

# *The Utopian*

A Bulletin of Anarchist &  
Libertarian Socialist Thought



Volume 17, No. 4

June 2018

# *In this issue...*

The Eclipse of Class Or, Keeping the Vision Alive.....	3
Donald Trump and Fascism.....	20
Palestine, Israel, Hamas and National Liberation—A Discussion.....	24
Report from Barcelona.....	43
<i>Who We Are</i> .....	48

# *The Eclipse of Class* *Or, Keeping the Vision Alive*

Ron Tabor

April 20, 2018



Speaking personally, I see my main political task at the moment as keeping our ideas and ideals alive in a political climate that is not conducive to their positive reception by any significant section of the American people.

As far as I can tell, our group is extremely isolated politically, while the ideas we espouse are perceived as being irrelevant to the economic, social, political, cultural, and intellectual processes currently animating US society. Although there are many reasons for this, among them our limited numbers, our ages, and our relative lack of presence in activist milieus, the main reason is political. Specifically, three of the fundamental aspects of our program are completely outside the contemporary political discourse and are considered by the vast majority of the US population to be not only irrelevant but also absurd: (1) that our society is fundamentally diseased -- cynical, brutal, unjust, and corrupt -- and is incapable of being reformed sufficiently to provide all Americans with a decent and meaningful life; (2) that the solution to this problem lies in a popular revolution, an uprising of the vast majority of the people against the tiny elite that runs our society; (3) that this revolution should aim at establishing a truly democratic, egalitarian, and cooperative social system, what we have called "revolutionary libertarian socialism." In sum, any notion of transcending the contemporary social arrangement and replacing it with another seems to have been lost.

Our political isolation and programmatic irrelevance are somewhat ironic, since the word/concept "socialism" seems to be as popular today as it has been for decades. According to various polls, large sectors of society, particularly young people, have a positive estimation of "socialism" and consider themselves to be "socialists" of one sort or another. To a great degree, this has been the work of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders and the political campaign he waged in the Democratic primaries in 2016. Although Sanders never called for the establishment of socialism in the United States, he did identify himself as a "democratic socialist." He also spoke highly of the Scandinavian countries and implied that they are contemporary exemplars of what he means by "socialism," despite firm denials of this by the political leaders of these nations.



Unfortunately, what most people understand by the term "socialism" is a far cry from our view. Their conception is much closer to FDR's "New Deal" and LBJ's "Great Society" than anything we might consider to be socialist. From our standpoint, the popular conception of "socialism" has been largely liquidated of radical content, reduced not merely to the level of the reformist and statist program of the old Social Democracy but even below that. Today, "socialism" to most people signifies little more than welfare-state capitalism, the contemporary capitalist system with somewhat more generous social programs. (Even where a more radical conception continues to exist, that is, among the Marxist-Leninists, their notion of "socialism" is what we consider to be "state capitalism," that is, a highly stratified society, such as the Soviet Union/Russia, China, Cuba, North Korea, and, for some, Syria.)

This fact and our resultant political isolation have been facilitated by the collapse of the majority of US left into and behind the Democratic Party, the party that represents the liberal wing of the capitalist class. Among other things, this collapse parallels and reflects the fact that what seemed to be a militant popular movement, the so-called "resistance" that emerged in the wake of Donald Trump's surprise victory in the 2016 elections, has been effectively defanged and has poured into and behind the Democratic Party. On the part of both the organized left and the "resistance," this political alignment has been largely motivated by fear bordering on panic,

specifically, the visceral conviction that Donald Trump is a fascist (or a “proto-” or “quasi-fascist”) whose goal is to overthrow “American democracy” and impose an authoritarian regime on the United States, and that the only way to stop this, if indeed it can be stopped, is to align ourselves with, to support, vote for, and organize for, the Democrats.



There is an additional irony here. This is that many, if not most, of the Marxist organizations and currents that make up the explicitly revolutionary left in the US have abandoned anything even vaguely resembling a class analysis of what is happening in the country and have rejected any kind of Marxist strategy for orienting themselves in the current situation. Rather than seeking to unite the broadest majority of the working class in opposition to the ruling class as a whole, which was the professed strategy of Marx and Engels (as well as of Lenin, Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg, and Eugene Debs), they have, like the broader liberal-left, decided to do their best to tie one section of the working class to the capitalist liberals while abandoning the rest to the Trump-led Republican Party.

This is a reflection of the fact that the concept of social class (and especially the idea of the working class being in fundamental conflict with the capitalist class) has become virtually taboo in the country’s contemporary political discourse. To be sure, Bernie Sanders periodically denounces what he calls the “billionaire class,” but he focuses his fire at the Koch brothers and other conservative capitalists, while never mentioning the liberal billionaires, such as Warren Buffet, Bill and Melinda Gates, George Soros, Haim Saban, Eli Broad, (Dianne Feinstein’s husband) Richard Blum, Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckerberg, Tom Steyer, and the rest. In like manner, while Sanders excoriated Hillary Clinton as a spokesperson for Wall Street during the Democratic primary season, he never mentioned that ever since the 1990s, the majority of the bankers, hedge-fund managers, and investors on Wall Street have supported and bankrolled the Democratic Party. Moreover, Sanders completely capitulated to this tool of Wall Street several weeks before the Democratic convention, enthusiastically endorsed her candidacy, and ordered his political operatives, in collaboration with Clinton’s, to muzzle his disaffected supporters at the convention itself. Meanwhile, most

of the left has followed suit. This, sadly, reflects the fact that for all practical purposes, the American working class has lost whatever class consciousness it ever had, while the left, including most of the Marxist organizations, have given up any effort to represent it or to foment it. Instead, what has emerged is a politically diffuse and uninformed "populist" resentment that has been easily manipulated by the leaders of both capitalist parties to pursue their partisan agendas.



The capitulation of the Marxist left to the Democratic Party is an indication of their theoretical bankruptcy. After all, to Marx and Engels, "class" and "class struggle" were fundamental, determinant, facets of human history. They insisted that all history is in fact the history of class struggle and contended (and attempted to prove) that it was the very logic of this struggle that would inevitably lead to an international proletarian revolution and the establishment of socialism around the world. It should be obvious at this point in time (that is, 170 years after the publication of the Communist Manifesto) that these contentions can no longer be defended. However, as far as I know, the Marxist organizations continue to uphold them in theory while completely rejecting them in practice. They have, in essence, followed in the footsteps of the old Communist parties, which in the mid-1930s jettisoned even the pretense of waging class war against the entire ruling class in favor of supporting one section of it, the so-called "progressive" capitalists represented by the Democratic Party, then led by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. This policy, known at the time as the "People's (or Popular) Front," has continued, except for a brief left jag in the late 1940s, up until the present, under the name of the "People's Anti-Monopoly Coalition."

In sum, while these Marxists continue to defend those aspects of Marxism that I believe to be untenable, they have discarded one Marxist tenet that I think remains valid. Thus, while I reject the theoretical contentions of Marxism, I continue to uphold one of Marxism's strategic conceptions: that of uniting the entire working class against the entire capitalist class. In the US, this means, above all, explaining that both the Democratic and the Republican Party are capitalist parties and that the vast majority of the



American people can never win their freedom and the opportunity to live comfortable lives by supporting either one of these outfits.

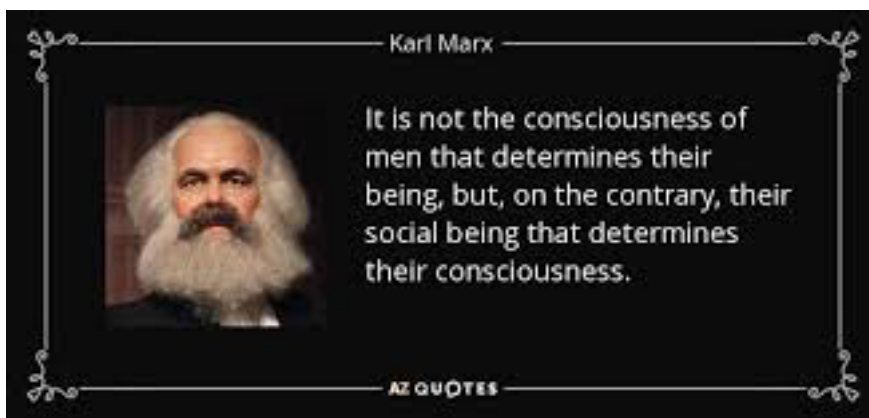


Among other aspects of Marxism that I reject are two centerpieces of the Marxist canon, while I would substantially revise a third.

