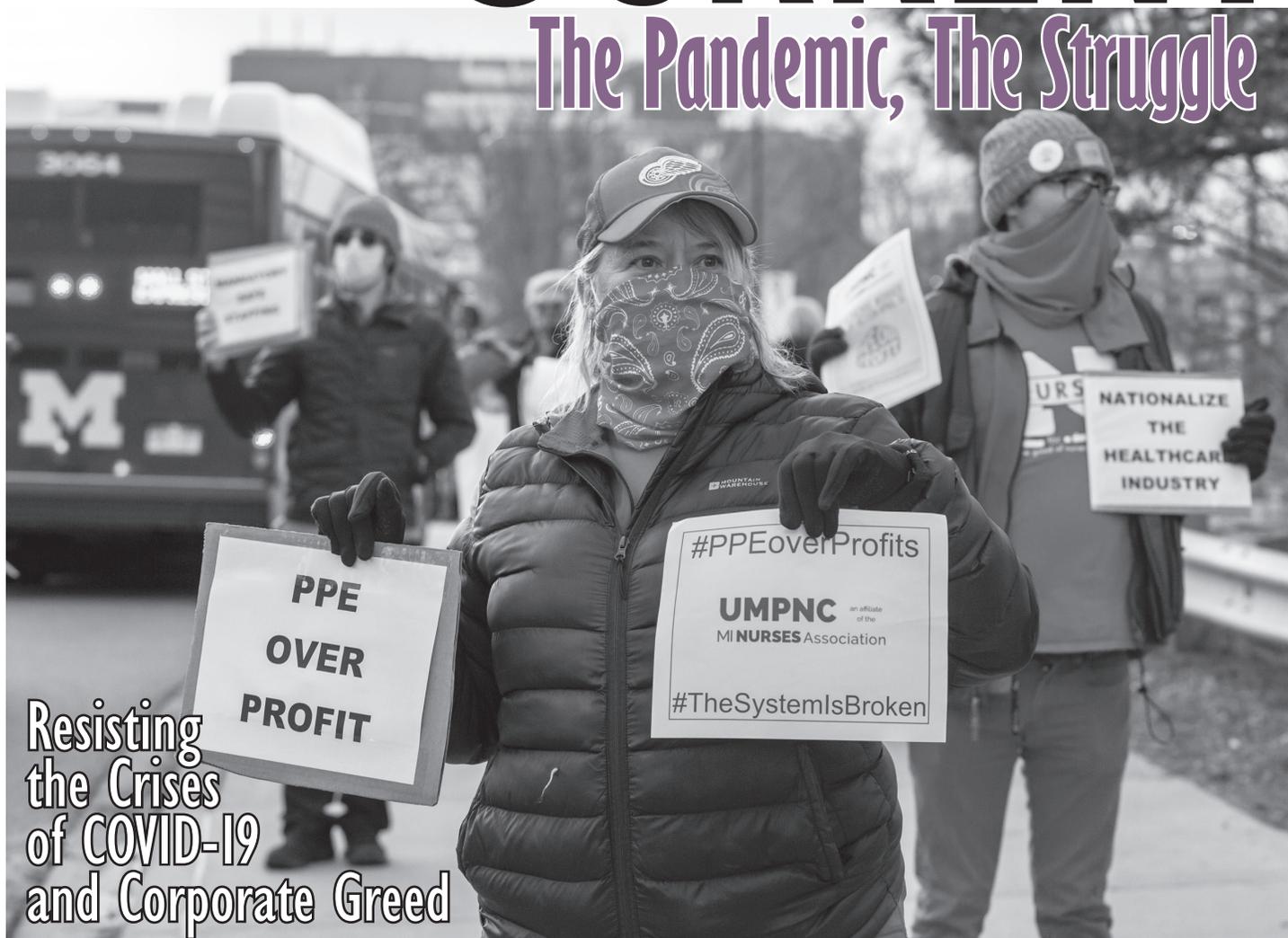


# AGAINST THE CURRENT

A SOCIALIST JOURNAL

## The Pandemic, The Struggle



Resisting the Crises of COVID-19 and Corporate Greed

### Knowledge for Justice and Palestine

♦ RABAB ABDULHADI

### The Virus Is Color Blind, Humans Are Not

♦ MALIK MIAH

### India: Class Struggle and Coronavirus

♦ KUNAL CHATTOPADHYAY



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## A Letter from the Editors:

# A Crisis of Vast Unknowns

AS THE FULL scope and horror of the coronavirus pandemic unfolds, two realities confront us in the United States — which is now the world leader in confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths, even while emerging conditions are incomparably more horrific in much of the Global South. *First*, this is a public health, economic and environmental crisis that would seriously challenge the most competent, clear-sighted, effective and well-prepared national political leadership. *Second*, that's not the political leadership we've got, by a long shot.

We are acutely aware that the rapidly moving situation as these lines are written will look enormously different by the time they're in print. Our society and the world have entered a crisis of vast unknowns, potentially involving tens of millions of deaths and a global Depression.

Most important to state at the outset, *the class struggle isn't "self-isolated" or quarantined*. Protests, wildcat strikes or stay-at-homes, and other acts of resistance have broken out among the front-line fighters for our lives and their own — medical workers, grocery store workers and deliverers, Amazon warehouse workers without basic safety protection, bus drivers and more — and the vast "gig economy" work force. These signal the start of the fight that will be needed if working people and communities of color aren't ultimately to be burdened with the full cost of a looming and unfolding disaster.

Amidst the government's colossal corporate bailout packages, there are a few concessions for the vast majority — enhanced unemployment pay, some paid sick leave, the \$1200 emergency payment — at least for those who can get through the administrative chaos. These fragile protections are a hint of gains that are possible if they can be preserved and extended.

*The reality of race in America isn't on lockdown either*. Statistics are inadequately compiled, but every reporting city and state shows death rates among African Americans at nearly three times their proportion of the population.

### National and Global Emergency

The mess that Donald Trump and his army of sycophants made has brought irreparable harm, including potentially hundreds of thousands of lives. The spectacle of the government's own medical experts — and the embattled state and local authorities — scrambling to compensate for federal indolence is simultaneously comical and terrifying.

All that damage is done, and Trump's daily rambling, shambling, dissembling pronouncements and direct incitement of his base to defy emergency health measures only make matters worse. But there are deep systemic issues in this still early phase of a global crisis.

The ultimate human cost of the pandemic can't be known at this time — whether it will be only severe, or extreme, or possibly apocalyptic. Will tens of millions die globally, and millions in the USA — or luckily only some hundreds of thousands around the world and tens of thousands here, or somewhere in between?

The extent and duration of the economic collapse is a grim prospect, but another unknown. Trump's promise of a short recession followed by a "fantastic reopening" is less likely than a more protracted downturn, possibly on the scale of a global Depression. Financial markets fell, over just a few weeks, by the 30% or so that would have been expected over the course of a recession that was looming already before the coronavirus outbreak. Their continuing wild gyrations tell us only that "the market" doesn't know

what to expect.

The stability of political institutions is in question. Authoritarian regimes (India and Hungary in the lead) are trampling basic human and democratic rights. Here in the USA, what would the November election look like if the virus infection rate curve hasn't "flattened" well before then? What new dirty tricks or voter-suppression schemes might emerge in states controlled by the right wing?

The potential for violent social panic can't be totally discounted if the public health crisis is protracted. The ugly, violent harassment of Asian Americans walking the streets could become more systematic attacks on targeted (Chinese, Asian, or immigrant) communities if ignorance and desperation turn toward finding scapegoats.

Trump's "Chinese virus" ravings and calls to "liberate" states with Democratic governments may be calculated to energize his base, rather than to incite mob action. But that kind of demagoguery is a notorious enabler of the nativist and white-supremacist menace that's grown under the auspices of this repulsive administration.

We don't have to imagine full societal breakdown to envision the potential bankruptcy and disappearance of millions of neighborhood businesses, restaurants, non-chain grocery stores and the like.

That's an acute issue, for example, in Detroit where the metropolitan area accounts for 83% of Michigan's death toll. Will food deserts in our cities become even more severe? One commentator on CNBC suggested that at the end of the pandemic, the only retailers left might be Amazon, Walmart and Costco. That might be the logic of capital concentration in an extreme crisis, but is it a place where we'd enjoy living?

### A Diseased System

Conventional coverage treats the coronavirus pandemic as an external shock to the system, something like an asteroid striking the earth. Quite the contrary, it's very much embedded in the functioning of the system itself.

What's technically called the "SARS 2-CoV-2" pathogen, like the avian and swine flu, HIV, SARS, MERS, Zika and Ebola viruses of recent years, as well as the 1918 flu virus and probably the more familiar viruses of distant origin, are the result of animal-to-human transmission. That the current one began in a Wuhan live market is a happenstance that tells us nothing about where the next one comes from.

These outbreaks are a product of both the way present-day industrial agriculture is organized with mass concentrations of animals in the most horrific conditions, and increasing human encroachment into the natural

continued on the inside back cover

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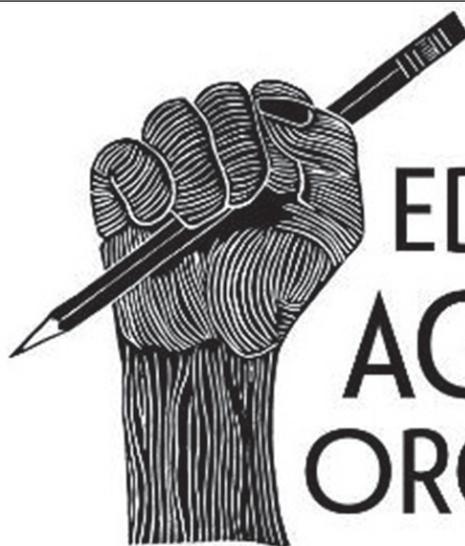
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Above: Facebook graphic, Local 2865, UC Santa Cruz

Back Cover: Surrey COVID emergency shelter City of Surrey

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## The Virus Is Color Blind, Humans Are Not By Malik Miah

THE CORONAVIRUS IS color blind. It strikes whites, Blacks, Latinos, indigenous people, Asians, rich and poor. So why the higher number of cases and deaths for African Americans?

Structural inequality and racism explain why African Americans are dying at a much higher rate than whites in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Permanent color-based inequality is developed out of a system of white supremacy that predates the Revolutionary War in 1776. The colonies under English rule considered Africans, whether enslaved or “free,” as inferior to whites. After Independence, the ideology of white supremacy remained and persists to the present.

That original crime is why the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic kills African Americans more than twice the rate as for whites. The invisible enemy does not discriminate, only humans do.

Many white Americans are surprised by a colorblind disease. They had always assumed that Blacks dying from other viruses and diseases was their own fault. “It’s them, not us.” Today, the fear is that high death rates for African Americans could be a signal to greater deaths for them.

African Americans with underlying health conditions face permanent inequalities in their daily lives (a structural racial deficit), suffer more and die at greater numbers than whites.

### The Data

Statistics (from a selection of states) show this life gap. As of this writing (April 12):

**Illinois:** Blacks are 15% of the state’s population, whites 77%. Deaths: 42% Black, 36% white.

**Michigan:** Blacks are 14% of state’s population and 40% of deaths (heavily concentrated in the metro area of Detroit. The three counties of metro Detroit make up 83% of the state’s deaths).

**Mississippi:** Blacks are 38% of state’s population, 72% of deaths.

**Louisiana:** Blacks are 33% of the pop-

*Malik Miah is a retired aviation mechanic, union and antiracist activist. He is an advisory editor of Against the Current.*

ulation, 70.5% of deaths.

**South Carolina:** Blacks are 27% of the population, 46% of the deaths.

**New York City** (the epicenter of the virus): Blacks and Hispanics die at twice the rate of whites, who are 46% of the population. The racially diverse Elmhurst section of Queens is being devastated.

Official figures are underestimated, as New York City has not counted deaths of many people who died at home and were never taken to hospitals. There were not enough tests to check.

Some of this racial disparity is tied to specific type of jobs that Black men and women can get such as transit, garbage collection, postal delivery, home care and nurses’ aides in public health. Internet access and computers are less plentiful in low-income homes. Diabetes, hypertension and asthma are prevalent.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) charts the racial gap in all walks of life for Blacks and whites before the Covid-19 virus:

**Life expectancy:** 74 years for Blacks; 79 years for whites.

**Infant mortality rate** before age one per 1000 births: 11.5 for Blacks; 6.17 for whites. Both infant and maternal mortality are even higher in African American majority cities like Detroit.

**Obesity in the United States:** At all ages it is almost twice as high for African Americans. Specifically from ages 20-39 years, Blacks 46%, whites 26%. Obesity is a form of malnutrition, and access to quality affordable food is a big factor.

**Hypertension** is a major risk factor for heart disease, heart attack and stroke: Some



On April 19, five-year-old Skylar Herbert, from Detroit, became the state’s youngest victim of novel coronavirus.

75% of Blacks develop high blood pressure, compared to just 55% of white men and 40% of white women.

**Housing segregation:** Despite fair housing laws Blacks continue to be excluded from housing loans (or at much higher mortgage rates) and programs through redlining and discrimination.

Freed Blacks after the Civil War (1861-65) were denied land and property; before and after WWII many new housing programs prioritized suburban development and did not grant favorable loans to Blacks, even though many served in the military.

**Unemployment** (Bureau of Labor Statistics): It is twice as high for African Americans than white Americans — some 6.3% in 2018 for Blacks, 3.3% for whites — obviously before the current economic collapse. (This does not count those who stopped looking for jobs, those working part time or those so-called independent contractors such as

Uber drivers.)

### The Detroit Story

Benjamin Wallace-Wells observes in his article “Inequality intensifies coronavirus crisis in Detroit”:

“We are just beginning to see demographic data on those who’ve died of covid-19, but African-American communities around the country may be especially vulnerable...”

“In Detroit, where seventy-nine per cent of the population is Black and thirty-six per cent is below the poverty line, the diabetes rate is roughly twice the national average. Southeastern Michigan has become a national epicenter of the outbreak, and though African Americans are just fourteen per cent of the state’s population they represent forty-one per cent of its covid-19 victims...”

[Dr Rana] Awdish and her colleagues [at Henry Ford Hospital, in midtown Detroit, one of the largest teaching hospitals in the country] are on the front lines in two senses: in Detroit, the pandemic is escalating in intensity, and poverty and poor health may be changing its shape.” (New Yorker, April 7)

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## Spark at Santa Cruz: Graduate Student Workers on the Line

By Shannon Ikebe

ON DECEMBER 8th, 2019, the General Assembly of graduate student workers at University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) decided to begin a wildcat strike, demanding a Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) of \$1,412 a month for all graduate students, regardless of employment or citizenship status. By early March, the COLA movement took root in all University of California (UC) campuses, with wildcat strikes spreading to five campuses.

How did the COLA campaign lead to the most significant campus mobilization in California in many years, and what are its political prospects and lessons?

The wildcat strike emerged as a truly spontaneous call from below. Core organizers of the COLA campaign have been working on it since the beginning of the academic year in September, and have secured leadership of both the Santa Cruz chapter of UAW Local 2865 as well as the Graduate Student Association (GSA). The union is composed of academic student workers (graduate students and undergraduate tutors) across the UC system.

The first mass action in early November was a march to the chancellor's office to present the COLA demand; it attracted around 250 grad workers. This was a significant number at the second-smallest UC campus, with only 1,800 grad students.

The organizers had developed a year-long campaign plan, which envisioned possibilities of more militant direct actions in the spring. But once energized, the rank and file would not wait so long.

The university administration's condescending responses to the COLA demand sparked a flurry of angry emails denouncing them and calling for a strike, quickly amplified through a "reply-all" listserv. Pleasantly taken by surprise, the entire group of organizers pivoted immediately towards realizing a grade strike, even though very few of them had organized a wildcat before.

Everything had to be figured out from scratch, from technical mechanisms of grade

*Shannon Ikebe is a Ph.D. candidate in Sociology at UC Berkeley and has been active in the COLA movement. Shannon has written for various publications including Jacobin, In These Times, Viewpoint Magazine, the File and Nouveaux Cahiers du Socialisme.*

submission to managing the strike fund. After an intense week and half, hundreds of Santa Cruz teaching assistants — estimated around a half of all TAs — refused to submit the fall quarter grades on the designated December 18th deadline, substantially disrupting the operation of the university.

### Strong Support

The COLA movement has attracted strong support from undergraduate students and faculty, who occupy a strategic position regarding the strike. Since undergraduates would be missing grades, securing their support is crucial. COLA organizers clarified that most students would not be negatively affected by grade withholding. They offered to release grades on an individual basis to any student with a time-pressing need.

Undergraduate activists have also organized their own solidarity actions such as liberation of dining halls. They have also won commitment to non-retaliation for strike participation from faculty in many departments, in which the Faculty Organizing Group (FOG) — a group of politically conscious professors — has played a crucial role in facilitating.

The rapid growth of the strike underscores the dire material conditions that face grad workers at Santa Cruz, which has seen skyrocketing rent in recent years caused by nearby Silicon Valley. It has become one of the most unaffordable places to live in the country. Real wages have not increased to reflect the housing crisis at all. The struggle for affordable housing was dealt a further blow when the Measure M, the local rent-control initiative in November 2018, was defeated by landlord forces.

The vast majority of grad workers spend more than half of their income on rent, as we are reminded in the "Rent Burden" line on the strikers' email signatures. The amount of COLA demand would bring down rent to 30% of income, defined as affordable housing in the federal guideline.

As many workers have expressed, the lack of a COLA has exposed them to substandard and unsanitary housing conditions, hunger, and overwork. But dire conditions are not sufficient on their own to spark a mass uprising. The exponential growth of the COLA movement also owes a lot to the

political savvy of the militants organizing the months-long strike, who, with a combination of utmost seriousness and irrepressible optimism, have always sought to cultivate rather than stifle militancy.

### COLA goes statewide

After maintaining grade withholding for many weeks, the wildcat gained another wave of impetus in February. In response to the UC Santa Cruz administration's threat of retaliation through disciplinary charges issued in late January, Santa Cruz strikers decided to escalate into a full teaching strike from February 10th.

While the UCSC administration offered a tepid concession in the form of a housing supplement of \$2,500 a year, available conditionally, they utterly failed to stop the momentum.

Strikers held mass picket lines every day at the campus entrances, managing to shut down the entire campuses on multiple days. They faced police violence and mass arrest at the picket lines, which were followed by the threat to fire striking workers issued by UC President Janet Napolitano herself.

The full teaching strike in February brought the movement a far greater level of attention and support than ever before, from articles in the national and international media outlets to Bernie Sanders' solidarity tweet. Meanwhile the COLA strike fund collected nearly \$300,000 from more than 5,000 donors.

Facing escalating retaliation, Santa Cruz issued an urgent call for solidarity wildcat strikes across the UCs, which began a new statewide phase of the COLA struggle. As the fast-rising cost of living and stagnant wages are a common experience across UCs, the simple and universal demand of a COLA quickly resonated.

COLA organizing had already been active on many UC campuses, as workers at UC Berkeley, Davis, Los Angeles and Santa Barbara organized the first solidarity rally in December. Hundreds of grad workers across the state committed to withholding grades if Santa Cruz workers were fired, which in turn encouraged Santa Cruz to maintain grade withholding past the "doomsday" of February 21st set by Napolitano.

Mass pickets at Santa Cruz inspired

other campuses to organize towards a strike, for their own COLA demand as well as against retaliation at Santa Cruz. While an intercampus strike had appeared a remote prospect not long before, this was the decisive turning point, when #spreadthe-strike became the ubiquitous slogan and the implausible suddenly became the obvious. We learned that when the struggle is in upswing, we were always more ready than we had thought.

Santa Barbara was the first campus outside Santa Cruz to spread the strike. Having already organized a one-day strike in late January, UCSB for COLA was ready. Two thousand students and workers turned out on their first day of teaching strike.

At Berkeley, a strike was organized on a departmental basis; within a week, grad workers in 15 departments declared themselves as strike-ready, prompting the General Assembly to call a wildcat strike.

COLA GAs at UC Davis and San Diego declared a grade strike for the winter quarter. As the COLA movement took root in all 10 UC campuses, mass rallies, assembly and occupations were happening constantly, which peaked on March 5th, the statewide day of action.

### Mass Firing and Resistance

Amidst a great upsurge of COLA strikes, more than 80 Santa Cruz workers who had withheld the fall grades were fired at the end of February. While many departments did maintain support for the strikers, they could not prevent repression ordered at the highest levels at the UC Office of President (UCOP).

But UCOP would not find it easy to replace them with scabs, as 559 grad students across 22 departments committed to refuse TAships vacated by fired workers. Rather, they simply cancelled many sections that were to be taught by fired TAs, which meant deteriorating quality of education for undergraduate students.

The campus shutdowns and the shift to online courses since mid-March, caused by the coronavirus pandemic, have posed serious challenges to the COLA movement. As the Santa Cruz strikers wrote in a statement addressing the new situation, COVID-19 makes a COLA even more necessary than before.

Our precarity is exacerbated, precluding us from necessary protection from the disease in many ways; meanwhile our living conditions literally become the working conditions as we are made to teach online from home.

On the other hand, organizing conditions have become more difficult; the administration has taken the opportunity to undermine our leverage for withholding of teaching labor (even if it happens to coincide with the pandemic-related reasons),



as (online) classes are made optional and grades are switched to pass/no pass basis on some campuses.

Even more importantly, in these circumstances we are forcefully reminded that lifeblood of the movement is in mass assemblies and visible picket lines; deprived of those, it becomes difficult to demonstrate our power, to the boss as well as to each other.

While the pandemic led to wildcat strikes in many sectors where workers are forced to work in-person in unsanitary conditions, our particular working situations do not necessarily have the same factors conducive to organizing now.

Despite these difficulties, the COLA movement is adapting to the new conditions and remains active. The teaching strikes on some campuses have become a “social welfare strike, in which workers may connect with students only to discuss welfare, basic needs and sharing of resources.

COLA organizers on multiple campuses have established mutual aid networks, are participating in discussions on a rent strike, and created the Strike University, a series of COLA-related and other teach-ins, that provides a space for free, public education.

Worker on multiple campuses have made additional pandemic-related demands including free tuition and rent suspension for campus housing, and are still withholding the winter quarter grades that were due in late March, demonstrating that the strike is far from over. At the time of writing, the workers are organizing for a one-day statewide COLA strike on May Day.

### UAW Politics

The COLA movement began as a wildcat strike and remains one, but we cannot fully understand it without examining its complex relationship with UAW Local 2865. Starting in 2011 the Local was run by a radical reform caucus called the Academic Workers for a Democratic Union (AWDU). It democratized the union, rejected the UAW’s corrupt Admin Caucus and won a strong contract after two strikes in 2013-14.

But the mass student movement in

California peaked in 2009-12. That, combined with the rapid turnover in grad students, led to gradual weakening of AWDU as an organized caucus.

The round of bargaining in 2017-18 had an initially promising start as organizers sought to combine AWDU’s commitment to radicalism and militancy with a more systematic and coordinated approach to state-wide organizing to maximize our power. This included hiring a professional organizing staff. Worker-leaders across the state began organizing to increase membership and then launch a powerful strike in Fall 2018.

But in the Summer 2018, a conservative, bureaucratic faction within the union leadership managed to ram through a weak, inadequate contract through anti-democratic means.

The contract included a 3% nominal wage increase, which amounts to stagnating — if not declining — real wages, and later precipitated the wildcat strike. It did contain a few of the other main contract campaign demands including abolition of discriminatory international student tuition and protection from police violence on campus.

But the process of imposing this contract was plagued by extremely biased wording, use of paid staff to campaign for ratification. The summer ambush precluded possibilities of in-person deliberations.

As the “August Coup” shocked, angered and demoralized union militants across the state, it further entrenched the power of the coup perpetrators, a caucus called Organizing for Student-Worker Power (OSWP).\*

As the contract was “ratified” in violation of both the basic norms of democracy and the Local’s own bylaws relating to conduct of elections, we filed a formal appeal to annul the contract, called the Mussman Appeal. It was predictably rejected by the OSWP-dominated union leadership, but it gave voice to the truth that the ratification process was deeply wrong. (See my piece <https://thefilemag.org/the-roots-of-the-santa-cruz-wildcat-strike/> for more details on the

\*They have recently renamed themselves as Union for All (UFA).

August Coup and the Mussman Appeal.)

But despite such defeats, Santa Cruz remained the only campus staunchly opposed to the OSWP dictatorship. They rejected the 2018 contract with 83% NO vote, the highest by far of any campus. The campus union leadership persisted in their commitment to a union based on grassroots democracy and militancy, which helped develop the wildcat strike.

The OSWP is, in a certain sense, another iteration of the UAW Administration Caucus at the local level. They espouse a centralized union whose power is concentrated in the Executive Board, with a much greater role for the UAW International Representative. They prioritize membership numbers and meeting with high-ranking politicians, and are hostile to any initiative from rank and file that does not originate from them.

Further, they directly assisted the UAW bureaucracy by defeating a resolution for direct election of UAW Executive Board members, championed by the Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD), the most significant reform effort in UAW in 30 years.

The OSWP is not just any Admin Caucus; its ideology is steeped in the language of the contemporary left revival in the United States. Not only do many leaders of this caucus claim to be socialist, they claim to be inspired by mass politics based on the high level of organization and a serious analysis of power, counterposing themselves to Occupy-style “horizontalism.”

Concepts like “supermajority,” “deep organizing” and “structure tests” are deployed by the OSWP, not for raising our aspiration to organize more, but to stifle actually-occurring mass actions by portraying them as weak and convincing workers that they do not have enough power. Perversely enough, the OSWP’s tactic is to suppress, rather than raise, expectations of workers about what we can win collectively.

The OSWP leadership predictably sneered at the strike after having treated the COLA campaign with hostility from the beginning and their high-ranking leaders published an attack piece against Santa Cruz merely days into the strike.

As the strike attracted broad support, including from the national leadership of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), the political cost for the OSWP to simply keep dismissing it became too high. The UAW 2865 Executive Board issued support for the COLA demand and issued a demand to bargain in mid-January, and filed Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) charges against UCOP for firing Santa Cruz workers.

While they are in one sense an attempt to co-opt the COLA demand from the wildcats, the fact that they have should at the same time be seen as victory for the move-

ment, who forced their hand.

The OSWP continued to agitate against wildcat strikes, which was particularly detrimental to COLA movements at Berkeley and Los Angeles, the OSWP strongholds; but their power has been weakened. Their majority on the bargaining team is very thin, and in the recent vacancy election in early April, the wildcat candidate for an open Executive Board seat defeated the OSWP (UFA) candidate.

In April, one focus of the COLA movement has been the fight to call an Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) strike officially through the UAW 2865 structure. A ULP strike would give strikers greater legal protection from retaliations and dismissal; it can help expand the strike in these uncertain times. While the COLA movement has already won a considerable portion of the seats on the union’s statewide Bargaining Team, it falls short of the majority and the OSWP continues to present a formidable obstacle.

While there is some ambivalence within the movement regarding the pursuit

of a ULP strike, which they may regard as unlikely to succeed due to continued OSWP dominance, COLA organizing for a ULP strike has played a role in significantly shifting the balance of power in the union apparatus.

## Conclusion

The COLA wildcat strikes have transformed the political terrain on UC campuses, created entirely new, dense networks of organizing and politicized the entire generation of student workers at the UCs and beyond. While we have yet to win a COLA, no class struggle is so easily won, especially for such an ambitious demand.

We have already achieved what we never thought would be possible. Our task is to maintain our independent movement and community over a longer-term, amidst the challenges posed by the pandemic, to grow and emerge stronger than ever, to keep fighting for a COLA, against COVID-induced austerity, and create a liberated university for all. ■

## Virus Is Color Blind, Humans Are Not — continued from page 2

The United States is the only developed country in the world where there is no universal health care. The racial gap, however, has prevented united action — even though most people now support a single payer type system. Blacks, Latinos and Native Americans have never received fair and equal treatment. Many African Americans don’t have a primary care physician.

The ideology of white supremacy is so engrained that solidarity between whites and others has been difficult to forge. Racial inequality is exacerbated under a system that puts business and profits first. Yet the need for health solidarity is changing that.

### Inequality Spreads COVID-19

The same is true for inequality around the world. Racial conflicts have undermined development and anti-capitalist struggles, including in Africa and Latin America.

“Why inequality could spread COVID-19,” by Faheem Ahmed, Na’eem Ahmed, Christopher Pissarides and Joseph Stiglitz in the British medical publication *The Lancet* (April 2) explains:

*“Estimates indicate that COVID-19 could cost the world more than \$10 trillion, although considerable uncertainty exists with regard to the reach of the virus and the efficacy of the policy response.*

*“For each percentage point reduction in the global economy, more than 10 million people are plunged into poverty worldwide. Considering that the poorest populations are more likely to have chronic conditions, this puts them at higher risk of COVID-19-associated mortality.*

*“Since the pandemic has perpetuated an*

*economic crisis, unemployment rates will rise substantially and weakened welfare safety nets further threaten health and social insecurity.”*

In short, people in less developed regions such as Africa with weak health systems and safety nets will be hit the hardest.

### Opportunity for United Action

An opportunity nevertheless exists today. To close the inequality gap is possible as more working-class people and farmers see the virus as color blind. Many whites who had ignored racism now express some solidarity to minorities dying at higher numbers.

As 22 million Americans lose their jobs in the first month and then lose their employer-based health insurance, the demand for a Medicare-for-all health care system seems logical. U.S. law does not pay for sick leave or provide other basic social services as other wealthy countries do.

More whites and most African Americans are asking, “Why not?” As the Federal Reserve prints trillions of dollars to save the economy, what were once seen as “socialist” demands seems more and more realistic.

How to win is also clearer: mass action by working people for fundamental changes to the system that put profits before health. The invisible enemy is showing that unity is possible, and that the essential driver of the economy is not capital but labor.

