics of the proletarian party; this conception conformed adequately enough to the then prevailing trade union, parliamentary methods (...)”⁶

A century after the Russian Revolution, the challenge of reclaiming this tactical and strategic legacy for 21st century revolutionary Marxism must confront a theoretical negation that explicitly provides the foundations for “anti-strategic” thought and a political negation that can be seen in the most recent experiences of class struggle.

War is Still a Means to a Political End

As Trotsky asserted in his polemic with Stalinism in the mid-1930s, “He who thinks of renouncing ‘physical’ struggle must renounce all struggle, for the spirit does not live without flesh. Following the splendid phrase of the great military theoretician, Clausewitz, war is the continuation of politics by other means. This definition also fully applies to civil war. Physical struggle is only ‘another means’ of the political struggle.”⁷ He added, “It is impermissible to oppose one to the other since it is impossible to check at will the political struggle when it transforms itself, by force of inner necessity, into a physical struggle. The duty of a revolutionary party is to foresee in time the inescapability of the transformation of politics into open armed conflict, and with all its forces to prepare for that moment just as the ruling classes are preparing.”⁸

Michel Foucault, an assiduous reader of Clausewitz, said it was necessary to reverse the Prussian general’s formula. According to Foucault: “One would then confront the original hypothesis, according to which power is essentially repression, with a second hypothesis to the effect that power is war, a war continued by other means.” At this point Foucault would reverse Clausewitz’s assertion and say that *politics is war continued by other means*.⁹

This Foucauldian reversal results in a lack of differentiation between physical and moral violence that erases the concepts of “war” and “peace.” “Civil peace” becomes a sequel of war and the exercise of power is equated to continuous war.

Furthermore, Foucault’s thesis of “biopower” is based on the colossal development of mechanisms of social control, which have only grown larger since the original formulation of the idea. However,

behind the omnipresence of uniform control, Foucault's proposition conceals social asymmetries and inequalities, and overlooks class conflict.

The most significant consequence of these formulations is that, as Perry Anderson has indicated: "Once hypostatized as a new First Principle (...) power loses any historical determination: there are no longer specific holders of power, nor any specific goals which its exercise serves."¹⁰

The continuation of this course has its most prolific contemporary expression in Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben. Agamben reclaims the concept of "global civil war," initially developed by Carl Schmitt and Hannah Arendt, to affirm that "global terrorism is the form that civil war acquires when life as such becomes the stakes of politics."¹¹

The Foucauldian reversal of Clausewitz's formula, the absolute domination of "biopower" and the "global civil war", merely conceal the objectives of domination as well as those who genuinely hold power, as well as the role of the capitalist state and class antagonisms in the framework of the current global capitalist crisis. Hence, they avoid distinguishing what is specific about a civil war or an armed conflict. By theorizing about an indeterminate war or "state of exception" and identifying it with politics, the relationship between politics and war loses any strategic meaning.

This is an essential problem for revolutionary strategy, since it is necessary, following Trotsky, to foresee the transformation of politics into armed conflict and prepare for that moment, just as the ruling classes do.

The Negation of Strategy

In his book *Eloge de la politique profane* [the book was never published in English], Daniel Bensaïd suggested that the defeats of the revolutionary processes that shook Europe in the late '60s (May 1968, the Prague Spring, etc.) and the early '70s (the Portuguese Revolution) caused "a movement of retreat from and desertion of the strategic field,"¹² led by Foucault and Deleuze.

Foucault declares that "where there is power, there is resistance."¹³ But this interpretation of resistance confirms the retreat from the question of the state, which is no longer seen as the special armed apparatus and guarantor of capitalist relations of domination, but becomes just one relationship of power among many others. Strategy, as Bensaïd indicated, is thus reduced to nothing, diluted in a sum of resistances, with no possible victory.

As Clausewitz asserted, absolute defense, or pure resistance, "completely contradicts the idea of war, because there would then be war carried on by

one side only."¹⁴ In Foucault's view, in the era of biopower, power becomes "that which represses." War continued as politics, according to his reversal of Clausewitz, is a unilateral "war."

Revolutionary Situations Don't Fall from the Skies

Three decades have gone by without revolutions. Yet, the development of the global capitalist crisis has changed the political framework. There have been situations of intense class struggle, which are essential for reflections on strategy today. Greece is one example but certainly not the only one. Egypt is another great laboratory, a more "Eastern" than "Western" one, according to the political categories of the Third International.

In Egypt's "Eastern" scenario, a pre-revolutionary situation has turned into a counter-revolutionary situation. In Greece's "Western" scenario, the mechanisms of bourgeois democracy have resisted the impact of the crisis and the class struggle so far, although at the cost of the collapse of the traditional parties, catapulting Syriza to power.

Nevertheless, situations of profound crisis that lead to class struggle are not synonymous with revolution, let alone with a revolutionary outcome. "A revolutionary situation," according to Trotsky, "is formed by the reciprocal action of objective and subjective factors. (...) [I]t does not fall from the skies, it takes form with class struggle."¹⁵ In this context, the position of the leaderships of mass movements is the primary subjective factor.

The Greek example shows us the current state of the relationship between objective and subjective factors to which Trotsky referred. When Pablo Iglesias, the leader of Podemos, was asked about the transformation of Syriza into a government party that applies the European Union's austerity policies, he stated that the Greek party had no other choice but to follow that course. Of course, in defending Syriza, he was thinking about Podemos' future in the Spanish State.

"The problem," Iglesias said, "is that it is yet to be seen if someone can pose such a challenge from within a state (...). If we, in government, take a hard stance, all of a sudden you have a large part of the armed forces, the police apparatus, all the media (...), you have everything against you, absolutely everything. And in a parliamentary system, in which you have to ensure an absolute majority, it's very difficult (...). For starters we would've had to reach an agreement with the Socialist Party."¹⁶

In effect, here we have the outlines of the two existing strategic courses. The first is the one championed by Iglesias: acting within the limits

imposed by the Troika with a generally left-wing rhetoric and “culture.” A similar stance can be found in the pamphlet called *Construir Pueblo*¹⁷ recently published by Íñigo Errejón and Chantal Mouffe, or in *Disputar la Democracia*¹⁸ published by Pablo Iglesias himself. In short, it is the course taken by Syriza, with lesser or greater margins for action.¹⁹

The second strategy is confronting the institutions of the EU and attacking the interests of capital, which implies preparing for a confrontation with “a large part of the armed forces, the police apparatus, the media,” etc., as well as achieving new democratic forms for the majority to express itself, forms which are superior to parliamentarism.

In the first case, there is no strategy in the Clausewitzian sense, understood as the use of partial tactical struggle for the purpose of imposing one’s will on the enemy, or, as Trotsky said, the art of the seizure of power. On the contrary, it simply implies managing, as benevolently as possible, the implementation of the other’s interests, that is to say, those of capitalism. As shown by the case of Greece, the permitted margins for such benevolence are particularly slim in the context of the world crisis.

The question of strategy does not begin on the day of the “storming of the Winter Palace.” Nor does it consist of waiting for “capitalism’s terminal crisis.” There is no room for magical thinking when it comes to the balance of forces. Strategic work, coordinating the volumes of forces available for combat, is therefore indispensable.

In the Greek case, there are two key elements in which the official leaderships of the mass movement played an essential, negative role: the united front, that is to say, the possibility of presenting a common front of workers in action against capitalist attacks, and the self-defense necessary for the development of struggle.

The defensive united front, without which an offensive united front and soviets are inconceivable, was notably absent throughout the entire first phase of class struggle in Greece from 2010 to 2012, with dozens of general strikes, protests, and clashes with the police.

The union leaderships were the main opponents to the development of a defensive united front against the attacks by successive governments who were agents of the Troika. A majority sector of the bureaucracy did this through their policy of subordination to PASOK and other bourgeois parties. Syriza, which had no significant influence in the workers’ movement, let alone an oppositional position within the unions, represented no alternative to these leaderships. At the other extreme, there was a combination of sectarianism and opportunism in the workers’ federation led by the Greek Communist Party (PAME), which explicitly refused to promote

unity in action. Each one in their own way was opposed to the establishment of the united front required to defeat the austerity plans, despite more than 30 general strikes.

Something similar can be said of the problems of self-defense. As Iglesias noted, the alternative to accepting the limits imposed by the European Union implies, among other things, preparing to confront the repressive forces of the bourgeois state. Like most strategic questions, this cannot be resolved on the day that power is seized.

As Trotsky explained, workers must understand that the stronger their struggle is, the stronger the counter-attack by capital will be. According to the scale of the struggle and the level of confrontation, the creation of workers’ organs of self-defense becomes necessary, from the establishment of picket lines in a particular strike to the formation of workers’ militias when the confrontations become greater.

In the Greek case, the defense against the attacks by neo-Nazi groups like Golden Dawn raised the question of self-defense in its initial form. The same can be said of the picket lines during the general strikes, especially if these had prepared a clear plan for combat and not only isolated actions, which would have led to even fiercer repression.