I. I no longer believe that the working class, in contrast to other popular social layers, is ontologically privileged. By this, I mean that I reject the notion that the logic of capitalist development (and all history) automatically impels the working class to carry out a revolution. In my view, an honest look at the history of the last 150 years shows:

- A. The working class is not intrinsically revolutionary. There are times when it can and has become revolutionary, but this is not the expression of some underlying (let alone inexorable) logic of capitalism or the nature of the class itself, but the result of contingent and ultimately unpredictable economic, social, political, and cultural/psychological processes.
- B. Other popular classes, such as small farmers (peasants); semi-proletarian social strata, such as artisans and craftsmen; and other sectors of society, such as middle-class students, may also, under certain circumstances, become revolutionary. (Incidentally, this was one of the crucial differences between Marx and Engels and other Marxist theorists, on the one hand, and major anarchist thinkers, such as Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin, on the other.) It is also worth noting that in many of the revolutions of the past that have been described or identified as "proletarian" or "working-class," the most revolutionary elements were to be found not among the longstanding proletarians but among those social layers, such as peasants and artisans, and workers recently derived from those groups, which were in the process of being "proletarianized," that is, forced into the working class.
- C. While the working class continues to have a structural advantage over other sections of the population in terms of economic muscle, this is not as significant as it used to be. Yes, workers on the whole continue

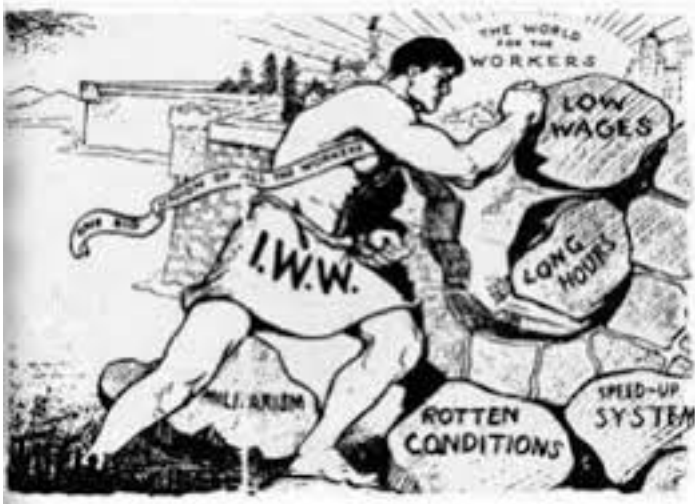
to be located in urban areas, which is where economic and political power lies in contemporary society. Also, since most working-class people have jobs, they have a degree of economic power because of their ability to stop work, that is, to strike, even if this is limited in time. Finally, many workers are still united in and organized by their workplaces. However, because of the tremendous amount of automation that has occurred over the last few decades along with other economic realities, such as the transfer of manufacturing plants to low-wage countries, the fact that small businesses today employ a significant proportion of the working class, and the fact that many people now work out of their own homes and/or are self-employed, this has become far less important than it was in the heyday of "industrial capitalism."



II. I do not accept, as Marx put it, that "social being determines social consciousness." In other words, I do not believe that human consciousness is an automatic reflection (or reflex) of socio-economic processes. This is one of the many things in Marxism that have a superficial plausibility but which cannot be reasonably sustained after careful consideration. In fact, nobody knows what consciousness is, what ideas are, or how our ideas arise, let alone what the precise relationship is between our consciousness and the rest of reality. Moreover, the notion that social being fully "determines" our consciousness, as opposed to merely influencing it in some way, represents a denial of ontological freedom, that is, it defines out of existence the idea that human beings, as individuals, groups, and as a species, have the ability to make choices and to determine our future. And if such freedom does not exist, the idea that human beings can create a truly free, self-determining society, is a complete and utter delusion, or in the words (actually, the title of one of his stories) of the Russian writer, Fyodor Dostoevsky, "the dream of a ridiculous man." (The question of whether such ontological freedom exists or not has never been answered, and in my opinion, never will be answered, by science, philosophy, religion, or anything else. It is, at bottom, an issue that everyone must decide for oneself [if, of course, one is interested in such things]).



III. I think we need to revise our notion of the working class, specifically, to broaden it and make it more inclusive. We have in fact done this over the years, but I think we need to make this explicit and to extend our conception even further. I believe the classic Marxist definition of the working class is too narrow to reflect modern capitalist reality.



Marx and Engels defined the working class primarily as the industrial "proletariat," that is, as workers in large industrial and manufacturing factories and in allied sectors of the economy, such as transportation (particularly, the railroads) and the wholesale sector. In their view, these workers represented the essence of humanity under capitalism, that is, people completely deprived of all their human attributes but their labor-power, their ability to work, while all the accumulated creative powers of historical humanity have been alienated from them and congealed in capital/the modern technical-industrial apparatus that stands over them, dominating them at work and, through this, their entire lives, their very being. Marx and Engels also believed that the logic of capitalist development, the necessary evolution of the system, would impel the vast majority of human beings, including small farmers, artisans, shopkeepers, peddlers, white collar workers, professionals, intellectuals, artists, small businesspeople, and even most of the capitalists, into the ranks of the industrial proletariat. Eventually, if not in their day then ultimately (asymptotically), humanity and the proletariat would be co-terminus, so that the proletarian revolution would represent the democratic self-emancipation of humanity. It was this conception of the working class that was adopted by the classical Marxist thinkers and organizations. The Bolsheviks, for example, did not include white collar workers, such as employees of the banks and the government, to be members of the proletariat. (These workers reciprocated the sentiment. Better educated and working and living in more comfortable circumstances than the industrial workers, they did not see themselves as "proletarian" either.)

From the vantage point of the present, we can see that, at least in this respect, capitalism has not evolved as Marx and Engels thought it would.

Thus, while today most members of society are working people in the literal sense of the term (that is, people who must work if they are to survive and who do not possess substantial financial assets), they are obviously not all members of what Marx and Engels called the proletariat. Many are white-collar workers employed in banks, insurance companies, medical establishments, and other offices, including those of local, state, and the federal government. Many are technicians of various kinds. Others are teachers, nurses, doctors, lawyers, and other professionals, most of whom are not wealthy. In addition, more and more people today work as "independent contractors"; legally (as far as the IRS is concerned), they are owners of small businesses: those who drive for Uber and Lyft and those who work in other sectors of the "gig economy", along with street vendors, owners of shops and restaurants, and other small businesses. In my opinion, most of these people ought to be included in a political (as opposed to a narrowly ideological or sociological) definition of the working class.



Today, as I understand the situation, roughly 20% of the US population are wealthy or at least comfortable. The rest of the people, roughly 80%, are struggling to get by; many, maybe the majority, are in deep distress. So, when I say I wish to unite the working class in a militant movement against the capitalist class as a whole, these (at the risk of being theoretically muddled and overly sentimental) are the people I mean.

To me, what our situation adds up to is that, today, we and other radicals face a choice. Either we abandon any claim to stand for a revolution, deciding that it is not feasible at the moment or not possible at all, and commit ourselves to support, vote for, and organize for the "lesser evil," which, to most leftists, means the Democratic Party. Or, we can continue to raise and fight for the idea of building a revolutionary working class movement, one that is conscious of itself as being distinct from and counterposed to the entire ruling class. And this, in turn, requires opposing both the Democratic and the Republican parties. (As a tactical aside, I don't think we should concentrate our efforts on convincing people not to vote if they are inclined to do so. Instead, I believe our focus should be on exposing the pro-capitalist nature of both parties, while arguing that we

need to build a movement that is independent of both of them. For those active in political organizations, this means opposing resolutions to endorse Democratic candidates, to give them money, and to work on their campaigns, including so-called "socialists" and "progressives" running in the Democratic primaries.)