The demand for nationalization of the health care and drug industries for the public good is more realistic than ever. A new radical leadership is possible, and necessary. ■



Squatters gather outside the Hothouse Squat after being evicted by the RCMP.

Red Braid

## A Report from Canada: Two-Tier Response to COVID-19

By Ivan Drury

THERE ARE TWO stories of Canada's response to the novel coronavirus. One story, spoken in daily briefings by politicians, is bailouts and the warm embrace of state support. This is the story of \$5.8 billion in federal monies for beleaguered oil and gas extraction corporations, and \$500 million for property and homeowners in mortgage forgiveness.

The other is Iris's story.

On March 22nd, three weeks into Canada's immersion into the COVID-19 pandemic, I got a phone call from a young woman named Iris. She had gotten my phone number from a pamphlet about COVID-19 that she found on the street and she was calling for advice.

Holding in tears, Iris said she had nowhere to go. Her boyfriend had just been arrested so she had found herself suddenly alone on the street, with no money or

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*Ivan Drury is active in Red Braid Alliance for Decolonial Socialism and an editor of The Volcano in the Vancouver, BC area.*

income, and nowhere to stay. All the shelters, she said, were full or not accepting new residents because the operators were trying to improvise ways to stop the coronavirus from being introduced into their buildings.

She was calling for advice. "There is an empty apartment across the hall from my friend's place," she said. "Do you think it would be okay for me to break in and stay there?" Iris said her plan was to nail the door shut behind her, keep the lights off, and keep quiet to not be discovered.

Canada's response to COVID-19 is a poor young woman terrified, breaking into vacant apartments and huddling in the dark, hiding from police, and hopefully from the coronavirus.

Iris will not get a penny from the \$50 billion that Canada has pledged to banks to secure potential mortgage payment losses, and not a dime from the \$15 billion Alberta oil and gas executives are demanding from Ottawa. She is not a property owner so does not qualify for mortgage relief, and

doesn't even pay rent so can't apply for \$300 a month from the British Columbia (BC) provincial government on behalf of her landlord.

She hasn't logged 600 hours of licit wage labor in the past 52 weeks, so cannot receive either Employment Insurance (with a sped-up wait time) or Canada Emergency Response Benefit of \$2000 a month because she has not had a job to lose. She's not even on welfare, so she can't get the BC government's \$300 pandemic bonus that gives people with disabilities and on regular assistance about half the amount of money of those workers who were laid off because of COVID shutdowns.

### The State and "Civil Society"

While different, the two stories of Canada's response to the coronavirus are not contradictory. The coronavirus crisis, like any crisis that shakes the confidence of the middle class and relatively privileged, white working class in the authority of the bourgeois state, adjusts and redefines that

civil society.

In his *Prison Notebooks*, written while incarcerated under Mussolini's fascist government, Italian communist leader Antonio Gramsci wrote that bourgeois power in western liberal democracies is made durable by hegemonic blocs formed at their core.

Alliances between the capitalist class and other relatively privileged sectors create close ties between what Gramsci calls the "state" and "civil society," with the level of independence of civil society from the state depending on historical conditions.

Canada's state response to the COVID-19 crisis has tightened the relationship between the state and civil society, into an indistinguishable capitalist-health bloc. In prime minister Justin Trudeau's daily addresses, public health workers appear as a "front line" in the "battle" against the virus while his bailout packages flow to consumer markets, the oil and gas industry, and mortgage banks.

Media coverage has adopted a wartime self-censorship, turning airwaves into uninterrupted channels for government talking points, and members of civil society hang out their windows at 7PM every day to bang pots and pans and cheer their troops and demand police powers to fine and arrest those who disobey government orders.

In the coronavirus pandemic, Gramsci's state and civil society become a reflexive whole with a pulsing and circulating ideology and capital like a heart and arterial system in the total body of the nation state of Canada.

COVID-19 is the obvious and stated danger against which this capitalist-health bloc is organizing. But the viral danger is especially organized against certain groups of people who have been excluded from belonging in civil society, defined along lines set by racism, colonialism, and capitalist class war.

In the United States this exclusion is most obvious in the racial disparities in the numbers of COVID-19 deaths. *The New York Times* reports that 70% of those who have died of coronavirus in Louisiana are Black while they are only 32% of the population. In Canada Indigenous people, long targeted for destruction by settler colonialism, live in overcrowded housing on reserves and packed into congregate homeless shelters in cities. They have epidemic levels of tuberculosis and other lung and immune system conditions.

The virus at this writing has not hit Indigenous communities but if it does, Canada's colonial apparatus will cause a widespread and devastating spread.

The capitalist-health bloc of state and civil society are arranging a two-tier response to COVID-19. The Canadian state is distributing some degree of bailout support to the civil society public while it treats others as a social and health threat to that

public. During the pandemic, Iris and tens of thousands of other poor, Indigenous and racialized migrant people have had their meager food and health services stripped away.

### Losng Services

In response to a March 18th directive from the BC Provincial health authority to shut down all gatherings over the size of 50, the Salvation Army Caring Place in Maple Ridge shut down its meal service and froze its homeless shelter intake, the only daily free food serving in town and the only regular place for unhoused people to sleep indoors.

Maple Ridge is typical of many smaller BC cities. Its population of about 80,000 was built around long-struggling and recently failing resource industries. Large unhoused and low-income populations have emerged in the last decade. Unlike the urban centers Vancouver and Victoria, these tertiary cities do not have old institutions of regulatory care for the poor built into their cores.

During the third week of Canada's pandemic crisis, volunteer researchers with Red Braid Alliance for Decolonial Socialism did a telephone survey of shelter and soup kitchens throughout the province. We surveyed 54 out of 61 homeless shelters listed BC-wide. Out of 2335 available shelter beds, 761, about one-third, had been frozen to new admissions or closed completely.

Researchers also spoke with staff at 32 soup kitchens that serve weekly or daily free meals outside Vancouver. More than one-third of them had closed completely, making a recorded loss of 630 meals a week.

The number of meals lost is likely double that or worse because about half of the meal programs in a government registry were unreachable; many of those are likely closed. In Vancouver the numbers were less marked; only seven out of 27 soup kitchens surveyed had shut down.

Every soup kitchen, along with every restaurant in BC, had been forced by government order to close their regular indoor food services. But unlike restaurants, soup kitchens did not move their menus to gig-worker delivery service.

The great majority of soup kitchens have moved from hot meals to exclusively cold, bagged lunches, with sandwiches and cookies replacing more nutritious hot meals. Out of 40 soup kitchens still operating province-wide (half of them in Vancouver), only seven reported that they were still serving hot meals.

The loss of food and shelter resources is devastating for a community already vulnerable to death by COVID-19 because of the long-term effects of poverty. Indigenous people who make up about half of those on the streets.

On March 18th Dwayne Martin, a leader in Anita Place tent city, a camp that housed more than a hundred beside the highway in Maple Ridge between 2017 and 2019, rode his bicycle up to the doors of the Salvation Army only to find the sign on the door announcing the closure.

"This is going to be bad," Martin said. "I heard a doctor on the radio saying we are supposed to eat well and get lots of rest. Well, this was the only hot meal that most people out here get. And last night they told me they aren't accepting anybody who's not already in the shelter. We can't sleep or eat."

A week later another man sleeping on the streets of Maple Ridge said, "I'm down to stealing food." He said that COVID-19 regulations make shoplifting more difficult because grocery stores restrict the number of people allowed inside at a time. He opened a cloth shopping bag to show me what he had been able to steal that day; it was all candy and chocolate bars.

Besides services dedicated to low-income communities, the poor have also suddenly lost the other spaces they can ordinarily use for sanctuary from the streets and for access to running water. On March 16th, the City of Vancouver joined other cities across Canada and the United States in shuttering "non-essential services" including community centers and libraries.

Spaces in private businesses where low-income people can access washrooms have simultaneously dried up. Cafes like Tim Hortons and Starbucks have closed their branches to public access under pressure from government order and moved to pickup-only, resulting in all their bathrooms being closed down.

Vancouver City government has opened some handwashing stations on sidewalks in the Downtown Eastside, where 60-80% of the population is low-income. But most communities and services have put nothing at all in the place of these frozen shelter beds and disappeared public spaces and services.

### Case-by-case Pandemic Treatment

Where governments have opened or maintained low-income community resources, they are either dangerously congregate spaces where the coronavirus is more likely to spread, or institutional, spaces set up to treat people already exhibiting symptoms of the virus.

In Victoria, BC's capital city, the city government declared three parks as temporary campsites for unhoused people. These COVID camps include trailers outfitted with bathrooms and running water and promise residents three individually packaged meals a day. These COVID camps are overflowing.

The fields themselves are orderly, gridded like soccer pitches with spaces marked

for people to set up their tents. Security staff surveil residents and regulate donations in mass, outdoor shelters.

Tents crowd the bushes around the fields where an overflow of unhoused people seek a space where they won't be harassed by security guards and bylaw and police officers.

Community activist Kym Hines says he believes Victoria has set up the COVID camps in order to break up the unregulated, organic camp of more than 100 tents that line the sidewalk on Pandora Street, close to downtown. Services on Pandora, including the drop-in and food serving Our Place, have been closed down and the city has refused community calls to set up bathroom and washing facilities for people camped along the street.

Hines said, "It feels like the city is cutting off services to people who won't leave their spots and go to the government camps in one of three parks."

In an OpEd published April 3rd, public health professors Bernie Pauly and Marilou Gagnon critique Victoria's Covid camps.

They argue: "Proven prevention approaches include rapidly housing people in hotels and housing rather than creating physically distant indoor shelters, setting up open-air shelters, or other designated locations for warehousing homeless people that make physical distancing a charade and self-isolation a myth."

A statement released on April 14th by New Democratic Party (social democratic NDP) provincial government agrees in word, claiming "we are providing emergency housing options to people experiencing homelessness and COVID-19 symptoms can self-isolate." But it fails to mention that the meager 900 emergency beds the government has opened province-wide are accessible only by health worker referral, and most are congregate emergency shelters consisting of cots set up in rows in empty gymnasiums.

Pauly and Gagnon, along with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), say such congregate shelters will cause a second, devastating outbreak in poor and incarcerated communities.

On March 26th, the City of Vancouver announced that it will open 200 hotel rooms to people who are homeless and living in single-room-occupancy (SRO) hotels who need spaces to self-isolate. These rooms are also accessible through doctor's referral.

For those with money, the city and province mandate a pandemic response: everyone must self-isolate at home and practice physical distancing, under penalty of fines and regardless of health status.

The poor, however, only gain access to self-isolation spaces as a form of minimal

medical treatment, and these beds are restricted to those who show symptoms. Governments are organizing coronavirus treatment for the poor on a case-by-case basis rather than affording them the pandemic-level access to self-isolation available to people with homes and resources.

### Shelters a Hothouse for COVID-19

Unhoused and underhoused people who had shelter or modular housing beds before shelter operators began freezing intakes as response to the virus are stuck between the choice of staying in a dangerous congregate shelter or leaving for the streets without a way back indoors.

Staff at the Union Gospel Mission in Vancouver, which provides 72 shelter beds, say they don't have any isolation space onsite. But they are "spreading the mats out a bit more than usual."

In the words of a worker in a small-town shelter, the protocol from the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority is for shelter operators to treat the coronavirus "on an individual basis, not like a pandemic."

One man staying in the Union Gospel Mission told me on April 11th that nothing has changed in how the space is operated except that he sees staff cleaning more often. He sleeps in a bunk bed in a small room with about 40 people. "If I stretch my arm out from my bed I can touch the guy sleeping next to me," he said.

Eva Bardonnet, who lives in a modular housing facility that the BC government describes as a "work-camp style trailer," said she is worried about what will happen when the coronavirus hits the building she lives in with 60 other people. "If one of us gets it, we're all getting it," she said. "There is no way to self-isolate in there. And we all eat together. We share bathrooms. Our rooms are tiny and we have no way to cook food."

A circular released by the health authority on March 20th instructs shelter and low-income housing operators to separate clients with "mild symptoms" like cough, sore throat, fever, sneezing and difficulty breathing "2 meters from others," and to confine them to "separate room and bathroom if possible." Staff "should mask and maintain 2 meters distance."

Without new or additional facilities to thin the crowds of people packed into congregate shelters, these orders are impossible and, like the daily declarations from politicians that they are helping "our most vulnerable," are doomed to hang forever as empty words.

The rut of long-standing austerity cuts that make service providers tight-fisted about distributing resources to people under their care combines with neoliberal ideology that pathologizes and blames poor people for their poverty.

In Nanaimo, a small island city on Vancouver Island with a large poor and unhoused population, the transit authority decided against providing hand sanitizer on their busses. Regional District general manager of transportation Daniel Pierce said he worried that "transit riders could potentially try to drink... hand sanitizer."

A prisoner health researcher at Dalhousie University in Halifax said hand sanitizer is considered "contraband" in Canada's prisons. As well as being forcibly confined to cramped, indoor conditions with poor ventilation, she told CTV news, "they're lucky to get a bar of soap. It's terrifying."

### Sweeps Continue — Policing the Crisis

Outside the walls of Canada's poverty institutions, the public response is increasingly to develop new carceral powers and to increase the policing of the poor.

Federal emergency measures and new COVID-19 fines will stack on top of existing laws and bylaws that city governments and police are using throughout the crisis to continue the harassment, displacement, and criminalization of unhoused and poor people.

Dave Diewert, an organizer who works with unhoused people in Surrey and a member of Red Braid, says that police in Surrey are patrolling all the storefronts and awnings where unhoused people congregate and moving them along.

On March 23rd he was talking with a group sitting in front of a community services building, which was shut down because of the pandemic, when an RCMP officer pulled up to tell them to move.

"I said there was no place to move since the shelters were full and not accepting new 'guests.' The cop said it was private property and the landlord wanted them removed; but she had no idea where they should go."

A similar thing happened the same day in Coquitlam, another Vancouver suburb. Isabel Krupp, another Red Braid organizer, said she was talking with a group of unhoused people who were standing in front of the city's main homeless shelter when the police showed up.

"Two masked-up, gloved-up cops came to half-heartedly disperse people," she said. When she asked where they should go, the cops shrugged and said "Everything's closed."

On April 6th, an open letter organized by West Coast Prison Justice Society and signed by 169 medical professionals called for the release of prisoners in Canada's prisons because "the window to act to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in correctional facilities is closing." In the weeks that followed, outbreaks of coronavirus in Canada's prisons began.

On April 8th, after an eight-day hunger strike by men detained at the Laval



Government-run Covid camp set up in a park, Victoria, BC.

Kym Hines

Immigration Holding Centre demanding release for their safety from coronavirus infection, the Canada Border Security Agency confirmed that a guard had tested positive for the virus.

Starting March 17th, Immigration Minister Bill Blair suspended “non-essential” immigration hearings and moved detention reviews to camera hearings, but despite widespread support for the hunger strikers his government has kept people detained under immigration orders on lockdown.

Likewise, the only adjustments made in Canada’s criminal court system has been to make adjustments to protect judges and lawyers. On March 16th, provincial courts in BC rescheduled all “non-urgent” matters to June or beyond. For people incarcerated awaiting trial, it means videoconferences for bail hearings and sentencing.

Closing the court protects judges and lawyers from the virus, but does nothing for incarcerated people, who languish in city cells, remand, and prison. James Bloomfield, with a representative of the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers, said “it’s impossible” to isolate people in institutions that are already overcrowded.

Under the pressure of prison abolitionist movements and the overwhelming danger of the pandemic, prison wardens in some U.S. states like Ohio, parts of California and New York, have ordered the release of some prisoners. Corrections Canada has only isolated judges and lawyers, while prisoners have had their visits restricted, cutting them off from their communities, and been moved into solitary confinement: punishments for their vulnerability.

### No Social Isolation for the Socially Isolated!

Since the pandemic hit Canada, social media channels have been flooded with petitions, mobilizations, and calls to action that make similar cases for unhoused and underhoused communities.

The petition from a group of prisoner support organizations in Ontario and an

open letter from the Union of BC Indian Chiefs say that to make incarcerated people safe, empty the prisons and reunite incarcerated people with their families and communities.

A petition with more than 10,000 signatures from a coalition of groups serving and made up of unhoused and underhoused people in the

Vancouver Downtown Eastside, including those languishing in more than 100 tents in Oppenheimer Park, calls to empty the shelters and the streets by opening vacant hotel rooms and apartments. And a demand from the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition calls to close the soup kitchens by immediately increasing welfare and disability incomes.

These calls to extend government relief to the poor refer to a similar hope: that the coronavirus pandemic has finally shaken Canada from the long spell of neoliberalism and brought back the possibility of a revitalized welfare state. But the signs are that deep colonial, race and class inequities encode differential access to the relief packages that have trickled down.

It is beyond the scope of this article to analyze the economic and cultural or national purpose of government coronavirus relief. But I argue that it is not to help people who need help to survive, or to end the attacks on communities targeted by the forces of capitalism and colonialism.

What relief has trickled down to poor communities has been either a side effect of a scattergun consumer bailout or, most often, a containment project that works to protect members of civil society from the perceived public health danger of the poor.

The coronavirus pandemic reveals the underlying inequities and income inequalities that undergird a settler colonial and capitalist society. The government response for groups that are securely part of Canada’s civil society has been a public health model, which has treated the virus as a pandemic and provided resources to stop middle class and privileged working-class people from backsliding into absolute desperation.

The limits of who in practice are excluded from the full benefit of Canada’s public health system is made obvious through this process. Canada’s response has been to treat those already immersed in poverty and despair as part of the contagion.

The struggle, therefore, cannot be content to petition, convince or find pitiful rea-

son for the government and public to open access to more resources. All signs suggest resources accessible to low-income communities are actually shrinking.

### Direct Action

The opportunity is elsewhere: in the militant and organized resistance and self-activity of the poor. On April 1st a group of 30 unhoused poor people and supporters broke into a vacant community center in the low-income center of Surrey, the largest Vancouver suburb. Dubbing the building the “Hothouse Squat,” the occupiers announced that they were creating a space for poor people to find sanctuary from the risk of contracting Covid-19.

Most of them moved into the building from the overfull congregate shelters in the surrounding neighborhood, where rumors were spreading that the community’s first cases of coronavirus had been detected.

They also said they were protecting each other from the ongoing dangers of the opioid overdose crisis and the other risks of poverty and life on the street. That same day, the health authority announced that more people had died in Vancouver from opioid overdose in the previous week than at any since 2013.

The claim of the Hothouse Squat, and the #Squat2Survive movement that its participants hoped to spark, is that because the state is failing to provide even the minimal protections for the poor, these communities should be legally entitled to provide care for themselves.

Such actions, the squatters claimed, should be protected under Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and police should not enforce trespass and break and enter laws. The Surrey RCMP, however, did not hesitate, and within four hours had entered and evicted the building occupation.

The COVID-19 crisis poses a fundamental challenge to the economic and cultural logic of settler colonial, capitalist society. Margaret Thatcher’s neoliberal adage that “there is no society” is proven obviously false when coronavirus shows that if one has the virus, all are vulnerable.

The only real solution is to recreate a society where no one is cast out and where all people have what they need to be healthy and safe. But Canada’s response shows that who the state and civil society define as full person, one deserving protection, is not universal. Those outside of the public receive answers drawn from the toolkit of fascism.

The lesson drawn by the Hothouse Squatters was not that resistance is impossible, but that the self-organization and struggle of subaltern communities cannot depend on police following their own laws in good faith. The next squat, they say, will include stronger barricades. ■

# Producing Knowledge for Justice

By Rabab Abdulhadi

*THIS IS THE first of a two-part interview that Against the Current editor Dianne Feeley had with Rabab Abdulhadi. Professor Abdulhadi initiated the Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas Studies program (AMED) at San Francisco State University (SFSU) 13 years ago in the College of Ethnic Studies. ATC was interested in learning what it had accomplished and how the right wing is so intent on harassing her and the AMED program.*

I WAS RECRUITED to come and build this program as the fifth Department in the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State from my job as director of the Center of Arab American Studies at the University of Michigan Dearborn. Before I signed my contract, I insisted on several things, including that AMED Studies be housed in the College of Ethnic Studies.

I wanted to build AMED studies in the spirit of the student strike of 1968-69, led by the Black Student Union (BSU) and Third World Liberation Front (TWLF). The 1968-69 striking students demanded the decolonization of the curriculum and the creation of educational programs that reflect, legitimize and validate the lived experiences of marginalized communities.

They demanded a different relationship between the university and the community in which the university does not only produce scholarship and advance academic careers, but is accountable, transparent and collaborative. They wanted a respectful and reciprocal relationship between the two; this is exactly what we built in AMED studies.

As you can imagine, there is a real need to educate the academy and the public at large about Islamophobia, anti-Arab discrimination and the struggle for justice in and for Palestine as part of the indivisibility of justice. As well, there is the low bar with which Arab, Muslim and Palestinian bashing is generally treated (and ignored). In the United States, including at SFSU, most incidents are not readily recognizable as racist, discriminatory or xeno-

phobic.

I did not sign the contract until the university agreed to hire two other tenure track faculty members in addition to me so we could have a critical mass dedicated to building the program even though the Dean told me at the time that there would be 12 faculty members for me to steer.

I also negotiated an initial three-year grant. I asked for, but did not succeed in receiving, a standard-of-living salary comparable to that of Michigan but I agreed to the pay cut because I was very excited to build this program.

Like 1968-69, my hire as AMED's director was a result of two major community historical struggles at SFSU. The first became very urgent in 2002, post 9/11/2001 and during the Aqsa Intifada when the Israeli military reinvaded Palestinian towns, villages and refugee camps. Former SFSU President Corrigan unfairly disciplined and sanctioned the General Union of Palestinian Students but failed to crush their activism, leading to a stand off with the community.

Attempting to resolve these tensions, Corrigan formed a task force to study and make recommendations to improve cam-

pus climate. Initially the task force was not inclusive of members of our community but sustained activism persuaded him to make it more diverse. One of its top recommendations was to hire a senior scholar to teach about Arab, Muslim and Palestinian communities and mentor students at SFSU.

The second development was around the Palestinian Mural. Designed to honor the late Professor Edward Said, it joined other SFSU murals honoring Malcolm X, Cesar Chavez, South Asian and Filipino struggles, the Pacific and finally Native American and Indigenous communities. The Palestinian Mural, then, was one of our first accomplishments as AMED. Importantly, it reflected the Spirit of '68, as it was led by the students and included constant discussions and debates with the faculty, staff and the broader AMED community of justice.

## Diaspora Narratives

Next, we organized a workshop on Mapping Arab Diasporas (MAPAD), a project that I started at CAAS in Michigan and brought along to SFSU.

MAPAD aimed at compiling oral history narratives from and in collaboration with

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Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas Studies (AMED) (College of Ethnic Studies)

Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas Initiative

المبادرة الأكاديمية لدراسات الجاليات العربية والمسلمة في المهجر

**Upcoming Events**

**Teaching Palestine: Pedagogical Praxis and the Indivisibility of Justice**

An International Symposium Call for Proposals

Date: July 16-22, 2018  
Location: World Congress of Middle East Studies (WOCMES), Seville, Spain  
Proposal Deadline: January 15, 2018

Initiated by the Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas Studies at San Francisco State University and co-sponsored by several Palestinian and international academic and intellectual institutions, the international symposium on *Teaching Palestine: Pedagogical Praxis and the Indivisibility of Justice* will be convened during the World Congress of Middle East Studies (WOCMES), in Seville, Spain, July 16-20, 2018.

The symposium is part of AMED Studies' multi-site and multi-year project on Teaching

Contact Hours: Monday through Friday, 9am - 5pm  
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Phone: (415) 405-2668  
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تتصرف جامعة النجاح الوطنية - كلية التربية وإعداد المعلمين والتعاون مع دراسات الجاليات العربية والمسلمة في المهجر (AMED Studies SFSU) في جامعة سان فرانسيسكو في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية ومجموعة من الجامعات والمؤسسات البحثية الفلسطينية والدولية بدعمكم بحضور المؤتمرات الدولية: "التدريس في فلسطين: الممارسة التربوية وشمولية العدالة"

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في مركز الشريعة في كلية التربية - الحرم الجامعي القديم الساعة ٩:٠٠ صباحاً

community groups and organizers. It contributed to the growth of Arab American Studies and Muslim American interdisciplinary studies that were relatively new after September 11, 2001, and thus represented a significant cutting edge in the academy. We organized our first workshop in May 2007 even before my first spring semester at SFSU was over.

The MAPAD workshop included testimony by Arab American Union member Sheikh Abdullah, a Yemeni worker who struggled alongside Cesar Chavez. He spoke of the late martyr Nagi Daifullah, who was active in the United Farm Workers and killed as he was defending Cesar Chavez. At the time and even today, very few within or outside the academy know this history of the involvement of Arab and Muslim communities in other struggles for justice.

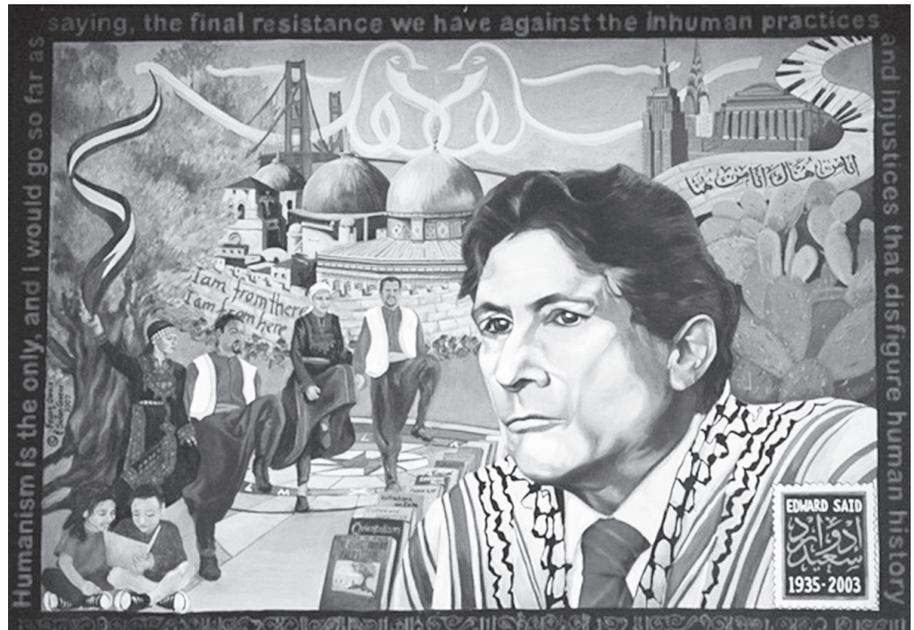
The Mapping Arab Diasporas workshop is an example of how we can in praxis enact scholarship that is accountable to our communities. By researching, teaching about and making public such knowledge we engage in what the 1968 BSU/TWLF strikers demanded, validating the lived experiences of marginalized groups. In left and “progressive” circles, even within the ranks of Ethnic Studies, few are familiar with Arab involvement in all segments of justice-centered struggles in the United States and internationally.

This includes Arab workers in labor struggles and solidarities, including Detroit autoworkers in collaboration with DRUM, or California farm workers. This knowledge also undermines the dominant trend about Arab American Studies that claims that Arab- and/or Muslim-Americans are only concerned with narrow ethnic matters and are part of U.S. middle-class whiteness. It reinforces the need for inclusion of Arab, Muslim, and Palestine Studies in the California Ethnic Studies curriculum that has been targeted by Israel lobby groups.

### Building from Scratch

To build AMED’s infrastructure from scratch, I started out by hiring lecturers (as per the CFA Collective Bargaining Agreement) under the title of Research Associates to staff the two AMED faculty lines that I had negotiated in my contract. I did not want to start by hiring tenure-track faculty until I became more familiar with the lay of the land at SFSU and determined what expertise we needed. Meanwhile AMED Research Associates helped out in community outreach, mentoring students and designing courses, such as Comparative Border Studies: Palestine and Mexico, Arab American History, and Islamophobia.

I was able to draw on the San Francisco Bay Area community due to my prior involvement with several national organiza-



tions, such as Palestine Solidarity Committee (PSC), General Union of Palestine Students (GUPS) and Union of Palestinian Women’s Associations in North America (UPWA).

As a result, I was already familiar with Arab and other non-Palestinian organizations such as the American Arab anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), Al-Awda, the Arab Cultural and Community Center, CISPES, Filipino, Central American, American Indian Movement, Black Panthers Party, and several left organizations. Through my Palestine Solidarity Committee work, I knew Gus Newport, the former mayor of Berkeley, and Barbara Lubin, the founder of the Middle East Children’s Alliance as the organization was being created.

I therefore engaged Bay Area scholars and community members and organizations before deciding on how to best frame the job descriptions for the permanent AMED faculty. This was essential to bring about the stability and longevity needed to maintain the program and turn it into the department that I was hired to build.

### International Context for Threats

However, Zionists had already intensified their campaigns to oppose my plans for the institutionalization of AMED. Within less than a year (and while I was still healing from two broken shoulders), a major pro-Israel donor made a \$90,000 gift to SFSU to start the first visiting scholar in Israeli Studies. In 2014, it was converted to an endowed senior faculty position.

It is important to note that this institutionalization of an ideologically pro-Zionist Israeli studies program at SFSU took place at the same time as Israel’s continued colonization and occupation of Palestine, the institutionalization of the AMED studies program, and the escalation of attacks against

me. This has been a central site for pro-Israeli advocacy and opposition to Palestine.

The attempts to block the institutionalization of the AMED Studies in 2009-2010 coincided with Israel’s 2008-2009 war on Gaza. We were about to submit the job description and conduct the searches for the two AMED tenure track lines.

The spring 2009 semester began with Islamophobic and anti-Palestinian posters issued by the College Republicans and supporters of Israel. The posters invited students to “throw shoes” at what the posters labeled as “ Hamas flag” which was in fact the *Shahadatyn*, the second tenet of Islam, that states that “there is no God but Allah and Mohammad is his prophet.”