Syriza’s “solution” to this problem upon assuming government, taking Iglesias’s stance to its logical conclusion, was giving control of the army and the police to a nationalist and xenophobic right-wing party, ANEL, through a parliamentary coalition, and handing over the Ministry of Defense to them.

Overall, both the united front and self-defense were essential for influencing the balance of forces and, therefore, developing a revolutionary situation. Thus Trotsky’s assertion that a revolutionary situation does not arise *ex nihilo* but is constructed through class struggle.

The working class and the mass movement in Greece showed a great fighting spirit and willingness to struggle, especially from 2010 to 2012. In spite of that, it clearly did not establish a united front or develop organizations of self-defense against the will of its leadership, showing that the radicalization that took place was certainly embryonic.

But posing the question exclusively in these terms, ignoring the actions of the actually existing leaderships, the political and union bureaucracies of the mass movement, is the pure negation of strategy. It is as ridiculous as intending to analyze the outcome of a war without evaluating the strategy and tactics of the general staffs.

As seen in the debates of the Third International, the tactic of the Workers’ United Front is based on the central role – observed again and again throughout history – of the political and union bureaucracies, including reformist organizations, as

guarantors of the division of the workers' movement in its confrontation with capital.²⁰

Therefore, the establishment of a united front, and particularly its development, is the work of strategy. In other words, the establishment of a united front depends on the existence of a revolutionary organization that is willing to fight for it. It is important to clarify, once again, that it is not about making an abstract proclamation but about the coordination of certain volumes of material force that are sufficient to impose it, and also to use it strategically by developing a struggle between the tendencies within the united front, to attract mass sectors towards a revolutionary strategy and program based on shared experiences.

In the Greek case, however, only the traditional leaderships of the bureaucracy linked to PASOK or the Communist Party, and politically subordinate to Syriza, had sufficient power to determine the situation, which they used to boycott the development of the united front. There was no organized revolutionary force with enough influence on the workers' movement to carry out a serious fight.

The Poverty of Politics without Strategy

Much has been written about Syriza and the possibility of establishing a "left-wing government" after decades of rule by what Tariq Ali called the "extreme centre,"²¹ which includes both social democrats and conservatives.

Shortly after coming to power in January 2015, a former member of the Central Committee of Syriza from the former Left Platform, Stathis Kouvelakis, maintained that we were witnessing the application of the "strategy of Gramsci's 'war of position,'" which, according to him, could be described as "Nicos Poulantzas and the Eurocommunist tradition reformulated as the 'democratic road to socialism.'"²² However, as early as July of the same year, he was observing a "completely disastrous outcome [of] a political experiment that gave hope to millions of people struggling in Europe and in other parts of the world."²³

On July 6, 2015, the great majority of Greek people voted, in effect, against the Troika in a referendum organized by Syriza. In the context of an international campaign to spread fear by bourgeois forces, their governments and their media, 61% of the people who participated in the referendum still voted "No". 70% of voters in the main working class districts of Athens voted against the deal, and 80% of youth also voted no, reflecting the sentiment resulting from the masses' experiences with the Troika and its local agents.

Syriza's actions after this pronouncement displayed the bankruptcy of neo-reformism. Against the vote of the broad majority of the population, Syriza signed the agreement with the Troika. Refusing to attack capitalist property, Syriza became, in just a few months, the "left-wing" administrator of the austerity plans and of unprecedented privatizations; this occurred in the context of a social catastrophe that included an unemployment rate of approximately 24% (46% among youth)²⁴ and a quarter of the population living in poverty.

Kouvelakis, as a representative of the left wing of Syriza, is the expression of a protracted illusion that an intermediate path is possible between the strategy of a resolute break with capitalism and the "left-wing" administration of the existing order, just as we saw with Iglesias. This is the same illusion reflected by the "Anticapitalistas" group within Podemos.

Kouvelakis explained the development of the situation in Greece and the rise of Syriza in the following terms: "Thirty-two days of general strikes, hundreds of thousands of people taking to the streets, haven't succeeded in the withdrawal or defeat of a single measure of those memoranda." He added, "A political perspective was absolutely necessary, and it is the awareness of that necessity that prepared the ground for (...) the moment of the political initiative, when Syriza (...) captured the imagination of the people by providing a political translation that so far had been missing."²⁵

It is telling that he presents the ascent of Syriza to government as the political expression of the impotence of the class struggle, which had not defeated a single austerity measure, and that he does so without any reflection. In Kouvelakis' opinion, the fundamental error that led to Syriza's failure was "thinking that we could obtain something by negotiating with the European institutions without a Plan B. The consequences of the lack of such a plan are now being felt in a very harsh and devastating way."²⁶

This "Plan B" consisted of nothing more than a withdrawal from the eurozone and a few neo-Keynesian measures based on a currency devaluation, which sought to create an economic "rebound" like the one that took place in Argentina under Kirchnerism. But the example of Greece shows that the tailwinds that sustained the "post-neoliberal" governments in Latin America for a decade – after significant mass uprisings – are a thing of the past in the context of the global crisis.

According to the leader of the former Left Platform, it is not necessary to question why nothing was accomplished after more than 30 general strikes. Although he speaks of a "war of position," a term coined by Antonio Gramsci, he fails to ask whether

the workers could have presented a defensive united front in the struggle against the Troika, let alone organizations of self-defense, a failure that is in line with his explicit defence of the agreement with ANEL. None of this is important to him. The problem, for him, was only the lack of a plan for a withdrawal from the eurozone in order for Greece to negotiate with the Troika from a stronger position.

Of course, Kouvelakis does not express an original perspective but that of a long-standing school of thought. “The task of this school of strategy,” as Trotsky used to say about other leaders, “consists of an attempt to obtain through maneuvers what can be won only through revolutionary workers’ struggle.”²⁷

The fact is that the electoral rise of Syriza from 2012 to 2015 was the reflection of the increasing impotence of the mass movement, which was divided and worn down by the union and political bureaucracies in dozens and dozens of actions. These actions had less and less of an effect on the relationship of forces; in the end, they did not have any effect at all. This is the exact relationship we must examine if we want to address the problem from the point of view of strategy.

With regard to the dynamics at play, it is similar to the one analyzed by Trotsky in relation to France in 1922. “Reformist-Dissidents,²⁸” he said, “are the agents of the ‘Left Bloc’ within the working class. Their successes will be the greater, the less the working class as a whole is seized by the idea and practice of the united front against the bourgeoisie. Layers of workers, disoriented by the war and by the tardiness of the revolution, may venture to support the ‘Left Bloc’ as a lesser evil, in the belief that they do not thereby risk anything at all, or because they see no other road at present.”²⁹ That is to say, in situations that are not yet determined by the confrontation between revolution and counter-revolution, the weaker the development of the united front against the bourgeoisie in the class struggle, the stronger the reformist political alternatives of class collaboration become.

From this perspective, the dynamic described by Kouvelakis is the reverse of that which could lead to the formation of an anti-capitalist and anti-bourgeois workers’ government, since the latter depends on the broader development of a defensive united front as a basis for the transition to an offensive united front, including soviets or councils as the organized expression of the United Front.

This strategic link between position and maneuver was the basis of the Third International’s formulation of the “workers’ government” tactic, the main goal of which was to disarm the bourgeoisie and arm the proletariat.

The conclusive outcome of the referendum against austerity and the Troika was a great opportunity to

reverse that dynamic. The “workers’ government” tactic could have played an essential role in doing this.

A workers’ government in Greece in 2015 could have taken advantage of the popular will expressed in the referendum to impose essential measures of self-defense in the face of what can be called *the transition to direct action* by the large banks and the Troika: the massive capital flight. As Kouvelakis himself pointed out, this quickly altered the relationship of forces.³⁰ And on this basis, it could have implemented the non-payment of the foreign debt. Something similar could be said of the 30% of companies that closed down: These could have been expropriated under workers’ control, among other measures.

Of course, these kinds of measures towards a break with capitalism imply the necessity of preparation for combat. This would have included an international call for a broad mobilization in favor of the cancellation of the Greek debt. Not only did Syriza refuse to make this call, but Podemos preemptively declared itself against such a mobilization. The repudiation of the Troika would have generated enormous support in Europe. The anti-Troika sentiment ultimately took on a right-wing form with support for Brexit as an example. In addition, the 61% of people who voted against the austerity memorandum could have provided the basis for the creation of bodies of self-organization, as well as self-defense, to defeat the resistance of the capitalists and their repressive forces.

Now there is no doubt that the primary condition for a dynamic of this kind is the establishment of a material force that is capable of influencing events and building a revolutionary alternative to neo-reformism, which is embodied by Syriza. However, due to the lack of this objective, the Left Platform – which once constituted 30% of the organization – had been reduced to its minimum expression by mid-2015. Those who expressed the need for a revolutionary alternative, like Antarsya, the Anticapitalist Left Coalition (the main coalition to the left of Syriza), and the KKE (Communist Party), lacked significant material strength and influence to build it.

The Greek experience is an example of the need for strategic planning so that, in decisive moments, the outcome is not defined beforehand by the impotence and/or nonexistence of a revolutionary alternative.