If we are to unite the majority of the American people into a militant anti-capitalist movement, we cannot write off all the people, particularly the working-class people, who voted for and continue to support Donald Trump. These people have real grievances; they have been victimized by the capitalist system that we oppose. Living in medium-sized and small cities, in towns, and in rural areas that have been rendered obsolete by the relentless march of the capitalist system, millions of them are truly suffering, from unemployment or partial employment, and from social isolation, depression, and opioid addiction. Moreover, they are not all committed racists and fascists. Nearly ten million people who voted for Trump in the last election voted for Barack Obama in 2008. Hardcore racists do not vote to make a Black man the president of the United States! While they have illusions in and delusions about Donald Trump, as well as various levels of racist and sexist attitudes, they have legitimate resentments against the capitalist liberals in general and the Democratic Party in particular. Remember, the Democratic president, Barack Obama, who claimed to represent all the people, threw billions of dollars at the banks and insurance companies and bailed out the auto companies but did very little to help the real victims of the recession: the homeowners who lost their homes, the workers who lost their jobs, the small businesspeople who lost their businesses, and the millions of others whose lives were devastated by the worst economic crisis since the 1930s. The workers and other people who voted for Trump have good reason to hate the Democrats and the rich, corrupt, and condescending liberals, such as Hillary Clinton, who lead the party. Following on Obama's betrayal, Clinton made it very clear, both in word and in deed, that she didn't need and didn't want the votes of the white working-class and middle-class people in the cities and towns of the Rust Belt and elsewhere in the heartland of the country,

people who once constituted the base of the Democratic Party. I don't know how we can even begin to talk to these people if we tell them that we voted for Hillary Clinton and think that they should support the Democrats this time around too.

As I see it now, it is people like us who represent "class consciousness," at least in embryo. If we don't hold onto it and fight for it, nobody else will. At some point in the future, such consciousness may emerge among broader layers of the population. (As we know from our experiences in the 1960s, things can change, and radical consciousness can develop, very rapidly.) However, neither the "laws of motion" of capitalism nor the logic of history guarantee its emergence.

As far as this year's election and the election of 2020 are concerned, each of us ought to act as he/she thinks best. If people are so frightened of Donald Trump and the policies he is pursuing that they want to support the Democrats in the next two elections, or support "socialist" candidates running in the Democratic Primaries, they should do so. I, for one, do not want to try to convince people intellectually of what they do not feel emotionally. However, I will continue to wave the flag of revolution no matter how absurd this may seem at this time, to try to explain to whomever is willing to listen what's the matter with the capitalist system and why the majority of the American people should rise up, smash it, and replace it with a better one. And I will continue to look for and to unite with other people who think and feel, in their heads and in their guts, as I do.

---

## ***Discussion***

April 23  
All,

A brief comment on Ron's statement, with his focus on the issue of class. I am mainly in agreement with him, from the point of view of a "class-struggle anarchist" who has been influenced by Marxism. Years ago when I first came around the unorthodox Trotskyists of what became the International Socialists, I (like everyone else there) read Lenin's major work, *What Is To Be Done?* Along with what I eventually came to see as authoritarian aspects, I noted that one of his main points was that working class revolutionaries should not only fight for immediate working class and labor union issues (that was "Economism"). They (we) should also defend every popular struggle and democratic issue. This included big non-working class issues, such as those of the peasants and oppressed nations, as well as women. Also, he wrote, we should champion smaller issues, such as the writers fighting censorship, abused rank-and-file soldiers, religious

minorities, and so on. I think this revolutionary democratic approach was attractive to many of us.

Now I am no longer a Leninist in any way. But what I reject about Lenin (and Lenin's Marxism) is *not* his support for non-working class, democratic, struggles. Quite the contrary. Without giving up a working class perspective, I still think this applies more than ever. I think this is in agreement with the direction of Ron's statement on class.

Wayne

---

April 25

### **The Inevitability of Socialism**

Eric Chester

I am in general agreement with Ron's assessment of the current situation in the United States, but Ron also includes a critique of Marxism that seems to me to be simplistic and not helpful.

Ron believes that Marx held that the working class would automatically become class-conscious socialists and that capitalism would be automatically superseded by socialism. Needless to say, neither of these propositions accord with the actual experience of the last century and a half.



To begin with, it seems helpful to outline Marx's argument. The relations between capitalist and worker, here Marx was thinking of both industrial workers and miners primarily, were bound to be one of conflict. Over time, the working class would coalesce into both militant unions and a working class party. As the working class became more powerful, the ruling class would crack down, democratic norms would be discarded and a revolution would be the only way forward.

This is a compelling scenario and yet one that hardly seems inevitable. There are certainly sections of writings from Marx and Engels that indicate that they viewed these propositions as some type of law, but there are also

writings that indicate that Marx and Engels understood that society was far more complicated, with conflicting currents at work.

For us in the twenty-first century, more important than understanding exactly where Marx stood on these issues is learning from those who followed them. Marxists come in many different varieties, but one trend is that of the anti-authoritarian revolutionaries. Luxemburg famously wrote that the choice was one of socialism or barbarism. (I would slightly modify this to socialism or catastrophe.) This is hardly the argument of someone who sees socialism as inevitable or class consciousness as automatic.



Instead of presenting a simplistic version of Marxist thought and then rejecting it, it is more useful to try to take a more nuanced approach and to see how both Marxist and anarchist thought and practice of the past can be used to help us develop a theory and strategy that can be relevant to the current period.

---

May 3, 2018

Utopians may find interesting this essay that I submitted to the Anarcho-Syndicalist Review. It discusses issues that have recently been raised here.  
Wayne

## Liberal Illusions and Delusions

Wayne Price

Facing the Trump regime, there are several different liberal delusions (although these views are also held by many who regard themselves as radicals). One is to see Trump as leading pretty directly to fascism and another believes that Trumpism does not really represent a major change in U.S. politics. The view that the U.S. is approaching fascism is based on an unrealistic expectation that the U.S. government is—or at least ought to be—a fair and open democracy, as portrayed in high school civics classes.



Instead, many people are shocked—shocked!—when the state acts in an undemocratic, unjust, and authoritarian manner (I am not thinking of young people, new to politics, but to older people who should know better). *What, the government lies to us! Elections are distorted and votes are suppressed! African-Americans are killed by police at random! Public opinions (on gun reform or the environment) are ignored by elected "representatives"—who are really agents of the wealthy! The government attacks people in countries with which the U.S. is not at war! And so on.* Therefore the conclusion is often reached that the U.S. is undemocratic and on the road to fascism, or perhaps is already fascist.

On the contrary—**this is what capitalist democracy looks like.** It is a system, which serves the interests of the capitalist class and its systemic need for capital accumulation. *"The three wealthiest people in this country own more wealth than the bottom half of American society. The top one-tenth of one percent now owns as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent."* (Bernie Sanders in an interview with John Nichols for **The Nation** 4/2018; p. 4.) How could such an arrangement permit true democracy? Instead, the system of representative democracy permits factions of the capitalist class to fight out their differences and make decisions. And it fools the mass of working people into thinking that they really control the state—that they really are free.

At times things have been worse. The '50s were part of the "golden age" of capitalism, the prosperous years following World War II. They were also the years of the anti-communist hysteria and McCarthyite witch-hunt. Thousands of leftists were persecuted, jailed, or thrown out of their jobs in government, universities, public schools, unions, entertainment, and other private businesses. Meanwhile, the whole of the South was under legal segregation, the vicious oppression of African-Americans. This was enforced by the law and by the terror of the Klan. The anti-communist repression and the legal Jim Crow laws were defeated by the 70s. This was done by the massive struggles of African-Americans and by the movement against the war in Vietnam, and other efforts.