SFSU administrators were asked by Palestinian, Muslim and other students of color to take seriously this racist threat, but they refused under the guise of defending “freedom of speech.” At a meeting with administrators, Hillel, Department of Jewish Studies and Middle East and Islamic Studies, administrators argued that Islamophobia was not legally defined as hate speech.

As we were narrowing down the short list for AMED candidates (which coincided with the 2009 conference celebrating 40 years of the College of Ethnic Studies), Zionist groups launched a campaign to cancel the commemoration of the second anniversary of the Palestinian Mural. They demanded that SFSU disinvite the featured speaker, Omar Barghouti, co-founder of the Palestinian Boycott National Committee that coordinates the movement for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS).

Immediately following the event, President Corrigan emailed me a new statement he published in support of Israel that denounced BDS. Shortly thereafter, he proceeded to cancel AMED faculty searches.

SFSU claimed that this was not retaliation but a normal response to the 2008 financial crash. However, AMED faculty lines were already part of the university budget since I was hired in 2007. Furthermore, I submitted the job descriptions in 2009 after the 2008 crash and the adjusted fiscal budget that was already approved on July 1, 2009.

Upon his retirement, Robert Corrigan took another hostile action against AMED by deleting its budget lines, thus carrying out Zionist wishes to prevent its institutionalization. Since that time, university administrators came up with all sorts of excuses not to reinstate AMED's faculty lines.

As a result, since 2012-13 AMED has been a one-faculty program, with no operating budget, administrative assistance, or other tenured faculty. It is quite challenging, to put it mildly, to offer courses, run a program, advise students and do everything else, not to mention facing unrelenting Zionist attacks.

Take for example the current reality. As a result of union advocacy, faculty members who need a paid leave can apply and receive it now due to the coronavirus health crisis. However, I can't avail myself of this opportunity now and take care of my health because that would effectively mean abandoning AMED studies. That simply is not an option for me.

Despite the university collaboration with the Zionist agenda, we refused to be defeated or stop the institutionalization of AMED studies as Zionist forces had hoped. Our strong community of justice extends beyond Arabs, Muslims and Palestinians, it includes students and faculty as well as activists and leaders from inside and outside the university who come from Indigenous communities, third world and communities of color, Jewish anti-Zionist groups, labor, prison abolition and civil rights.

### Developing Courses and Collaborators

With such broad involvement, we were able to develop and offer 22 courses.

Our courses are certified as General Education so all university students can receive credit for and become familiar with multiple issues that they are unable to learn about from dominant media outlets. These topics include Islamophobia; Palestine; Comparative Border studies: Palestine and Mexico; Edward Said; the Palestinian Mural; Gender and Modernity in Arab and Muslim Communities; civil liberties of Arabs and Muslims; Media images; art; literature; and representation; and queer Arab Diasporas.

Our program is accountable to the community and places justice at the center of critical knowledge production. Our students have received job placements and are now involved in some amazing research.

Our graduate students have gone on to exciting careers in the academy that are linked to their communities.

We also signed the first — and so far, the only — memorandum of understanding (MOU) between San Francisco State and An-Najah National University in Palestine. We proposed it, discussed and debated it widely. It was vetted at every administrative and academic level at SFSU and was finally approved at the level of Chancellor of California State University (the highest body of the California state university system).

But Zionist groups have targeted our collaboration with An-Najah National University. Campus Watch/Middle East Forum, led by Daniel Pipes, a right-wing leading Islamophobe (according to the Southern Poverty Law Center), has taken the lead, launching a pro-Israel campaign demanding an end to the agreement, calling An-Najah a "terrorist university." It has reproduced the same false accusations that AMCHA and other Israeli lobby groups have spread about me and that were proven to be completely baseless.

Their long two-fold goals have been to discredit Palestinian academic institutions on one hand, and cover up Israeli denial of Palestinian right to education, on the other.

Our next achievement was the development of the Edward Said Scholarship for students who excel in their studies and exemplify the model of the late Professor Said's life of publicly engaged scholarship. A high level Zionist at SFSU tried to block it, but we defeated that attempt and created the scholarship.

However, since the escalation of Zionist attacks in 2016, and in a typical move employed by other neoliberal institutions against Black Studies, Women and Gender Studies, and Ethnic Studies, SFSU has sought to further weaken AMED by taking away the decision-making authority over the scholarship fund from me and placing it in the hands of administrators who are unfriendly to AMED, the Edward Said Mural, our community and its dynamics.

We also continue to organize Open

Classrooms where we bring longtime community scholars, leaders and activists together to interact with our students, faculty and staff. We stream those educational events live, both to reach the public beyond the university boundaries and also because we don't have access to the resources those who seek to silence us do.

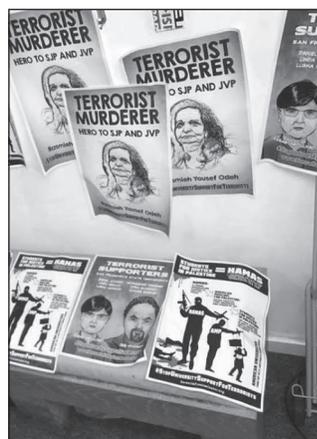
As a result, both Zionist groups as well as SFSU administrators have consistently targeted me over my social media outreach, posting to silence me. One administrator even wrote me that "classes are not supposed to be open to the public. They are for students who are registered in the class."

### Delegations to Palestine

We have organized several delegations to Palestine, including the 2011 Indigenous and Women of Color Feminist delegation in which several transnational feminists have participated, such as Angela Davis, Barbara Ransby, Chandra Mohanty, Waziyatwin, and Beverly Guy Sheftall. In 2014, we had the Academic and Labor Delegation that included colleagues from different universities including Joanne Barker, Chair of the American Indian Studies at SFSU, and Junaid Rana, Chair of Asian American Studies at UIUC.

In 2016 we co-organized the first U.S. prisoner solidarity delegation to Palestine. The delegation included four other formerly incarcerated U.S. political prisoners, artists, scholars and labor organizers, including the graphic artist and the former Minister of Culture for the Black Panther Party Emory Douglas. Each delegation issued a statement either while we were still in Palestine or within a month of our return.

The 2014 delegation issued a statement on the day on which we arrived in Palestine after being held by the Israeli military intelligence for 10 hours at the Jordan-Palestine Bridge crossing. The 2016 delegation issued a powerful statement timed for the April 17th International Day of Solidarity with Palestinian Prisoners. We translated the statement into five languages within less than two weeks of returning.



From: David Eitan  
 To: Babab Ibrahim Abdulhadi  
 Subject: YOU FUCKING RACIST FUCK  
 Date: Friday, March 23, 2018 9:10:40 AM

YOU ARE A RACIST JEW HATING FULL OF SHIT LEFT WING ISLAMOFACIST LIAR.

YOUR HATE FOR JEWS MUST ALSO TRANSLATE INTO SHARIA SUPREMICIST BELIEFS, SO WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING IN THE US AT A UNIVERSITY EXCEPT FOR THE MISSION TO SPEW YOUR FILTH INTO THE EMPTY SHELLS OF YOUR STUDENTS AND ANY OTHER IGNORANT INDIVIDUAL WHOSE LIFE YOU CAN POLLUTE WITH YOUR PSEUDO-INTELLECTUAL FILTH?

WHY DON'T YOU QUIT YOUR JOB, IF YOU ARE SO DISGUSTED AND ASHAMED TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH THE SFSU ADMIN, AND GO LIVE IN TEHRAN, OR RAMALLAH, OR MOGADISHU? OH YES, OF COURSE, BECAUSE YOU LIKE THE GOOD LIFE THE HORRIFIC, WHITE, JUDEO-CHRISTIAN UNITED STATES PROVIDES, RATHER THAN THE LIFE THOSE SHITHOLE PLACES PROVIDE.

BUT YOU ARE A SHITHOLE PERSON, CHAMPIONING THE SHITHOLE PLACES AGAINST THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN TRADITION, SO THAT IS WHAT YOU ARE - A SHITHOLE. THEREFORE INSTEAD OF LIVING IN A SHITHOLE PLACE, YOU WORK TO MAKE WHERE YOU WORK AND LIVE INTO A SHITHOLE PLACE.

YOU AND YOUR ILK, SUPPORTERS OF SHITHOLES.

YOU STINK.



Holloway Avenue, 1968: During the San Francisco State strike, students gathered every morning and faced the police. During course of the strike over 850 were arrested and expelled. Faculty, who belonged to an AFT local and supported the strike, were fired. Notice sign on the left, calling for amnesty and due process.

Another highlight was the collect call we received in the midst of the conference at Birzeit University. Mumia Abu-Jamal called my colleague Johanna Fernandez from his prison cell in Pennsylvania to express solidarity with the Palestinian struggle and Palestinian prisoners.

Each delegation traveled all over Palestine, met and critically engaged with academics, artists, labor and feminist and queer activists, prison solidarity groups and political leaders.

Each delegation experienced moments of joy and pain. A most heart wrenching experience during the prison delegation was attending an Israeli military tribunal for three Palestinian children at the Ofra Settlement military prison outside Ramallah.

The Zionist movement has particularly targeted me and members of the delegation. SFSU Administration also contributed to the Zionist agenda by subsequently revoking my travel to Palestine in 2014. The administration has since imposed several bureaucratic obstacles every time I submitted a request for travel authorization to Palestine. They proceeded to deny my travel authorization application for Teaching Palestine, and travel reimbursements for international conferences at which I was either co-organizing or presenting my scholarship.

We also developed a full program for Study Abroad in Palestine last summer. The program was drawing on the AMED academic curriculum, the delegations we took to Palestine, the open classrooms, as well as

the Teaching Palestine project.

My students and I spent seven months working on developing the Palestine Study Abroad project, jumping through one hoop after another, including processes that SFSU applied only to us, and answering ridiculous questions, asking for an explanation of “engaging with the Israeli peace movement.”

After we were told that the trip could go forward and my students spent considerable resources to get themselves ready, SFSU suddenly cancelled the trip. We suspected that they were going to try to prevent the institutionalization of a Palestine Study Abroad program in support of the Zionist agenda. Honestly, we did not expect them to be so obvious about it.

### Teaching Palestine

The project that I am very proud of is the Teaching Palestine: Pedagogical Praxis and the Indivisibility of Justice project.

I have been involved in teaching and co-learning Palestine as long as I can remember. I grew up under Jordanian rule and Israeli occupation and became an activist and community organizer. I formally taught my first course on Palestine in 2000 when I started my academic career at the AUC for the Graduate Certificate in Forced Migration and Refugee Studies.

I also organized my first academic Teaching Palestine trip during the 2001 summer school at the American University in Cairo (AOC). My students and I visited the Shatila and Ein El-Hilweh Palestinian Refugee Camps and traveled to the South

of Lebanon. It was during that trip that the Egyptian student project, Cairo to the Camps (C2C), was started. As a critical solidarity engagement rather than a solidarity tourism exercise, C2C lasted for years and was only suspended in 2011 due to student engagement in the Tahrir Square protests and the Egyptian Revolution.

Teaching Palestine builds upon and weaves in the concept of critical solidarity that has been the hallmark of delegations, the pedagogical praxis of open classrooms inside and outside campus that we’ve been doing since AMED started in 2007, and that I brought with me from Michigan, NYU and AUC, as well as the radical methodology of accountability in research and scholarship. We compiled, analyzed and made accessible oral histories and archival material that remains absent in dominant narratives.

We started this latest rendition at AMED in 2016 as we were brainstorming how to commemorate 10 years of the Palestinian Mural and the significant anniversaries in Palestinian and U.S. history. We debated what to name the program and we deliberately decided to use the term, Teaching, because it entails accountable scholarship, pedagogy and advocacy.

We stressed pedagogical praxis to signal our commitment in AMED to a justice-centered curriculum and to our refusal to treat our students as consumers or ourselves as customer service. We also wanted to validate activism.

### Remembering Anniversaries

Teaching Palestine is inspired by Palestinian and other revolutionary movements. For example, the academic year, 2017-18 marked significant anniversaries in the history of Palestine such as the 100th anniversary of the Balfour declaration or what we refer to in Palestinian history as not only 100 years of colonialism but over 100 years of Palestinian anti-colonial resistance.

It was the 70th anniversary of *Nakba*, when almost a million Palestinians were uprooted and displaced and Israel founded. It was the 10th anniversary of the blockade of Gaza, not only the 50th anniversary of the 1967 occupation. We sought to shift the discourse of the Palestinian solidarity movement and the movement for justice in Palestine from thinking of 1967 as the beginning of the occupation. Instead we traced it back to 1948.

It was also the 50th anniversary of the 1968 strike at San Francisco State, and multiple other locations around the world, such as Paris, Senegal, Mexico and Tunisia. In bringing together these historical moments, we wanted to compare and contrast them with each other and with Palestinian history. We raised the question in the minds of students, faculty and other public intellectuals how we might reframe our historical analy-



### BSU/TWLF Veterans Support Arab American Studies

Fifty years ago, as members of the Black Student Union (BSU) and the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) of SF State and TWLF of UC Berkeley, we conducted the largest student strikes in US history to open educational institutions up to our histories, our cultures, and our communities as racially oppressed peoples. Out of this historic strike emerged the field of Ethnic Studies. As veterans of the BSU and the TWLF who sacrificed to breathe life into Ethnic Studies, we stand solidly behind the inclusion of Arab American Studies in California's Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

While the main protagonists within the TWLF were African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinx/os, and Native Americans, the spirit of the TWLF encompassed all those struggling against racism and colonialism. Arab and Muslim activists participated in and expressed solidarity with the TWLF strike. Both the Organization of Arab Students (OAS) and the Iranian Student Association (ISA) actively and unconditionally supported the goals of the SFSU strike in particular, and the goal of decolonizing the curriculum in general. OAS and ISA shared BSU/TWLF opposition to the Vietnam war with the same unequivocal commitment to opposing US intervention in the Middle East and elsewhere.

sis to revise colonial narratives and center anti-colonial and justice-centered narratives.

Aside from its intellectual value and the excitement over engaging in a multi-generational conversation, one of our major achievements was our ability not to be distracted or derailed by the escalation of Zionist attacks against us within and outside SFSU. It was quite challenging but we were able to co-organize two international conferences in Palestine (at Birzeit and An-Najah), host a panel at the Caribbean Studies Association in Havana, Cuba, and put together an impressive international symposium at the World Congress of Middle East Studies in Seville, Andalucia, Spain.

We also co-organized another international conference in Johannesburg in collaboration with several South African universities and organizations.

In the midst of the heightened Zionist attacks and SFSU administration complicity, we brought "Teaching Palestine" to the American Studies Association, the National Women's Studies Association, Middle East Studies Association and several U.S. campuses and community spaces. We are now putting together an edited volume, a website and future Teaching Palestine encounters around the world. This will depend on what happens with the global health crisis.

You can then imagine why the right-wing Zionist groups and the university's corporatized forces are upset at me and AMED Studies, and why they are escalating their attacks after having failed to shut us down. As a justice-centered program, AMED contests colonial narratives of submission, subjugation and defeat. We link different struggles on the basis of the indivisibility of justice.

Our impact goes beyond the university and the academy to organically and seriously engage the community. We are continuously engaging the public, connecting education with the community. We challenge Islamophobia, anti-Arab discrimination, anti-Palestinian hostility, and injustices everywhere.

We are committed to student involvement in and accountability to their communities instead of turning them into docile citizens

We make space for students who are formally enrolled and informally engaged with the program to grow together and become advocates for all our communities.

We do not forget for a single moment that critical thinking represents a danger to right-wing forces who have historically tried to silence us and I do mean all of us. The first target of right-wing attacks on critical thought has focused on sites of knowledge production on university campuses.

### Continuing Harassment

Historically, books have been burned, campus grounds were invaded and teachers and students thrown in jails, tortured and sometimes disappeared for daring to challenge an unjust system from Chile to Palestine, Saudi Arabia to South Africa and Michigan to San Francisco.

Throughout, the right wing has attempted to destroy justice-centered knowledge production and enlist members of our communities in their plan to suppress resistance so the system can reproduce itself.

Needless to say, if you can engage students in critical thinking, inevitably they will be open to change not because we indoctrinate them but precisely because they have brains and can think for themselves. Affording students and other members of the community the space to think differently, I am convinced that they will inevitably act for justice.

upon graduation and reproducing unfair and unjust systems at home and around the world. We expose injustice and complicity, as we believe that it is our mission to do.

Here, then, the right resorts to McCarthy-style tactics of intimidation and harassment. They try to ruin people's reputation, including mine, in order to isolate and silence us, maintain business-as-usual facade, and prevent anyone from rocking the boat.

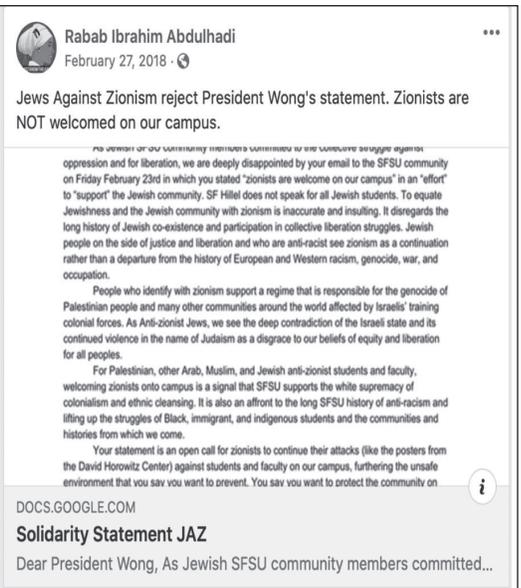
Pro-Israel attacks against me, AMED studies and our students, along with SFSU collusion by denying us resources and suppressing student activism still failed to prevent us from institutionalizing AMED.

However, this meant that I had to do the job of three or four faculty members. It also means continuing to mobilize community resources. Both took a toll on me, AMED studies, our students and our community resources.

One of the problems we have encountered at SFSU, including right before the outbreak of the coronavirus, has been to find space for our events/open classrooms. For example, we reserved the college conference room for Palestine@SFSU teach-in only to find it singled out for "insurance" under the guise of a potential "fire hazard" as if Arabs, Muslims and Palestinians represented a terrorist danger to this society and the university community.

This semester we faced "technical" issues that were quite transparent to us in how the bureaucracy can be used to shut down a program and try to force a faculty member they do not like to resign. What they are afraid of is a justice-centered program that speaks truth to power and a faculty member who is not afraid to rock the boat.

To support Rabab Abdulhadi, Palestine at SFSU, visit the International Campaign to Defend Professor Rabab Abdulhadi (<https://www.facebook.com/DefendProfAbdulhadi/>). To learn more about AMED Studies, visit its official site at <https://amed.sfsu.edu/> or its unofficial FB page at <https://www.facebook.com/AMEDStudies/>. ■



## On the Delhi Pogrom By Radical Socialist (India)

INDIAN PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi, who recently hosted Trump, is a longtime member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), an extreme Hindu-nationalist organization and its party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The ideology of the RSS is Hindutva (“Hindu-ness”), which defines Indian culture as solely composed of Hindu values. This statement by the Radical Socialist was written in response to the communal violence that occurred during the state visit. It was posted March 8, 2020 ([www.radical-socialist.in](http://www.radical-socialist.in)) and has been edited for publication, with parenthetical explanations in Against the Current.

THE COMMUNAL VIOLENCE that erupted in the National Capital Region of Delhi on February 24th, and carried out for a week, marks another orchestrated step in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh’s strategy of deliberately polarizing the Indian public along Hindu-Muslim lines.

In the past such politically motivated communal assaults have been large scale and episodic. After 2014, such targeting of Muslims by the cadres and supporters aligned to *Hindutva* has taken the form of attacks, sometimes fatal, on individuals or very small groups. This occurs especially in the [national governing party] BJP-ruled states where the perpetrators mostly can get away with what they have done.

Such low-intensity violence makes attacks a routinized, normalized and banal affair. It displaces any blame onto the failings of the local law-and-order machinery. It thereby disguises the machinations of *Hindutva*’s hate-filled project of terrorizing, inferiorizing and ghettoizing Muslims as it deliberately spreads fear among local Hindu communities of possible Muslim retaliation.

The Delhi violence marks something of a departure from this post-2014 pattern in that it took place in the capital city. It overlapped with Trump’s visit and was contained afterwards within a few days. Unlike the anti-Sikh pogrom of 1984, it was not allowed to be as widescale.

Most importantly this incident took place after the BJP’s failure to make substantial electoral gains in the early February Delhi Assembly elections, although the BJP did somewhat expand its vote share and seat tally.

It is not a coincidence that the violence was worst in the northeast region where there is more solid support for the party. That helped it gain five out of eight assembly seats.

Frustrating for the *Sangh* (Buddhist monastic orders) was the fact that the anti-CAA/NPR/NRC sit-ins and agitations [that opposed discriminatory immigration and citizenship legislation] did not show signs of fatigue. Indeed there was greater international media exposure of these protests as well as criticism of the BJP central government than before, all the more so because of the Trump visit.

Senior BJP leaders — already preparing the ground for the assaults through their calls for violence and hate speech before and after the Delhi elections — felt that a more hurtful message, albeit in a more contained time-span, had to be sent.

What was not expected was that sections of the minority community, out of impending fear, made preparations for self-defense. As a result, the casualties were less than they otherwise would have been. But it also meant that there would be some casualties in Hindu majority areas, including the unfortunate death of (police) IB officer Ankit Sharma. This death was played out of all proportion by BJP leaders and an absolutely biased media determined to ignore and divert attention from the reality. Most of the casualties — as well as property damages — were suffered by Muslims. So far, a total of 53 deaths have been counted.

Making matters worse, there was video proof of the police either being silent spectators or actually participating in the assaults launched by pro-*Hindutva* cadres. According to local witnesses, many came from across the Uttar Pradesh border.

This repeats the earlier cases when the Delhi police did nothing to prevent masked intruders from entering Jawaharlal Nehru University and beating up leftwing students, and even teachers. Nor have those intruders been rounded up despite visual evidence enabling identification.

Earlier, in Jamia Millia Islamia University, the police had illegally entered the campus and caused serious injuries. They attacked students with stun guns, rubber bullets and teargas as well as making *lathi* (a heavy, iron-

bound bamboo stick) charges. The police also went into the libraries and dorms to carry out further physical assaults and to damage property.

In neither case have the police been held responsible, nor will this happen in regard to the latest, more serious Delhi violence.

That there were also remarkable and heart-warming instances of Hindus sheltering besieged Muslims, and of Muslims protecting Hindu neighbors, doesn’t alter the more disturbing reality of pre-planning. In Hindu-majority areas Muslim shops and houses were marked prior to the subsequent burnings and attacks.

Moreover, police complicity and subsequent behavior, clamping down on all violence only after the passage of a few days, can only be explained by sanctions, messages and orders coming to them from the political masters at the Centre [national government].

### Violence with Impunity

Most disturbing is the failure of the judiciary, particularly the Supreme Court, to order the immediate trial of *Sangh* hate-mongers or to condemn the police. In asking Harsh Mander [a leading opponent of Hindu-nationalist violence] to prove his bonafides, the Supreme Court seems to have gone beyond that.

This augurs ill for hopes of just, fair and impartial punishment later on for all those guilty of criminal violence. Should we be surprised then if there are unusually favorable rulings given to the BJP and its members?

The AAP [the governing party in Delhi] did nothing to mobilize its activists to protect the besieged areas when it could have done so. It has refused to highlight the disproportionate plight of Muslims for fear of alienating Hindu voters, thereby reinforcing rather than contesting the BJP’s ideological-political project.

The AAP has confined itself to offering relief to all victims who can show proof of their suffering — a difficult enough task requiring legal support not forthcoming from the Delhi government. In setting up makeshift, poorly equipped camps one might conclude that the *perception* of providing relief seems more important than providing

*continued on page 40*

## In the Time of the Coronavirus: Class Struggle and the Pandemic

By Kunal Chattopadhyay

THE GRAVITY OF the coronavirus pandemic should not be understated, nor should we exaggerate. There have been other, significant pandemics in the late 20th and early 21st centuries: Ebola, SARS in 2003, the H1N1 influenza pandemic of 2009.

The 2009 case is important for one particular reason: It started in North America. On June 11, 2009 the World Health Organization (WHO) raised its pandemic level

to the highest level, Phase 6, indicating widespread community transmission on at least two continents. The 2009 H1N1 virus contains a unique combination of gene segments from human, swine and avian influenza A viruses. But it was never called “the North American swine flu.” This bears stressing given the aggressive racist attacks on China in connection with the coronavirus.

The gravity of the current case comes from other factors. By the first week of May, the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases worldwide has exceeded three million, with over 200,000 dead. The total is well over that because testing and reporting are so incomplete.

COVID-19 is transmitted more readily between humans than its closest relation, SARS. The virus has caused severe respiratory disease in about 20% of patients and killed more than three percent of confirmed cases. While the death rate is lower than for SARS (up to 10%), its transmission is wider.

Medical practitioners and specialists are warning of severe consequences. In several interviews Ramanan Lakshminarayan, Director of the Centre for Disease Dynamics, Economics and Policy, New Delhi, has suggested an estimate of as many as 300-500 million will be affected in India. Even if even one percent die, that would be three to five million. If the top estimate includes a number who are asymptomatic and never tested, and if the official figure is only 100 million, India might still end up with a million dead from COVID-19 in 2020.

To understand the gravity, look back at the “Spanish Flu” of 1918-20, which caused 100 million deaths, [So called because the Spanish press could cover it without wartime censorship — ed.] Compared with the bacteria-induced plague pandemic that resulted in the death of 12 million Indian people in the period 1896-1939, the Spanish Flu caused a similar number

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*On March 24th, Prime Minister Modi made his announcement via TV, placing the country on immediate lockdown.*

in two years’ time. So many people were dying that at one stage, disposal of the bodies proved impossible. The poet Suryakant Tripathi “Nirala” wrote about bodies lying along the Ganga riverside for lack of wood with which to burn them.

Then too, the government had attempted “social distancing” and some stress on alternative medicine. Then, as now, certain factors were understated. A key one was its social and economic dimension.

Fatality must be measured not just in gross numbers but also in terms of distinct social layers — the class, the gender, and in India, the caste.

Fatality rates are hard to estimate in the early stages of an epidemic and depend on the medical care given to patients. For example, ventilators save lives by enabling people with pneumonia to breathe. Most experts believe the current fatality rate is exaggerated by serious under-diagnosis of mild cases.

Hypothetically, if COVID-19 affected half the world’s current population of seven billion over the course of a year with a one percent fatality rate, the death toll would be 35 million — substantially increasing the number of annual deaths for all causes worldwide to 60 million.

This is where a key human intervention comes in. However, for the last three decades the world has been reeling under a deep right-wing economic offensive, which used to go under the name of neoliberalism, but under Trump, Modi, Johnson, Bolsonaro and others may be said to have gone beyond that.

### Public Health and the Neoliberal Offensive

India’s public health expenditure has been rising somewhat over the decade 2009-2018, in order to meet its growing population. But by fiscal year 2018, the value of public health expenditures by states and the central government amounted to around 1.58 trillion Indian rupees (\$22 billion), estimated to be 1.28% of the GDP. If we average this out, India spent \$22 per person on healthcare that year.\*

Additionally, a study by Sanika Dewanji, an author quite sympathetic to the Narendra Modi government, points out that the low public expenditure resulted in a sharp rise in private sector for-profit healthcare. Dewanji remarks that “Various programs like the *Ayushman Bharat* and the National Health Mission have already showed some success by providing the common man with an alternative to exorbitant healthcare costs and treatments.”<sup>1</sup>

\*All figures given here in U.S. dollar equivalent. — ed.

Even by Modi's level of "fakespeak," this takes the cake. The *Ayushman Bharat* program has two components. One is the creation of 150,000 "health and wellness centers." Its 2018-19 budget was the equivalent of about \$1100 per center. All that would do is repaint existing health centers and decorate them with Modi's picture.

The other component is the *Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana* (PMJAY). Jean Drèze pointed out in an angry note that the previous Medical Insurance scheme was folded into the new program. The actual hike was just \$140 million.

Drèze added that according to media reports, NITI Aayog (the premier policy think tank of the government, called the National Institute for Transforming India) experts anticipated the annual PMJAY budget to rise significantly over the next few years. But for the purpose of providing adequate health insurance, it is just chicken feed, amounting to an annual \$2.80 for a family of five.<sup>2</sup>

This is not the picture of India alone, but of the Global South (the exploited, ex-colonial world). Neoliberal policy instruments such as privatization, marketization, commercialization and deregulation have led to the expansion of markets in economic and social sectors. In the public health sector this has meant restructuring by introducing market principles and reducing barriers for capital investment on for-profit services.

Several studies have identified the critical role played by global multilateral organizations like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) in furthering neoliberalism through their Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs).

In the case of India, however, a significant aspect was government negotiation, not simply World Bank coercion. This means that one cannot pass the buck on to "imperialist exploiters." The intelligentsia played an essential role in shaping policy by legitimizing liberalization and privatization.

Several influential academics, policy and media analysts actively promoted these ideas, just as now a lot of them are whitewashing the Modi regime and the RSS (extreme Hindu-nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh — ed.). Advocates of all-out privatization held many key positions in finance, industry, education and health. Some already held senior positions in the World Bank, IMF and WHO prior to occupying influential positions in government.

There was a whole community of Indian experts, including diaspora Indians, pushing neoliberalism before 1991 and certainly during the period of formal changeover to a privatized system. Changes in the health sector began with the introduction of user fees, public-private partnerships, and greater commercialization.

In the last three decades health care, historically seen as a not-for-profit sector, has begun displaying a mind-set and a form of activity meant for profit-making enterprises. This has meant a massive widening of inequalities.