Strategy and the Art of “Creating Power”

The more intense the processes of class struggle becomes, the more “the relationship of forces,” according to Trotsky, “keeps incessantly and rapidly changing under the impact of the changes in the

consciousness of the proletariat, the attraction of backward layers to the advanced, the growing assurance of the class in its own strength.” He also added that, “The vital mainspring in this process is the party, just as the vital mainspring in the mechanism of the party is its leadership.”³¹

From this point of view, the Greek experience also showed the resounding failure of the “left wings” of neo-reformism, which in the case of Syriza represented up to 30% of the organization. According to Kouvelakis, the Coalition of the Radical Left (i.e. Syriza) showed a new party model to be implemented: “a pluralistic organization that includes various traditions of the radical left, communists, Trotskyists, Maoists, movementists and some left-wing social democrats. It must be seen as a project for the reconstitution of the radical left.”³² But in fact, not only did it fail to reconstitute the “radical left,” it also expressed its categorical retreat.

After the victory of “No” in the referendum, 15 representatives of the Left Platform voted in favor of the agreement with the Troika, based on the argument that the alternative was that Tsipras’s government would lose its majority. Members of the Left Platform who held government positions and voted against it were removed from the administration. In spite of this and the government repression of protests against the agreement, the Left Platform remained in Syriza, only to split from the party before the September 2015 elections. The new political organization led by 25 legislators, Popular Unity, obtained less than 3% of the votes in those elections, which was insufficient to secure a seat in the Greek parliament. This was a clear demonstration of its impotence.

What happened to the sectors that organized independently of Syriza, such as Antarsya? In a polemic with Stathis Kouvelakis, the leader of the British Socialist Workers Party, Alex Callinicos, stated: “Stathis, when we last debated, we talked about Antarsya, the front of the anti-capitalist left, in which our comrades in the Greek Socialist Workers’ Party participate. He talked about Antarsya having been strategically defeated [in reference to its lack of influence among mass sectors]. But to be honest, what can we say about Syriza today? Hasn’t Syriza been strategically defeated? What about the Left Platform? I don’t think the performance of the Left Platform (...) is anything to be proud of.”³³

Clearly, Callinicos is correct regarding the Left Platform. However, he disregards Kouvelakis’ observations of the weakness shown by Antarsya in the Greek process.³⁴ “The people who think that ‘the reformists will fail’ and that somehow in the wings stands the revolutionary vanguard who is waiting to take over somehow and lead the masses to a victory are, I think, completely outside of reality.” And in

this respect, it must be said that the representative of Syriza’s left wing is correct.

This essay and the work we have been developing on Marxism and military strategy are connected to the fight for the construction of revolutionary parties at a national and international level as part of the Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas (Socialist Workers’ Party, PTS) in Argentina and the Fracción Trotskista – Cuarta Internacional (Trotskyist Fraction, Fourth International, FT-CI). We have attempted to draw lessons from history and our own experience – our victories, defeats and frustrations. This is part of an effort to learn how to coordinate those “volumes of forces for combat” so that, paraphrasing Clausewitz, when the bourgeoisie picks up its sword, we do not end up welcoming it with a ceremony.

This is what we are trying to do with the experience of the PTS as part of the Left and Workers’ Front (FIT) in Argentina – a front based on class independence that promotes the struggle for a workers’ government and a break with capitalism. With this purpose, we aim to establish a hegemonic material force based on the main struggles and organizational processes of the working class – as well as on the students’ and women’s movements – and to develop revolutionary fractions within it through a combination of different methods and forms of struggle (parliamentary and extra-parliamentary action, clandestine and open work, the struggle against the bureaucracy, the United Front, etc.).

This leads us to a final, more general conclusion. The subjective conditions for a revolutionary victory are not created by a bolt from out the blue in decisive moments, but out of daily struggles. In this sense, it is useful to remember Lawrence Freedman’s formulation, “Strategy is the central political art. It is about getting more out of a situation than the starting balance of power would suggest. It is the art of creating power.”³⁵

Marxism, unlike theories such as those of Foucault, does not invert Clausewitz’s formula according to which war is the continuation of politics by other means. However, unlike Clausewitz, Marxism maintains that politics is inextricably linked to the concept of class struggle within state borders and at the same time is international in nature.

Every serious struggle, whether it be a strike or a partial conflict of the class struggle, and each significant confrontation with political or union bureaucracies, is a moment to measure the relationship of material forces. From the outcomes of these struggles, including physical confrontations, from the difference between the initial and subsequent relationship of forces, a revolutionary party capable of facing the combat of the future develops.

In these confrontations, contrary to the logic of the “deconstruction of hegemony” posited by Laclau and Mouffe, the importance of engaging in strategic thought is directly related to the possibility of accurately measuring the material forces in which bourgeois hegemony is embodied within the working class and its potential allies, and drawing conclusions from it.

This has become increasingly apparent in the second half of the 20th century, which saw the unprecedented development of political and union and other bureaucracies within the working class as well as in social, women’s, and student movements. As a result, although the working class today is larger on a global scale than at any other time in history, it has never been so divided.

The constant struggle against these bureaucracies as guarantors of capitalist rule is a precondition for the establishment of the working class as an independent class, and certainly as a precondition for the fight for its hegemony. In the face of these material forces, we must also create the material power required to wage decisive battles.

Victory is a Strategic Task

The global crisis will continue to create profound processes of class struggle. The question is whether these opportunities will clear the way for revolution and socialism in the 21st century, or for the triumph of the right and, ultimately, of fascism.

As Trotsky stated in what is perhaps one of his most important works, “Victory is not at all the ripe fruit of the proletariat’s ‘maturity.’ Victory is a strategic task.”⁵⁶ He added: “Had the Bolshevik party failed to carry out this work, there couldn’t even be talk of the victory of the proletarian revolution. The Soviets would have been crushed by the counter-revolution and the little sages of all countries would have written articles and books on the keynote that only uprooted visionaries could dream in Russia of the dictatorship of the proletariat, so small numerically and so immature.”⁵⁷ This is perhaps one of the main lessons that the experience of the 20th century, one hundred years after the Russian Revolution, has left for us to apply in the new century that has begun.

TRANSLATED BY MARISELA TREVIN

Notes

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- 24 Data for November 2016 according to the Greek National Statistics Service.
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- 28 This refers to the minority of the French Socialist Party. At the Tours Congress in 1920, this sector opposed the majority, which was in favor of the Communist International and founded the Communist Party of France. The “Dissidents” broke up and later re-founded the Socialist Party.
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WHY SOCIALISTS HAVE ALWAYS FOUGHT FOR OPEN BORDERS

*A debate with Socialist
Alternative and the CWI*



BY WLADEK FLAKIN

Trump, Brexit, Le Pen – the question of migration is a motor of new right-wing phenomena across all the imperialist countries. Sectors of the working class, who have seen their standard of living under attack for decades, are looking to xenophobic answers – as if immigrants were responsible for stagnating wages. This rightward shift is only possible as a result of the decline in workers' organizations and international solidarity.

The capitalists and their states use migration to divide workers and increase the rate of exploitation. But workers have no interest in limiting the movement of their class sisters from other countries. As the history of capitalism has shown, restrictions on migration don't really stop anyone from moving – xenophobic laws simply deny immigrants their rights, and therefore lower wages even further.

Socialist traditions

The socialist movement has been debating this question for more than a century. Over 100 years ago, an international congress categorically rejected all border controls. A resolution passed by the majority of the delegates at the International Socialist Congress in Stuttgart from August 18-24, 1907 declared categorically:

“The congress does not seek a remedy to the potentially impending consequences for the workers from immigration and emigration in any economic or political exclusionary rules, because these are fruitless and reactionary by nature. This is particularly true of a restriction on the movement and the exclusion of foreign nationalities or races.”¹

The resolution included the demand:

“Abolition of all restrictions which prevent certain nationalities or races from staying in a country or which exclude them from the social, political and economic rights of the natives or impede them in exercising those rights. Extensive measures to facilitate naturalisation.”

A right-wing minority at the congress wanted to only place limits on deportations, proposing the amendment: “Regulation of the expulsion of foreigners, which must not be ordered for political reasons, and not by administrative means either, but only by court order.” But this was rejected in favor of opposition to all border controls.

The German socialist Karl Liebknecht – later world-renown for his brave opposition to the imperialist war – spoke a month later at the congress of the Social Democratic Party of Germany in reference to this debate (our translation):

“Down with the Damocles sword of deportation! This is the first condition for foreigners to stop being predestined to squeeze wages and break strikes. The discussions with the question of migration is a glorious chapter of the International Congress. The problem, however, has not yet been decided. The Stuttgart Resolution is just a first step in this area.”²

Liebknecht spoke for the then left-wing majority in the Socialist International. V.I. Lenin, writing in 1913, similarly argued that “only reactionaries can shut their eyes to the progressive significance of this modern migration of nations”. The Russian revolutionary observed how migration was “breaking down the musty, fusty habits of local life, breaking down national barriers and prejudices, uniting workers from all countries in huge factories and mines in America, Germany, and so forth”.³

Stringent opposition to all restrictions on workers' freedom of movement – this is the Marxist tradition. When the capitalists and their states use immigrant workers as wage squeezers and strikebreakers, our answer is to fight for equal rights and common organizations for all, with or without papers.