There has since been a rightist backlash. This includes the rise of a real fascist movement, one that aims to overthrow bourgeois democracy and replace it with a political dictatorship. Trump has encouraged these people to come out into the light. However, the neo-Nazis, Klanspeople, and advocates of a theocracy are still a small minority, even of Trump's followers. All parts of the establishment, including businesspeople, high military officials, and leading Republicans have denounced them. There has not been an effort to cancel elections, establish a president-for-life, ban all but one political party, outlaw unions, throw political radicals into concentration camps, legally persecute Jews, LGBT people, and women, and reinstall African-American slavery. That is what fascism would really be, and it is not what we are currently facing. Claiming that we are confronting

an immediate fascist threat from Trump weakens us when we deal with real fascists.

### Another Liberal Illusion

This may lead to the other illusion. Since Trumpism isn't fascism, then perhaps it is nothing new or important. The vile Trump is then seen as an accidental president with personal peculiarities. Therefore he will be defeated in 2020 (if not impeached before that). Then U.S. politics will return to "normal." Hopefully a moderately liberal Democrat—or at least a not-crazy Republican—will be elected. Progress marches on.

This approach ignores what is new and dangerous in U.S. politics. Just as, in regard to climate change, we are not facing immediate ecological catastrophe, but there is no more "normal weather." So, in politics, we are not facing imminent fascism, but **there are no more "normal politics."** Since the early 70s, the post-World War II prosperity has ended, and the overall direction of the world economy has been toward stagnation in real production, growth of empty financial and speculative "wealth", increased inequality within and between nations, and limited and fragile growth even in the "up" phase of the economy. In order to keep and expand profits, the bourgeoisie has attacked the world working class, in various ways. In the U.S.A., the main political instrument of this attack has been the Republican Party. Now completely controlled by far-right reactionaries ("conservatives"), it has become the cutting edge of the assault on the working class, as well as on women, African-Americans, Latinos/as, LGBT people, and the environment.

In 2008, much of the public was fed up by eight years of George W's Republican administration. The capitalist class gave them someone apparently different, the first Black presidential candidate. Besides electing Obama, the Democrats expanded their majorities in both congressional houses. In reaction, the Republican response did not seriously try to increase their voting base. For example, they could have tried appealing to the increasing population of Latinos/as. But such an appeal would antagonize their existing base of nativist-racist white people, even if this sector was declining in population. And there was a limit as to how much they could appeal to the voters, since their real program of cutting taxes on the rich and cutting benefits for working people had only limited attraction. So instead they sought to build in political control, to "rig the game".

With an unprecedented flood of money, they mobilized their racist, nativist, fanatical base of white, middle class and upper working class people, especially men and especially evangelicals. Republicans whipped up sexual hysteria over abortion choice or rights for homosexuals and trans people. The dupes were organized, through the Tea Party and such, to take over state legislatures. *"Their plan [was] to remake America not from DC down,*

*but from the statehouse up.”* (William Barber, **The Third Reconstruction**. 2016; xiv) They won control of the majority of state governments. There they expanded efforts to suppress votes among People of Color, youth, and women. Also a very conscious plan was carried out to gerrymander the voting districts of each state, to give the Republicans a big advantage. Democrats had gerrymandered too, in the past, but the extent and the methods (using computer maps) were unusual. This was not a particularly secret strategy (see the history in Joan Walsh, “The 7,383 Seat Strategy” **The Nation** 4/2018). Meanwhile a huge right-wing media machine was created, from radio, to Fox television, to the Internet.

These methods did not mean that Democrats could not defeat Republicans in elections. But it became much harder, requiring more effort and more money. There was an extra pull to the right, so that Democrats needed to be more “moderate,” less “liberal,” to have a chance of winning in the biased political system.

By 2017, the Republicans controlled 32 state governments. If they get control of two more states, they would have the legal power to call a constitutional convention—to alter the U.S. constitution. They have actually discussed this in conservative circles. If they reached this threshold of power, they would not set up a one-party dictatorship. They do not have popular or elite support for this. But they could gut the power of the national government to regulate business, to protect the environment or labor, or to enforce various democratic rights.

## The Democrats

Many liberals believe that the republic can be saved by impeaching Trump. No matter how many illegal, unconstitutional, or immoral things Trump has done, it is impossible that he could be impeached so long as the Republicans hold majorities in both houses of Congress. The current Republican Party is so corrupt that it has done its best to derail and discredit the investigations into Trump’s activities. Even their supposed super-patriotism has wilted under Trump’s connections with Russia. Therefore passing a bill of impeachment would require a Democratic majority in the House of Representatives—which is quite possible. Then actually expelling Trump would require a two-thirds majority of Democrats and “moderate” Republicans in the Senate—which is highly unlikely. Polls generally show that most U.S. citizens, including Democrats, are opposed to impeachment. This makes support for it unlikely among Democratic politicians from “purple” states, let along “moderate” Republicans. Historically, only two presidents were impeached (in the House) but neither was expelled (by the Senate). And suppose impeachment did work. The result would be...President Mike Pence! Perhaps the shakeup would be another sign that the system was in crisis, but...all that effort for so little effect.

The biggest illusion of the liberals is that the attack on the people by the Republicans can be beaten back by supporting the Democratic Party. The whole of U.S. politics exists to channel discontent into one or the other of the two big parties. Both are supporters of capitalism and the national state, both rely on big money contributions, both seek to ingratiate themselves with sectors of big business, and both are the enemy of the working class and most of the rest of the population.

The already cited article by Joan Walsh of **The Nation** reports on efforts by rebellious people, new to political action, to work through the Democrats. However, she notes a problem: "*The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, and the Democratic Legislative Committee—as well as state-party operations and legislative-caucus groups—all come to function as incumbent-protection committees...[causing] the party's failure to reach out to its grass roots, especially at the state level...*" (4/18; p. 17) She reports on valiant attempts of women, youth, and others to break through the old-timers establishment. But even if these efforts were to succeed, basic problems would continue.

What drives people to the Democrats is the horrible failures of the Republicans. But what has driven people to the Republicans has been the horrible failure of the Democrats. After eight years of a Democratic president (which had included two years of a Democratic majority in Congress), there was still so much suffering and stagnation that a bombastic demagogue could appeal to a great many people. Even the best of the left-liberal Democrats (the Warren-Sanders wing) has no real answers to the decay of capitalism. If people swing to the "left," to throw out the Republicans, the Democrats will be unable to improve things significantly—and there will be another swing back to the right.

As the anarchist Paul Goodman said in the 'sixties, even a huge electoral swing to the Democrats, even to their liberal wing, would come up against "*the massiveness of the status quo and its established powers, venal, blimpish, police-ridden, prejudiced, and illiberal, officially existing in the Pentagon, the Treasury, the FBI, the Civil Service...a large part of congress.*" (Paul Goodman, "The devolution of democracy"; **Drawing the Line** 1962; 62) Today we can add the continued existence of far-right organizations, funded by big money, and far-right media. Even with a swing to the "left" (if the Democrats may be called that), there will still be 30 to 40 % of the population which lives in a crazed far-right fantasy bubble, supporting Trump or, at least, Trump-like politics. While only a minority of these people are outright fascists, they still amount to about one out of every three U.S. citizens—a lot of people. Meanwhile the decay of capitalism goes on (even during the current limited "recovery") and the attack on the working class continues by the whole capitalist class, including its "liberal" wing. Gains may still be won, but only limited ones.