**H**ealth and health service inequities became global concerns a decade after the initial euphoria of neoliberalism. Several countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia that had taken loans under SAPs implemented health sector reforms; they were faced with the challenge of rising inequities. Even economists like Joseph Stiglitz, an advocate of neoliberalism, wrote on the discontents of globalization and highlighted the fault lines of liberalization and globalization across and within the developing and developed countries.

The policies of the World Bank and IMF reconfigured the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the health sector. For example, public-private partnerships became an important element in national disease control programs like HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and leprosy.

Kapilashrami and McPake<sup>3</sup>, in their study of the role of the Global Fund to fight HIV in India, observed that funding made available through these global initiatives created many distortions and fissures within the NGO community. It led to unhealthy competition in accessing resources. Two other scholars, Rama V. Baru and Malu Mohan, pointed out that the seemingly radical language employed by NGOs helped to delegitimize the role of the state and proving highly beneficial for the for-profit sector.

With the growing disengagement of the United States from United Nations and WHO funding, a financial crisis developed. The void was partly filled by a combination of big pharmaceutical corporations and philanthro-capitalist groups like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF).

Global public-private partnerships were forged for several disease control programs and the production of vaccines. Consequently, the autonomy of WHO was compromised by the entry of big capital.<sup>4</sup> The BMGF, for example, spends more on global health than any government other than the United States. Receiving funding from the BMGF, WHO has had to modify its policies to follow their priorities.

Further, the BMGF played an important role in the formation of the H8, which is like the G8. The H8 consists of WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund), UNAIDS (United Nations Program on HIV and AIDS), the World Bank, the BMGF, the GAVI Alliance (Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization), and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. The H8 holds closed door meetings that decide global health policies.<sup>5</sup>

Neoliberalism has extracted a greater amount of the surplus from working people, redirecting it to the already well off. At the same time, it has created aspirations, which turn into anxieties when they are not fulfilled. Moreover, the individualistic ideology of neoliberalism attempts to undercut all social solidarities. Consumerism increasingly displaces the ideas of democracy and social justice. This leads to the exclusion of socially weaker or marginalized groups — women, oppressed castes, religious minorities, sexual minorities — from both public and personal spheres.

## **A Public Health and Reproductive Crisis**

The rise of neoliberalism has also fuelled the rise of the religious right — in some cases fascist-like, in other cases fundamentalist — who share some similar traits while remaining distinct from country to country. A key area where religious fundamentalisms operate through state policies is in women's sexual and reproductive health, contributing to gender-based health inequities. As the coronavirus threat forces us to prioritize, several U.S. states have seized the opportunity to make abortions "non-essential," i.e. delaying abortions because of the pandemic.

Accordingly, I am arguing that the coronavirus pandemic is a public health crisis created by capitalism. As the crisis unfolds, we are being told "now is not the time for politics." On the contrary, *now* is above all the time for politics, since

doing politics means fighting for alternative strategies.

Anyone in India watching television, reading newspapers, or receiving messages on WhatsApp or Facebook is aware that the aged (above 65), the very young (below five) and people in the medical profession are the most threatened. There is also special mention of people with risk factors such as asthma and diabetes. Yet few commentators in the mainstream media have talked about the class dimension.

If you are rich and have medical insurance, you can obtain treatment that is very different from that given to those who are poor or those who lack a minimum pension. Remember that in India, the bulk of the working class is unorganized and without retirement benefits.

At present there is no vaccine or medical cure for the coronavirus. The majority who get infected will have a fever, cough, and recover after some days. A minority will develop serious respiratory trouble. Between one and two percent will be more acutely affected. Deaths occur because their bodies will produce antibodies that are ineffective against the virus. Many will develop pneumonia.

Developing a COVID-19 vaccine takes time. Programs are underway in dozens of academic and private labs around the world, some under the auspices of the Oslo-based Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI). The first results are expected this summer. However further tests will be necessary. No serious candidate is expected before early 2021; a faulty vaccine can kill more than it cures.

Treatment means supportive treatment, medical care, ICUs and ventilators when necessary, proper food. Respected cardiologist and chair of the 21-center Narayana Health chain, Devi Shetty, went on record in late March to say that in Bengaluru alone, he was staring at 80,000 testing positive for the virus. Some 15,000 might need hospitalization, with 2500 further care in ICU, requiring 1000 ventilators.

These issues are not confined to India but can be seen in other Asian countries, in Africa, in Latin America. The IMF, World Bank, regional agencies such as the African Development Bank, have all imposed cuts in health care spending over decades. There are now fewer personnel in the public hospitals.

## Governments and Medical Responses

The Government of India responded in a shabby way for the first two-and-a-half months after the coronavirus was reported in early January. As we subsequently learned, the government called for all returning from abroad on or after January 1 to get themselves checked. But there was little seriousness in follow up.

At the beginning of March Rahul Gandhi, Congress Party leader (opposition), stated that he felt the government was underestimating the dangers of the virus. There was an immediate response, typical of the BJP (ruling party), who trolled him on Twitter and Facebook. Yet by the end of February, the WHO-issued guidelines clearly stated:

*“The current global stockpile of PPE is insufficient, particularly for medical masks and respirators; the supply of gowns and goggles is soon expected to be insufficient also. Surging global demand — driven not only by the number of COVID-19 cases but also by misinformation, panic buying and stockpiling — will result in further shortages of PPE globally.”*

PPE, or personal protective equipment, means gloves,



India's spreading virus emergency.

masks, gowns or coveralls, and N95 respirators. Yet the Indian government waited until March 19 to prohibit the export of domestically manufactured PPEs or the raw materials necessary for their production. In fact, putting profits before people was the government's systematic approach.

As early as January 31, 2020, soon after India's first COVID-19 case was reported, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade issued an order prohibiting the export of all PPEs. But eight days later the government reversed itself, permitting the export of surgical masks and gloves.

On February 25, by which time there had been 11 reported deaths in Italy, a further relaxation was ordered, with eight more items added. Although the WHO had forecast the need for PPE kits, the government was doing nothing to obtain them. Prime Minister Modi was saying in early March that small measures would be enough to tackle the virus.

For the next month, the government was busy with the budget, ignoring what was happening globally except to welcome Trump and remain silent while BJP leaders organized the targeted anti-Muslim pogrom in Delhi.

The government finally imposed a temporary price freeze only after the price of masks and hand sanitizers skyrocketed 20-fold in online shopping platforms over an eight-day period. Meanwhile, in late March India sold and exported a planeload of vital equipment to Serbia.

Between late January and late March, the government's Health Ministry, Textile Ministry and the government-owned HLL Lifecare Limited colluded in giving HLL a monopoly over the procurement of PPEs. HLL then sold them at a very high price. Since HLL does not manufacture the equipment, handing it a monopoly over procurement was just a mechanism to secure profits.

Vidya Krishnan, a health and related issues author, wrote in *Caravan* magazine that manufacturers told her they can produce PPEs at half of what they were being sold.<sup>6</sup> There is also a gross mismatch between the government's orders and the potential requirements. While the All India Drug Action Network estimated that orders for coveralls could be as much as 500,000 per day by May, government orders are for a total of 750,000.

Until March 24 when Modi placed the nation under lockdown, the government was allowing only U.S. Food and Drug

Administration or European Conformity certified kits in testing. Since none of the Indian test kits were being validated by the National Virology Institute (NIV), none could be used.

Why this madness? Why this short-sighted behavior?

It turns out there is just one Indian manufacturer with USFDA approval, Cosara Diagnostics. Based in Ahmedabad, it has a tie to a U.S. firm. CoSara Diagnostics, a joint venture of Synbiotics, a wholly owned subsidiary of Ambalal Sarabhai Enterprises and a U.S. firm CoDiagnostics, is a Gujarat-based molecular diagnostic company. Here is a case of prime minister Narendra Modi favoring a Gujarati (his home province) capitalist concern. In fact, the CEO of the company, Mohal Kartikeya Sarabhai, was part of the group welcoming Donald Trump to the Sabarmati Ashram on February 25.

The medical profession has reacted to this. As a result of the state-imposed terror over the past few years, not all have been too vocal, but many have made the point that they feel let down by the government. Modi appealed to people to gather on their balconies on March 22 at 5PM and bang metal plates, pots and pans to show appreciation of the doctors. But one doctor, gastroenterologist Manisha Bangar, wrote sharply in a Facebook post shared over 3200 times: "Dear Indians! pay no heed to 'ghantologygyan' of Modi-BJP. Please don't clap for me!" Dr. Mangar also wrote:

*"I have been attending to patients with severe contaminating infections for two decades and will continue to do so in times of Corona but I don't want anyone to clap for me on 22nd March. Instead, as responsible citizens who possess fundamental rights. I want you to demand and pressurize the Modi-led BJP government to do the needful:*

- *Spell out the allocation of disaster relief funds and medical aid strategy for all.*
- *Demand that Modi double the amount of funds required for the statue of Sardar Patel.*
- *Get Modi to tell corporates and his industrialists whom he let escape or bailed out with your money, that now it's their turn to bail out the country from the crisis of their own making.*
- *Declare the tons of gold/silver/money looted, hoarded and now accumulated in temples of Tirupati Padmanabhan, Shirdi Siddhivinayak, Puri and many more, as being state treasure to be used in times of such crisis."*

She added: "We need... massive efforts to deploy testing kits... conversion of schools and stadiums into hospitals with adequate ventilators, financial help for those who are losing jobs.... States like Maharashtra and Kerala are doing a much better job than the Centre [central government — ed.] and it seems the BJP government wants to wash its hands of this massive expense.... The PM could have at least come out and said that unscientific claims like *gaumutra* (cow urine) curing the Corona virus infection or the banging of plates chasing away the virus are false.... On the contrary, social media handles supportive of the BJP have put out antiquated, religion-coloured ignorant thinking."

According to *The Telegraph*, she received three death threats after the post.<sup>7</sup>

**G**overnment response also needs to be seen at another level. Until March 24 the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) claimed that there was no community transmission. Meanwhile, ministers and BJP leaders flouted all norms. Yogi Adityanath, chief minister of Uttar

Pradesh state and one of the most aggressive faces of *Hindutva*, had been insisting even after the spread of coronavirus on holding a large gathering at Ayodhya celebrating Ramnavami.

In West Bengal, Dilip Ghosh, state BJP president, alleged that the Chief Minister was unnecessarily exaggerating the problems; the state's governor, an appointee of the central government, demanded that the Chief Minister follow the Prime Minister, who had remained silent.

We can multiply these examples manifold. Just one story should stand in for many. While the Shaheen Bagh protestors (opposing the new Hindu-supremacist immigration law — ed.) were being condemned, even though they had changed their mode of operation with just a small number of people in the sit-in and keeping safe distance from each other, the BJP organized a victory celebration in Madhya Pradesh. Having topped the Congress government, large numbers of BJP supporters gathered outside their party office in Bhopal. Inside, the party's top leaders were photographed offering sweets to each other.

A few state governments were much ahead of the BJP and the central government. They included the governments of Maharashtra (Mumbai is one of India's major international points of contact, so Maharashtra got a higher than average incidence), Kerala and West Bengal.

Maharashtra is ruled by a non-BJP coalition. West Bengal is ruled by the right-wing populist Trinamul Congress. Kerala is ruled by a coalition, the Left-Democratic Front, headed by the major parliamentary left party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI(M).

The Kerala government, despite a limited budget, took early initiatives. In February, when three of the first cases were being treated, the government took prompt action, hospitalizing suspected cases. This led to a reduction of the spread. When the second wave hit, it organized a massive tracking exercise to identify who else had been infected. As a longer quarantine was imposed on the affected, they were kept in comfortable.

The government established call centers where those quarantined could talk to counsellors about the problems they faced living in isolation. The Kerala State Drugs and Pharmaceuticals Ltd, a public sector undertaking, went into mass production of sanitizers. Awareness campaigns were launched, including among migrant workers who speak different languages.

Yet when the parliamentary opposition raised the need to pass a financial package, the Modi government refused. Since Modi desires to keep the spotlight on himself, he announced his package in a television speech on March 24. This also enabled him to set the terms of what would be spent and how.

Modi announced a strict 21-day lockdown. Nobody can explain why 21 days, the most likely explanation being that — given 75 municipalities and four states including opposition-run governments in West Bengal and Kerala, were already in some form of lockdown — Modi supposedly trumped by announcing a longer one. He also announced that the government would spend the equivalent of \$2.1 billion to buy more testing kits, increasing the number of ventilators, and stocking hospitals with more equipment and beds.

This financial commitment needs to be viewed alongside the government's budget for non-performing assets for public sector banks, which lent money to big capital but will not get

it back, is the equivalent of \$35 billion.

This behavior of the central government contrasted not only with the Kerala state government, but also with West Bengal, where the government, after announcing a lockdown, took additional steps. These included converting a hospital in Kolkata into a coronavirus treatment hospital and providing for the poor and unorganized wage workers.

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee has earned much applause for announcing a step-by-step lockdown that gave people time to prepare. First came the closure of schools, colleges and universities. Then cinema halls were shut.

Banerjee assured people that basic services would be kept open and demanded that migrant workers be provided for wherever they had gone to work. She vowed not to let anyone to remain unfed. Community kitchens, alongside rationing, will ensure that food will reach everyone.

The Chief Minister has earned much applause for her populist ways, “leading from the front.” For example, she goes into the streets to draw chalk lines where people should stand when they are shopping.

What the state governments of West Bengal and Kerala are doing, was only to be expected. Fifty years ago, when the welfare state model was more widely accepted, this is how it would have operated. But neoliberalism has lowered expectations of how public funds are used even during a pandemic; since 2014 the economic performance of the Modi government has lowered expectations even more.

These models stand in contrast to Modi’s four-hour warning that there would be a lockdown without any assurance about maintaining supplies or a commitment to providing aid. Modi has shown how utterly inhuman he is, and how he can manipulate a pliant media to aid him in his juggling act. Instead, the Modi government’s program functions to siphon off money to his cronies.

At this point, we need to go beyond such comparisons and look at wider dimensions of the class struggle.

## The Pandemic and Opportunities of Capitalism

The coronavirus pandemic is a natural disaster aggravated by environmentally unsound practices of production and consumption under capitalism. How the pandemic is tackled is a matter of capitalism, and its priorities.

This essay, written over several days, saw changes in how the Government of India moved. To begin with, as it admitted, since January 1 some 1.5 million people — including the farcical state visit with Trump — entered India. Yet no one was tested. The coronavirus arrived primarily through the rich, travelling back from jaunts abroad, or from tourists. The government bent over backwards to make them comfortable.

The Modi government’s opening act was on March 19, when the Prime Minister appeared on television and appealed to people to go out into the streets and bang pots and pans in support of doctors. Given the near total support for the current regime by the print media and television, and also the regime’s use of all its powers to ensure that its views are the ones that are communicated, this meant that for every handful of people questioning the action, far more would hail him for the “support” he was showing to the doctors.

“Twenty one days of lockdown is a long time but it is

important to save you and your family, this is the only way we have,” Modi said on March 24, warning: “This is as good as a curfew.” But coming after a sustained neglect of advance preparation, the lockdown led immediately to the well-to-do and the middle class rushing to stock up as much as possible.

Essential services were exempted, including electricity, banks, ATMs, groceries, medical stores and of course hospitals. In the case of many shops, lack of staff (unless purely family run) led to closures. Those local stores that remained open ran out of oil, salt, and liquid hand wash within a few days. There was a run on the supermarkets as well. Obviously, neither the unorganized sector workers nor the lower middle class were in any position to stockpile.

Since Modi’s lockdown occurred as Delhi chief minister Kejriwal’s local lockdown was already in effect it meant that people were stuck. There was a panic, especially the next day when landlords evicted migrant workers or people felt they would not be able to sustain themselves and set out for home. Masses thronged to the Anand Vihar Bus Terminus, where there were no departing buses. In many different parts of the country, and out of sheer desperation, the migrant workers began to walk home.

Expressing sorrow that some people faced difficulties with the lockdown Modi, in his March 28 TV address, claimed it was his only option. Later that day, it was evident that orders had been sent to block people trying to get back home.

## Caste and Class

During March, the dominant narrative in India has been either about the state enforcing the lockdown, or about “social distancing” — do not go out, do not mix closely with others, keep a six feet distance, work from home.

However, social distancing is not a value-free term. In India it has a firm caste implication. Brahmins in India have practiced social distancing for thousands of years, in a culture where even now a *Dalit* [so-called “untouchable” caste — ed.] taking water from a well used by upper castes can lead to lynching.

Writing from the Jhargram area, Mrinal Kotal, nephew of the late Chuni Kotal (the first woman graduate from the *Adivasi* or the so-called “tribal” community of Lodha Shabars, forced into suicide by her unpunished university teachers) appealed for help because *Adivasis* were not even getting one full meal a day. How does one tell people who live in these poor and densely packed neighborhoods that their priority should be social distancing, hand sanitizers and washing with soap for 20 seconds?

It has taken over a century of struggles by *Dalit* leaders and activists to generate a degree of awareness about how oppressed the *Dalits* are and why there is a need to make that a sustained battle for equality. But at each opportunity it gets, the upper castes, who are dominant within the ruling class, ensure that *Dalit* rights are pushed back. The whole strategy adopted by India ignores the class-caste dynamics of its population.

How can it be addressed? To start with, there was a need to recognize that social distancing cannot function for the vast mass of people. Additionally, we can’t ignore the underlying health and sanitation conditions that the unorganized workers and poor have. And certainly, hosing down with diluted bleaching powder — as was done to migrant laborers in Uttar



*Instead of aiding migrants trying to return home, the Director General of Police ordered them to stay in place or face arrest.*

Pradesh — is not an alternative to stemming the virus.

The capacity of the health system, including diagnostics, must be augmented to make it universally accessible. That means building, at the block level, temporary “Corona treatment units,” modelled along the lines of the Ebola treatment units in West Africa. Because so many have little access to health care, examinations and treatments should be comprehensive rather than focused on only the coronavirus.

Accredited social health activists, practitioners of alternative medicine (to whom many of the poor will go, having no other option) as well as nurses, should be trained in triaging or deciding the order of treatment for COVID-19. They also should be provided with the knowledge, training and supplies to manage the virus.

Considering the ecology of urban India, there must be decentralization with authority and funding moving downwards. Municipalities, block level institutions, district and middle-level *Panchayat* bodies, must be empowered to design locally suitable strategies for the heavily crowded poor and lower middle-class neighbourhoods, for homeless shelters and prisons.

What do we have instead? Kerala with its Social Democratic leadership has shown what can be done even within a capitalist set-up. It attempted to be relatively inclusive as it invited diverse religious leaders, local bodies, civil society activists, and NGOs to work with them. It saw that notices were put up in the languages people used. Prisoners were engaged in the production of masks.

On March 27 the central government announced what was supposed to be a huge package for the poor.<sup>8</sup> It includes insurance coverage for health workers. This is a positive announcement. But the principal beneficiary will be the insurance companies to whom the premium is paid. While the actual spending will depend on how many fall ill, the big question is why that there is no countrywide health care network, under state regulation and control. The answer is that governments have avidly run to adopt the patchwork and retrograde U.S.

model of health care, and therefore determinedly withdrew from decent public healthcare.

A few proposals commit the government to some spending, although the plan was announced without any parliamentary discussion. Once again, every social, economic crisis is seen by the present government as an opportunity to whittle away at the powers of parliament.

For Modi, every event is seen primarily as an opportunity to build up his own cult. The periodic speeches by the Prime Minister on television — never a public and open press conference — serve only to focus attention on him personally.

This is connected to how the BJP-RSS has been stepping up its hollowing out of parliament as an institution. Repeatedly, bills have been passed just by vote, without referring them to select committees, without considering ideas from numerous social organizations or opposition parties.

The Modi government’s response starkly reveals its class interests. Trains were immediately cancelled along with long-distance buses that would carry the working class. Cancelling air traffic came later and even then there were exceptions for special flights and dispensation visas. True, the planes carried Indian

citizens, or families of Indian citizens; they had a right to be home with their own. But they were people potentially bringing more of the contagion into India.

## **The Class Struggle on the Political Plane**

Meanwhile working people, the people who clean cities, who work in the unorganized sectors, who travel hundreds of miles to work in some big city or other, were not in the vision of the Prime Minister, the Home Minister, or any of their minions. They, who have a right to be home with their own, were told by Modi: “Stay where you are.”

For tens of thousands, this meant staying at bus stations for buses that would not be plying their routes, or in empty railway stations, or on highways. Shrugging off government responsibility, the Prime Minister said that civil society organizations were taking care of the poor. Since they cannot afford an airplane ticket, he does not see these people as part of the citizenry.

Migrant workers in India always head home when they have no prospect of work, for at home they can survive better and expect kin support. This has been a pattern during any disruption, natural or man-made. In fact, during Modi’s tenure, migrant workers have left their place of work in droves more than once, most memorably when he announced demonetization, when much of the currency held by these workers became worthless overnight.

But now as establishments closed, construction ground to a halt and vendors and stall holders found few customers, they headed back to their towns and villages in the poorer states of the north and east. This time staying might mean the added threat of pogroms that might cost them their lives.

But they were to be halted. On March 29 the Director General of Police, Haryana, informed all high-ranking police officers through a video conference that under the Disaster Management Act there must be no movement of people along the roads. Large indoor stadiums and other buildings should

be turned into temporary jails.

The coronavirus pandemic is an ecological disaster created under conditions of aggressive global capitalism. This global capitalism seeks opportunities everywhere — the opportunity to make money but also the opportunity to carry out its political projects.

It is the case that in numerous countries an ultra-right, chauvinist, nationalist force is on the rise. They are pursuing all aspects of their agenda at the same time. We must not view the coronavirus crisis as a purely public health issue isolated from politics.

Right from the start the crisis has been linked to specific political projects. In India — and in other countries such as the Philippines — that has meant the increasing use of police and the legitimization of police violence in the name of disaster management. In West Bengal police treated the lockdown not as a medical issue, but as a kind of curfew. One young man was beaten to death when he went out to buy milk for his young child.

Due to the COVID-19 scare, courts closed; bail petitions were not heard. And as of March 20, prisoners were not allowed to meet their relatives. As a result, in the Dum Dum Central Prison violence broke out the following day. Angry prisoners apparently set parts of the prison on fire.

According to human rights activist Ranjit Sur, police fired on prisoners and there are rumours about the number of dead. The police, as usual in such cases, have denied that there was any firing, claiming they “only” teargassed the prisoners. Since the attempt by human rights activists to pursue court action failed, the government is left sitting pretty.

Activists sought to have paroled prisoners from several overcrowded jails. While the government has released on parole some 3018 prisoners, not one political prisoner is included. Yet according to the Association for the Protection of Democratic Rights (the oldest functioning civil rights organization in West Bengal) there are currently 71 political prisoners in West Bengal prisons, either accused or sentenced on antiquated charges of sedition, or of being members of the banned CPI (Maoist).

People who were arrested as early as 2010 are still awaiting trial. Sudip Chongdar, a former state secretary of the CPI (Maoist) died in prison. Patitpaban Halder died a few days after being released. Others too have died while in prison. Currently there are at least seven such political prisoners at least 60 years old, and others critically ill. Spondylitis, diabetes, glaucoma, depression and various skin diseases are common.

## Not a Local but a Global Trend

The environmental crisis is linked to capital, which sees nature as something that has to “adjust” to constant growth. The rapid industrial growth in India and China have contributed to increasing pollution. Studies done by the World Health Organization in 2016 found that approximately 98% of cities in middle- to low-income countries have air quality that doesn’t meet the recognized WHO standards. In Delhi, the world’s most densely packed city, levels of dangerous particles in the air are far higher, seven times higher than in Beijing.<sup>9</sup>

Across the world, members of the ruling classes are concerned with how to exploit the COVID-19 virus for their goals. For Donald Trump, it was to go on an anti-China propaganda drive. At the same time, Trump attempted to minimize

the threat, since keeping business running was his major goal.

Given their slow initial response, the capitalist class globally is now compelled to take some measures. But these measures begin by putting pressure on the working classes. Israel and Singapore have refined their already well-developed internal espionage systems.

Considering the specific ideological-political contexts, each country is moving to cut down the democratic and civil rights of working people and extend so called anti-terrorist measures. While this authoritarianism does nothing to slow down the virus, it gives an impression of a government hard at work. It also responds to a standard middle-class reaction of demanding “firm action.”

Meanwhile, workers are attempting to defend themselves. In Italy, workers struck after seeing that despite the massive spread of the virus, industrial production was continuing. In the USA, nurses and Amazon workers have demonstrated, demanding better personal protection equipment and other safety measures.

Of course, it will be argued that “we are all in the same boat.” But that is not how the ruling class sees it; and that cannot be the working-class response. Yet with the political blows struck at the working class in many countries, including India, to talk of a fightback is easier said than done. Nevertheless it remains essential.

We must not give up struggles for better wages, living conditions and quality public healthcare in the name of national unity. We must fight for international collaboration for better scientific research. We must fight for immediate state regulation of hospitals so that far greater numbers can be treated at low cost.

Unless militant actions are undertaken, workers will find more of their rights trampled in the name of fighting the coronavirus. Parties, trade unions, social movement organizations and networks of the working class and poor peasants must try to understand which measures constitute scientific methods necessary to fight the threat, and which are attacks by capital. ■

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## TUEL and the Rank-and-File Strategy By Avery Wear

BY THE END of the strike-happy decade of the 1910s, the small U.S. syndicalist movement led by William Z. Foster pushed the American Federation of Labor (AFL) to the threshold of mass industrial unionization in the Packinghouse and Steel campaigns. Yet the culmination of Foster's remarkable efforts at revolutionizing the labor movement were still to come.

The Trade Union Educational League (TUEL), like the Syndicalist League of North America (SLNA) before it, sought to organize labor's "militant minority" into an alternative leadership to that of the conservative "labor fakers."

But where the abortive SLNA had merely shown promise, the TUEL over several years rallied mass forces in multiple unions for heroic struggles with varying outcomes. It was the most significant concerted left intervention in established U.S. unions to date.

It is a history ripe for study 100 years later, as a reborn socialist movement debates its labor strategy. But its achievements stand out fully only when one takes account of the exceptionally unfavorable circumstances facing labor in the 1920s.

The end of World War I brought mass unemployment, persecution of radicals, and a conservative political turn. Employers responded to the wave of labor militancy that had peaked in 1919, with the Open Shop Drive.

Over the next decade union membership fell from five to two million members, as union leaders moved toward class collaboration to save their organizations and positions. The space for alliances of AFL leftists with progressives against conservatives steadily closed.

Where a radical figure like Foster could find a place alongside Chicago Federation of Labor leader John Fitzpatrick, and even Samuel Gompers himself, in the Steel campaign in 1918-19, he would soon find himself isolated and attacked.

### Foster's Conversion and Early Successes

The defeat of the Great Steel Strike left Foster famous and well-connected but without steady work or an organizational base. Opposed to "socialist politicians" since leaving the

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### William Z. Foster & the TUEL: An Introduction

*WE PRESENT HERE a retrospective on an important initiative in U.S. labor and radical history, the Trade Union Educational League of the 1920s organized and led by William Z. Foster.*

*In a previous issue of Against the Current (November-December 2019, #203), author Avery Wear presented a detailed account of Foster's earlier "syndicalist" period of the 1910s, pioneering the hard campaign for inclusive industrial and non-racial trade unionism which would ultimately bear fruit in the mass upsurge of the 1930s. We recommend that article for background.*

*William Z. Foster's subsequent career as a leader of the Stalinized U.S. Communist Party, with its many factional intrigues and changes in line, belongs to a different discussion. What's important here is the lessons of the long struggle for militant, democratic unionism committed to social justice and working-class self-organization, and its relevance to a rank-and-file strategy for rebuilding today's weakened and beleaguered labor movement. —The ATC editors*

Socialist Party for the IWW in 1909, he was amazed to find the most powerful of allies in one such figure: Lenin.

Lenin's pamphlet "Left Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder" argued what Foster had long said against overwhelming left-wing opinion: revolutionaries must forsake IWW-style dual unionism to fight for the masses in the AFL unions, no matter how conservative their leaders.

After attending the founding Congress of the Red International of Labor Unions (RILU) in Moscow (1921), Foster secretly joined the Communist Party. He brought with him the TUEL, formed earlier in 1921. The TUEL had appeared stillborn until the influence of Lenin's pamphlet and Foster's conversion to Communism.

Like the SLNA, the TUEL worked against any appearance of dual unionism. There were no dues. Membership depended on subscribing to its newspaper, *The Labor Herald*.

TUEL's program called for union transformation by amalgamating craft into industrial organizations, union democratization via shop by shop self-representation (the "shop delegate system"), class struggle not class collaboration, anti-racism, rejection of the two capitalist parties in favor of a labor party, recognition of Soviet Russia, and affiliation with RILU.

With his previous connections and the Party's national collection of branches, Foster in "rapid fire" fashion (said James P. Cannon) produced TUEL branches in 90 cities.<sup>1</sup> Through frequent national, regional and industry conferences, the TUEL organized to fight at the level of both the union locals and the national/international organizations.

At Foster's insistence it maintained independence from the Party, and future CP head Earl Browder claimed in 1922 that 90% of League members were not in the Party.<sup>2</sup>

The TUEL immediately launched nationwide campaigns for amalgamation and a labor party. It sent ballots to 35,000 union locals querying support for a labor party. Seven thousand mailed back "yes." The TUEL's leading branch, in the Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL), obtained the support of that body for a Labor Party.

The CFL also approved the League's resolution calling on the AFL to hold a national conference to begin amalgamating craft unions into industrials. TUEL branches obtained endorsement of this from 17 State Federations, scores of

municipal labor councils, and thousands of locals. Fourteen Internationals endorsed as well.<sup>3</sup>

AFL President Samuel Gompers feared an unprecedented clamor for a general strike. “United front” strategy, in which the TUEL sought to ally with progressive union leaders like Fitzpatrick and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers’ Sidney Hillman, showed dramatic potential just as they had during the Steel and Packinghouse campaigns.