The CWI's adaptation to chauvinism

The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) is the international tendency to which Socialist Alternative (SAlt) in the USA is affiliated. The CWI has dropped the traditional socialist demand for freedom of movement. Instead, they argue for a “socialist” form of border controls.

As Clive Heemskerck, leader of the Socialist Party (CWI in England) has argued:

“The socialist and trade union movement from its earliest days has never supported the ‘free movement of goods, services and capital’ – or labour – as a point of principle but instead has always striven for the greatest possible degree of workers’ control, the highest form of which, of course, would be a democratic socialist society with a planned economy. It is why, for example, the unions have historically fought for the closed shop, whereby only union members can be employed in a particular workplace, a very concrete form of ‘border control’ not supported by the capitalists.”⁴

What can we say? There are at least as many mistakes in this passage as there are sentences. First of all, it is factually incorrect. As we’ve shown above, the majority of the Socialist International did in fact argue against all border controls. Heemskerck is presenting the position of the right-wing minority of the socialist movement – the same reformists who were in favor of colonialism and just a few years later lined up behind the imperialist war. Obviously the CWI does not identify with this social-chauvinist tradition – except, unfortunately, on the question of borders.

Secondly, the demand for a closed shop has a contradictory history in the workers’ movement. It can be used to cement the power of workers’ organizations – but just as easily, it can be used by chauvinist bureaucrats to exclude black workers, women or other oppressed groups from employment. Turning Britain into a “closed shop” – closed to workers without British passports – was one of the driving forces behind Brexit. And the Socialist Party tried to form the left wing of this reactionary campaign, instead of fighting for an independent class position.

Thirdly, Marxists argue for workers’ control of production – the proletariat must seize the means of production to open the road to a classless society. However, Marx argued that workers cannot simply take over the existing state apparatus, i.e. the police, the army, the border regime, etc. Workers’ revolution must smash the state and replace it with organs of self-organization (councils, militias etc.). This is why Marxists reject all demands for “workers’ control” of the capitalist state as illusory. However, the CWI, in contrast to Marx and Lenin, thinks that the working class should fight for democratic control over the capitalist state apparatus.

Differences within the CWI

This explicit rejection of “open borders” is the position of the CWI in Britain, which is the largest and leading section of the international tendency. Interestingly, this does not appear to be the

position of the entire CWI. In September 2015, the national office of the CWI’s German section (SAV) published a position paper on the refugee crisis for discussion in their organization. They tried to develop this demand as well (our translation):

“Decisions by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees regarding asylum applications should be subjected to democratic control, right of veto and final determination by local, democratically elected committees of trade unions, neighborhood and migrant organizations.”

This demand stood in sharp contrast to the rest of the document, which also called for “tearing down the border fences” and “no to fortress Europe.” But without border fences, there would be nothing for the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees to decide about. And that is not the only logical difficulty.

How would this “democratic control” work in practice? A “workers’ asylum committee” would decide if a refugee could stay? And in the case of a negative decision, this person will be handed over to the border police? Or would a workers’ deportation squad need to be democratically elected?

How would this asylum committees be constituted? Should Turkish nationalist workers be allowed to sit on a committee deciding the fate of Kurdish refugees? Should it only include citizens, i.e. should it exclude refugees from basic democratic rights granted to the rest of the population? Or should immigrants have the same right to participate? But then on what basis should their right to stay be questioned?

Millions of people gave practical support to the refugees arriving in Germany in 2015, organizing demonstrations, donating food and clothes and offering German classes. Should we call on them to instead process asylum applications? What a bureaucratic nightmare!

The Bolsheviks had a much simpler answer to this question, as described in the constitution of the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic:

“In consequence of the solidarity of the workers of all nations, the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic grants all political rights of Russian citizens to foreigners who live in the territory of the Russian Republic and are engaged in work and who belong to the working class. The Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic also recognizes the right of local soviets to grant citizenship to such foreigners without complicated formality.”⁵

After the SAV leadership published this document, a number of members objected to this demand publicly on social media. We published a debate on the question on Klasse Gegen Klasse.⁶ After a discussion in their broader leadership, the point was – correctly – dropped and any mention of it was removed from the web site. Good.

However, if CWI members reject such a demand for Germany, why do they raise it for the UK? Should an international tendency have (apparently) opposing positions on this central question?

Is the demand scary?

The reason that the CWI rejects the traditional socialist demand is their adaptation to the consciousness of the majority of workers, and especially to the “labor aristocracy” and the trade union bureaucrats. This consciousness – especially in times of Trump, Brexit and Le Pen – is infected with chauvinism of all kinds.

Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky argued again and again that Marxists must swim against the stream, with a program that reflects the objective needs of the workers’ movement, not the momentary prejudices of sections of the class. Yet the Socialist Party takes the opposite route, as they decided at their 2013 congress:

“Given the outlook of the majority of the working class, we cannot put forward a bald slogan of ‘open borders’ or ‘no immigration controls’, which would be a barrier to convincing workers of a socialist programme, both on immigration and other issues. Such a demand would alienate the vast majority of the working class, including many more long-standing immigrants, who would see it as a threat to jobs, wages and living conditions.”⁷

But what could a “socialist program on immigration” look like if it restricts the movement of workers simply for not possessing the right documents from a capitalist state? Yes, some workers feel threatened by migration, due to the endless scapegoating by the bourgeois media.

A revolutionary transitional program against this bourgeois propaganda is easy to understand: We need a united struggle of all workers – with or without papers – for equal rights. We need unions that organize all workers. We need decent jobs and housing for all, regardless of origin. And we need to force the capitalists to pay for this program. Yes, the demand for open borders might alienate some workers with chauvinist prejudices

– just as the demand for “socialist” border fences will alienate immigrant workers.

Trotsky argued that the Marxist program was not a reflection of the “outlook of the majority of the working class,” but rather the lessons of the last 200 years of workers’ struggles:

“We have repeated many times that the scientific character of our activity consists in the fact that we adapt our program not to political conjunctures or the thought or mood of the masses as this mood is today, but we adapt our program to the objective situation as it is represented by the economic class structure of society. The mentality can be backward; then the political task of the party is to bring the mentality into harmony with the objective facts, to make the workers understand the objective task. But we cannot adapt the program to the backward mentality of the workers, the mentality, the mood is a secondary factor – the prime factor is the objective situation. (...) This program is a scientific program. It is based on an objective analysis of the objective situation. It cannot be understood by the workers as a whole.”⁸

Adapting to chauvinist prejudices of sectors of the proletariat is no “transitional demand” – it is simply a capitulation. Trotsky expressed this uncompromising view in a 1933 letter to South African revolutionaries:

“The worst crime on the part of the revolutionaries would be to give the smallest concessions to the privileges and prejudices of the whites. Whoever gives his little finger to the devil of chauvinism is lost.”⁹

A revolutionary method

Outside of a revolutionary situation, genuinely socialist demands will never be supported by the majority of the proletariat. In times of a rightward shift, demands like expropriating capital, smashing the capitalist state and forming a world socialist republic can also be alienating for broad swaths of workers. But as socialists, we are organizing revolutionary fractions within the workers’ movement who can fight for the rights of all oppressed people and oppose every division in our ranks – these uncompromising revolutionary factions are necessary to win the majority of workers in the decisive historical moment.

Should workers who live here decide on the basic democratic rights of workers from other countries?

That would only mean accepting the divisions the bourgeoisie has imposed on our class, and even cementing them.

V.I. Lenin, writing during the First World War, was totally unsympathetic to socialists who did not support the traditional socialist demand for complete freedom of movement:

“In our struggle for true internationalism & against ‘jingo-socialism’ we always quote in our press the example of the opportunist leaders of the S.P. in America, who are in favor of restrictions of the immigration of Chinese and Japanese workers (especially after the Congress of Stuttgart, 1907, & against the decisions of Stuttgart). We think that one can not be internationalist & be at the same time in favor of such restrictions. And we assert that Socialists in America, especially English Socialists, belonging to the ruling, and oppressing nation, who are not against any restrictions of immigration (...), that such Socialists are in reality jingoes.”¹⁰

Since it appears that the CWI is divided on this question, with at least some groups opposing the British section’s adaptations to chauvinism, we hope that CWI comrades will fight to correct this position at an international level. It is time to take up the uncompromising position of Liebknecht and Lenin: “Down with the Damocles sword of deportation!” Freedom of movement for all workers!

Notes

1 Resolution of the Stuttgart Congress of the Second International. Translation by Ben Lewis. <http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1004/border-controls-reactionary-by-nature/>.

2 Karl Liebknecht: Fort mit dem Damoklesschwert der Ausweisung! <https://sites.google.com/site/sozialistischeklassiker2punkt0/liebknecht/1907/karl-liebknecht-fort-mit-dem-damoklesschwert-der-ausweisung/>. (Our translation.)