These forces cannot be defeated by politics as usual, by rushing into the Democratic Party, or by running in elections. They need to be met by independent mass direct action by working people and all oppressed. Anarchists and other radicals need to raise maximal programs of opposition to the whole rotten system, in all its economic, political, environmental, and cultural aspects. As Goodman concluded his already cited essay, *"If...catastrophe [is to be] prevented, we must do it by action outside of their politics, by every means and on every relevant issue."* (77)

---

# ***Donald Trump and Fascism***

By Eric Chester

April 8, 2018

All too often, progressives have sought to justify their support for the Democratic Party by claiming that Donald Trump is a fascist. Since it is obvious that peaceful street protests continue and trade unions continue to engage in strikes, the underlying argument for this claim can only be that Trump has a secret plan to organize a coup in order to acquire dictatorial powers. Needless to say, there is not a shred of evidence to support such a conspiracy theory.



With this argument in mind, it should be helpful to provide a brief history of how the claim that one's opponent is a fascist has been used to justify the lesser evil. The final section looks at how fascism, and in particular Nazism, actually functioned under Hitler's rule.

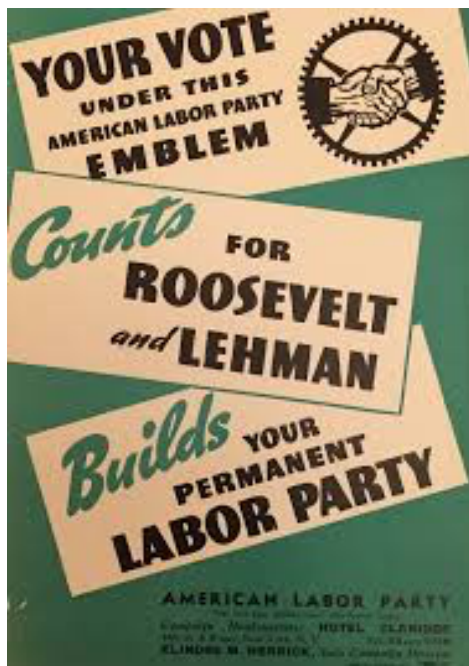
## ***The Popular Front***

Hitler assumed power in January 1933. It soon became clear that he was intent on destroying any opposition, particularly that coming from anywhere on the Left. Thus, labelling someone as a fascist or Nazi rapidly became a common method of belittling conservatives.

The Communist Party was the strongest force in the U. S. Left during the 1930s. It had developed a significant popular base that followed its policy directives. Still, policy guidelines for the CP were set in Moscow in accordance with Stalin's latest worldview and were therefore subject to swift and radical shifts.



By the mid-1930s, Stalin had come to the realization that Nazi Germany represented a serious threat to the survival of the Soviet Union. Parties adhering to the Communist International were ordered to build a broad Popular Front against fascism. In the United States, the new line led the Communist Party to align itself with President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his New Deal. In 1936, Roosevelt was opposed by a moderately conservative Republican, Alfred Landon. With Moscow's approval, the CP opted to spend all of its time attacking Landon, repeatedly condemning him as a fascist. Roosevelt went on to defeat Landon in a landslide of historic proportions. Soon after the 1936 election, the Communist Party shifted to open support for the Democratic Party, as its militants joined liberal organizations directly tied to the Democrats.



Of course, Landon was not a fascist and the CP's leaders knew this. Criticizing the Republican candidate as a fascist merely provided a convenient rationale for the implicit argument that the current situation was such an extreme emergency that a fundamental precept of U. S. socialists, independence from the Democratic Party, had to be abandoned. Trump is more conservative than Landon, but then the program presented by mainstream Democrats such as Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden falls short of the limited reforms promised by the New Deal.

### *Hitler and the Lesser Evil*

The spurious use of the term 'fascist' during the 1936 presidential election as a justification for lesser evil politics is a particularly salient case from U.S. history, but the most important example arose in Germany during the Nazi's rise to power. Hitler was prepared to use force to gain control of the state, but he preferred to have a veneer of legality as a cover for his autocratic regime. In the spring of 1932, Hitler campaigned to become Germany's president, a powerful position in the Weimar constitution.

Although his paratroopers used force to intimidate the populace, he still failed to be elected.

The incumbent president, Paul Hindenburg, was frail and old and had no desire to remain in office. Hindenburg had been the Kaiser's chief of staff during World War I. Frightened that Hitler would win a plurality, the German Social Democrats, the largest working class party, urged Hindenburg to seek re-election. A loose coalition of mainstream conservatives, centrists and social democrats came together to back Hindenburg, ensuring his victory. Since Hitler received roughly only one-third of the total popular vote, Hindenburg defeated Hitler by a substantial margin.

The Social Democrats had opposed Hindenburg when he was first elected in 1925. To justify their switch, social democratic leaders insisted on the need to support the lesser evil in 1932. In this case, categorizing the right-wing candidate as a fascist was not just rhetoric, but a matter of fact. Nevertheless, the strategy proved to be a total failure. Less than a year after the election, Hindenburg named Hitler as chancellor. Within a few weeks, Hitler used the excuse of a fire in the Reichstag to destroy all civil liberties in Germany.



Confronted with the mortal threat posed by the Nazis, the Social Democrats continued to believe in the system, relying on an electoral maneuver to resolve their quandary. Only the mass action of a united working class could have created the possibility of averting disaster. Even in an extreme situation, lesser evil politics is both an illusion and a snare.

### *Fascism*

So far the focus has been on the electoral arena and its pitfalls. We need to move beyond this and look at what fascism actually was. Hitler's Germany remains the archetypical example, but Italy under Mussolini is also relevant.

A fascist regime crushes any form of opposition. This means destroying independent trade unions, banning any dissident voices in the media and prohibiting public protests such as marches and rallies. Elections are either suspended or rendered meaningless. Yet fascism is not just a particularly

brutal form of autocratic dictatorship. It has its roots in a type of popular insurgency. The Nazis formed large paramilitary organizations as they grew in strength. These militarized units, the SA and the SS, used violence to break up meetings held by those on the Left. The Nazis also organized elaborately choreographed mass rallies designed to exalt Hitler as an iconic figure. Although Hitler assumed power through a maneuver that maintained a facade of legality, the use of force was always present. Indeed in Italy, Mussolini's fascists took power in a coup, with only the thinnest veneer of legality as a cover.



Fascism arose in a specific historical context, that is, a country in total disarray. The Nazis surged in popularity after Germany had lost a devastating world war and remained mired in the worst economic depression in history. Unemployment was pervasive and the economy was in shambles. Once in power, Hitler solved these economic woes by ramping up for war. Military spending brought full employment for a while, but it also led to another world war that led to Germany's utter destruction.

The current situation in the United States does not approximate Germany in the 1930s. Although the grim consequences caused by the flight of heavy industry have led a segment of the working class in the Rust Belt to back Trump, this is still a long way from the circumstances needed to sustain a viable fascist movement.

### *Conclusions*

Donald Trump is an opportunistic politician. A demagogue, he appeals to the worst sentiments of a certain section of the populace. His record is atrocious, but it is not that of a fascist. Labelling Trump as a fascist is just a convenient excuse for progressives to support Democratic Party candidates while avoiding the fundamental, underlying problem. Capitalism has reached a point of no return. We either come together to create the basis for a new society or we continue to lurch from one crisis to another even worse one.

# ***Palestine, Israel, Hamas and National Liberation—A Discussion***

May 28  
All,

Remember the American SWP? Well, here's a current piece from their newspaper, *The Militant*, that blames Hamas for provoking the recent Israeli army massacres of scores of Palestinians. I am not making this up.

Jack

<https://themilitant.com/2018/05/04/right-of-israel-to-exist-is-at-the-heart-of-mideast-fights/>

---

May 28  
Jack,

Thanks for passing on this article.

Any article that puts Israel's right to exist at the heart of the conflict in the Middle East (the headline) is on the wrong side of history. Israel's occupation of Palestine, and its subsequent colonization, subjugation, and apartheid-like policies toward the Palestinian people are at the heart of the conflict in the Middle East.

That said, calling out the cynical, self-serving, bankrupt policies and outlook of Hamas is not wrong on its own terms.

A fuller discussion of these issues would be good. I will give further thought, and look forward to others' comments.