The campaign for amalgamation advanced furthest under the TUEL’s Railroad Department. Sixteen craft unions divided up railroad workers; 400,000 struck together across five of them in 1922, while the rest kept working. The TUEL denounced this scabbing. Foster went on a national speaking tour, “gaining a foothold” among the railroad workers.<sup>4</sup>

Over 3000 railroad Locals endorsed the League’s detailed plan for amalgamation. With the defeat of the strike, frustration that could have led toward dissolution instead channeled toward the organized left wing.

The International Association of Machinists (IAM) had members affected by the sellout of the railroad strike as well. The TUEL’s opposition to the strike settlement, in which unions agreed to labor-management cooperation on unfavorable terms, combined with amalgamation proposals in a potent appeal to the rank and file.

At the 1924 IAM Convention, five Locals moved the amalgamation proposal. This was defeated. But in the union’s March 1925 Presidential election, the TUEL backed progressive Vice President J.F. Anderson, after significant totals for their own independent candidates in the primaries.

President William Johnston (himself a Right-wing Socialist) barely survived in a 50-vote victory, likely only through fraud. (Opposition to the League in the IAM was fueled in part by their uncompromising demand to organize Black workers. Samuel Gompers forced the union to drop their formal Constitutional ban on Black membership in 1895, but allowed the ban to continue in practice.)

## Bureaucracy and Sectarianism

But the nationwide backlash had already begun. The AFL viciously red-baited Foster and the League. Many unions expelled members. And they collaborated with the Federal Justice Department to identify, fire and even prosecute them.

Historian Phil Foner rightly emphasizes this. In addition, the defeat of the railroad and miners’ strikes in 1922 ended the last gasp of postwar militancy.

But crucially also, bureaucratic meddling from the degenerating Communist International began. Foner fails to deal forthrightly with this. In 1923 the Moscow-appointed U.S. Communist International representative John Pepper (alias of

Hungarian Joseph Pogany) demanded that the Party press for an immediate Labor Party Presidential campaign — despite Foster’s warnings that pushing ahead was premature and would alienate Fitzpatrick’s CFL.

It was “impossible for the (Communist) party by itself to lead the rank and file revolt to establish the Labor Party,” Foster said. His warnings came true. Fitzpatrick — who was also pressured by Gompers’ threats to cut off AFL funding — withdrew CFL support for amalgamation, the Labor Party, and anything “supported by Foster and his friends.”<sup>5</sup>

The Hillman alliance soured as well. Labor’s conservative mood in the ‘20s would certainly have been inhospitable for the further development of the left-progressive united front. But it did not have to lead to the disaster of total isolation for the TUEL by 1925.

The previously boundless promising united front opportunities foreclosed abruptly. Foster’s career from the 1912 founding of the SLNA to this point had racked up powerful demonstrations of the potential for left initiatives to move organized labor forward. It made the most of the united front opportunities of the late Progressive era.

There are similarities with today’s climate in unions. For more than two decades, labor’s declining membership and clout have fed a reformist malaise at the top.

A train of events including John Sweeney’s New Voices leadership, ambitious organizing in the service sector, the Fight for 15, and experimentation with social justice unionism have created a climate in which many union locals have a far less closed atmosphere than in earlier decades. Anti-communism has waned considerably, and the question of how to revive the movement is open for debate.

## Evolving Strategy and Facing Repression

But there was more to the TUEL than reliance on the temporary openness of the minority progressive wing of the labor bureaucracy. After 1923 the TUEL came to rely solely on independent organization and rank and file support to survive.

Fortunately, this type of support is not as ephemeral. Moving away from electioneering and “endlessly passing resolutions” (which while demonstrating widespread support for left proposals, had proven “futile” as means for advancing concrete change<sup>6</sup>), the League’s most dramatic mobilizations happened despite the period’s heavy persecution.

In the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), future progressive President John L. Lewis desperately tried to ram through weak agreements and concessions to a coal industry determined to survive economic crisis by attacking its workforce. Lewis and his violent thug regime expelled rebellious locals and militant leaders like Alexander Howat after several postwar wildcat strikes. But the spirit of rank-and-file revolt



Hugo Gellert’s sketch of William Z. Foster, 1940.

survived in spite or because of the defeat of the 1922 strike, providing the basis for a TUEL presence. Openly Communist miner George Vozey got 31% of the 1924 UMWA Presidential vote, despite fraud and intimidation.

When the industry forced the reluctant Lewis into another strike in 1927, the TUEL's "Save the Union" committee called for all-out measures. When the Lewis machine failed to organize nonunion miners or provide adequate relief to strikers, Save the Union organized these actions on their own.

They championed Black members' rights, gaining widespread support in Pennsylvania. One Black miner said at the 1928 conference of Save the Union that it was the first time in 25 years that he was allowed to speak at a Union meeting.

Communist Party branches began to proliferate in mining towns. As the national strike spiraled toward defeat, the committee called out the Union's northeastern district without Lewis' approval, in a heroic attempt to shore up a failing cause. The ensuing disaster not only wrecked the committee, it nearly destroyed the UMWA — which dropped from 600,000 to at most 150,000 members.

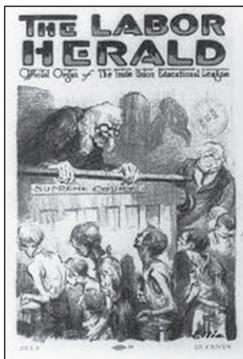
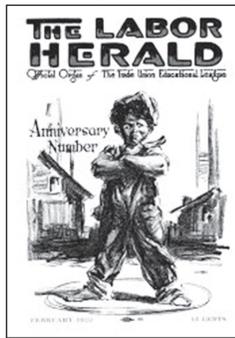
The general picture was similar in the needle trades. Wartime wildcat strike waves had cohered left-wing opposition caucuses. Pro-Soviet radicals expressed widespread sympathies in these East European immigrant milieux.

Meanwhile the moderate socialists who led these unions, some wielding corrupt gangster shock troops, sought to impose austerity on the ranks in order to avoid direct confrontation with a cost-cutting industry.

In the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU), TUEL slates won top offices in several Locals, including three in New York City. In response ILGWU President Morris Sigman expelled those Locals, cutting off funds for offices and salaries. The Locals in turn organized greater rank-and-file involvement, effectively keeping the Locals flourishing despite the attempted death-blow. In 1925 a humiliated Sigman re-admitted the Locals.

The TUEL won elections to lead Locals of the Millinery workers in Boston, Chicago and New York. They proposed to a recalcitrant national organization that they organize the women workers, who would otherwise undercut union men's wages. The left-led locals then proceeded to carry out this plan on their own resources, with considerable success.

In New York's Local 43, 400 initial members in 1924 became 4,000 by 1926. An 18-year old TUEL member, Gladys Schechter became known as the "Joan of Arc of the Millinery Workers" for leading this, the largest Local of women workers in the country at the time.



Union-sponsored mob violence against women picketers, union recruitment of scabs against its own members, and expulsions of TUEL members eventually cleansed the League from the union.

TUEL influence in the ILGWU ended after the defeat of a strike it led in 1926. Historian Edward Johanningsmeier claims that the Communist Party factional struggle between Foster and Charles Ruthenburg meant that Foster was afraid to accept a necessary compromise deal with the employers, for fear of being charged with a sellout by Party rivals.

Expulsions also drove the TUEL from the IAM, railroad unions, and the Carpenters. But in the International Fur Workers' Union (IFWU), the TUEL overcame all obstacles.

Ben Gold, left-wing socialist and leader of the wartime opposition "Furrier's Agitation Committee," campaigned for member-organized picket lines. This was against the IFWU's practice of hiring gangsters for picket duty, to counter the employers' picket-bashing mobsters.

The failure to heed Gold contributed to a disastrous defeat in the strike of 1920, decimating the Union. But the remaining 600 (out of 10,000 previous) members rallied to Gold's rank-and-file committee, now under the auspices of the League.

President Kaufman lost control of the New York Local, but maintained leadership of the IFWU. He used that position to undemocratically stack Conventions, wage mobster terrorism, and expel Gold. But the New York Local refused to break under bureaucratic pressure.

Gold won election back to Union office. He ordered an audit to uncover corruption. Gangsters threatened him with guns, but rank-and-file Furriers outnumbered and drove them out. The League launched an organizing drive among Greek workers, who had been the main scabs in 1920.

In 1926 thousands of newly unionized Greeks won a rare 1920s victory in sweeping fashion, winning a very unusual early 40-hour week, increasing pay, and banning unpaid overtime. (The Local had organized Greeks in part by fighting overtime abuse using direct action, shop by shop.)

Ben Gold soon displaced Kaufman as IFWU President. The Union thereafter became a pioneering stronghold of militant, democratic and social justice unionism, including by extending consistent and crucial support to Black civil rights struggles over a period of decades.

## What Was New in the TUEL?

Prior to the TUEL the great majority of U.S. labor leftists practiced and supported dual unionism, primarily in the IWW. The influence of the early Comintern flipped the script, putting Foster and "boring from within" at the head of the mainstream of '20s labor leftism.

Unlike the SLNA, the TUEL eschewed dogmatic decentralization. League chapters coordinated and challenged union bureaucracies at the national as well as the local level.

Under Foster's influence the League continued the SLNA tradition of autonomy from political parties, something that was important to its broad alliances early on. But this autonomy was steadily sacrificed under pressure from rival Party factions and Moscow.

Kim Moody correctly criticized the Party's sectarian identification with the League,<sup>7</sup> but it is worth remembering that a rather opposite approach with correspondingly positive results had happened early on in the League.

Later the TUEL evolved toward greater reliance on independent rank-and-file self-activity, from organizing drives to member-run union offices to direct workplace action. *The theory of unions is that they belong to the members.* Acting consistently on this principle can disarm conservative attacks and bring the unique power of the working class to stop production more readily into the frame.

Comintern leadership, based in a Russian revolutionary experience in which unions, as opposed to workers' councils, had played little role, had little to say about this. But worker Comintern leaders with roots in the wartime Scottish Shop Stewards movement had already theorized the TUEL's later approach, according to Darlington.<sup>8</sup>

The Stewards, operating inside large and established factory unions, participated in and linked up mass workplace assemblies that organized antiwar strikes and solidarity with neighborhood tenants' struggles.

The assemblies consisted of rank-and-file union members acting independently of the unions. They were the equivalent, in their limited geographic area of Glasgow, of the Russian soviets or workers' councils.

Steward and later Comintern delegate J.T. Murphy saw unions as necessary media for the assemblies to emerge from, even as the assemblies transcended (without necessarily directly conflicting with) the unions. He argued that traditional left strategies aimed at taking over official union office inevitably tended toward conservatization because unions are inherently sectional, aimed at coexistence with capitalism, and require a bureaucratic layer of staffing and leadership.

This led Murphy to argue for the long-term priority of

independent rank-and-file organization. Though experience caused the TUEL to grope toward similar conclusions, there is no evidence that Murphy's thinking influenced it.

The TUEL showed that an independently organized militant minority allows socialists to merge with masses of workers inside unions, without dropping or hiding their politics. In fact, those politics if intelligently applied can allow that organized minority to provide alternative leadership.

The combination of union leadership sluggishness and member alienation often produces a vacuum of vision and ambition, a vacuum waiting to be filled.

Independent rank-and-file groups, and individuals where necessary, can propose joint action when and where progressive leaders are receptive, while at all times building and relying on rank-and-file involvement. Resolutions and electioneering can very usefully gauge, demonstrate and cohere support for socialist strategies. But rank-and-file self-activity tends to be necessary for concrete gains.

In periods of labor retreat the environment may become hostile and repressive for radicals. But the TUEL experience shows that organizations in crisis are not only the most in need of saving, they can also be the most ripe for radical changes of direction. ■

#### Notes

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3. Foner, Philip S., *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, vol. 9, *The T.U.E.L. to The End of the Gompers Era*, International Publishers, New York, 1991, 155.
4. Johanningsmeier, Edward P., *Forging American Communism: the Life of William Z. Foster*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1994, 183.
5. *Ibid.*, 202.
6. *Ibid.*, 219.
7. Moody, Kim, "The Rank-and-File Strategy: Building a Socialist Movement in the U.S." 2000. Available online at <https://solidarity-us.org/rankandfilestrategy/>.
8. Darlington, Ralph, *Radical Unionism: the Rise and Fall of Revolutionary Syndicalism*, Haymarket Books, Chicago, 2008. See especially Chapter 8, "Union Bureaucracy."

## A New Economy Envisioned? By Dianne Feeley

WITH OVER 27 million jobs lost in five weeks and the economy crashing, Trump of course wants to "reopen America" to what existed just a couple of months ago. But that economy's not coming back.

As so much production grinds to a standstill, people are discovering that essential work is less about producing commodities than ensuring a place where they can safely shelter, with access to food and water, and health care.

Under capitalism in its neoliberal phase, workers are driven to produce at top speed and all "excess" has been eliminated. Now, as people no longer drive to work and much of industry has been shut down, we are suffering — yet also breathing cleaner air, noticing rivers running clearer.

As we see nature begin to repair itself, and as Medicare for All suddenly seems like a no-brainer, why should we want to return to an economy driven by Wall Street? Yes, we need food, shelter and security. But how to provide that, and at what cost?

• An economy that would end the massive destruction of the earth and its

resources is often called a Green New Deal. It's the logical way to restart the economy.

• In fact, retooling to make what is needed in order to effectively fight the COVID-19 virus is already underway. UAW workers now producing ventilators and PPEs, and liquor industry workers contributing hand sanitizers, show what can be done to develop what is needed — rather than the imperative of production for profit.

• With almost three million testing positive for the virus, we still have little idea of how widespread the virus is, or how often tests must be administered in order to rebuild social life. Many facilities could be retooled into producing high quality tests.

• But more than tests. Once a reliable vaccine is developed, we would need to scale up production so that everyone would have access to the vaccine once, or possibly twice, a year. Testing and the vaccination must be free and available to all.

• We need to design the health care system so that it can handle emergencies. This means "excess capacity" in hospital beds, ventilators, dialysis machine, and personal

protective equipment (PPEs). It requires more doctors, nurses and technicians — and cross-training so that instead of being laid off, health care workers can be redeployed.

The already noticeable improvement in air quality suggests an alternative to resuscitating transport and fossil fuel industries we can no longer afford for our health and environment. Instead of the individual car, luxury cruise boats and planes, we need a mass transit system that includes electric buses, vans and bikes, trains and trams.

Even the mainstream media are reporting that the virus kills people of color at two or three times the rate for whites. Not only is there discrimination in access to health care, but in every other aspect of life. To end racial injustice would mean, for starters, building quality social housing and establishing free childcare and quality education.

Retooling can best be undertaken democratically, when workers develop the plans and proceed to carry them out. That's socialism — but even short of that, retooling today for what we need builds the solidarity that humans and nature alike need. ■

# REVIEW

## A Bitter Class Grudge War By Rosemary Feurer

**The Long Deep Grudge:**  
A Story of Big Capital, Radical Labor,  
and Class War in the American  
Heartland

By Toni Gilpin

Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2020,  
425 pages, \$21.95 paperback.

TONI GILPIN'S *THE Long Deep Grudge* is a vivid story about the feisty radical union, the Farm Equipment Workers Union (FE) of the Congress of Industrial Organizations and how it took on International Harvester, which fought unions for generations.

The FE had distinct ties to the Communist Party, and some scholars have argued that despite the cost of such affiliations, there was nothing much radical about these CP-dominated unions — that the forces of capital or Party policies tied to a materialist theory of change constrained them and directed them to the center despite the costs of their affiliations.

Gilpin disagrees, makes this a class struggle story, highlights the human element, bringing details from oral histories and buried documents to life. Her compelling narrative is achieved with short chapters that convey the character of people and transformational moments. We can see the power plays from the shop floor, the mansions of the McCormick titans who guided labor policy, even from the reports of the Federal Bureau of Investigation on Gilpin's Communist father, Dewitt, who became the FE's publicity and education director.

Gilpin has told this story before, in a 1988 dissertation that has been cited and respected for many years now, but in this version she has brought more drama and narrative force, and aims to make the story relevant for thinking about the role of radicals in labor organizations.

*The Long Deep Grudge* anchors the story of this twentieth century union to the 19th century battles for unionization, continually reminding readers of the way that the FE leadership saw themselves as part of a tradition that derived from the deadly struggle for the eight hour day and radical visions

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of the 1880s. The corporate behemoth they took on originated with McCormick Works based in Chicago. Cyrus McCormick thought those who sought to interfere with his shop floor control needed to be targeted, blacklisted and policed.

By the 1880s, Chicago was the center of a socialist and anarchist "Chicago Idea" that thought trade unions were not just instruments for settling a contract, but a possible means to social transformation, toward the cooperative commonwealth. In that context, Cyrus McCormick reacted with his own class war to "weed out" the "bad element."

So McCormick tied the private profit motive to a larger purpose of eliminating the militant minority. He locked out his workers over union recognition and firing scabs in 1886 in the months before the eight hour day national strike call of May Day. That strike brought anarchist leader August Spies to the doorsteps of the McCormick Works on the morning of May 3, as police clubbed workers, fired revolvers into the mass picket lines, leading Spies, in outrage, to call for "Revenge!" for the deaths that took place.

The rally at Haymarket Square was rather peaceful until a bomb exploded and killed police. McCormick was part of the red-baiting revenge campaign that crushed the eight-hour-day-movement and led to conspiracy prosecution of anarchists, four of whom clearly not associated with the bombing were hanged in November 1888.

As the noose was being tightened around his neck, Spies proclaimed that "The time will come when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you strangle today."

### Long Memories

Gilpin makes a most compelling case that the long memory of the anarchists, and of Spies specifically, influenced the FE activists as well as management. Management might grudgingly accept some mid-20th-century unions, but the kind of challenge the FE presented was something that harkened back to this earlier style.

The FE radicals conjured up the anarchists as founding fathers of their campaign,

from the first leaflet in Chicago to organize, to calls for a 30-hour workweek in the 1950s and 1960s. Spies' words were printed on organizing leaflets, and the Chicago Idea of making unions more than bread and butter instruments informed the approach of the key organizers.

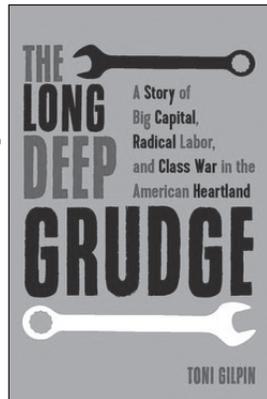
Radicals in the mid-20th century, she argues, were trying to create instruments that might make the union movement capable of taking on the power structures of capitalism. It was more than just heroic inspiration, but a continuation of the struggle to implant radical visions into praxis, both in and beyond the contract. This long arc is usually absent from the stories of the union uprisings of the 1930s.

Organizing International Harvester was tremendously difficult because of the tight reign of management after 1886, and especially after early 20th-century mergers and capitalization made it a premier corporation whose management was still tied to the personal agenda and perspectives of the McCormick family. John L. Lewis, head of the CIO, called organizing Harvester "the hardest job I know of," and maybe that's why he allowed CP activists free rein to take it on.

By that time, the company was an extensive multi-plant operation whose tentacles extended well past Chicago into the Midwest. Scholars who have studied Harvester have taken management's word that it sought by the 1920s to satisfy stockholders and workers, that both interests could be served better without unions.

Cyrus McCormick III established a modern works council and instituted welfare capitalism after World War I, and most histories have acknowledged this forestalled unionization. Lizabeth Cohen's book on Chicago's CIO (*Making a New Deal*) claims these were part of a "moral capitalism" approach that management offered and workers embraced in the 1920s, but these claims are dissected here and found to be wanting, using new evidence from management and other archives.

There was nothing moral about it. The welfare was sniveling and targeted toward a small number of workers, a continuation of the divide-and-conquer strategy. Gilpin shows these modern business approaches were extensions of the effort to weed out the "bad elements," installing a façade of democracy over a regime of dictatorial shop floor control.



The works councils offered little voice for shop floor value extraction and were better characterized as propaganda pipelines, intended to help management detect and channel dissent. This is important, because without this full picture we will miss the repression at work in the 1920s and 1930s, and then also miss how despite this, organizers were able to undermine the control and surmount the repression.

While Cohen took her cues from labor historian David Brody who held doubts about the potential for radicalism (*Making a New Deal* barely mentions radicals in Chicago), Gilpin's discussion of organizing tells the fuller story with the radical organizers left in, and here we see that there was more to it than workers wanting security under the federal government.

Often we harbor notions that solidarity erupted spontaneously in the CIO era, but Gilpin has used the oral histories to show that an activist cadre steadily built workers' growing confidence that the union movement was worth their while. That there was a strategy to beat the system, and that they wouldn't be left behind, mattered more than some formula for "moral capitalism."

Gilpin does not romanticize solidarity, but shows that when radicals took over the organizing drive they sought to carefully and steadily lay the groundwork for centering the capacity of workers. There is no evidence that desire for security was the only possible direction for unions. Radicals' involvement made a difference. It's what the McCormicks had always warned against.

At the center of the class war was management's incentive piecework system, which drove workers to exhaustion under the guise of bureaucratic chains that seemed intractable. The pay rate system (enclosed in secreted black binders) was so complex that workers doing the same job might have vastly different paychecks, without being able to figure out why that was the case.

By the 1940s there were 30,000 piecework prices, for example. Relentless timing and re-timing efforts were designed to capture the energy and knowledge of workers and created antagonism that Gilpin shows to be the linchpin of the union campaign.

The radicals considered the incentive system as daily lessons about surplus value extraction, and turned the shop floor experience into the base for the praxis of solidarity and resistance.

### **Wartime Gains**

The key to organizing was finally taking over the works council and organizing from within as well as the outside, in a steady drip-drip-drip of counter-information. It took until 1938 for the first local to be formed, and until World War II for the union to gain some major victories.

Ironically, it was in the heart of the patriotic moment during World War II that the first contract was signed, and that is usually where narratives suggest the war effort dissolved the class struggle. Gilpin redeems the CP activists from the criticism that they capitulated on behalf of the political alliance with capital on behalf of Soviet Union directives, though it's pretty obvious there was major kowtowing to the Soviet line.

The base for their radical shop floor campaigns came from establishing — through the War Labor Board cases — the right to democratically control the pace of work and to contest the rate of exploitation. These rulings were in fact centered in the conceptual and evidentiary assistance from FE researchers who contested and dissected every element in order to prevail.

The FE's researcher Aaron Cantor, only 25 years old at the time, saw the War Labor Board cases as a vehicle for "democratic control over the powers of management relating to the tenure and conditions of work, particularly the disciplinary powers of management."

This set the stage for the first major showdown of the postwar era when management wanted to roll back these WLB-assisted assaults on the incentive system, while the FE was determined to extend them.

Gilpin quotes FE's Director of Organization, Milt Burns, declaring that "the philosophy of our union was that management had no right to exist," and shows it was more than just rhetoric.

Through an energetic strike, the FE secured a contract that provided not only significant wage increases, but most importantly a strong shop steward system that paid stewards for time off to police the plant. This hit Harvester hard, and combined with the assault on surplus-value-extraction, set the stage for later contests in the following years.

Shop stewards sought to communicate the concept of work stoppages as the starting point to building solidarity against managerial attempts to divide, and as daily exercises for empowerment. In addition, the union won plant-wide seniority, which it used to contest vestiges of racist allocation of jobs.

### **A Study in Contrasts**

Gilpin uses the FE's chief rival, the United Auto Workers, to show the distinction between FE's radical union style and the dominant form of CIO union strategy. The UAW was led by former socialist (likely a former Communist Party member, as well) Walter Reuther, who rose to power through an iron grip caucus that included a campaign of purging or quieting CP-aligned factions.

Reuther committed to winning long-term

contracts, to accepting management's right to run the plant, extracting cost-of-living benefits in exchange. The 1950 so-called Treaty of Detroit with its five-year contract was a peace plan, and a proving ground for statesmanship over labor conflict that would be tolerated by management more willingly than the FE's challenging style.

Harvester management continually compared FE to the UAW (there were more than five times the number of work stoppages at FE Harvester plants in the postwar years) and yearned to bring the kind of peace the UAW offered.

Reuther committed the UAW to a "politics of productivity" that accepted management's right to run the plant, and focused on the contract as a legalistic instrument that cordoned off workers' demands to contract bargaining rounds. The contract helped to build a bureaucratic apparatus regime that oversaw things and helped extend Reuther's control as well.

The most notable comparison, though, was the shop steward system: the FE aimed for a ratio of one for every 50 workers or so, and even less if possible. The UAW committee system was one for every 250, or even more.

Every day was a bargaining session in this FE conception of the union. The FE promoted settling grievances by striking or other forms of collective action instead of letting the grievance wind its way through a maze of bureaucracy. For the UAW in this period the contract was legalistic, and the grievances were increasingly instruments for a bureaucracy off the shop floor that considered themselves experts on the details of classifications, skill and legalese.

The UAW mastered the art of grievance filing, while the FE believed in immediate resolution, leading to regular job actions that saw them leaving the plant at strategic quickie strikes, engaging in job actions far beyond anything experienced in the UAW. That's the real way to run a union, even one not tied to farm equipment.

I'd guess that most people who have been in unions will be able to place their own unions' philosophies along the spectrum that they encounter in the comparison between these unions, even if these were mostly male industrial workers.

### **Racial Justice for Real**

Gilpin also distinguishes the FE from the UAW on the issue of racial justice. While the UAW is well-known for its commitment to civil rights in high points such as the March on Washington, its record in connecting labor rights and civil rights at the local level, especially in the Southern locals, was abysmal.

In contrast, when Harvester management plotted a course of escape from FE

union contracts by establishing a large plant in Louisville, Kentucky, the FE immediately followed, and racial justice was at the center of their conception of reordering power. Shortly after winning recognition, the union launched a strike to eliminate the differential and came close to that goal.

Gilpin's account contests Jennifer Delton's writing on Harvester for racial integration (*Racial Integration and Corporate America, 1940-1990*), showing through these oral histories and other sources that it was instead a hard-won fight by the workers that deserves the most credit. Gilpin uses the case of FE Local 236 to explain how workers could be radicalized on the issue of racial justice through the shop steward system described above, to move to a broader kind of solidarity that included racial justice.

Soon, leaders like African-American Jim Wright, whose commitment to the union was built through the pledge of the FE to interracial justice, was leading community campaigns in Louisville to desegregate parks and a hospital.

While Harvester jobs were mostly male, these campaigns brought women into the union movement as well. Such campaigns also built an allegiance to the union that allowed it to withstand the anti-Communist raids that seemed a yearly concern.

### **Defeat and Forced Surrender**

Despite the gains that the FE made through militant representation at the point of production, Gilpin writes a cautionary note about how management also took advantage of the union's zealous contentiousness at the point of production.

Capitalists are always on the alert for opening salvos in their class war to reign in their adversaries, and the interviews in this book show precisely the limits of such activism when capital simply doesn't recognize the radical union's right to exist.

It turns out that by the 1950s, Harvester management was provoking these shop floor struggles in order to shut down production and to wear workers down. There were some wise shifts in strategies from the FE in response, including slowdowns instead of work stoppages, but such strategic miscalculations by union leadership bled into a disastrous 1952 strike.

The union seemed to think they could prevail in a bracing mass picket-line campaign, but instead they were handed a massive defeat despite occurring amidst the escalating Cold War and red-baiting.

Having sought refuge against the UAW attacks by merging briefly with the United Electrical Workers union, by 1955 the top leaders of the FE collectively turned tail and made the decision to exit into the arms of their enemy, the UAW. They bargained for union positions (though some refused, and

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*As more surplus is extracted, whether in the public or private sector, the issues that industrial workers once confronted are still as relevant as ever.*

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a few locals in Chicago stayed in the UE). This they did against the counsel of the CP leaders.

The question of whether the FE might have done a disservice to the workers' movement by refusing to struggle on with the UE, which did survive, is a question Gilpin doesn't care to address. It was the UE which revived the sit-down in recent years at Republic Windows & Doors, a reprise of the FE's actions at Harvester's Twine Shop in the 1950s, winning severance just in the same way, but also sparking the imagination of trade unionists across the United States.

There are counterfactual speculations among some scholars that an alternative course might have built a labor federation that could have harnessed the 1970s upheavals. Nevertheless, we see step by step in Gilpin's portrayal, that Cold War politics shouldn't lead us to view the ultimate victory of the UAW as an endorsement for the conservative approach to labor relations.

The factionalism of labor, jurisdictional boundaries and Taft-Hartley created the means of taming the possibilities for a struggle-based unionism in this major industry. And the capitulation of the FE to the UAW only added to the ultimate advance of the Administration Caucus which has ruled the UAW ever since, with disastrous consequences in the present.

There were some sparks of fire that carried over into the UAW. Those sparks carry deep irony as the UAW has continued to be dogged by the legacy of Reuther's calculations. Gilpin notes that as the Harvester plants in Chicago began to shut down in the 1950s through the 1970s, her father, now a UAW representative, was a lonely voice calling for a movement for a shorter work week without a reduction in pay, bringing forth the memory of the anarchists' strategy of the 1880s.

International Harvester of course could ignore such calls, given that they had won the war of position. Within a generation, International Harvester would be gone, and the industry then would be led to its own demise by other players even more ruthless than Harvester management, intent on ramping up the extraction of surplus value to new levels.

### **Recovering a Radical Legacy**

Gilpin's book is the most engaging and accessible among a growing list of histories of the so called CP-dominated unions. Scholars have established that these unions

built more democratic structures, including vibrant shop steward systems, than other CIO unions. They thought about how to contest the power dynamics of capitalism, even if they were uneven on the issue of managerial prerogatives.