3 V.I. Lenin: Capitalism and Workers’ Immigration. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1913/oct/29.htm>.

4 Clive Heemskerck: Corbyn’s Brexit opportunity. In: Socialist Today 201. http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/keyword/Labour_Party/article/23490/05-09-2016/corbyns-brexit-opportunity/.

5 1918 Constitution of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic. <https://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/government/constitution/1918/article2.htm>.

6 Wlodek Flakın: Debatte: Offene Grenzen oder „demokratische“ Abschiebungen? <https://www.klassegegenklasse.org/debatte-offene-grenzen-oder-demokratische-abschiebungen/>.

7 British Perspectives 2013: a Socialist Party congress document. http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/partydoc/British_Perspectives_2013:_a_Socialist_Party_congress_document/7/.

8 Discussions with Trotsky on the Transitional Program. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/tp/tpdiscuss.htm>.

9 Leon Trotsky: Letter to South African Revolutionaries. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1933/04/safrica.html>.

10 V.I. Lenin: Letter to the Secretary of the Socialist Propaganda League. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/nov/09.htm>. “Jingoism” was a popular term at the time for extreme national chauvinism.

CLASS, PARTY AND LEADERSHIP

Lessons from the Spanish Revolution



Eighty years after the Spanish Civil War, we review one of its main lessons: the preparatory task of building revolutionary parties and leaderships in non-revolutionary periods.

BY SANTIAGO LUPE

The Civil War that broke out in Spain in 1936 was one of the great revolutionary events of the twentieth century, leaving behind valuable lessons on revolutionary strategy and party-building.

The last (unfinished) text written by Trotsky before his assassination by a Catalan Stalinist agent in Coyoacan in August 1940 was entitled “Class, Party and Leadership.” It focused on lessons from the Spanish proletariat’s first defeat at the hands of Stalinism and the Second Spanish Republic, and its subsequent defeat by Franco’s fascism. The main lesson is that all revolutionaries must embark upon the preparatory task of building a revolutionary party, and its leadership, *from day one*.

In Spain in the 1930s, the social force and organizations of the proletariat were much stronger than in Russia of 1917, and yet the Spanish Revolution failed. Knowing the reason for this defeat was and still is crucial for all of us who want to put an end to capitalism in the twenty-first century.

The Spanish Revolution started with the fall of the monarchy on April 14, 1931. According to Trotsky, the Spanish Revolution would require much more time than the Russian Revolution due to the different conditions in each country. The decomposition of the Russian Tsarist state was at a much more advanced stage than that of Spain, and the Russian proletariat and peasantry were already organized and armed in the military due to the First World War. Aside from these factors, the major difference between the two cases was the absence in Spain of a revolutionary party like the Bolsheviks.

This latter element would make the task of channeling the enormous energy of the masses towards seizing power far more torturous. The masses were in for a tough experience with their socialist and anarchist leaderships, despite the revolutionaries having had the time and opportunity to build a truly revolutionary party.

During the constituent period of the Second Spanish Republic, and then the republican-socialist coalition government of the so-called Progressive Biennium (1931-1933), the masses embarked upon a long and bitter experience with their traditional leaderships, especially the socialists. The socialists, who were in a coalition with the progressive bourgeois republicans, left major problems unresolved: unemployment, poverty, democratic demands such as the agrarian question or national question. At the same time, the government kept the bases of power for the most reactionary sectors of society intact while harshly suppressing peasant insurrections and the most militant sectors of the labor movement organized by the CNT, an anarcho-sindicalist trade union.

The victory of the right-wing candidates in the November 1933 elections initiated the reactionary period known as the Black Biennium. During these two long years, some of the most heroic acts of the working class took place, such as the general strike of Zaragoza in 1934 that lasted more than 30 days. In support of this strike, the workers of Catalonia and other regions received the strikers’ children to take care of them. But the most important development took place in Asturias in October 1934, where a united front among workers’ organizations – something that did not take place in the rest of Spain – served as a dress rehearsal of the revolution that would unfold after the coup d’état of 1936: the Commune of Asturias. Asturian workers, with miners leading the way, took control of the region for two weeks, collectivized the countryside, created a vast proletarian army, and established organizations of workers’ power in all municipalities.

The defeat of the Commune was followed by a period of severe repression. Finally, in February 1936, new elections were held and the candidates of the Popular Front won the day. This coalition between reformist workers’ parties and bourgeois republicans, sponsored and promoted by the Stalinists, constituted a massive diversion from revolutionary tendencies. The CNT did not join in, but it refused to run a pro abstention campaign, as it had done in the 1933 elections, and thus allowed much of the workers’ vote to flow to the Popular Front slate. The POUM (Marxist Unified Workers’ Party, led by Andreu Nin) eventually joined the Popular Front, prompting a definitive rupture between Trotsky and his old comrades of the Spanish Left Opposition. The Russian revolutionary considered this merger to be a betrayal of the Spanish Revolution.

The Popular Front could not rein in the urge of workers and peasants to mobilize. A wave of strikes and land occupations marked the spring of 1936, and in the summer, the army, supported by the bourgeoisie and the church, staged a fascist coup. After the military coup was defeated, the social revolution of July 19 erupted throughout much of the country.

The revolutionary initiative of the masses led to the greatest process of collectivization of industry and basic services in Europe, and to the formation of various organisms of workers’ power: local committees, factory committees, patrols for control and supplies, and especially, militias. Yet, although the working class fought with enormous energy and determination to defend the revolution against the republican government that was trying to bury it, it always had to do so in spite of its own leadership:

both the overtly counter-revolutionary organizations (Stalinists, socialists and republicans), as well as the CNT and POUM, which, by participating in the national and Catalan governments, endorsed the decrees against the gains of the July revolution.

The Spanish Revolution thus became one of the revolutions in which the wedge between the heroism and militancy of the working class and the counter-revolutionary role of its leadership was largest. The workers were anxiously seeking a path to victory, but their leaderships constantly worked against them, and finally drowned the revolutionary process in blood on the streets of Barcelona in May 1937. This defeat wrote a fundamental lesson into the soul of the Catalan proletariat: the necessity and urgency of building a revolutionary party as a preliminary and preparatory task to avoid the defeat of future revolutions.

This question of the type of working-class party and leadership was the leitmotif in Trotsky's discussions and later break first with the leaders of the Communist Left and then with the POUM. If we review the main debates between the Russian revolutionary and the Spanish leaders of the POUM, we come across two opposing methods for the construction of such a party.

One of these debates concerned the feeble internationalism of the Spanish section, which according to Trotsky weakened the formation of cadres inoculated against powerful nationalist pressures. Another key debate involved the diplomatic method, based on formal agreements, in which the POUM leader Nin maintained his relations with Joaquín Maurín. The latter was the leader of the Workers and Peasants Bloc (BOC) who practiced a policy of collaboration with the organizations of the Catalan petty bourgeoisie. However, the debate that initiated the break between Trotsky and Nin would be the latter's refusal to carry out entryism among the radicalized youth of the PSOE (Socialist Workers' Party of Spain). As a result, Nin missed the opportunity to win over the more radicalized sectors of the PSOE, and instead opted for a formal agreement with the BOC to found the POUM. In doing so, Nin had overlooked the recent litmus test of the class struggle in October 1934, when the BOC had called upon workers to rally behind the president of the Government of Catalonia.

These discussions revealed two different conceptions about what kind of party to build, and therefore what strategy and program to pursue for the revolution. These conceptions would find radically different expressions when the social revolution exploded and the POUM joined counter-revolutionary governments in Catalonia, proving itself incapable of presenting an alternative to the thousands of workers who broke with their

treacherous leaderships to defend the revolution with arms in hand on the streets of Barcelona.

The defeat of the May 1937 insurrection and the attempts of some anarchist sectors to construct a political alternative, embracing a large part of the program also defended by Trotskyists, showed that the construction of a revolutionary leadership is not something to be improvised in the midst of a revolution. It is instead a fundamental preliminary and preparatory task, for which no group with the least perspective towards insurrection had prepared itself in the preceding years.

Nin's "school" was diametrically opposed to that of Trotsky, and therefore to that of the Bolshevik party. In 1917, the Bolshevik party had cadres who had been trained to stand firm against conciliatory parties in the previous years, and this preparation allowed Lenin to straighten out the party's orientation in April 1917. Later this minority party, which at certain moments became very isolated politically, managed to gain the leadership of the masses in the soviets. The POUM pursued an opposite logic, a cadre formation based on diplomatic struggle and a tendency to "not become isolated from the masses" in moments of huge reformist illusion. The POUM did not realize that this tendency would actually *isolate* it from the masses, in the sense that the POUM would not be seen as an alternative after the masses experienced the treason of their existing leaderships.

It is no coincidence that all the political currents that in recent years ended up rallying behind Podemos or Syriza are the ones that had made a POUM-like *revision* of the lessons of the Spanish revolution, which is already indicative of the role they would play in subsequent events.

The lessons formulated by Trotsky are still valid 80 years later for those of us who remain optimistic and fully confident that the working class will rise again to overcome the obstacles that today limit its force, and to seize new historical opportunities to end exploitation and oppression. It is also a lesson for those of us who do not want to passively accept a repetition of defeats, such as the one in Spain that opened the door to World War II, the greatest carnage and expression of barbarism of the twentieth century – and for those who view the historical necessity of building a revolutionary party and leadership as an urgent and fundamental task.