Rod

---

May 28  
Rod,

I agree that it's more than OK to call out Hamas for its cynical and manipulative policies. But *The Militant* article puts the preponderance of blame on Hamas, not the Israeli state. And it blames Hamas not just for

manipulating, misleading and using the Palestinian masses, but for challenging the Israeli state.

This seems pretty straightforward to me: we need to stand with the oppressed against the oppressor, and the main oppressor of the Palestinians is the Israeli state.

Jack

---

May 29

Jack, and all,

It's even worse. There's this phrasing: " Hamas-led charges on the Israeli border May 14 that led to the killing of over 60 Palestinians." Indirect language that doesn't say who actually does something (in this case, shooting the demonstrators) is a giveaway of political dishonesty.

Moreover, while the SWP's official position is for two independent states (Israel, Palestine), the headline, "Israel's right to exist," uses Zionist language. This is the phrasing Israel's uncritical defenders always use. In this case, it accepts the idea that return of the refugees--the issue behind the confrontations--destroys Israel's right to exist, meaning that the article accepts "right to exist" as including the right to exclude people Israel drove out (or their families, 70 years ago).

"Our position" (meaning, the position of the ex-RSL) has been to accept a two-state arrangement, based mainly on the existence (and power) of Israel as a fact, but also, conditional on a willingness of Israel to accept a Palestinian state and reach a deal with Palestinians. This condition has never been met (pro-Israelis claim this is entirely the Palestinians' fault, and there's blame to go around, but predominantly it is Israel's fault). It may be time to rethink this view (it was based largely on practicality and hasn't proved practical) and put forward something like a nonsectarian democratic state society with equal rights for everyone, communal rights for religious communities, and no official language (or two official languages). Not very "practical," but the "practical" position isn't either. SWP is right that this would destroy "Israel's right to exist" as an exclusionary state, but we've never accepted that, only (provisionally) accepted its right to exist as a nonexclusionary state.

Chris

---

May 29  
Everybody,

Thanks to everybody for their contributions to this discussion. I agree with what's been said. I especially agree with Chris's last email.

The two-state solution originally required three main issues to be addressed/rectified.

1. Israel was to withdraw to the borders of the original UN partition plan.
2. East Jerusalem was to be the capital of the Palestinian state.
3. Some consideration for the Palestinian refugees (those the Zionist armed forces forcibly ran off their land and whom Israel has never allowed to return) needed to be given. Ideally, this meant the right of return to their land, but it eventually came down to some sort of official recognition (of their existence, their right to return, etc.) while given them some sort of financial compensation ("reparations") in exchange for their actual return.

It is clear, and, in my view, has always been clear, that the Zionists had and have no intention of accepting anything close to these conditions. The more time goes by, the more hardened the Zionist position becomes. So, in my view, the two-state solution is dead. Instead, there is the demand for a democratic secular state in the Palestine, under which all citizens (and languages and religious practices, etc.) have equal rights. I have always favored this position (which I believe the Trotskyist movement once supported). This would require a struggle both in Palestine/Israel and internationally of the Palestinians and all those interested (including anti-Zionist Jews) for full rights for the Palestinians within Israel (whom the Israelis refuse to call Palestinians but insist on calling "Israeli Arabs") and for the right of return of those in the West Bank and Gaza and in the Palestinian Diaspora. The international facet of the struggle involves treating Israel as the movement treated South Africa under apartheid and waging a struggle in the UN and elsewhere against it. The current Boycott, Divest, and Sanction movement is part of this. It is my understanding that there is a generational split within the Palestinian community, with older Palestinians still supporting the two-state solution while younger Palestinians have given up on that and prefer the struggle for full rights in Israel and all of Palestine. It is also my understanding that an increasing number of American Jews, particularly young Jews but also including older members of the community, have moved or are moving into outright opposition to Israel, resulting in an increasingly acrimonious split in the Jewish community on this issue. This, of course, is all to be welcomed.

Ron



May 30  
Hi all,

As far as I am concerned, all of the situations in the Middle East are clear examples of the poison of nationalism and the festering sores that nation states are.

Below is an article critical of the state of Israel relating the atrocities it commits to atrocities committed by other nation-states. If you haven't already read it, I think it is worth reading.

In solidarity,  
Sylvie Kashdan

*(Editor's note: The article is posted at the end of this discussion.)*

---

May 30  
Sylvie,

Thanks for your comments.

I agree that nationalism plays a reactionary role in countless situations. Internationalism—or to put it in more human term, the recognition that we're all humans, with a common humanity (one hopes)—is a central part of my view of and hope for a cooperative, egalitarian, democratic, peaceful and non-hierarchical world.

That said, there are cases where I recognize and support 'national rights' (national liberation) even while recognizing the limitations of nationality - based solutions. People struggling against big power (imperialist) domination have the right to be free of such domination. Think, among many examples, of the Vietnamese people in their 20th century struggles against the French, the Japanese, the French again, and then the US. I don't make an a priori demand on the Vietnamese to be fighting for anarchism or revolutionary democratic socialism before I support their (nationalist) struggle. Similarly, I support (generally speaking) struggles for \$1 more an hour (reform struggles), even when (as is most often the case) revolutionary socialist conscience is absent

I don't know if we have differences in this area, but I'm interested in your views, if you would like to share them.

In solidarity,  
Rod

---

June 1  
Hi Rod,

Here is an attempt at a sort of brief response to your question about 'national rights' (national liberation). It definitely is an ongoing important issue that deserves a lot of thought and discussion.

Like you, I am committed to helping to work toward a cooperative, egalitarian, democratic, peaceful and non-hierarchical world.

And in that spirit, I recognize the importance of becoming aware of the complexities of social and political differences in struggles of people fighting against big power imperialist domination and not settling for supporting centralized parties or tendencies claiming to represent all the people anywhere, as all too many did in most of the twentieth century.

In that spirit, I have searched for groups and individuals in parts of the world outside North America committed to anti-authoritarian perspectives as far back as the 1960s, because I believe that such groups and individuals have generally understood the dynamics and debates within their own societies better than any authoritarian groups claiming to represent all the people wherever they might be.

It certainly wasn't easy to find such anti-authoritarian groups and individuals in the 1960s. But, I was lucky enough to be open to learning about the Cuban anarchists and the Spanish anarchists through people at the Libertarian Book Club in New York City like Sam Dolgoff and Paul Avrich. I was also able to find out about Chinese anarchists before the Maoist takeover, and about the resurgence of anti-authoritarian activities in that country and in Hong Kong (including people fleeing Communist China and discovering anarchist ideas that resonated with their own aspirations) in the 1970s and beyond. I was able to find them through the CIRA Anarchist Library in Switzerland.

Sadly, after the Russian Revolution and the success in the seizure of power by the centralized organization of Russian Communists, many people all over the world were co-opted by the supposed utopian aspect of Communist takeovers without examining the shortcomings of its realization--authoritarian regimes organizing social and individual life, mechanisms of extreme repression, the construction of a one-dimensional reality, etc. In this context anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists were physically attacked and socially marginalized in most parts of the world, including in North America.

This is one of the reasons that the movements of the 1960s in various parts of the world, from France to Mexico, to eastern Europe, and even in North America, was so inspiring to me and others, proving conclusively that social

possibilities for resistance to centralized power was still possible, and anything could and can happen!

In this regard I think that Fredy Perlman's articles: "The Continuing Appeal of Nationalism" and "ANTI-SEMITISM AND THE BEIRUT POGROM" continue to be timely many years after they were written. For those who might not have read them, both are available on the Anarchist Library and in print.

And, indeed there have been many groups and individuals resisting centralized authoritarian self-appointed representatives of national liberation well beyond Western European contexts. One good book about the anti-Stalinist left movement in Vietnam is now in English: *IN THE CROSSFIRE: Adventures of a Vietnamese Revolutionary*, by Ngo Van, Translated by Ken Knabb, Hélène Fleury, Naomi Sager & Hilary Horrocks (Published by AK Press) It is also available online, for those who haven't read it and might want to do it that way. There is also: *A Vietcong memoir* by Truong Nhu Tang with David Chanoff and Doan Van Toai, HARCOURT BRACE JOVANOVICH, PUBLISHERS.