All of them in one way or another were influenced by the styles of organizing and strategizing, formulated by William Z. Foster, based on the lessons of the steel strike of 1919, and expanded upon by the experiences of the 1920s and '30s. [On this history, see articles by Avery Wear in this issue of *Against the Current* and previously in the November-December 2019 issue — ed.]

Radicals who were committed to making the union a force for social transformation, whatever the injunctions of the Soviet Union, still had to struggle to connect a vision of radical beliefs to the day-to-day organizing and strategies of the workplaces they inhabited. They learned from each other and often connected labor and community concerns and labor and civil rights.

So while these studies recognize the problems and liabilities of the CP, they emphasize the contrast with other CIO unions and with the AFL. The 30-hour work week was promoted not only by the FE, but also for example by the UAW's Ford River Rouge CP-dominated local, and the UE was still pushing this from the 1940s to the 1960s.

Collectively, these studies show a possible distinct path toward organizing the South, the clearest problem for labor in this era and one that still dogs organized labor and our political possibilities. These studies have confirmed a difference in these unions' approach that might have led to a different path without the intensity of Taft-Hartley and the Cold War, or the liabilities of the CP.

In the war of position, any union movement of the future will look to these moments to think of ways to undermine the authority of capital at the point of production and in the political economy. Even those that don't make harvesting equipment.

It's clear that in our present moment, with most unions still embedded in the politics of productivity, alternative paths are welcome. The leadership of unions themselves were a contributing factor to the extension of capital's power because they had given up on the issue of managerial prerogatives and continued to steer workers into a political and legal solution in the years of tumult.

As more surplus is extracted, whether in the public or private sector, the issues that industrial workers once confronted are still as relevant as ever. If we are ever to take on capital effectively, we will have to include questioning who controls us, and connecting unions to solutions about how structures of power dominate our lives. ■

# REVIEW

## Free Higher Education to Benefit Everyone!

### The GI Bill, Then and Now

By Steve Early

#### Grateful Nation:

Student Veterans and the Rise of the Military-Friendly Campus

By Ellen Moore

Duke University Press, 2019, 280 pages, \$26.95 paperback.

#### Soldiers to Citizens:

The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation

By Suzanne Mettler

Oxford University Press, 2005, 252 pages.

#### When Dreams Came True:

The GI Bill and the Making of Modern America

By Michael J. Bennett

Brassey's Inc., 1996, 335 pages.



TWENTY YEARS AGO a terminally ill Tony Mazzocchi, longtime union leader and founder of the Labor Party, was promoting a campaign he called “Free for All.”

Mazzocchi was a veteran of World War II and a beneficiary of the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944 — the original G.I. Bill of Rights. He had just read one of the books under review here — Michael Bennett’s *When Dreams Come True*. The author’s account of how the G.I. Bill was enacted, and the social impact it had, inspired Mazzocchi to launch what his biographer Les Leopold calls a final crusade “to reintroduce free higher education into the national political agenda.”

Like Bennett, Mazzocchi believed that the G.I. Bill was “one of the greatest pieces of legislation ever enacted,” because it gave millions of returning veterans, like himself, a “sabbatical,” a much-needed government-paid chance to re-tool for the civilian job market.

Mazzocchi argued that a 21st-century version of this program could similarly plant the “seeds of the good life” for millions of Americans by allowing them to attend public universities and graduate schools without accumulating ruinous personal debt.

When potential supporters balked at

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the \$23 billion price tag for his proposal, Mazzocchi noted that a Congressional study in 1988 found that the original G.I. Bill “had paid for itself six times over.”

When veterans’ groups questioned why everyone should qualify for this benefit without “earning” it through military service, Mazzocchi brushed aside those objections too. “We all need to participate in continuing education,” he insisted. “It should be part of our work-life and it should be free.”

In his two rounds of presidential campaigning, Senator Bernie Sanders, a friend and ally of Mazzocchi, finally succeeded in putting this old Labor Party idea on the national political agenda. Sanders’ candidacy has pushed the presumptive nominee to announce that he now favors making public colleges and universities free for students from families earning less than \$125,000 per year. (“Biden backs free college,” *New York Times*, March 15, 2020)

Amid the economic crisis created by Covid-19 (and after Sanders suspended his campaign), former Vice-President Joe Biden unveiled a “a student debt forgiveness plan which would eliminate student debt for low-income and middle-class people who attended public colleges and universities, and other institutions that serve students of color...but does not go as far as Sanders’ plan to cancel all student debt.”

#### An Obstacle to Enlistment?

One reason to doubt that a Biden Administration will cancel student debt or make higher education freer-for-some is the impact it would have on military recruit-

ment — at least in periods of low unemployment or reduced patriotic fervor. As the antiwar group Courage to Resist recently noted, “recruiters are no longer using patriotism as their main marketing strategy.”

Instead, the Army is trying to take advantage of “extreme economic inequality” and “the national student debt crisis” by stressing the importance of G.I. bill benefits, including access to affordable education. (<https://couragetoresist.org/army-recruitment-student-debt/>)

Antiwar activist and former Army Ranger Rory Fanning agrees “that if college were free, then the pool of potential military recruits would plummet — and that fact scares elected officials to death. Roughly 20% of the 184,000 people who sign up for the military each year come from households that make less than \$40,000 a year. It’s hard to find a college education that costs less than that amount.”

A national board member of Veterans for Peace, Fanning was among the many young men and women who enlisted, in part, to pay off college loans. If he had been debt free, his decision might have been different, he says. Erasing college debt would be “a huge threat to the U.S. war machine,” he believes, because “thousands of soldiers would lose their incentive to stay in the military.” (<https://truthout.org/articles/a-truly-antiwar-agenda-must-include-free-college-and-medicare-for-all/>)

Long before education benefits were beefed up as a key recruitment tool for our modern-day “all-volunteer army,” the original GI bill was developed in response to a different threat, from a returning “citizens’ army.” As Michael Bennett describes it bluntly:

*“If the twelve million veterans of World War II had been dumped off the boats like the nearly four million from the previous world war and given only \$60 and a train ticket home, with neither educational or economic opportunity awaiting them when they got back, violent revolution might have easily been sparked.”*

Key backers of the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944, like American Legion national commander Henry Colmery, were quite aware that angry veterans had become shock troops for the right and left in Germany and Russia after their

experience of combat in World War I. In the United States, postwar social unrest among veterans culminated in a march on Washington by thousands of them in 1932.

Members of this “Bonus Army” sought immediate payment of deferred compensation for their service that was not due until 1945. Leaders of the Legion like Colmery opposed their demand because it would put too great a strain on the U.S. Treasury.

The militant veterans, camped out in DC were heavily red-baited by Republican President Herbert Hoover, who then ordered active duty troops (led by General Douglas McArthur and future General George Patton) to drive them from the city.

In 1934, after Hoover’s electoral defeat, Congress authorized payment in the form of bonds that most veterans cashed in immediately to help them survive the Depression.

### Ticket to the Ivy League

To avoid similar upheavals after World War II, Congress and the Roosevelt Administration authorized what Bennett calls “first class education benefits” — covering tuition and fees up to \$500 a year at a time when Harvard and other top schools were charging \$400. By 1947, veterans comprised nearly 50% of total student enrollment of 2.3 million.

Nearly half of all World War II veterans utilizing the G.I. Bill went to private colleges and universities, including Ivy League institutions; under the less generous G.I. Bill coverage provided after the Korean and Vietnam wars, about 80% of the veterans utilizing the program then opted for public higher education instead.

The original G.I. Bill (or its successor legislation) was egalitarian in another important way. As Bennett notes, it enabled many leading figures in the 1960s civil rights movement to attend college or professional school, along with future political leaders like Ron Dellums, John Conyers and Charles Rangel and cultural figures like Harry Belafonte and Ossie Davis.

In the aftermath of World War II, it also provided unemployment insurance for Black veterans that was equal to the benefits for whites (a G.I. Bill provision that southern segregationists in Congress fiercely opposed and tried unsuccessfully to block).

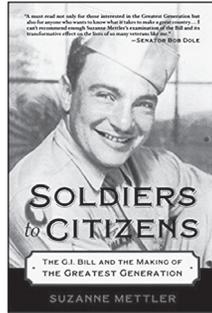
### From Soldiers to Citizens

In *Citizen Soldiers*, Cornell University Professor Suzanne Mettler assesses the broader impact of free higher education for veterans. Prior to World War II, she notes:

*“[A]dvanced education had been largely restricted to the privileged, especially to white, native-born, elite Protestants. The social rights offered by the G.I. Bill broadened educational opportunity to veterans who were Jewish or*

*Catholic, African American and immigrants, as well as those whose families had struggled in the American working class for generations.”*

In Mettler’s view, the G.I. Bill provided not just “social opportunity but also promoted more active citizenship, making “the



political system more inclusive and egalitarian during the middle decades of the 20th century.” Mettler cites studies showing that the 7.8 million beneficiaries of the original G.I. Bill participated in civic and political organizations to a greater degree than non-veterans and veterans who did not use their educational benefits.

In the late 1940s, of course, existing veterans’ group, like the Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars, experienced a huge membership increase. But, according to Mettler, they were not the only vehicle for community engagement and organizational leadership development among veterans.

Both as members and leaders, veteran participation greatly increased in “cross-class fraternal groups” like the Elks, Eagles, Knights of Columbus, and Shriners, in labor unions, civil rights and religious organizations, and in political parties, which ran many candidates for public office in the post-war era who were G.I. Bill educated veterans.

In New York, for example, Tony Mazzocchi became a rising star in the Oil Workers Union, a Democratic Party reformer, and, briefly, candidate for Congress from Long Island in 1964. Across the country, other veterans served in disproportionate numbers on civic boards and commissions.

As Mettler notes, even the “sub-college training benefits” of the G.I. Bill “played an important role in democratizing the nature of organizational leadership.”

Because vocational training benefits also increased the skills and expanded the confidence of veterans who ended up in blue-collar jobs, they also “were more likely to hold office or serve on a committee for a civic organization.”

The scope of the original G.I. Bill was wide indeed, reaching nearly five percent of all Americans. But even before the draft ended and the United States switched to an “all-volunteer force” in 1974, later iterations of the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944 provided educational opportunity to far fewer disadvantaged citizens.

“The version of the law established for Vietnam Veterans in 1967 was more restrictive than those for either World War II or Korean War veterans,” Mettler notes. It reached only 1.5% of the population, although veterans using their less generous benefits during the Cold War accessed higher education at a higher rate than those

who served in World War II.

### Key Recruitment Tool

As Department of Defense officials started building a “professional army,” they quickly discovered that education benefits were cited as a major factor in the enlistment decisions of nearly 80% of those recruited for it. In 1984 Congress passed the Montgomery G.I. Bill (named after its Congressional sponsor from Mississippi, Representative Gillespie Montgomery), which created the modern-day framework for making higher education affordable for many veterans who might not have been able to pay for it themselves.

Since the military is much smaller today — comprising just one percent of the total population — the program’s potential for expanding social opportunity is far more limited than 70 years ago. Nevertheless, since 2008 more than a million men and women who served in the military have been able to pursue post-secondary degrees or certificates using benefits accessed via the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

The lack of campus-based support services for post 9/11 veterans led some to form a new advocacy organization called the Student Veterans of America (SVA), which now claims 1300 campus chapters.

SVA in recent years has been busy protesting bureaucratic screw-ups and delays in VA payment of monthly housing allowances to student veterans. But in the Trump era, the latter have also been victimized, on a much larger scale, by low-quality for-profit colleges that target former military personnel with deceptive marketing pitches.

In an Op Ed piece for the *New York Times* last year, SVA leaders James Schmeling and Carrie Wofford blasted for-profit colleges for vacuuming up nearly 40% of all G.I. Bill tuition and fee payments in recent years. As they noted, the risk of G.I. Bill waste is “exceptionally high at for-profit schools, which received 81 percent of improper payments,” according to one VA internal audit.

Schmeling and Wofford accused the Trump Administration of “eviscerating student protections and quality controls” at the very institutions most prone to defrauding the government and leaving their fellow veterans with worthless degrees or course credits useless anywhere else.

Because Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos has been so complicit with industry misconduct, other enforcement agencies have been forced to act. Last December, the Federal Trade Commission reached a \$191 million settlement of charges against the University of Phoenix for deceptively promoting its tax-funded programs for active-duty service members, veterans, and military spouses.

The VA itself has broad powers to punish

educational institutions guilty of deceiving veterans. Yet conservative Republican Robert Wilkie, Trump's Secretary of Veterans Affairs, has been reluctant to crack down on for-profit schools — even ones that recruited veterans into degree programs that did not qualify them for state licensure in their chosen fields of study. (*New York Times*, December 31, 2019)

On March 9, the VA did finally suspend G.I. bill reimbursement for the University of Phoenix and several similar outfits accused of “erroneous, deceptive, and misleading enrollment and advertising practices.” They were given 60 days to take “corrective action.”

### The Military-Friendly Campus

In her insightful new book *Grateful Nation*, Berkeley-based sociologist Ellen Moore raises a very different set of concerns about student veterans and their relationship to higher education today. She approaches this subject with the unusual credential of having been “born on a U.S. military base to an Army Captain father and a pacifist mother.”

Her father grew up during the Depression in a working-class family in Fresno, CA. Yet his “military service and G.I. Bill education benefits eventually enabled him to join the professional class” — thus helping pave the way for Moore's own second-generation academic success and upward mobility.

Because of this family legacy and for her dissertation research, Moore spent three years interviewing veterans about their experience at several California colleges.

She also talked with their professors, administrators and classmates, who are often younger than the veteran cohort that “brings billions of dollars in guaranteed tuition to colleges, creating strong financial incentives for them to project themselves as friendly toward the U.S. military in pursuit of G.I. Bill funded students.”

Moore was particularly interested in investigating the claim that some campuses have nonetheless created a “hostile environment” for former members of the military, making their smooth transition to campus life more difficult.

On the California campuses she studied, Moore found little or no evidence of such bias. On the contrary, she discovered that “teachers were instructed to treat veterans deferentially in their classrooms” and even avoid talking about the wars (in Iraq and Afghanistan) that many had participated in — for fear of offending them.

In Moore's view, initiatives designed to “welcome veterans to college” fostered an unhealthy tendency to “welcome military viewpoints and suppress debate about current wars.” Instead of creating an environment in which “veterans must learn to



become college students by adapting to civilian academic norms and practices,” the colleges profiled in *Grateful Nation* have responded to the presence of ex-military personnel on campus by changing their own “institutional practices and discourse.”

Despite the lack of any discernible collegiate animus toward the military in general or to them personally, student veterans faced other challenges due to “disjunctions between their military training and academic demands and psychological trauma engendered by their experiences in war.”

It's here that Moore is most effective in debunking the secondary claim of army recruiters — that military training and experience helps prepare you for higher education — that the G.I. bill then provides free of charge. Many student veterans drop out before they graduate — particularly if they are married and have kids, which often requires juggling jobs and school and makes it harder to survive on VA housing allowances.

In addition, student veterans, whatever their greater personal motivation and higher career aspirations, are not spared the signature afflictions of their post 9/11 generation — PTSD, Military Sexual Trauma, and the lingering effects of traumatic brain injuries, which can include impaired memory and ability to concentrate, suicidal ideation, depression, and related substance abuse.

All these hidden costs of earning a “free higher education” through military service can put achieving the goal of a college diploma beyond the reach of the most determined striver.

### Time for Change

Like Tony Mazzocchi before him, Will Fischer is a labor-oriented veteran who would like to transform the landscape of higher education that Moore describes, and that he personally experienced, as a G.I. Bill beneficiary.

Fischer served as a Marine in Iraq before becoming the second person in his family “to graduate from college and do so without the yoke of student debt.” Later, he became director of the AFL-CIO's Union

Veterans' Council and governmental affairs director for VoteVets.

Now Fischer would like to see student debt cancelled and public higher education, including vocational schools, made tuition-free because all working-class people “would benefit, without question, from such legislation.” He believes that limiting free higher education to veterans confronts young people with an unacceptable choice — between being forced “to put on a uniform and participate in never-ending U.S. wars or take on crushing debt.” (<https://www.nation-ofchange.org/2020/02/11>)

Unfortunately, an influential national commission has just recommended that Congress instead confront all Americans aged 18 to 25, with a related choice — whether or not to register with (our never actually abolished) Selective Service System.

According to this commission on national service, women have proven themselves in uniform, including in combat roles, and now represent about 17% of all active duty troops. Expanding the registration process to include them would be a “necessary and fair step” — and apparently a great victory for gender equality.

If adopted by Congress, of course, this recommended change would result in equal punishment of anyone who fails to comply.

Not surprisingly, the main carrot dangled by military recruiters — greater access to higher education — is already in use as a stick to secure compliance by millions of young men. As the *New York Times* reminded its draft age readers, “not registering with the Selective Service comes with a lifetime of penalties, including exclusion from student loans...” (*NYT*, March 24, 2020)

Meanwhile, for the millions of poor and working class young people just entering a job market now gutted by Covid-19 — and living in parts of the country where recession/depression conditions will persist longer than elsewhere — the main incentive for enlisting is the promise of employment (and training) not available anywhere else at the moment, with “free higher education” a secondary benefit by far. ■

### Note to Our Readers

This issue of AGAINST THE CURRENT is being produced, printed and mailed under unusual circumstances, and will be reaching subscribers with some delay. Thanks for your patience! We hope everyone is remaining healthy and as safe as possible during the coronavirus emergency. We urge you to check the website <https://solidarity-us.org> for ongoing analysis. For additional international perspectives, [www.internationalviewpoint.org](http://www.internationalviewpoint.org) is also highly recommended! ■

# REVIEW

## Vagabonds of the Cold War By John Woodford

### Of Vagabonds and Fellow Travelers:

African Diaspora Literary Culture and the Cultural Cold War

By Cedric R. Tolliver

University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 183 pages plus notes, 2019, \$24.95 paper.

THE FOCUS OF Cedric R. Tolliver's *Of Vagabonds and Fellow Travelers* is the bond between Anglophone and Francophone African-diaspora intellectuals, primarily the leading producers of radical literature. He observes that during the period after World War I and through the post-World War II "Cold War" between the USA-led capitalist countries and the Soviet-led pro-socialist/communist countries and movements, a group of critical intellectuals experienced "blacklisting, red-baiting, congressional subpoenas, passport revocations and deportations." Thus he labels them "vagabonds."

Such assaults on their careers and their persons, he notes, were "fundamentally extensions of the violence deployed to discipline labor into adapting to the needs of capitalist production" that began in Early-Modern Western Europe and then expanded to every continent.

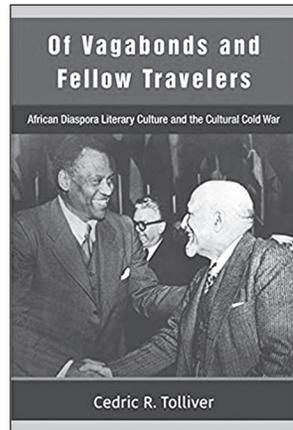
Although Tolliver's book begins in the Cold War era, some background history is required to assess its strengths and weaknesses. As early 20th century movements of workers, intellectuals, peasants and humanists resisted and organized against both domestic and international (initially, colonialist) forms of capitalist exploitation, the struggles in Russia resulted in first overturning capitalist rule, forming a state in 1922 after the epochal revolution of 1917.

The fledgling state, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), was presumably to be guided by Marxist-Leninist principles with the aim of building a worker-led democratic state that would end class exploitation, champion anti-colonialism and national liberation, and end imperialist warfare around the globe.

Soon the fight for independence by colonies, later known as the "Third World Liberation Movement," heated up after World War I. African-diaspora writers and

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intellectuals in the U.S.-West European bloc — like their counterparts in Asia, Latin America and in Africa, itself — developed multiform alliances described by Tolliver as being "with the Euro-American left, and in many cases with the various national communist parties."

Due to varying levels of risks and punishments imposed by their home governments, the involvement of African-diaspora figures ranged from open-to-covert membership in communist movements to strong-to-weak alliances with such movements. A few anti-communist cases rose to spying, often bringing career success and elite status as rewards for defending their adopted governments against "sedition," "revolution," "anarchic instability" or what have you.

Some key figures embroiled in this East-West, US-Soviet, capitalist-communist nexus are Tolliver's "fellow travelers." He traces the term to Leon Trotsky and assigns it to "writers and intellectuals who had an ambivalent relationship to the Bolshevik Revolution."

Surprisingly, he cites Richard Wright, officially a Communist Party member from 1933 to 1942 as a leading example of a fellow traveler; he explains that, although Wright was later a "high-profile" defector from the pro-Soviet Communist movement, he, like many other defectors, "continued to find value in Marxist analysis." Wright and others who shared his political flexibility regularly proclaimed their "distance from the institutions and sectarian positions of the communist left."

### Rivalries

As Tolliver relates in his first chapter, by 1956 Cold War rivalry was intense, a fact uppermost in the minds of those who, on September 19, attended *Présence Africaine's* First Congress of Black Writers and Artists. Joining the luminaries such as Alioune Diop of Senegal and Aimé Césaire of Martinique were Léopold Senghor of Senegal and Jacques-Stephen Alexis of Haiti. From the United States, although as reporters rather

than official representatives, were Richard Wright and James Baldwin.

But it's who *wasn't* there that is most noteworthy — W.E.B. DuBois, "without parallel in intellectual accomplishments in the Black world," as Tolliver describes him.

His homeland barred DuBois from foreign travel, just as the "Land of the Free" had blocked him the previous year from attending the Bandung Conference in Indonesia, where 29 countries planted the seeds for formation of the Non-Aligned Movement in the "Third World."

Wright, on the other hand, had dutifully checked in at the U.S. embassy in Paris before attending the Congress of Black Writers. He assured authorities that he would not support Communist goals, a U.S. stance that flew in the face of the fact that nearly every anti-colonial and national liberation movement in the world at that time was either led by Communists or leaders who shared Marxist-Leninist and related Trotskyist viewpoints.

Wright aligned himself at the Congress with the five official Black American representatives, all of whom, it was later discovered, were covertly approved and funded by the CIA: Prof. John A. Davis of the City College of New York; Horace Mann Bond, president of Lincoln University in Pennsylvania; Prof. William Fontaine of the University of Pennsylvania; Prof. Mercer Cook of Howard University, and James Ivy, editor of the NAACP's *Crisis* magazine.

But the maneuvers of the USA's McCarthyism-gripped political, judicial, police and spy agencies could not stop DuBois from exposing the U.S.-approved delegation's objective. In a telegram to the meeting DuBois revealed why he was absent and accused the five Afro-Americans in attendance of "either not car[ing] about Negroes or say[ing] what the State Department wishes him to say."

They were to convince the world — especially those regions where Africans lived or whither their forebears had been taken in chains — that the presence of the cohort of educated and elite Afro-Americans at the meeting was a false signal to the world that the United States was successfully overcoming its racism problem.

Tolliver reports how Wright, in contrast, "distan[ced] himself from the organizers' supposed communism," and then goes on, to my astonishment, to maintain that Wright's

maneuvering “should be seen as a shrewd attempt to appease the irrational powers of anticommunism, an attempt to preserve his hard-fought but far from secure freedom.”

### The Afro-Caribbean Arena

Moving from the Francophile scene, as it was ripening into West African national liberation movements, Pan Africanism and state-building, Tolliver highlights three brilliant Afro-Caribbean authors, Jean Price-Mars of Haiti, George Lamming of Barbados and Jacques Stephen Alexis of Haiti.

Most U.S. citizens do not know that their country invaded and occupied Haiti in 1915 and stayed there until 1934, when Washington devised the FDR-liberal-sanctioned Good Neighbor Policy as a sugarcoating to conceal the bitterness of its racist brutalization and exploitation. Price-Mars’ novel, *So Spoke the Uncle* (1928), depicts the atrocities, massacres, assaults on women and jailings and executions of Haitian freedom fighters during this period and I’m indebted to Tolliver to pointing me to this work.

Moreover, most U.S.-Americans also do not know that their country occupied Trinidad during World War II.

George Lamming, from nearby Barbados, was well aware of that and other measures by which the Caribbean was turned into an “American lake” in the 20th century. When the Panama Canal Zone project was launched in 1904, the US devised many means to impel or encourage Barbadians to work on canal construction crews.

Lamming’s *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953) is an autobiographical tale that expresses the unity between U.S. imperialism and racism. After imposing economic conditions that damaged village life and uprooted youths who could then survive only by joining work gangs in Panama, Washington turned thousands of Barbadians into “vagabonds,” Tolliver says. The transformation followed the same coercive process that had uprooted the peasantry of the British Isles centuries earlier.

Once the workers were under its thumb, Washington imposed a two-tier race-based pay system on the canal work crews, with the Black workers getting bottom pay.

The devastation wrought on Barbados mirrors that of many other countries around the world, now designated as “shitholes” by the U.S. president: 25% of all working-age Barbadian men had to leave their homes to work in Panama over the course of the 10-year project.

The resistance leader, politician and writer Jacques Stephen Alexis (another revelation for me from Tolliver) portrays the last five years of the U.S.-occupation of Haiti in his *General Sun, My Brother* (1955).

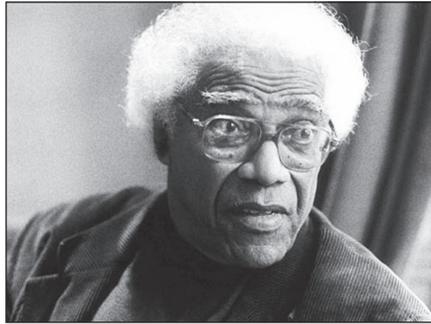
In 1929 the Marines massacred Haitian peasant freedom fighters, then left in 1934 after installing one of a line of U.S.-flunky dictators. The novel closes after the Dominican Republic’s Good Neighbor-approved tyrant conducted a pogrom of Haitian workers in the Dominican part of the island the countries share.

### Hughes and Childress

Progressing along to representative “fellow travelers,” Tolliver recapitulates the careers of Langston Hughes and Alice Childress, chiefly in their newspaper columns in which regular-folks Black characters like Hughes’s Jesse B. Simple and Childress’s domestic worker, Mildred, expose all manner of rightwing and racist hypocrisy, intrigue and threats on the struggle for Black freedom, justice and equality.

Using humor, the adroit Hughes set Simple loose in ways that the infuriated red-baiters could not figure out how to suppress.

Writing in mass-audience Black newspapers, Hughes knew that



George Lamming (above); Alice Childress (right).

what a character may say cannot be pinned on its creator. Thus the attacks that, say, Shakespearean fools, or Crazy Kat, Pogo or Bugs Bunny may make against orthodox opinions are hard to censor and its authors hard to punish.

Like Simple, Childress’ Mildred could violate any and every rule of propriety governing Cold War utterances.

Childress also enjoyed the protection of her involvement in progressive collectives such as the Negro Theater Youth League within the New Deal’s Federal Theater Project and the Committee for the Negro in Arts. No sooner did the Attorney General or FBI or CIA, or another police state entity crack down on such organizations than they reconstituted with other names.

True, many Afro-American organizations

also had to resist pressures from doctrinaire Communist officialdom increasingly undergoing warping by Stalinist autocracy and its minions.

But as Childress, who wrote for Paul Robeson’s Black leftist newspaper *Freedom*, put it, she and the other Black radicals “never took a position ‘We’re anti-C.P.’ They simply said, ‘We’re going to do it our way. We’re not going to have other people saying, you know, what they’re going to ... you know, the party line’ ... But they were not going to have a separation from the Black struggle. That’s what *Freedom* was about.”

Tolliver then takes up the career of Paul Robeson, which he presents as an “ordeal” endured by a “Black Radical Vagabond.”

He sees Robeson’s career ending in an Othello-scale personal tragedy accompanied by estrangement from the international celebrity’s Black roots. As Tolliver demonstrates, the racist/imperialist/capitalist establishment brought every gun at its disposal against Robeson: financial sabotage, legal restrictions on his freedom of movement and ongoing slander by Black stooges.

The latter individuals took the increasingly modish, seemingly radical but in practice reactionary-nationalist accusation that Robeson was, according to some mystical metric, “not Black enough.”

### Murder in Congo

Tolliver ends his study with a recounting of the rowdy protest by radical Black and Pan African groups that erupted at the United Nations in February 1961 at the

announcement of the assassination of the Republic of the Congo’s prime minister Patrice Lumumba.

After the Congo won formal independence from Belgium in 1960, the game changed as to what relationship the Congo might assume with its former colonial “owner.”

Rich in uranium, gold, zinc, copper, petroleum, timber, magnesium and more, the Congo was a prize the West was determined to hold onto.

Lumumba sought to use his ties with the other emerging African former colonies to ensure real independence, but representatives of mineral monopolies and Western spy agencies, including several of the same African American CIA operators who had gone to Paris for the cultural conference two years earlier, were determined to prevent that.

Their goal was to convince Lumumba to accept independence in name only. Belgian and various other Western corporations would continue, under the guise of promot-



ing “stability” and of nurturing the young republic into the ways of “democracy,” to run the economy, finance, military and diplomacy.

Lumumba said his party and his nation preferred true independence, declaring to King Baudoin face to face: “We are no longer your monkeys!”

Oh, how shocked, shocked were U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower and the Afro-American UN representative Ralph Bunche to hear such frank language, and from a person regarded as a savage by the West. Sensing he could not “turn” Lumumba and might wind up being exposed as an agent of neocolonialism, Bunche took off for home.

Next came the West’s attempt to break resource-wealthy Katanga province away from the Congo as a new nation to be headed by the imperialist-backed stooge Moïse Tshombe. In the fallout, the UN sent troops — ostensibly to preserve Congo unity — but they refused to resist Tshombe’s move.

When Lumumba then said he would seek military assistance from the Soviet Union, the imperial powers trotted out future dictator Joseph Mobutu to oversee Lumumba’s assassination and head up a regime-change.