TRANSLATED BY SEAN ROBERTSON

A RACE TOWARDS THE ABYSS

*Labor and Capital
Competition in a
Globalized Market*



Illustration: Joaquín Bourdieu.

BY ESTEBAN MERCATANTE

The internationalization of production has redefined the terms of global competition. Global Value Chains perpetuate the North-South divide and create a unified global labor market.

Since Marxists produced their “classics” on imperialism in the beginning of the 20th century, numerous works have discussed an evolving capitalist competition—and with it the law of value—in the imperialist epoch. It is a multifaceted question, as it is necessary to consider the internationalization of production involving sweeping transformations in recent decades. Here we tackle a central aspect of this theme today, the asymmetric structure of the world market and the segmented competition generated by the establishment of global value chains. It is an issue that strongly impacts the conditions of the working class all around the world.

On the basis of John Smith’s recent book *Imperialism in the Twenty-First Century*, we discussed¹ the importance of Global Value Chains (GVCs) that have formed as a result of the restructuring of production, which large corporations have promoted with increasing intensity since the 1970s. While the internationalization of production has deepened and worldwide flows of commerce and capital have increased, competition has not necessarily developed evenly in all of these fields.

Segmented Competition

The last decades have seen the marked substitution of goods produced in the most developed capitalist economies for goods produced in less developed nations. This movement, established by the largest corporations through both Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and the setting up of worldwide networks of diversified suppliers, has in many cases led to a situation where these multinationals perform only a tiny portion of the production process in the countries where they are located. This tendency can be seen not only in low value-added goods, but also in high value products such as electronics and information technology.²

It would be wrong to draw the conclusion from the above that emerging economies are winning the competitive battle against the richest economies. In the best of cases, this is only a half-truth, as the advantages that these emerging economies offer—primarily low costs in labor—make them more attractive as a destination for the resources of

multinational companies. But in the strict sense, there is no competition between the firms of the imperialist economies and those in the rest of the world that have primarily developed as intermediate suppliers for these multinationals. Neither is there competition between the imperialist powers of the Global North and the economies of the Global South.

Let’s look at some examples to illustrate this point. Apple competes with technological giants Samsung and Nokia. On the other hand, emerging companies that are gaining ground in the production sector—such as FoxConn or the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC)—do not compete directly with these multinational corporations but are instead integrated into their value chains as suppliers. In notebooks, Dell competes with HP, Lenovo (the Chinese giant that bought IBM’s computer division in 2005 to position itself as a leader), Asus and Acer from Taiwan; but none of these companies compete with the Chinese Compal, Wistron and FoxConn. In textiles, the largest brands contend amongst themselves for the main world markets but do not compete with the firms in countries such as Bangladesh that abundantly supply them. The same relationship can be found in all fields of production.

This brings us to an important conclusion: the large multinational companies that dominate access to the main markets compete with each other in their respective sectors, while they establish a complementary relationship, that is, a relationship of non-competition, with other capitals within the sector that are integrated as their suppliers. The imperialist economies, which today are the source of more than 80 percent of the world’s foreign direct investment (World Investment Report 2015), are the base for corporations that primarily compete among themselves, excluding the firms of the “emerging” economies. Despite the fact that the latter have made progress with the development of some players who are beginning to have global reach, the presence of these “emerging” economies within this competition remains secondary.³

In 2010, Richard Herd of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), in reference to the establishment of Japanese companies in China, stated that the ability to assemble Japanese products in China gave these Japanese firms “a new lease on life,” and that “if you look at Chinese exports and Japanese exports, they are not competing; they are complementary.”

His conclusion was that “at the moment, China is not a threat to Japan’s core industries.”⁴

A similar analysis was made by think-tanks in the European Union. A study of the LICOS Centre at the University of Leuven (Belgium), observed that “the possibility of offshoring the more labor-intensive production and assembly activities to China provides an opportunity to our own companies to survive and grow in an increasingly competitive environment.”⁵ They conclude that “... our direct competitors in the tasks that we have a comparative advantage are not located in China, but continue to be the usual suspects: the United States, Western Europe and a handful of high-income East Asian economies.”⁶

This should not make us overlook the areas in which there is strong competition between the capitals of the richest economies and the rest of the world. The clearest example is the automotive industry, which is going through a major restructuring with countries such as Mexico among the main destinations for relocations, while many of the factories in the richest economies struggle to survive.

More importantly, the dominant pattern of complementarity and subordination that the corporations of the imperialist powers have established over the rest of the world in most cases runs into a stark limit. The emergence of firms in strategic high value-added sectors located in China, South Korea, Taiwan, and India, for example, presents a challenge to this domination. China, in particular, is becoming increasingly competitive in some of the most dynamic areas of technological development. Yet even with the strength of the Chinese state behind this development, the results being achieved are at best disparate. These are relatively exceptional cases within an overall trend in the opposite direction, but they are nevertheless of great importance because of their impact on global economic relations.

Asymmetric market structures

In a work published by the International Labour Organization (ILO), Gary Gereffi described the existence of: “... the fundamental asymmetry in the organization of the global economy between more and less developed nations. To a great extent, the concentrated higher value-added portion of the value chain is located in developed countries, while the lower value-added portion of the value chain is in developing economies.”⁷

The strategy of export-based growth, which after the success of the Asian Tigers in the 1970s became the model to emulate, was feverishly promoted by

the development agencies of various multilateral organizations through an agenda of liberalization and the opening of markets to attract capital. However, this strategy has done little else except stimulate a frantic competition to offer the best conditions to multinational capital.

A United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) document recognizes the risk that “the simultaneous drive in a great number of developing countries, including in particular those with a large economy, to export such dynamic products [technology intensive products such as computers and semiconductors] may cause the benefits of any increased volume of exports to be more than offset by losses due to lower export prices.”⁸

So on the one hand, the attempt by numerous countries to replicate “successful” development strategies has increased competition by offering multinational companies the best conditions for the establishment of investments and the organization of global supply networks. Yet on the other, multinational groups have taken advantage of these possibilities in order to preserve what Raphael Kaplinsky describes as their “fierce oligopsony,” a market of few buyers, allowing them to control prices and working conditions.⁹

As other global value change scholars suggest: “The asymmetry of market structures in global production networks, with oligopoly firms in lead positions and competition among first- and certainly second-tier suppliers, has meant intense pressure on suppliers who, in seeking to maintain markups, must keep wages low and resist improvements in labor standards that might lead to a shift in the supply process to another firm or country.”¹⁰

From a Marxist analysis, Ernesto Screpanti argues in his book *Global Imperialism and the Great Crisis*, that the countries of the Global South are nearly all penalized “by the technological gap with the dominant countries, and by their structural differences of labor productivity.”¹¹ Multinationals will only invest in these countries if their wages are low enough to ensure low labor costs. So, it is sufficiently depressed wage levels that allow firms to achieve competitiveness in labor costs per unit of product despite the lower levels of productivity. Since a large industrial reserve army is an essential condition for the maintenance of low wages, Screpanti notes, “in these countries unemployment and underemployment are rife.”¹²

As the author concludes, this type of specialization of production and its associated income distribution do “nothing to favor investment in human capital or to develop a culture of innovation, and consequently cannot help reduce the technological gap.”¹³

Underworld

One of the benefits that global capital has obtained from the last decades of restructuring is the intensified competition among the countries of the Global South which aspire to attract multinationals through the continued undermining of the conditions of their labor force. The other side of this process, which is no less important—yet has been overlooked by John Smith and others—is the ability to force international competition onto the labor force of imperialist nations, something which is increasingly being incorporated within global arbitrage (profiting off market price imbalances).

As Screpanti points out: “Goods exported by these countries [the Global South] to the North compete with goods produced at higher costs by local firms, which are induced to react by offshoring and relocating investments. This reduces industrial employment in advanced countries and weakens trade unions, so that real wages stagnate here too and exploitation increases. What’s more, to counter the outflow of capital and attract foreign direct investments themselves, the governments of advanced countries are prompted to cut taxes on businesses and wealth. Then, to avoid excessive increases in budget deficits and public debts, they increase taxation on wages or they reduce public spending, so that workers are hit by a further reduction in their overall income and social rights.”¹⁴

What we see here is an important innovation that is characteristic of the offensive that capital began in the 1980s in an effort to wipe out the conquests that workers had achieved in different countries, many of which still remain in the imperialist economies. In his famous book *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Lenin analyzed how the super-exploitation of the periphery allowed the imperialist powers to incorporate the trade unions and ensure the privileged conditions of a labor aristocracy.