And currently, struggles for self-determination continue to be multifaceted. I am particularly interested in understanding the various expressions of indigenous struggles, such as among the Mapuche in South America (where there has been a lot of supportive interchange between local groups and anarchists from a variety of countries), and the situations in Syria and in the areas dominated by the Israeli state power.

In terms of gaining a greater understanding of the Syrian situation, I strongly recommend the book, *Burning Country: Syrians in Revolution and War* by Robin Yassin-Kassab and Leila Al-Shami. Both also have blogs. There is also a lot of information coming out on a regular basis about the Kurds in the region, including in Rojava that deserves more respectful and critical consideration from anarchists and anti-authoritarians. All of this (and especially the perspectives of local people) is important to me in understanding the complexities of what has been called national self-determination.

Thoughts from others are welcome.

In solidarity,  
Sylvie

---

June 1  
Sylvie,

Thank you for your thoughtful and informative comments on my email.

In addition to our agreement on the maximal goals we seek, I share your views on two key issues that you raise:

1) We do not want to politically support various authoritarian/centralist tendencies or parties, regardless of what they call themselves or promise, since we recognize that these groups will maintain (in whatever forms) hierarchical, exploitative societies that bear no resemblance to what we seek and advocate for. All too many forces on the left supported such forces politically and often uncritically. Generally speaking, this reflected the Stalinist/state capitalist outlook of most of the left, and the authoritarian ideology held by its overwhelming majority (whether in a 'revolutionary' or reformist social democratic expression). In contrast, I think you and I agree that we would be in revolutionary opposition to these elements and any governments/states that they might create.

2) It is heartening that you have found tendencies in various places and struggles of the past that seem to express revolutionary libertarian socialist/anarchist aspirations, even if they are, as you say, small and few and far between. Some I knew of and some I didn't, and I appreciate your sharing this information. These are certainly the types of forces we would want to orient to, perhaps join, or at least be in a bloc with, were this a practical possibility.

This leaves an important question unanswered for me. In the cases of the overthrow of US puppet dictator Batista in Cuba or the defeat of US imperialism in Vietnam (to name just two prominent national liberation struggles), leadership of the mass struggle was in the hands, overwhelmingly, of nationalists whose ideologies were decidedly pro-capitalist (in whatever variant or guise). I believe that we both agree that we would seek to point out that these forces do not stand for and would not create a just or free society; hierarchy, exploitation and oppression in myriad forms would continue.

That said, would we be indifferent (that is to say 'neutral') to these struggles and their outcomes? Would our view toward the movement, that is to say, its rank and file or 'mass,' be something like, 'until you recognize the values and perspectives of our beliefs, and reject any leadership that has a pro-capitalist ideology, we don't support your struggle' (which might be the Indian people's revolt against British rule, the Hungarian or Czechoslovakian people's revolt against Soviet rule, Native American resistance to US physical/geographical/cultural and national genocide, or

even the forces of the US North in its de facto struggle to end chattel slavery)?

I would not be indifferent in any of these struggles. I would support the right to independence/national liberation/existence as a person embedded in each of these struggles against an oppressor. I would fight alongside these peoples for their immediate aims, even while criticizing the leaderships they were (or might be) supporting/following, and even while stating my belief that a deeper/further struggle for true/full human freedom still lay ahead. A way of expressing this is that I would be supporting the struggle 'militarily' (that is, I would be in favor of pointing guns and other weapons in a common direction against a common enemy), even while withholding political support for the leadership of that struggle at a given point in time.

Some people in the anarchist milieu, (broadly speaking) share the view I just outlined, and others have a view that I would characterize as 'indifference' to the outcome of a national liberation struggle if it is not (consciously and explicitly) fighting for worldwide anarchism/revolutionary democratic libertarian socialism. I am interested in your further views on this issue, if you care to share them.

Thanks again for the dialogue,

Rod

---

June 1

All,

haven't people (rank and file) in the developed world been fed the myth that the only way to a prosperous society (and its partner myth: a rising tide lifts all boats) is free market capitalism? so much so that people in the US accept low taxes for the rich because they think that when they win the lottery... etc.

so i think part of a long-term solution is two fold: the example of a sane socialist democracy, and a persistent effort to disabuse people of their illusions about free market capitalism.

many American people seem to me to be so attached to the instant-riches idea that they will tolerate inequities on the daydream that they will be rich one day.

and is that somehow tied in to the broader belief in American exceptionalism?

Robin

---

June 1  
Robin,

I think that all those things (beliefs you cite) exist, sometimes just as you state them, and sometimes in contradictory ways.

I think that all societies (and most situations) give rise to a set of beliefs that justify and perpetuate their continued existence. This doesn't require a conscious plot, in my view, but flows 'naturally' out of the social reality. To be sure, there are forces whose self-interest leads to the conscious and deliberate perpetuation of reinforcing views, but I think the material 'reality' is the chief driver. When abundant consumer products became available in the US, a 'consumer society' took shape—attitudes, advertisements, buying on credit, lay-aways, catalogues and an endless of similarly reinforcing views and mechanisms that perpetuated and reinforces the 'goodness' such a society. When slavery existed, people—the slave-owning plantation aristocracy certainly, but many people more broadly—needed to justify owning other human beings as property. Surprise of surprises, such human beings were judged inferior, not quite human after all, more like, well, property.

Fortunately, not everyone sees consumerism as the highest state of being, and everyone didn't think slavery was the 'just and natural order' of things. So, there are always oppositional voices. More significantly perhaps the stated values and the justifying ideological overlay does not necessarily meet people's real needs and aspirations. Often, very often, it actually crushes them. Somewhere in the mix of these two 'rebellions,' one an outlook of dissent, the other a deep conflict between real experience and fairytale overlay, lies the possibility for deep change, which actually takes place from time to time.

Rod

---

June 3  
Hi Rod, Sylvie, and All,

You-all may be interested in a study of how French anarchists (of varying tendencies and organizations) reacted to the French-Algerian war. Of course they all opposed the French imperialist aggression, but were quite varied in how they related to the Algerian forces. The book is David Porter, *Eyes to the South; French Anarchism and Algeria*. I wrote a review of it:

[https://www.anarkismo.net/article/24619?search\\_text=Wayne+Price](https://www.anarkismo.net/article/24619?search_text=Wayne+Price)

Solidarity,  
Wayne

---

June 5

Hi Rod and all,

Rod, You asked:

"Would we be indifferent (that is to say 'neutral') to these struggles and their outcomes? Would our view toward the movement, that is to say, its rank and file or 'mass,' be something like, 'until you recognize the values and perspectives of our beliefs, and reject any leadership that has a pro-capitalist ideology, we don't support your struggle'..."

I think it is fair to say that the positions that leftists and anarchists take with respect to the struggles of people in other places generally is most relevant to others where we live or where our printed material is read by others who use the same language. In our case, that is in the English-speaking world.

That said, I believe there are more choices than simply supporting any struggle with all its negative aspects or refusing to support it. I am convinced that it is possible to positively oppose the repressive actions of governments and authoritarian aspirants to power without endorsing bad alternatives. In the 1960s there were some people who expressed support for the self-determination of Vietnamese people and worked against the U.S. government's War on Vietnam and to help draft resisters and G.I.s in various ways, but did not endorse the Stalinist North Vietnamese regime. We were definitely in the minority, and our ideas didn't have any significance for any of the governments or major political parties involved. But, maybe we helped contribute to the resistance that developed in the military just a little. And the positions of the leftist parties that proclaimed their admiration for the Stalinist North Vietnamese regime didn't actually influence the main course of the war either. Those of us who offered criticism to the U.S. supporters of the North Vietnamese government did not hurt the struggle of the Vietnamese people at all, but every once in a while we were able to encourage some North Americans to think more deeply about the differences between authoritarian and anti-authoritarian approaches to social change, and about respecting the Vietnamese people enough to hope they would be able to go beyond that regime.