The Lumumba chapter, the book’s final, closes twice in a sense, first with a summation of what the book has shown: that the United States government, and certain Black elites, used “racial liberalism” as a way to conceal the structural underpinnings of racism. Under racial liberalism, the spotlight narrows on the individual accomplishments of Black Americans and on prejudiced attitudes of whites that require correction.

In true-American propagandist, cultural, journalistic and legal narratives, those are the two elements constituting the country’s “race problem.”

The un-American alternative to this approach, Tolliver says, focuses on the “structural elements effectively barring African Americans from inclusion in U.S. society.” The Lumumba incident laid bare the contradictions between these two approaches on the international scale:

*“By obscuring the racism that structured Western governments’ relationship to the Congo and its leader, racial liberalism provided the framework for dismissing Lumumba’s claim to control his country’s resources as the maniacal ravings of a meddling politician”* (emphasis added).

### Why Vagabonds?

“Bravo to you,” I wanted to message Tolliver. But I was still a bit confused by some aspects of this rich piece of scholarship until I got to the end of his 10-page coda titled “A Riotous Mood: Ideological

## PATRICE LUMUMBA

“History will one day have its say, but it will not be the history that Brussels, Paris, Washington or the United Nations will teach, but that which they will teach in the countries emancipated from colonialism and its puppets. Africa will write its own history.”

teleSUR

2 July 1925 - 17 January 1961



Rupture in African America.”

In truth, my copy *Of Vagabonds and Fellow Travelers* is littered with chicken-scratched notes hurling, on almost every page, all manner of objections to some of the terms and viewpoints that are offered up. I winced every time I encountered his central rhetorical device: his labeling of giants of African-diaspora writers as “vagabonds” and/or “fellow travelers.” Why call them “vagabonds”?

Tolliver derives his terminology from Marx’s description of people “dragged from their accustomed [i.e. peasant and small craftwork — JW] mode of life” at the dawn of the capitalist mode of production in 16th-century England. Those who could or would not “immediately adapt themselves to the discipline of their condition,” that is, to being driven into cities to work at the primitive accumulation of capital, became “beggars, robbers and vagabonds.”

This qualitative change in the ownership, modes, means and relationship of human beings producing goods involved “bloody legislation and enclosure acts” (laws that turned previously common or public lands into private property for the elite).

The process then and now has entailed a “violence [that] extends to all levels of capitalist society, including in the realm of the ‘superstructure’ or the institutions of the state and social consciousness of a given society” — a violence that fosters, in increasingly hard-to-detect ways, thinking patterns that emanate from the society’s economic base.

Yet none of the outstanding persons Tolliver brings onstage declared himself or herself either a vagabond or a fellow traveler. To give just one example of why “vagabond” doesn’t work for me as a category, Jacques-Stephen Alexis was hardly a “vagabond.”

He was a committed partisan of the left, an out-and-out Communist hardly of a mind to equate imperialism with socialism. Alexis shows that the heart of the Haitian liberation struggle lies with workers and peasants.

The central force against them is the

Haitian American Sugar Company, which had installed the client government under which drunken Marines, in a gripping scene from his novel (and real life) wave dollar bills above a match and then force a bony woman carrying her infant to crawl on all fours before them and “meow, bark and whinny before they would give her one of the bills they were about to burn.”

Yet, to my surprise, I ultimately wound up overcoming my early indignation at Tolliver’s approach. What helped is the way Tolliver ends by bringing it all home, as he talks about the University of Houston where he teaches.

His office site in the English Department is in the Roy G. Cullen Building, named in honor of the son of oil oligarch Hugh Roy Cullen and his wife Lillian.

Hugh Cullen greatly admired Sen. Joe McCarthy for his red-baiting fervor and was the single largest contributor to McCarthy’s 1952 Senate re-election campaign. The buildings bearing Cullen’s name “serve as a constant reminder that the right has not neglected the importance of culture in shaping the political direction of this country,” Tolliver says. To emphasize the point, he adds:

*“The present moment provides us with ample evidence that the radical right continues to invest in the cultural realm as a primary front in the battle against any vestige of ‘communism,’ by which it means pretty much any public good, including education.”*

With money flowing into Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics and drying up for the liberal arts and social sciences, Tolliver writes, “agents of the contemporary radical right can quickly ascend to positions of power and act as sentinels over the production of knowledge. Here they are able to cause problems, when left unchecked, for those scholars who dare take a critical look at the consequences of American freedom for marginalized populations around the globe.”

Tolliver endorses the call by cultural critic Hortense Spillers of Vanderbilt University for Black creative intellectuals in mainstream academies to produce a “scandalous criticism,” that is, criticism that “refuses to disconnect literature and criticism from their grounding in the economy.”

To that end, he says, progressive Black cultural figures should establish “endowments to support our scandalous work”:

*“The blooming of such spaces across the contemporary academic landscape would well serve as sites of refuge and sustenance for vagabonds and fellow travelers on the weary road of intellectual struggle against present and future enclosures.”* ■

# REVIEW

## A Problematic Diagnosis By Michael Tee

### Back to Black

Retelling Black Radicalism for the 21st Century

By Kehinde Andrews

Zed Books, 2018; distributed by University of Chicago Press, 256 pages, \$14.95 paperback.

*“Black national oppression, based as it is on the slave trade and the enslaving of African Americans, has created an obvious and even ‘justifiable’ ground for Black nationalism. The fact that white supremacy has been the most easily defined instrument in that national oppression creates a situation where Black nationalism can flourish. But even so, the majority of African Americans are not nationalists.”*—Amiri Baraka (1982 essay in *Black Scholar*)

IN A BOOK full of too many political contradictions and superficial “analyses” of deep, complex historical phenomena, author Kehinda Andrews — a native of Britain — writes in his sixth chapter, titled “Black Marxism:” “The Panthers always prioritized the issues of racism.”

As a former member of the original Black Panther Party in the United States, I know that the idea that we “prioritized” our antiracist orientation rather than our anti-colonialism, anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism does our movement a disservice. It can give people the erroneous notion that the BPP was not much more than a run-of-the-mill Civil Rights organization, just more “militant.”

Nevertheless, I found some useful observations in *Back to Black*. In his epilogue, for example, Andrews quotes Malcolm X accurately enough by writing, “revolution overturns everything we have come to accept.” Apparently he recognizes the need to “break beyond the limits of the colonial national state.”

Having said that, Andrews misses the political mark more often than not. To his credit he appears to acknowledge this shortcoming by saying, “It is important to critique the limitations of my own position.” Those limitations could be capsulized within a passage from “Black Marxism”:

*Michael Tee is a poet, playwright and ecological socialist activist, currently based in Louisville, Kentucky. Growing up in Philadelphia, PA, he began his social justice work in 1970 as part of the Free Angela Davis campaign and joined the Philadelphia chapter of the original Black Panther Party in 1971.*

*“Black radicalism is based on seeing the fundamental contradiction in society as that of racism, whiteness and hierarchy.”*

This “fundamental contradiction” is the theme pursued throughout the author’s successive chapters on “Narrow Nationalism,” “Pan-Africanism,” “Black is a Country,” “Cultural Nationalism,” “Blackness,” “Black Marxism,” “Liberal Radicalism,” “Black Survival” and the Epilogue, “It’s Already Too Late.”

If we define radical as “reaching to the roots of things” (as Marx did) Andrews fails to break ground.

### Mythology of Race

First, we need to debunk the race theory altogether, something even the American Association of Anthropology (AAA) has done, even if some of the left — let alone the right — has failed to do:

*“Today scholars in many fields argue that ‘race’ as it is understood in the United States of America was a social mechanism invented during the 18th century to refer to those populations brought together in colonial America — the English settlers, the conquered Indian peoples and those peoples of Africa, brought in to provide slave labor.”* (AAA *Statement on Race, 1998*)

As far as “whiteness” is concerned, justifications for human subjugation based on their supposedly inferiority can be traced back to the ancient (old) world. However, there seems to be no evidence that an actual social system, based on white “supremacy,” ever existed before the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

In her book *Loaded: A Disarming History of the Second Amendment*, historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz points out how various papal bulls facilitated the justifications:

*“From the mid-fifteenth century most of the non-European world was colonized under the ‘Doctrine of Discovery,’ one of the first principles of international law promulgated by Christian European monarchies, to legitimize investigating, mapping and claiming lands belonging to peoples outside Europe.”*

In *The Invention of the White Race*, Theodore Allen writes that the notion of a “superior,” white race — and, conversely, of “inferior” ones — initially emerged during the conquest of Ireland by the British. The latter justified the cruel exploitation of the former by claiming that, contrary to their skin color, they were not part of the white

“race.” Radical activist-educator Noel Ignatin (Ignatiev) explains how, at some point after they’d been in America for a while, the Irish became (socially and politically) white. (*How the Irish Became White*)

Moreover, Allen elucidates in his book that there was apparently no natural enmity between the exploited and oppressed in early colonial American populations. They often not only cohabitated, married and reproduced together, but also rebelled together. He cites Bacon’s Rebellion as one powerful historical example of this class solidarity.

After a year-long rebellion in the Virginia colony, in which the governor was forced to flee the wrath of hundreds of armed Africans and Englishmen, leading chattel slave owners concocted the specious idea of separate races — “white” being the dominant one.

It was a strategy born of the necessity to maintain social control, by encouraging and consolidating “white” working class collaboration with the ruling class.

### Accentuate Solidarity

Fortunately, in spite of all that there have always been significant numbers of people, classified as white, who throughout U.S. history have struggled individually and collectively against racism and white supremacy.

Rather than emphasizing the social divisions, it behooves us to accentuate the history of solidarity. Yet Andrews tells us:

*“What I have tried to do is dust off, repack-age and rearticulate the radical basis for the black revolution. . . to build a grassroots organization based on uniting the global black nation.”*

A global black nation — really? Where and how would that exist in the real world?

Andrews is apparently arguing here for a “repackaging” of the kind of pan-Africanism promoted by Marcus Garvey, with his Universal Negro Improvement Association.

In the 1920s when African Americans were living behind the Jim Crow “iron curtain,” some of that made sense. It was an understandable response to the kind of virulent, institutionalized white nationalism widespread, at least, until the 1960s.

Times have changed in the last 50 years. There has been enough social integration, particularly in the United States, to make establishing a “black nation” not only unappealing to most Black Americans, but also

*continued on page 40*

# REVIEW

## Hidden Deaths in a Long War

### Sand and Blood:

America's Stealth War on the Mexico Border

By John Carlos Frey

Bold Type Books, New York, 2019, 243 pages, \$28 hardcover.

"I WAS SURE that if I had stayed in the desert, I would be dead."

Much of the power of this book comes from the author John Carlos Frey's personal narrative, as well as his work in interviewing many people including officials, immigrants on both sides of the border, humanitarian water providers in the desert, activists and many more with first-hand knowledge — even a few Border Patrol agents not cut from the same racist and cruel cloth as most of them.



Frey went on forays into the desert with water providers, and gives a detailed narrative of the experience, so readers feel like they were there.

Another long account is his joining with a group of immigrants led by coyotes, criminals who smuggle immigrants across the border for exorbitant fees. These are members of the Mexican drug cartels, adept at smuggling drugs. With Washington's war on the border making the crossing difficult, the cartels saw an opening for another illegal capitalist enterprise.

Frey joined the group in Mexico some 70 miles from the border. Allowed to take videos of the immigrants along the way, he was

*Barry Sheppard is a longtime socialist author and activist living in the San Francisco Bay Area.*

told in no uncertain terms that if he took any videos of the cartel members he would be killed, and he believed them.

Getting up to the border was itself grueling. Getting across into the desert on the U.S. side took the expertise and patience of the coyotes.

Frey took part in the long trek in the desert on the U.S. side and chronicled the difficulties and hardships. Those who couldn't keep up were left behind, with a good possibility of dying.

Frey himself found he couldn't continue. "I had blisters on my feet. My skin burned, and my throat was dry. My water had to last me at least the whole day, so I rationed it in sips and only sips, and it was never enough.

"By 10:00 a.m., sweat was singing my eyes, and the day appeared to be hotter

than the previous scorcher. I took one last sip of what was left of my water which was hot now, and yelled to the guide that I couldn't go on."

He was left behind. But unlike the migrants he was accompanying, Frey had a phone, and called to be rescued.

### The Long War Against Immigrants

*Sand and Blood* presents a harrowing, well-researched description of Washington's war against immigrants on the Mexican border. The author is an investigative journalist and documentary filmmaker, including for the PBS *Newshour*. His interviews can also be seen at [www.democracynow.org](http://www.democracynow.org), August 15, 2018 and July 10, 2019.

John Carlos Frey was born in Tijuana,

By Barry Sheppard

Mexico. His parents moved in 1965 across the border to southern San Diego, from where he could see Tijuana as a child. His mother was Mexican and his father a United States citizen, so he was a U.S. citizen too.

This fact enabled him to move fairly freely back and forth between the U.S. side and Mexico, and he followed the developments at the border his whole life.

We are well aware of Trump's cruel treatment of immigrants and asylum seekers at the border. What I was largely ignorant of before reading the book was how the stage was set by previous administrations.

A qualitative turning point came in 1986 under the Reagan administration as immigration from Mexico grew, with what became known as the "amnesty bill" because it allowed legal status for many undocumented immigrants who had worked in the United States for years and had put down roots.

As Frey writes: "But the bill did not address the root causes for the migration ... [T]he bill's authors also made sure to provide for a militaristic approach to border enforcement. [It] would be fortified with physical barriers, and more border guards would be deployed.

"If the United States was going to grant an exception to codified immigration law by granting amnesty, it was going to make sure, by sheer force, that migrants would not come illegally again."

But of course they continued to come anyway. Frey also says, "Southern California was the destination for undocumented immigrants, and they would gain access to the United States through Tijuana and cross into San Diego ....

"But in the late eighties and early nineties, this pristine area became one of the main centers for the militarization of the border with Mexico."

Under the administration of George H.W. Bush (Bush the Elder), 1989-93, the size of the Border Patrol was doubled and seven hundred miles of new border fencing was built. But the real militarization of the border began under Bill Clinton as immigration continued to grow along with anti-immigration sentiment whipped up by the Republicans.

### Prevention through Death

Sensing a winning issue, Clinton out-Republicaned the Republicans on immigration, and the militarization of the borders

began in earnest. Under Clinton's order, the Border Patrol issued the *Border Patrol Strategic Plan 1994 and Beyond — National Strategy*, which became known as the “prevention through deterrence strategy,” still employed today.

That strategy was to build up fencing and Border Patrol agents at the border between El Paso, Texas and Juarez, Mexico, and to increase the fencing between Tijuana and San Diego, and the Border Patrol there. This would force those entering the United States without documents to cross the border in the inhospitable terrain of mountains and desert, sometimes scorching hot.

The trek across this terrain is long and difficult. Many die along the way, most often from dehydration. Frey has a chapter titled “Death as Deterrent.”

The border between El Paso and Juarez is the Rio Grande, crossed by bridges. Some try to evade the Border Patrol by swimming or using rafts to cross the river, and there are drownings — another “deterrence.”

It isn't known how many migrants have died in the deserts and mountains since “prevention through deterrence” was implemented from Clinton up through Trump, for reasons Frey explains, but it is in the thousands.

Many bodies and skeletons have been found by humanitarian volunteers who venture into these terrains to leave water for the migrants.

These heroic volunteers notify local authorities, who sometimes can bury the bodies. But most of the time they can only advise the Border Patrol where the bodies are. Although the Patrol has the resources to find and bury the corpses, and keep track of how many there are, and are supposed to do so, they most often do nothing.

### Bill Clinton's Legacy

In his 1995 State of the Union address to Congress, Clinton struck many themes and falsehoods Trump uses (although Trump uses openly racist language):

*“All Americans, not only in the states most heavily affected but every place in this country, are rightly disturbed by the large numbers of illegal aliens entering our country. The jobs they hold might otherwise be held by citizens or legal immigrants. The public service they use impose burdens on our taxpayers.*

*“That's why our administration has moved aggressively to secure our borders by hiring a record number of new border guards, by deporting twice as many criminal aliens as ever before, by cracking down on illegal hiring, by barring welfare benefits to illegal aliens...”*

When Clinton ended “welfare as we know it” in 1996, included in the bill was the provision that barred even legal immigrants from accessing welfare for the first five years of their stay in the United States.

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*The trek across this terrain is long and difficult. Many die along the way, most often from dehydration. Frey has a chapter titled “Death as Deterrent.”*

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Also in that year Clinton signed the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act after the first World Trade Center and the Oklahoma City bombings.

The Act allowed the government to increase prosecutions and arrests of suspected “terrorists,” but also allowed immigrants, legal or otherwise, to be apprehended and detained without due process if they had been convicted of certain felonies. As a result, the number of immigrants held in detention doubled.

Another law signed by Clinton, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, placed new restrictions on immigrants anywhere in the country who were caught without documents, denying them due process.

An undocumented immigrant, if deported, could not apply for any legal means to re-enter for 10 years. This meant that families of mixed undocumented, documented and citizen members could be separated for ten years. Most likely, those deported would try to re-enter.

The law also allowed the Attorney General's office to in effect deputize local law enforcement as federal immigration officers. Sheriffs and cops could stop anyone and demand proof of legal residency.

The notorious Arizona Sheriff Joe Arpaio famously took full advantage. Some cities have resisted, but their struggle with the feds continues up to today, with ICE raids in “sanctuary cities.”

This measure sent shock waves of fear through Latino communities. People stopped trusting police, and avoided reporting crimes to local police for fear they'd be deported.

Clinton also made it even harder for migrants to apply for legal documents to enter. The reason there are so many immigrants crossing the border without documents is that it can take years, even two decades, to get legal documents for Latinos from Mexico and points south.

Also under Clinton, the military increasingly was used at the border to enforce anti-immigrant laws. The Posse Comitatus Act of 1878 said the military cannot be used as a police force domestically — unless the Congress or the President authorizes it. This loophole had been rarely used, but that has been reversed in the war against immigrants at the Mexican border.

### Using 9/11 as Pretext

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the “War on Terror” was launched, justifying the war against Afghanistan and Iraq, and with

attacks on civil liberties domestically.

I hadn't realized before reading the book that there was another aspect: the border with Mexico was falsely claimed to be an entry point for terrorists, so the militarization of that border (but not the Canadian) was greatly increased.

Under Bush Junior, the budget for the the Border Patrol jumped from \$1 billion to \$2 billion. Under Obama and Trump the amount continued to rise, and is now around \$4 billion.

Under George W. Bush, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was established. Concerning the southern border, the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) was established.

CPB took over all functions of Customs, Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), including the Border Patrol, creating the largest police force in the country, of some 60,000. It was composed of Customs and Border Patrol agents and immigration inspectors. ICE did not fall under the CBP, but was part of DHS.

Under Bush another law was added, for the first time making crossing the border without papers a crime. The Trump administration's sadistic border policies required no new laws; those passed under Clinton and Bush sufficed.

Under president Obama, ICE ballooned to 20,000 employees with 400 offices around the country. Its duties morphed to include a massive immigrant detention center complex, and deportation force, with a budget of \$6 billion. ICE operates throughout the country, but also in the border area where the Border Patrol operates.

“Obama continued the legacy of all U.S. presidents and administrations since Ronald Reagan, making life more difficult for immigrants,” Frey writes. “Obama's rate of deportations of immigrants already established in the country was higher than any president before or since. During his eight years in office, Obama deported more than five million people, and, so far [2019] even Trump has not beat that record.

“Obama also expanded family detention facilities for women with their children” as a response to an influx of thousands of Central Americans fleeing violence and poverty.

“Many believe that the detention of children, albeit with their mothers, is the most egregious immigration-related stain on the Obama record.”

That's how the stage was set by both Democrats and Republicans for the openly racist Trump to intensify and deepen the war against immigrants on the border, in all its horrific manifestations that we know about. ■

# REVIEW

## Hugo Blanco's Revolutionary Life

By Joanne Rappaport

### Hugo Blanco:

A Revolutionary for Life

By Derek Wall

London: Merlin Press/Resistance Books, 2018

143 pages, 9 plates. \$25 paperback.

HUGO BLANCO IS probably best known for his work in the late-1950s and early 1960s in La Convención, a region near Cusco, Peru, where indigenous peasants eager for employment were allotted small plots of land to till in exchange for unrelenting labor and brutal mistreatment.

Blanco, who grew up speaking Quechua (the indigenous language of the Peruvian highlands), had embraced Trotskyism during several years as an urban activist. He signed on as a sub-renter on a large hacienda in La Convención at the invitation of local peasant unions who were already organizing against the abuses of the landlords by filing legal claims and organizing strikes.

The movement eventually turned to armed resistance, as the actions of the landowners and the police allied with them became increasingly violent in response to peasant calls for agrarian reform. Blanco was captured in 1963, spending the next seven years in prison, but the peasant movement eventually achieved its goal of ending the hacienda system in La Convención.

I met Hugo Blanco during his 1977-1978 tour of the United States, when he gave a talk in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois. The years have blurred my memory of his public presentation, but I remember that we held a welcoming party for him at my house, and that we stayed up all night in conversation after he helped me wash the dishes.

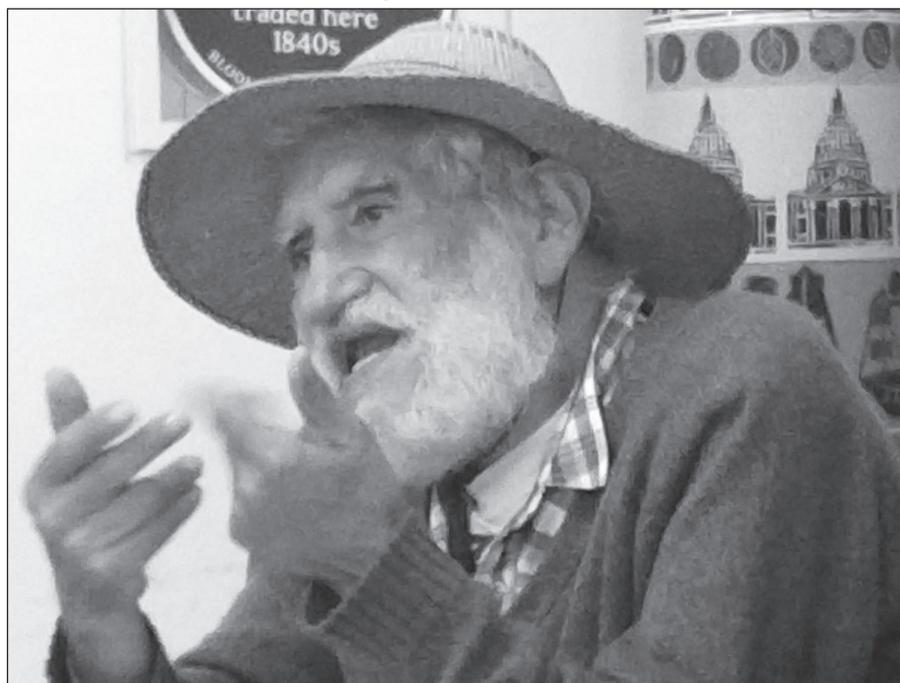
At the time I was a graduate student in anthropology focusing on Andean history and culture, with plans to conduct fieldwork in the Colombian highlands.

I was a student activist, and I had read Blanco's then-recently published *Land or Death!* (Pathfinder, 1977), so I remember that we had a great deal in common and he had a great deal to teach me in those hours before I had to rush off to class.

Derek Wall, a Green Party activist and former British MP, as well as an academic

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*Joanne Rappaport teaches Latin American cultural studies at Georgetown University and is the author of Cowards Don't Make History: Orlando Fals Borda and the Origins of Participatory Action Research, forthcoming in 2020 from Duke University Press.*



Hugo Blanco, London, February 26, 2019.

Roland Unger

economist and writer, came into contact with Hugo Blanco in 2010 and since then has entered into sustained conversation with him over their shared commitment to ecosocialism.

Wall is the author of numerous books on environmental politics. His biography of Hugo Blanco is geared to an activist readership; this lucidly written narrative is based on Wall's conversations with Blanco and with his former partner Gunilla Berglund, as well as a broad survey of the literature published in English on the Latin American left and on Hugo Blanco's role in Peruvian politics since the late 1950s as a student protestor, peasant organizer, officeholder, and environmental activist.

Wall leads readers through Blanco's experiences in the years before he joined the peasant struggle in La Convención, carefully detailing not only his activism, but also the labyrinthine history of Peruvian leftist groups with which he was in some cases associated, or in other cases in the opposition.

Wall also provides highlights about the indigenous history of Cusco, since indigenous culture was as influential as Marxism in the development of Blanco's ideas.

Blanco endured a long period of incarceration after his 1963 capture, coinciding

in its last years with the introduction of a limited agrarian reform by the military government of General Juan Velasco, who seized power in 1968.

This historical moment provides Wall with a frame for distinguishing between the agrarian socialism that Blanco was seeking and the liberal reforms of the government. A lengthy exile began in 1970, until 1979: Mexico, Argentina, Chile — just before the 1973 coup — and finally, Sweden.

Blanco's time abroad was punctuated by brief periods in Peru during which he was dedicated to organizing workers, followed by subsequent expulsions. In addition to his union work, Blanco was instrumental in unifying the Peruvian left into a short-lived electoral movement; he was elected to Congress and as a senator, providing Wall with a canvas on which to paint a portrait leftist electoral activity in Peru.

### Toward "Deep Green Marxism"

It was during the later years of his Senate career, in the early 1990s, that Blanco was attracted to environmentalist causes, principally those related to mining and fisheries, which were not only damaging to the environment but plagued by inequities in labor arrangements.

Peru's extractivist economy depends on

large-scale mining, while its coastal location has given rise to commercial fishing enterprises, both of which have come into conflict with organized peasants and workers.

This period coincided with the rise of the Shining Path guerrilla movement, which targeted peasant leaders, Blanco among them. The expansion of Shining Path was countered by an equally bloodthirsty campaign by the Fujimori government, which targeted the general population as presumed guerrillas.

Forced once again into exile, Blanco settled in Mexico from 1992 to 1997, where the Zapatista movement made him increasingly aware of the possibilities of peasants organizing along ethnic lines to create a more just society from the bottom up.

Upon his return to Peru, he began to write from an indigenous perspective and to support movements against mining enterprises and for water rights.

Wall observes that during this period, Blanco transformed himself from a Trotskyist to an ecosocialist; he told Wall that he best saw his efforts in the present as reflected

in an Andean cosmivision harnessed to the struggles of workers and indigenous people against capitalism and neoliberalism, more than in the more strictly class-based analysis of reality that had driven his activism in the past.

The final part of this biography abandons Wall's documentation of Blanco's political activities and travels, to reflect instead on the concept of ecosocialism, which both he and Blanco embrace.

Wall calls this "deep green Marxism," a politics that at once appeals to indigenous forms of knowledge and to Marx, Lenin and Trotsky, and that goes beyond the defense of the human community to guard and preserve the earth in all its complexity.

This final portion of the book inquires deeply into the philosophies that inform Hugo Blanco's current activities and writings: how they articulate with other thinkers and how they can become guides for action in an era of climate change and of continuing inequalities.

*Hugo Blanco: A Revolutionary for Life* documents the evolution of a major Latin

American revolutionary whose experiences were always informed by the needs, concerns and social conditions of rural laborers and urban workers, and by a sustained practice of listening to people at the grass roots and of recognizing their political wisdom and their leadership.

Wall is careful to describe in depth the ideological, political and economic contexts of Blanco's practice. More than a biography, this book inspires activism; it does not provide a recipe for action, but paints a series of scenarios in which readers become familiar with Hugo Blanco's deep-seated philosophy of politics from the bottom up and how it has developed over his lifetime. ■

## Problematic — cont. from page 36

impractical.

In the "Black Marxism" chapter Andrews goes on to state:

*"The unfortunate truth about Marx's hero of history is that the Western working class has benefited from imperialism and forged political movements that mostly aim to distribute the wealth gained from the exploitation of darker people more equitably between Whites."*

The main problem with that "truth" is that it implies that the contemporary working class is mostly white. It's not, whether in the United States or the world. As filmmaker Michael Moore astutely observed in a recent interview on "Democracy Now," the face of the working class is young, female and one of "color."

Rather than a white male factory worker, more often than not it consists of a precarious, underpaid, overworked service worker. The worldwide feminization of poverty has been a major result of this reconfiguration.

Finally, in light of global climate disruption and impending ecocide, the recognition of what Martin Luther King described as our "web of mutuality" is more important now, than ever before. The fundamental contradiction, as far as I'm concerned, at this time in human history is global capitalism vs. the biosphere. ■

[For further study, I refer readers to:

- "Birth of a White Nation" (<https://youtu.be/riVAuC0dnP4>)
- "Intercommunalism: The Late Theorizations of Huey P. Newton, 'Chief Theoretician' of the Black Panther Party" (<https://www.viewpointmag.com/2018/06/11/intercommunalism-the-late-theorizations-of-huey-p-newton-chief-theoretician-of-the-black-panther-party/>)

• *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* (<http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-feminist-theory-from-margin-to-center/#gsc.tab=0>)

• "What Should Socialism Mean in the 21st Century" (<https://youtu.be/UKFLLv3irRg>)

## On the Delhi Pogrom — continued from page 15

sufficient resources.

Other opposition parties have also done little or nothing. Sonia Gandhi as leader of the [main national opposition party] Congress, did not assure the AAP Delhi government she would give her party's full support to any collectively organized effort to bring the violence to a halt. She preferred to score political points by criticizing the AAP failures. Meanwhile she did not dare to mobilize Congress activists and supporters to march in mass to the affected areas as protectors.

Left parties could have made a similar joint call, but when the city was burning, they opted to carry out inconsequential marches and symbolic sit-ins.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Affairs Minister Amit Shah, as expected, indulged in generalities, claiming to deplore the violence and calling for "peace and harmony."

The overall political consequences are stark. First, the *Sangh*/BJP will most likely benefit from this polarization. Communal violence invariably sharpens religious identity and deepens the attachment to it. For some time to come, identity is filtered through this prism in order to make sense of what is happening in society. Allegiance to one's religious community generally becomes stronger.