However, the changes in the way that the exploitation of the periphery is carried out now means that imperialism: “...does not generate significant labor aristocracies in the Global North. The increasing surplus value extracted from the Global South flows only into the pockets of the big capitalists, thus contributing to increasing income inequalities even in the Global North. By placing the workers of every country in the world in competition with those of all other countries, commercial discipline exacerbates the exploitation of workers worldwide.”¹⁵

In this way, the same movement that propelled the opening of new areas for the accumulation

of capital and the reduction of production costs, thus fueling an improvement in margins, was at the same time a lever for deteriorating workplace conditions in imperialist countries.¹⁶ All of this is, of course, part of a new tendency underway. Imperialist states continue to have greater access to resources as well as greater financial capacity, fueled by the appropriation of a part of the world’s surplus value. These inequitable economic relationships allow imperialist nations to partially contain some of the effects of these new conditions.

The greater access to resources that the imperialist states have, and the greater financial capacity of their economies, which is fed by the appropriation of a part of the world’s surplus value that their capital gets, are all elements that continue to allow them to partially contain some of the effects of these new conditions.

With regards to global social capital, today’s capitalist world is characterized by a marked hierarchy, within which competition develops in a segmented fashion. This does not mean that this competition is less intense. In fact, the last few decades have been characterized by an increased opening up of markets, which has intensified competition. But this competition is not universal. It is instead between a few tens of thousands of large corporations largely based in imperial economies contending for a greater part of the surplus value torn from the world’s workers; and on the other hand, the many other capitalists, primarily from the Global South, who are competing to integrate themselves in a subordinate fashion into the production chains.

Ultimately, these exclusive competitions result in a cooperative relationship against labor that has allowed multinationals to maximize their share of the benefits, while further reducing their costs and risks. The illusion of reaching an elusive level of development, advanced by the bourgeoisies of dependent and semi-colonial capitalist countries, reveals itself as an unattainable utopia.

As far as labor conditions are concerned, we can see that the increasing integration of global competition, can truly be described as a race to the bottom, or to be more eloquent, a race towards the abyss. The flipside is that class conflict has also been globalized, creating the potential to move labor struggles towards unprecedented unification. This is one of the many new possibilities for workers’ action in these times of internationalized production.

TRANSLATED BY SEAN ROBERTSON

Notes

1 See “Open Veins of the Global South”, *Ideas de Izquierda* (IdZ) Number 28, April 2016.

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MEXICO'S NEW WORKING CLASS



“Nature required many millions of years in order to deposit gold, silver, and oil in the subsoil of Mexico. The foreign imperialists wish to plunder these riches in the shortest possible time, making use of cheap labor power and the protection of their diplomacy and their fleet.”

The Mexican Oil Expropriations, Leon Trotsky, 1938

BY JIMENA VERGARA

Introduction

Terremoto—earthquake. Economists, political scientists and analysts thus describe the effects of Trump’s arrival to the White House on the neighboring semi-colony of Mexico. A new political and diplomatic crisis between the two countries is emerging: NAFTA, the vast imperialist enterprise, which has proven the lifeline and basis of stability for the Mexican regime and national bourgeoisie, is now being put into question by the Trump Administration.

Mexico’s situation today is more influenced by its relationship with the United States than ever. Even if Trump’s program is only partially implemented, it calls into question the model of integration with the United States, on which the fortress of the Mexican regime was built throughout the past decades, ensuring certain economic growth and garnering the support of broad social sectors, especially of the middle and upper classes, who have benefited from a consumerist boom.

Since its implementation in 1994, NAFTA has transformed the Mexican economy into a manufacturing export-platform for US industry.

In the context of the global trend towards industrial outsourcing, Mexico is part of one of the most dynamic value chains in the world, making up the automotive components chain of NAFTA member-countries.

The need to compete with other countries that receive massive flows of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) led the Mexican regime to maintain the lowest wages among OECD member countries, causing some economists to label Mexico, “The China of the West.”

In addition to strengthening Mexican dependence on the United States economically, politically, and in security-related matters, the extreme imperialist penetration created a new Mexican working class. An estimated 42 million workers are employed in the industrial, manufacturing, extraction and oil industry, maquila and service sectors. This army of men and women working in precarious conditions comparable to those of the 19th century constitutes a powerful social

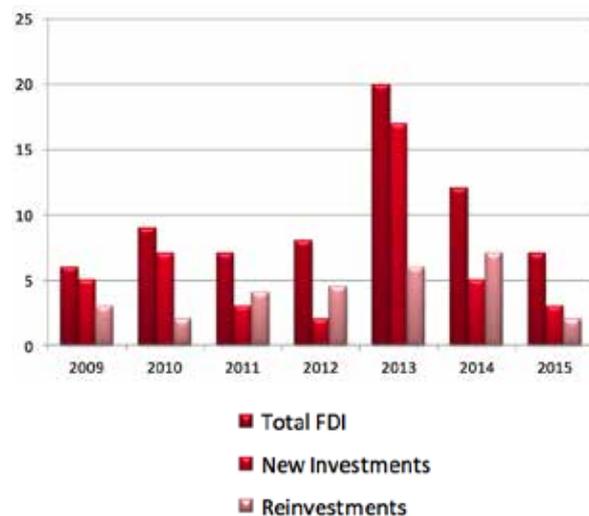
force that extends from the northern border to the middle of the country.

China of the West

The 2008 crisis shook Mexican industry, which is directly dependent on the US economy. However, contrary to most forecasts, after 2009 and in the context of the limited but undeniable improvement of the US economy, there was a significant recovery of the secondary sector (which includes manufacturing and industry) as part of an upward curve that started in 2003. Until the rise of Donald Trump, Mexico was going through an economic recovery that was in contrast with the downward trend of other Latin American economies, particularly the Southern Cone.

The most relevant sectors in this recovery were the automotive, electronics, and food and beverage sectors, in addition to cutting-edge sectors like aerospace. (See Graph 1).

GRAPH 1
Trends in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) (2009-2015)



Data from the Mexican Department of Economy.

Mexico's maquiladora export industry, the country's prevailing sector through 2003, has undergone significant changes. The geographic expansion of manufacturing industry over the past few years is especially noteworthy. Until late 2008, when the global economic crisis broke out, there was patent inequality between the growth of the Mexican economy as a whole and that of the border states: "While Mexico's economy overall grew at an average rate of 2.9 percent in the 1993-2006 period, the region that includes all of the northern border states grew at a rate of 4.1 percent. The states of Baja California, Chihuahua and Nuevo León grew at a particularly rapid pace."¹

The relatively strong performance of industry in the border region is, in part, due to geographic proximity to the United States. The entire border region became a pole of attraction for FDI, in particular from the United States, which increased 5.9 percent from 1994 to 2007:

"Thus, states like Chihuahua, Baja California, Nuevo León and Sonora had much higher average growth rates throughout the period than the overall national rate. The high growth rates were a result of the massive entry of investments oriented towards the maquiladora export industry.

"The state of Nuevo León, for its part, received investments both in the maquiladora industry and in the export manufacturing not included in the maquila system. In particular, FDI near the northern border were directed to labor intensive maquiladora plants, taking advantage of low wages and geographic proximity. It is important to note that in addition to investments from the United States, there has been significant FDI from Asia (Japan, China, Taiwan and Korea) which was fundamentally oriented towards the northern border states (51.9 %)."²

However, the industrial concentration has undergone a clear geographical southward expansion, propelled by two factors: 1) imperialist capital's aim to develop manufacturing for NAFTA's markets, and 2) the needs of local capital, advanced by the policies of the ruling party, Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), to counteract the Mexico's dependence on oil exports.

Since 2007, the maquiladoras have become part of a specialized industry that has been referred to as a "third-generation maquiladora." Some authors and economists have noted this new form of maquiladora is based on the integration of the traditional maquila with

"centers of research, design and development, i.e. based on highly qualified labor. This is an emerging type of maquiladora with a higher

level of technology and an apparent increase in decision-making autonomy. The work is characteristically highly qualified with a high level of responsibility."³

These new production facilities are entirely dependent on FDI and are based on the import of US technology (and patents owned by US companies). This, in the absence of state-sanctioned labor protections, has given birth to a new workforce that is directly employed by multinationals and third parties providing outsourced services.

This trend increased after 2007 (partially interrupted only by the 2008-2009 crisis) because China began to experience a significant increase in wages and, as a consequence, an overall reduction in FDI levels. In 2013, Mexico received 12.6 percent of the global FDI, which is the highest level recorded to date.

This is due not only to Mexico's low wages, but also to the recovery of the US economy, which led to an overall recovery of countries within the NAFTA bloc—a comparative advantage Mexico has in relation to China.

Mexico is part of a global trend in which "from 1990 to 2010, the global work force (...) increased by 190 percent in 'emerging' countries compared to 46 percent in advanced countries."⁴

In addition to creating a global market, so-called productive globalization creates "a global working class, which essentially increases in emerging countries...[A]ccompanied by a trend towards the wage labor of workers who did not previously work for a salary. The rate of salaried employment (the proportion of salaried workers in the workforce) has increased continuously, from 33 percent to 42 percent throughout the past 20 years."⁵

There are millions of people who have become industrial wage workers as a result of migration from rural to urban centers, or to the growing integration of women in the labor market.

According to 2015 data from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), a total of almost seven million people work in the primary sector (agriculture and livestock). One and half million among them are day laborers. About 12.5 million work in the secondary sector (industry, mining and energy) and a little over 31 million are employed in the tertiary sector (services). The industrial, service, and agricultural proletariat combined constitute a force of almost 42 million people.