Second, the terrorizing and ghettoizing of Muslims is accelerated. Richer Muslims in Hindu-majority higher-class areas move to Muslim-dominated neighborhoods where they believe they will be safer. The reverse

happens to richer Hindus who move out of Muslim-majority neighborhoods.

But this is no parallel or equivalent process of "Hindu ghettoization." Rather, the drawing of sharper boundaries diminishes the everyday actually lived co-existence of the two communities. Yet it is this lived experience that can counter to a certain extent the hatreds espoused by religio-political extremist propaganda and practices.

The one bright spot exhibited by the anti-CAA agitations and solidarity activities is the commitment of young people of college and university age cutting across religious faiths. In the immediate term, members of Radical Socialist in Delhi have participated along with others in these activities.

In the longer term it is vital that RS connects to this youth which everywhere, inside and outside Delhi, has been appalled by what has happened and recognize the distinctive threat posed by the forces of *Hindutva*. Likewise, they will notice the feebleness of the challenge other political parties offer.

It is from this constituency that activists committed to the progressive social transformation of India will be recruited and developed. They will discover how the socio-economic iniquities of neoliberal capitalism have fused today with the political-cultural ugliness of *Hindutva*.

They then will be a key input into the wider and longer-term effort to successfully confront and defeat the hegemonic ambitions of the most evil fascistic force that today exists in our country. ■

# REVIEW

## Karl Marx in His Times By Michael Principe

### Karl Marx and the Birth of Modern Society:

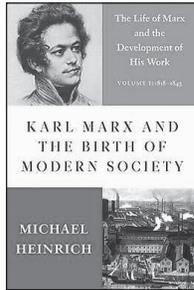
The Life of Marx and the Development of His Work, Volume I: 1818-1841

By Michael Heinrich

Translated by Alexander Locascio

Monthly Review Press, 2019,

390 pages, \$34 cloth



#### THE FIRST VOLUME of

Michael Heinrich's biography of Karl Marx, if any indication of the two volumes yet to come, signals a genuine event in the understanding of Marx and his work. With it, the terrain for understanding all aspects of Marx's life has likely changed fundamentally.

Heinrich, author of *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital* (also translated into English by Alexander Locascio), is comfortable viewing history, including Marx's own, through a Marxist lens. In his introduction to the present volume, he makes his commitments clear, arguing for the contemporary relevance of Marx, stating that the "basic structures of capitalism, which Marx analyzed more comprehensively than anyone else, are of fundamental importance to most societies today."

Heinrich tells us that theories of society "are driven by the question of what human emancipation means, and in what sense we can speak of freedom, equality, solidarity, and justice, and under what social relations they are even possible." On one side stands the bourgeoisie celebrating free markets and free elections, "last demonstrated in the 1980s and 1990s with the triumphal march of neoliberalism." (20) On the other side stand Marx and the Marxist tradition.

With regard to Marx's writings, Heinrich correctly rejects distinguishing between an early and late Marx, along with the corresponding arguments regarding where this line should be drawn. Like most writers, Marx is best seen as exhibiting continuity and discontinuity every time pen is put to paper. This is the Marx we meet in Heinrich's biography.

Heinrich offers three justifications for a new biography of Marx. First, too many biographies are guilty of what he calls "biographical overestimation," explicitly or implicitly

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claiming to reveal the entire essence of the person, depicting their deepest thoughts and feelings. Judging such a project impossible, Heinrich, in contrast, carefully refuses to

play the role of omniscient narrator; regularly identifying what is known, what is probable, and what is possible.

Second, very few biographies engage in a serious way with the relation between life and work. Exceptions cited by Heinrich include works by David McLellan — the biography regularly recommended by this reviewer — and Auguste Carnu (covering Marx's life only up to 1846 and unavailable in English).

These attempts are limited, according to Heinrich, in that they were written prior to the (second) *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe (MEGA)*, the largest collection of the works of Marx and Engels. Heinrich by contrast has clearly spent extensive time with some of Marx's most obscure and previously unpublished texts.

Third, Heinrich engages with historical context in a novel way, devoting unprecedented attention to the history and geography of place and on the backgrounds of figures around Marx.

#### Rich Environment

The attention to setting generates a narrative where, instead of seeing the world primarily through the eyes of Marx, we are offered a rich and textured environment within which we can imagine Marx moving. As a consequence, we don't encounter a Marx intended, or particularly well developed, as a literary character. Written not as a novelistic page turner, Heinrich's text avoids the literary embellishments that he willingly calls out in other biographers.

However, Heinrich still lets his own voice emerge. One noteworthy occasion comes when, describing Marx's academic program at the University of Bonn, he sarcastically remarks, "Back then, attending a university still had something to do with education. The usual practice today in Germany of testing the results of one's learning with exams in which knowledge learned by rote is interrogated would have probably been rejected as absurd." (127)

The time from Marx's birth to the writing of his doctoral dissertation has rarely attracted the attention given it here. In their biographies, both David McLellan and Sven-Eric Liedman each devote approximately 40

pages to this period. Consequently, this is not a text for those who want to know just a bit about Marx's life. However, for those who think they know quite a lot already, it is exciting, perhaps even a bit titillating in the way it challenges often repeated anecdotes from Marx's youth.

One might characterize this as, in part, a meta-biography. That is, Heinrich substantially engages with and offers commentary on existing biographies. In fact, the book will be of particular interest to those who have read other accounts of Marx's life.

Of recent biographies, Heinrich is probably most critical of Francis Wheen's *Karl Marx: A Life*. Apparently, Wheen makes a lot of stuff up. Examples include Wheen's unsupported story that Jenny von Westphalen at five years old "first saw her later husband when he was an infant during a visit by her father to the Marx household." (84) Heinrich considers this unlikely given the lack of evidence of any relationship between Ludwig von Westphalen and Marx's father at this early date.

Even more fantastic is what appears to be Wheen's wholly fabricated account of Marx's supposed duel while a student at the University of Bonn. This is an incident reported by virtually all biographers and one of the many popular nuggets from Marx's early life carefully unpacked by Heinrich.

Essentially, the only real evidence for a duel comes from a letter written by Marx's father in which he appears to scold his son by saying, "And is dueling then so closely interwoven with philosophy?" In addition, on Marx's certificate of release from the University, it is noted that he was accused of "carrying prohibited weapons in Cologne." (134)

These two incidents have led to wild speculation. Heinrich, careful as always, notes that University records actually reveal that Marx was levied a fine for carrying a sword cane which was used by a companion, injuring a bystander, during some sort of street brawl. Heinrich's commentary on Wheen is typical of his no-nonsense approach:

*"In the case of Wheen, the duel story is adorned with an entire bouquet of products of the imagination: the Borussians (one of the student corps) had allegedly forced other students to kneel and swear fealty to the Prussian nobility; in order to defend himself, Marx supposedly procured a pistol and ultimately accepted a challenge to a duel. There is not a single piece*

of evidence for any of this.” (135)

The book is filled with instances of this care for evidence and detail. From many biographical accounts, we have been told for instance that Marx’s mother Henriette was uneducated and perhaps semi-literate. However, Heinrich shows that most of these claims rest on almost no evidence.

Dutch by birth, Henriette never mastered German, though Heinrich demonstrates that her letters still exhibit wit and intelligence, concluding that “the dominant image in the literature of a vapid and uneducated housewife cannot be correct.” (59)

Heinrich explores Marx’s years at the Gymnasium [the elite level of German secondary school — ed.] in Trier, examining the background and political views of Marx’s teachers, most were liberal, as well as discussing Marx’s final *Abitur* exam essays. While these have received a fair bit of attention with most of it going to “Reflections of a Young Man on the Choice of a Profession,” Heinrich, in an attempt to discern what is original in Marx and what might have come from school lessons, offers up a comparison of Marx’s essay with those of his classmates on the same topic.

Marx is, for example, the only student to take an anthropological approach distinguishing between animals which have a fixed sphere of activity and human beings who have a choice amongst different activities. Also, while most students speak of working for one’s own perfection and for the good of society as being a tension to be negotiated, Marx is the only one to reject any necessary conflict.

Marx writes, “Man’s nature is so constituted that he can attain his own perfection only by working for the perfection, for the good, of his fellow men. If he works only for himself, he may perhaps become a famous man of learning, a great sage, an excellent poet, but he can never be a perfect, truly great man.” (107)

### Toward Young Hegelianism

With the transfer of the 18-year-old Marx to the University of Berlin, the philosophical context of Hegel and Young Hegelianism becomes crucial. In Marx’s famous 1837 letter to his father, he reports on his tumultuous journey leading from hostility to Hegelian philosophy to its embrace, necessitating his abandonment of poetry.

Heinrich argues that this was a significant personal crisis and that Marx’s commitment to, and talent for, poetry was more substantial than is generally recognized, with the surviving poems comprising about 300 pages of the *MEGA*. Heinrich even suggests that Marx seriously considered attempting a career as a poet.

In contrast to other biographers, Heinrich attempts to identify the causes of Marx’s intellectual transition. In his letter,

Marx calls his previous work “purely idealistic,” the “complete opposition between what is and what ought to be.”

Important here is understanding how Marx understood his early aesthetic vision. Some see Marx’s poetry as a retreat from his concern for “service to humanity” expressed in the Gymnasium essay. Heinrich, for example, cites McLellan who writes that Marx’s poems “reveal a cult of the isolated genius and an introverted concern for the development of his own personality apart from the rest of humanity.” (186)

To the contrary, Heinrich sees continuity of concern as more likely, citing examples of Marx’s poetry defending Goethe and Schiller against conservative religious attacks, as well as criticizing the passivity of Germans.

What Marx likely rejects is the possibility of improving the world by means of artistic endeavor. Going beyond Heinrich’s reading, we might even see this as an early indication of Marx’s concern for identifying the proper agent for historical change. In effect, Marx realizes through his early encounter with Hegel that engaging solely with the realm of ideas is insufficient for bettering the world.

Heinrich shows that there is substantial evidence that Marx engaged with Hegel’s critique of Romanticism in this period. Since Marx refers to Hegel’s *Aesthetics* elsewhere in 1837, he presumably encountered passages like this where Hegel describes the artistic ego that “looks down from his high rank on all other men” from “this standpoint of divine genius.... This is the general meaning of the divine irony of genius, as this concentration of the ego into itself, for which all bonds are snapped and which can live only in the bliss of self-enjoyment.” (191)

The world of Young or Left Hegelianism is explored in detail, with Heinrich investigating the origins of these terms, as well as various versions of who constitutes membership in these groups, with accounts of the positions taken by Strauss, Bauer, and Feuerbach (all students of Hegel) as well as background debates involving Kant, Lessing, Schelling, Schleiermacher and others.

Heinrich frames this through an investigation of Marx’s interest in the philosophy of religion. While Marx’s relationship with Bruno Bauer is well known, Heinrich lets us see the depth and intimacy of their friendship, arguing that it is likely that it was Marx that turned Bauer to atheism, rather than the other way around as suggested, for example by McLellan. We should look forward to Heinrich’s account of the two friends’ break in the next volume.

In general, the Young Hegelians became increasingly critical of religion in a context where religion and politics were deeply entangled. Heinrich provides evidence that Marx planned at least five publications concerning the philosophy of religion between

1840 and the spring of 1842, as well as planning a journal on atheism with Bauer.

The exact motivation for Marx’s doctoral dissertation, “The Difference between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature” is unclear, though Heinrich shows that religious and political concerns, broadly understood in the context of Hegelianism, are clearly evident.

In discussing the dissertation, Heinrich rightly questions the common practice of straightforwardly labeling the very young Marx a Young Hegelian. Some dense notes that Marx later added to the dissertation are of particular interest. In them, Marx makes broad claims regarding philosophy and the Hegelian system.

In particular, his concern is the relationship of philosophy to the world. Marx boldly writes: “As the world becomes philosophical, philosophy also becomes worldly, that its realization is also its loss, that what it struggles against on the outside is its own inner deficiency.” (314)

Marx identifies two different participants in this world historical struggle, again showing his concern for historical agency, which he characterizes as “the liberal party” and “positive philosophy,” both of which, he says, fail to reach their intended goal.

To whom Marx refers here has been subject to some scholarly debate. Many writers have suggested the distinction is between Left and Right Hegelians. Heinrich argues that “the liberal party” most likely represents those whom we call Young Hegelians, but also most other Hegelians, while “positive philosophy” refers to a group of speculative theists who wanted to go beyond Hegel theologically.

While Marx sides tentatively with the “liberal party” in these notes, he unambiguously distances himself from both sides. I have argued elsewhere that Marx here pits two sides of the Young Hegelian movement (roughly Bauer vs. Feuerbach) against each other, making Young Hegelianism a contradictory philosophical/political project.

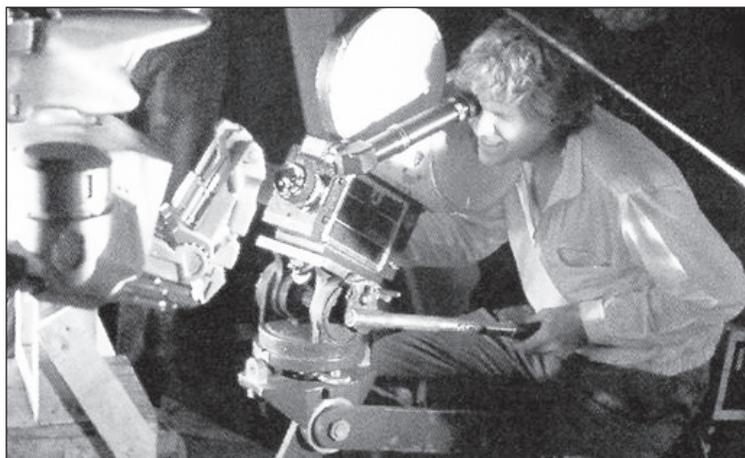
Ultimately, though, what is most significant is that Marx already stands back at least to some degree from Young Hegelianism, a point which may impact interpretations of later early writings.

Marx’s most important work comes after 1841, and most readers of Marx barely engage with the texts covered by Heinrich here. Nonetheless, for those interested in Marx and his development, this account is absorbing. The volume ends abruptly. The reader will want to simply turn the page and begin the next chapter. For now, we will have to await the publication of volumes two and three. The analysis of Marx’s better-known texts within the rich context Heinrich is guaranteed to provide should be fascinating and provocative. ■

# Gene Francis Warren Jr.

## 1941-2019

By Ron Warren



GENE WAS 21 months older than I, and because of this we were not only brothers but best friends and comrades, almost inseparable. Gene was my leader and mentor in the good and the bad while growing up.

Gene's independence and wanderlust began at the age of three, when he and a neighbor girl took a couple of miles' trek to Westlake Park (now McArthur Park). They were gone most of a day until a stranger brought them home. This was an early indication of the rebel life to be led.

We were lucky to be able to attend an integrated elementary school where, while the majority was white, classes would have Black, Latinx and Asian students, giving us an early grounding in the real world. Our junior high school was entirely white, except for one of Nat King Cole's daughters and my friend from elementary school, the son of a well-known doctor.

Los Angeles was strictly segregated with racial housing covenants [i.e., clauses forbidding sales to nonwhites — ed.]. Gene and I both went to Los Angeles High School, which was maybe 30% each Black, Latinx, white and 10% Asian, mostly Japanese.

From his pre-teen years, Gene was interested in making movies. By the time I arrived in high school he was the stage manager, after a successful stint as lighting director. By this time both of us were attired in motorcycle boots, jeans, black t-shirts and black leather jackets with pompadours and duck tail hair-dos.

Being on the crew gave us the run of the school and we became the "rebels without a cause." We were both on the "B" football team, being too small for the varsity. Actually neither of us finished high school, Gene leaving in the middle of the 12th grade and my being expelled at the end of the 10th.

But it was on the swim team that Gene excelled. He was a natural at springboard diving. In his senior year he took second in the LA city championships, only missing first

because his final dive was new to competition at that time (forward two and a half).

This performance led to his training at the Los Angeles Athletic Club with the legendary coach Peter Daland and four-time Gold Medal winner Pat McCormick for the Olympics. Gene could have made it but did not have the discipline necessary to complete the training.

After working as a grip and dolly/crane operator for seven years, he joined our father's visual effects company, Excelsior Animated Motion Pictures. In 1980, with two partners, he founded Fantasy II Film Effects.

### "Standing Beside You"

As Mike Davis writes in his tribute to Gene: "...you could always count on him to be standing beside you." Here is an instance that I remember from our younger days.

Along with two friends, we went to Bronson Canyon, a movie location with tunnels that appeared in many westerns, and decided to climb a cliff on the box end of the canyon. While one friend remained behind, three of us started up.

About six to eight feet from the top the rock began to crumble and fall away. Gene, being in lead as usual, scrambled up like a cat. But the two of us couldn't manage. I was hanging onto a rock with barely my fingernails; our friend was hanging on to my boot.

Realizing the mortal danger we were in, Gene tore off the stalk of a yucca plant, laid down and I grabbed it to keep the two of us from falling. If we had tried to climb up the stalk Gene would have been pulled off and the three of us would have plunged the 100 feet to certain serious injury or death.

The only salvation was for my friend down below to go around the back way and hold Gene while we attempted to climb up. My friend made the slog up the back, taking about 20 minutes while Gene, never wavering, was holding the weight of two.

My friend laid on Gene's legs and we were finally able to scramble up. This was what Mike meant by standing beside you, always to be counted on.

### Gene's Radicalism

Since Gene's death I have been asked what was the source of his radicalism. I think part of it was instinctual, as we both from a very early age identified with and defended the underdog.

Both of our maternal grandparents were union members, grandma at the post office and grandpa on the railroad.

A good deal came from our stepfather. He was a secular Jew born in Brooklyn to recent immigrants from Poland. In the 1910s his father moved them from hovel to hovel just ahead of the rent collector. His mother had 11 children of whom only five lived to adulthood.

He hung around the Communist Party as many young people did, but never joined. We learned of Trotsky very early as he loved to tell us a story of going into the workers' library and asking if they had any books by him and had to run for his life.

His best friend was a lifelong Trotskyist, though he was not. Our stepfather would quote passages from *Capital* and his friend related many of his political escapades. These things definitely had an influence.

Now to political activities. I think it was in late '68 that Gene, Judi Shayne (my companion and future wife) and I attended the founding meeting of Friends of the Panthers that was organized by Elaine Brown and Don Freed. There were about 50 people in attendance.

In the top-down fashion of the time, Elaine noticed something I said and appointed me chair. This was the first time I had met Elaine and Don. Gene, Judi and I along with Don became the core of the Friends.

Judi and I, going to community college at the time and not working, became involved in a whirlwind of activities in support of the Panthers — organizing fundraisers, public meetings and other support work.

Although working, Gene organized with us the supply of some defensive materials and aided the Panthers as they fortified their headquarters with telephone books. We were sure at the time, and I still contend,

Ron Warren was Gene Warren's brother and comrade.

that those fortifications saved the lives of the II Panther comrades inside during the five-hour military onslaught by the LAPD.

Not long after the organization of the Friends, we three became best friends and comrades of Milt and Edith Zaslow. After the disintegration of the Panthers due to the FBI's COINTELPRO operation, Milt and many of us in the Friends organized a group, the Socialist Union, which actively supported and participated in the fight for civil rights and against the Vietnam War.

### Longterm Activism

During this time we became involved in the 1970 wildcat Teamsters strike, a rare defensive victory. After Mike Davis' call to come to the picket line, about six or eight SU members joined the injunction-limited picket line at Western Carloading.

Over the next few days, hundreds of students and activists converged on the lines. Those drivers who had gone back to work came back out. Gene proved he was the militants' militant, always being the last to

move from blocking the scab-driven trucks.

We were blocking scabs trying to enter another barn when a Teamster smashed a scab's windshield and drove him away. The next car that approached was blocked by me and some Teamsters, at which time Gene opened his coat at the driver's window to reveal a very large rock. The scab also took off. This was Gene's nature.

We joined the Socialist Workers Party sometime in 1972 and were expelled in 1974 as part of the Internationalist Tendency. After the expulsion we, along with Milt, organized the Revolutionary Marxist Organizing Committee with some of the remnants of the IT. You can read about that history on marxist.org.

Working in both TV and the movies Gene and his partner, Leslie Huntley, won the Primetime Emmy Award for the TV miniseries *Winds of War* in 1983.

In 1992, 30 years after our father won an Oscar for *The Time Machine*, Gene captured one for *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. The tradition has continued with his

collaboration with his sons Gene Warren III and Christopher Warren. In 2011 they were nominated for their visual effects in the three *Underworld* movies. Gene was a cinematographer, model maker, sculptor and stop motion animator.

As time went on, Judi and I became somewhat less active, Gene never wavered, participating in the Workers Power organization (1979-85) and the founding of Solidarity in 1986. He anticipated the "Battle of Seattle" and was there. Gene marched, organized, wrote and spoke whenever he could. Over the last 20 years he became active in ecosocialist projects.

Over his almost 60-year political and film career he exhibited unstoppable energy. He wrote several novels and screenplays, taught at the USC film school and developed a love of karaoke.

In addition to his sons, he is survived by his daughter, Amy Gilbert, nine grandchildren and three great grandchildren. It is difficult to accept that my brother is gone. He will be missed by many, especially me. ■

## Socialism as a Craft

By Mike Davis

GENE WARREN AND I became friends in the late 1960s when I returned from Texas to LA, where I had earlier been the first SDS regional organizer. From the beginning, Gene fascinated me because he was quintessential LA but from a different galaxy than the rest of my LA friends. A high school dropout and veteran stunt man, he was then in the process of becoming a master of illusion.

With the arrival of computerized special effects in the 1970s, most of the traditional Hollywood craft shops that built and used models to simulate scenes went out of business. Faced with this digital tsunami, Gene resisted and stayed old school, that is to say, analog — a decision that was richly rewarded when the industry discovered that computerization was not quite the miracle that been advertised.

Everything from dog food commercials to the apocalypse, it turned out, still needed models and actual detonations. (In one of his most spectacular feats, Gene created the nuclear mushroom clouds in the film *The Day After* by setting off small explosions on his studio roof in full view of commuters gridlocked on the Golden State Freeway. A lot of fenders were dented that day as stunned drivers gawked at mini-doomsday.)

As a kid whose life once revolved around building model hotrods, I saw Gene's studio as a demi-paradise, the Ultimate Model Shop. I loved visiting him at work and envied those who worked for him.

*Mike Davis is the author of many books, including Prisoners of the American Dream, City of Quartz and Planet of Slums.*

Only in later years did I discover that together with all his other political work — Friends of the Panthers, then the Socialist Union and later Solidarity — he was helping lead the fight to keep Hollywood's blue-collar jobs from being exported abroad. He was a tribune of the industry's embattled crafts.

The skills and ingenuity that would win Gene an Academy Award were also applied in day-to-day activism. In a new book on *LA in the Sixties*, coauthored with Jon Wiener, I recall his role in organizing the defense of the LA Black Panther headquarters just before the LAPD attack in December 1969 (think phonebooks).

He was amazingly clever but also an independent intellectual in the old socialist tradition. This dropout from Los Angeles High devoured socialist theory and could hold forth on almost any current topic. In recent years he impressed all of us with his original research on energy policy and eco-socialism.

Gene would vehemently disavow the idea that he was "leader," yet he constantly inspired us. Whether sky-diving, climbing mountains, scuba diving or outrunning the LAPD, he had a wonderful daredevil sense of adventures. And adventures we had.

I especially relish the memory of one expedition: a trip to the two-mile-high Devil's Peak in the middle of Baja. One of the earth's great vista points (the Pacific on one side, the Gulf of California on the other) and there was Gene, dancing on a rock, threatening to turn into Icarus.

But in the final cut, as they say, what

made all of us love Gene was that when the hard rains fell you could always count on him to be standing beside you. Over more than a half century he and Ron — and I mean this accurately, not just figuratively — punched the time clock on more protests, demonstrations and riots than anyone in LA history.

A typical example: In 1970 when local freight drivers and warehousemen rejected a sell-out contract imposed by the Teamsters' national leadership and launched the biggest wildcat strike in the region's history, I was a semi driver in a non-striking local.

I had friends, however, on strike at one of the most militant freight barns, constantly harassed by the sheriffs and Wackenhut thugs. After a crazy failed attempt to recruit Mafia muscle from Las Vegas (this is a true story), they phoned me and asked if I could send down "some rioters from Watts or commie student protestors."

I called Gene and the next day the Socialist Union was walking the picket line: Gene, Ron, Ron's wife Judy, Edith and Milt Zaslow. One helluva group of comrades. But if we had a "Jimmy Higgins" award for unselfish, dogged toil for the revolution, then it would be up on Gene's mantle next to his Academy Award.

Finally, in remembering Gene, I can't help from chuckling. Some old friends are only recalled in sadness, but the Gene in our memory remains the one who made us smile, dared us to adventure, and showed us the steel of comradeship. These are his gifts to us, and he expects us to pass them on to younger generations. ■

habitats of nonhuman animals with which we share the planet. Already in the 19th century, many thinkers including Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were concerned with the consequences of the capitalist transformation of agriculture and destruction of nature, so it's not as if the problem suddenly jumped up.

Meanwhile, the escalating crisis of the medical system is the inevitable product of applying the "lean production" and "just-in-time" regimens of today's production system, together with the stripping of social budgets under the prevailing global regime of neoliberal capitalism.

That's why the backup supply of N95 masks in the United States depleted in a previous epidemic wasn't restored. It's why it wasn't only Trump's stupidity, although that didn't help, dictating that we don't want "extra doctors and nurses" when they aren't immediately needed, as if trained medical personnel are produced like auto parts on demand.

We are left with doctors and nurses — thousands of whom are DACA recipients in danger of deportation! — reusing personal protective equipment in ways that were never intended, with retired health care workers returning to the front lines. Ordinary people are performing miracles of community mutual aid and solidarity.

The system's bankruptcy, not only Trump's arrogant ignorance, lay behind the cynical dismantling of the cross-agency pandemic response unit the Obama administration had constructed. The neoliberal neglect of elementary public health practices is not only in America: The British National Health Service was resource-starved under successive Conservative party governments. Italy's medical service was cut for years, just in time for the coronavirus disaster.

Focusing on the U.S. situation, the urgent necessity of universal health coverage and Medicare for All has never been so obvious — except of course to the insurance industry, the political establishment, and in particular Joe Biden, who scolded Bernie Sanders that "they have that in Italy, and it didn't help."

That some 87 million Americans remain uninsured or underinsured — before the sudden mass unemployment crisis — has a lot to do with why hospital emergency rooms were *already* stressed prior to the coronavirus emergency, and why so many people in this country have inadequately managed conditions like diabetes, asthma and coronary disease that contribute to making COVID-19 all the more deadly.

The lack of adequate medical care for tens of millions interacts, of course, with the prevalence of poverty, pollution, shortages of rural medical resources, and other consequences of inequality that aggravate the crisis. In Detroit, the Water Department has cut off thousands of poor homeowners. The Michigan governor has ordered an emergency restoration of service, but for the bureaucracy that turns out to be a complicated process.

Even worse impacts face the most vulnerable populations: those in the overcrowded prisons and immigrant detention centers, survivors of domestic violence forced to "shelter in place" with their abusive, sometimes murderous, partners or the 11 million undocumented immigrants who get nothing from the multi-trillion dollar relief bill and may be terrified of seeking medical care.

## Looking Ahead

The prospects are unimaginable for many nations in the Global South — countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In India, migrant workers are starving as they walk hundreds of miles home. In Brazil, the pandemic-denying lunacy of far-right president Jair Bolsonaro in defiance of his own government experts is beyond comprehension. There are absolutely desperate circumstances facing refugee populations — in Syria, on the U.S.-Mexican border, in Bangladesh with the Rohingya flight from Myanmar — or the situation in Gaza, the world's largest open-air prison where there isn't even clean drinking water.

For imperialism, the coronavirus crisis is no occasion to "shelter in place" — exactly the opposite, it's a moment to unleash greater class and race violence on the world's poor. The U.S. government's murder-by-sanctions policies haven't abated. Washington's squeeze has tightened on Iran, where the import of medical supplies is crippled by the twin scourge of sanctions and collapsed oil prices. The U.S. Justice Department's indictment of Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro ramps up Washington's attempt to foment a military coup and civil war in that shattered country.

On the other side of this immediate crisis, the class war at home will be hardly less brutal. Right now relief packages are desperately required, but soon the public will be lectured that those trillions of dollars thrown at bailing out the Boeings and other distressed corporations must be "paid for" — by austerity for the working class and non-affluent population, of course.

The capitalist class, whose blind pursuit of profit and stock market gains did so much to create the present misery, will insist on society drawing all the wrong conclusions. Don't even think about Medicare for All now, let alone nationalizing (horrors!) the pharmaceutical industry whose profit drive is essential to developing and marketing the critical vaccines and therapeutic drugs for this pandemic and the coming ones.

Don't raise taxes on the corporations and the rich at the time when their "enterprise" is required for the economic recovery — or at any other time for that matter. And above all, this is no time for action on climate change and the environmental collapse. How can we even imagine indulging in a Green New Deal when our most precious airline and oil industries are going belly-up?

An alternative course will have to come from an aroused working-class public — and it must be global, expressing outrage over a system and government policies that universally fail to meet basic human and ecological needs.

The resistance of those heroic frontline workers, for their own sake and ours, can be the start of mass, anti-austerity social solidarity. We don't want to predict here the outcome of a long, bitter struggle. As a statement by the National Committee of Solidarity early in the crisis stated, the present pandemic and economic crash "is not (fortunately) the end of civilization, nor is it (unfortunately) the end of capitalism."

Having said that, the world that emerges afterward will look considerably different in ways that significantly depend on social movements and political intervention. Whether, when and how that response emerges is among the greatest of unknowns. ■

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