As mentioned earlier, the salaries of this new working class are far below the international average, even when compared to other semicolonial countries.

The automobile value chain

The auto industry has surprised the world with its strong performance in the past few years, in particular as a result of the way in which the US economy was able to overcome—for the time being—the economic crisis that shook the global economy in 2008.

According to expert Alex Covarrubias Valdenebro, “Apparently, the auto industry can keep growing at an even more unusual rate since we are witnessing a historical transition in which centers of industrial production and consumption are being relocated to emerging countries.”⁶

Valdenebro continues on to say that Mexico’s prominence in the automotive sector is fundamentally due to three relative advantages in a comparison with other automotive giants in Latin America such as Brazil: the exceedingly low labor costs, Mexico’s low tariffs as a NAFTA member country, and its increasingly qualified workforce.⁷ The automotive industry is undoubtedly the most dynamic sector in the Mexican economy.

Mexico receives investments from all the Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs), which already provides over half a million of the best-paid jobs in manufacturing. In addition, with the development of new assembly plants, the industry has fostered the creation of new “production chains” of “parts and components that are growing at an even more rapid pace than the assembly plants themselves.”⁸

According to a study by A.T. Kearney, Mexico “offers US corporations a way to reduce labor and production costs ‘right in their backyard.’” According to PwC, there has been a production change in Mexico which went from being a country of “cheap labor-intensive manufacturing to a country of qualified and specialized assembly plants.”

The relocation of auto industries to the global South and peripheral countries is a response to what some are calling the ultimate crisis of the manufacturing sectors in core countries.

According to Valdenebro, “It is a historical event that we call late motorization and coincides with the energy, environmental, and industrial crisis that, in developed countries, is placing at the center of public life the demands for alternative systems of mobility as well as a transition towards knowledge-based economies.”

The positioning of Mexico as a US export platform also coincides with the loss of control over the global market by what was once known as the Big Three of Detroit, i.e. General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler.

The US giants, which were violently shaken by the 2008 crisis and only saved by the massive injection of capital by the US government, not only lost hegemony over global auto markets, but also over the domestic market.

According to several authors, the growth of the auto industry in Mexico involved manufacturing as well as marketing. It is a value chain that is expanding to the periphery because of structural conditions, the massive investment of capital, increasing consumption of private cars, fixed capital development, and the availability of fossil-fuel energy.

The auto industry has complex interconnections. On one hand, it is part of a network of auto parts and manufactured components. On the other, it is integrated into distribution and sales networks, maintenance shops, and a subsector based on research and technological development. In the case of Mexico, it is an absolutely multinational industry.

By 2013, Mexico had produced almost three million cars. The auto industry generates an influx of foreign currency and makes up 23.5 percent of total exports and 31 percent of the total manufacturing sector. In 2013, the sector’s exports brought \$90 billion USD to the country and the auto industry’s share of the GDP was 3.8 percent, an increase of 27 percent from 2000.

The process of an increase in manufacturing exports counteracting the drop in oil exports is evident in the auto industry and operates on a general scale.

Although most product and process development activities have remained in imperialist countries, there are already seven OEMA engineering and design centers in Mexico.

Thanks to the aforementioned expansion, NAFTA’s auto parts production chain is one of the most extensive value chains in the world (See Map 1).

In addition, companies that exclusively produce auto parts extend throughout at least 21 Mexican states, including Aguascalientes, Baja California, Chihuahua, Jalisco, Nuevo León, Puebla, Querétaro and San Luis Potosí.

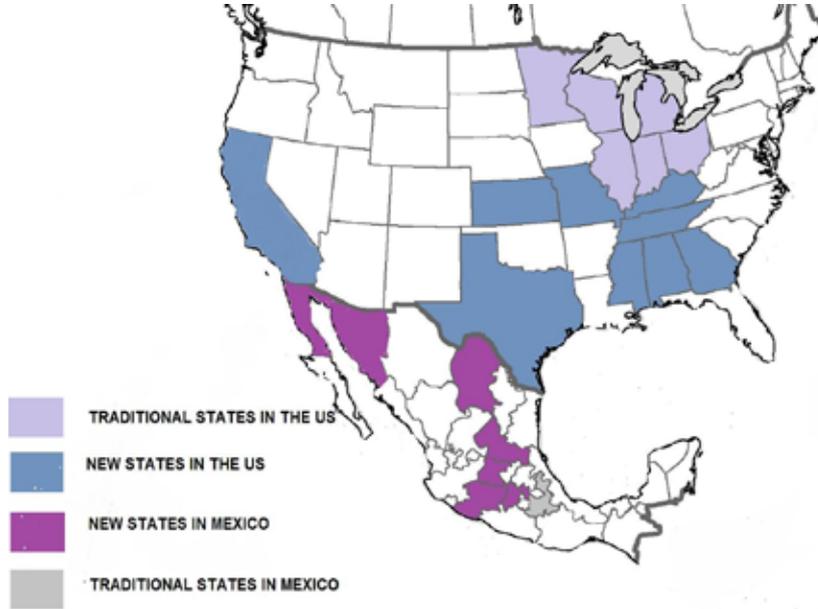
A total of 66,000 workers are employed in terminal plants and 700,000 workers are employed in the auto part industry.

Capital without borders

Eighty percent of manufacturing production in Mexico is exported to the United States. The main companies operate under NAFTA; it follows, the situation of the vast number of

MAP 1

NAFTA Automotive Component Chain



Source: Valdenebro, 2014.

MAP 2

Terminal automotive plants and numbers of workers



Source: Valdenebro, 2014.

workers employed by the auto plants appears uncertain after Trump's victory.

But at the same time, in states like Michigan, Texas, North Dakota, Indiana, Vermont, Alabama and Ohio—just to name a few—, the economy depends in large part on international trade with Mexico to maintain their production.

Mexico is the US's second largest trading partner: in 2016, the United States imported products from Mexico to the tune of \$294 billion USD and US exports to Mexico were worth \$231 billion dollars, according to the US Census Bureau.

In the United States, millions of Latino workers – mostly Mexican – are vital to agro-industry, construction, services, restaurants, and industrial production sectors. According to estimations, Latino workers contribute 32 percent of the GDP.

Despite Trump's propaganda accusing Mexico of benefitting from NAFTA to the detriment of the US economy, US multinational corporations have, in fact, been the main beneficiaries of the agreement. The Mexican bourgeoisie, which also received a significant share through the generalization of precarious work, has simply acted as a junior partner.

Capitalist development in the past quarter century has profoundly transformed the structure of the world economy. The fact that different components of the same goods are produced in different parts of the world has created a new international division of labor.⁹

This new working class, which is limited in its movement by borders and migration restrictions, is heterogeneous and fragmentary due to wage differences. On the other hand, capital has almost absolute mobility, which has led to competition among workers of different countries like never before in the history of capitalism. As a result, "the wage gap between different countries has grown. In Mexico the average wage is 4 dollars a day (80 Mexican pesos), compared to 32 dollars in the United States."

The xenophobic and racist rhetoric against Mexican immigrants is aimed at reinforcing this competition among workers. To counter this division, labor unions and workers in the US must fight against the exploitation of workers in Mexico and counter Trump's chauvinistic discourse (ie., "Buy American") campaign. At the same time, workers in the US need to embrace the struggle for all rights for undocumented Latino workers. This has the potential to unite native and foreign-born workers in the US with the millions of workers in Mexico in a fight against the same bosses.

The only way in which the situation of millions of workers employed in NAFTA-member countries can possibly improve is through bringing about the end of the imperialist oppression of Mexico and Central America and capitalist exploitation on both sides of the border.

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THIS MAGAZINE WAS PRINTED IN A WORKER-CONTROLLED FACTORY.

In 2001, Argentina was thrown into deep economic and political crisis that spurred numerous companies to declare bankruptcy, close plants, and move operations abroad in search of higher profits. **THOUSANDS OF WORKERS WERE THROWN INTO THE STREETS**, jobless.

Faced with a desperate situation, **MANY WORKERS DECIDED TO FORCE OPEN THE GATES OF THEIR FACTORIES AND RESUME PRODUCTION**. They held workers' assemblies, formed women's committees, opened daycare and health clinics, and created democratically-elected shop-floor committees to push the unions to respond to the needs of the rank-and-file and the working class. Today, **OVER 300 RECOVERED WORKPLACES WITH OVER 13,000 WORKERS CONTINUE TO OPERATE WITH NO BOSSES AND NO CLASS DIVIDES**.

While self-management, cooperative production, and preservation of jobs are tremendous achievements, the worker-militants in factories like Zanon and MadyGraf are striving for more. They demand the **EXPROPRIATION AND NATIONALIZATION** of their plants for the benefit of all. Under constant pressure from capitalist society and a political system controlled by bosses, the workers' experience and tenacity push revolutionary militants to continue the struggle for a classless society.

This year, President Macri's tarifazo (utility fee increase) caused a 500% spike in electricity bills, dealing a hard blow to worker-controlled factories, making an already-difficult situation for occupied factories even harder.

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