I could say the same about the small number of anarchists who refused to support the Castro regime or the U.S. government's actions against it in the 1960s. Etc.

With respect to the situation that started this discussion, I can honestly say I strongly condemn the Israeli government and the Israeli right that are repressing and brutalizing Palestinian people. But, that doesn't mean that I support the established organizations that claim to represent them. Many Palestinian people don't support any of those organizations either. They haven't really chosen those organizations to represent them any more than



you or I have chosen the Republican Party or the Democratic Party, or for that matter, the Green Party to represent us. My refusal to support any of the Palestinian organizations doesn't hurt their struggle for self-determination either. Maybe my joining with others who are anti-zionist to support boycotts of products from the West Bank or to educate others about the injustices of the Israeli state can help more people in North America to become critical of the state of Israel. I certainly hope so. But, I don't think that such activities require supporting authoritarian Palestinian organizations or governments. And I don't think that supporting such organizations or governments has been shown to lead to any better outcomes than not supporting them.

I also think it is important for each of us to share our anti-authoritarian ideas with other people to help cultivate present and future anti-authoritarian tendencies and possibilities in the world around us. If we don't speak up for them, who will?

In solidarity,  
Sylvie

---

June 5  
Hi Sylvie,

Thanks for your email. I believe we are in agreement on the issue under discussion.

I would summarize my view on national liberation struggles as follows: 1) We support for the struggle of the *people* against a common enemy (the colonizing/imperialist/oppressor power); 2) We do not give any political support to the *pro-capitalist/Stalinist leadership* of that struggle; rather, we are openly critical of that leadership in terms of the ways it will be inconsistent in the struggle and/or sell it out and in terms of the nature of a government/society it would create; 3) This support could be termed *military support* in the sense that the 'guns' (literally or figuratively) are directed at the common enemy, even while we oppose the current leadership of the struggle and seek to build a revolutionary libertarian anarchist/socialist alternative.

I see these points as in line with the views you express when you write: "*I think there are more choices than simply supporting any struggle with all its negative aspects or refusing to support it...in the 1960s there were some people who expressed support for the self-determination of Vietnamese people and worked against the U.S. government's War on Vietnam and to help draft resisters and G.I.s in various ways, but did not endorse the Stalinist North Vietnamese regime.*"

Am I seeing our agreement on these points correctly?

I do take some issue with part of your following statement: "*We were definitely in the minority, and our ideas didn't have any significance for any of the governments or major political parties involved.*" I think the anti-war movement in the US (and worldwide) influenced the course of events in the sense that, by its height (post-Tet offensive to 1972), it was able to limit the options of the US ruling class to some meaningful degree. We (people with our outlook) were an active part of that movement, and contributed to it in various ways in various locales and situations. That said, I think you are quite right to emphasize that the forces of libertarian socialism/anarchism were very small in comparison to liberal/social democratic/Stalinist forces; for the most part, we influenced individuals rather than the mass struggle as a whole.

Sadly, we are even smaller and more isolated today. We do not influence mass struggles at all (or hardly at all, to avoid being absolute), and we have difficulty being heard in those movements that do exist. In my view, that makes it all the more important that we keep our core ideas (our maximal vision and program, if you will) alive among whatever group or groups of people we possibly can. I sense that we agree on this as well.

Thanks very much for your time and thoughts in pursuing this discussion. Hopefully, others have found it helpful in some small way.

Rod

---

June 5  
Hi Rod,

I agree that we are in basic agreement.

However, when I wrote: "*We were definitely in the minority, and our ideas didn't have any significance for any of the governments or major political parties involved,*" I was talking about the anti-authoritarians/anarchists in the anti-war movement of the 1960s, not the movement as a whole. I have no disagreement with your general characterization of the movement as a whole.

I am a little more optimistic than you, since I do think that there are more anarchists around nowadays in many countries, and they/we have more influence than in the 1960s. Which doesn't mean that I always agree with all of them, but we can more easily have real discussions than with authoritarian socialists.

I appreciate you sharing your thoughts on the subject and welcome the thoughts of others too.

In solidarity,  
Sylvie

---

June 5  
Hi all,

In reading over the response I wrote last night, I realized that I didn't respond to an important aspect of the question Rod posed, namely the part about whether I would favor fighting alongside non-anarchists, supporting their right to independence/national liberation struggles, directed against a common enemy, even while withholding political support for the leadership of that struggle at a given point in time.

I certainly would never recommend indifference.

However, in thinking about this question, I realize that I need to consider contexts for specific cases as well as remembering that not all of us want to or can easily be fighters as such.

I know that in the Spanish Revolution of the 1930s, many Spanish anarchists urged comrades abroad to stay where they were and work to support the revolution by telling the truth about what was going on in Spain, to possibly send aid, and to work to help the Spanish anarchists get arms to fight. They said that they had a lot of people willing and able to fight, but not enough arms, while the Franco forces were getting the most up-to-date military equipment from the German Nazis and The Italian Fascist states. Some anarchists in the U.S. and elsewhere attempted to get arms for them, but were not very successful either in smuggling enough or in getting support from the self-identified democratic states. And, of course, the Soviet Union directed the arms for the use of the International Brigades and the policing units to control anarchists and Trotskyists in the cities of the Republic.

The Spanish anarchists did appreciate the refugees from places like Italy and Germany who came to fight alongside them because resistance in their countries of origin had become very difficult.

Then there are situations like Cuba, where many anarchists participated in the fight for liberation from the Batista dictatorship in the guerrilla force led by Fidel Castro. What happened to the majority of them after the Castro takeover is documented in the book, *Cuban Anarchism: the History of a Movement* by Frank Fernandez

<http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/frank-fernandez-cuban-anarchism-the-history-of-a-movement>

There is also some information in the article, "Authoritarian Demonization of Anarchists: Cuba and the Gaona Manifesto" by Rafael Uzcategui

<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/rafael-uzcategui-authoritarian-demonization-of-anarchists>

[and some info in:](#)

["Anarchists in Castro's Prisons"](#)

December 2016

<https://www.facebook.com/anarchosyndicalistfederation/posts/10154838540791953>

While what happened in Cuba shouldn't necessarily lead to the conclusion that fighting along side non-anarchists should always be ruled out, that experience should not be dismissed lightly.

And the question is once again relevant today in the East Mediterranean, with respect to the struggles in Syria, including both among the Kurds of Rojava and people resisting repression in other parts of the Syrian state.

Some anarchists have been volunteering to go to Rojava to fight alongside Kurdish fighters, using a lot of the romantic analogy between this fight and the fight in the Spanish Revolution. While this is definitely admirable, the situations are not exactly the same for several reasons that deserve more critical examination and thought than is usually given to the issues involved. And, very little attention has been paid to the anti-authoritarian resistance to the Assad regime in other parts of the country, and they have sometimes even been lumped together with right-wing religious by anarchists and leftists, using the same characterizations that the Assad regime has used to divide and conquer. To counter this narrative and fill this gap in knowledge, I recommended the book, *Burning Country: Syrians in Revolution and War* by Robin Yassin-Kassab and Leila Al-Shami, as well as both their blogs.

Even though rebels in the Kurdish region and the rest of the country are being fairly decisively crushed right now, their situations need to be understood better.

I think that the various situations where anarchists and other people have been invited to join native peoples in resistance to state and/or corporate brutality and domination also deserve serious consideration as part of committing to support struggles, even though they may not involve direct military struggles.

Although it is not definitive, I hope this answers Rod's question a little more fully.

In solidarity,  
Sylvie

---

June 5  
Sylvie,

Thanks for these further thoughts. I think I was clumsy in speaking of 'fighting' in terms that conveyed to you that I narrowly meant militarily. My main meaning was 'allies in struggle' against a common enemy. My use of the term 'military support' was to make clear that we would not politically support pro-capitalist, authoritarian, state-oriented leaderships; quite the contrary, we would see as one of our most important tasks the need to patiently explain to others in struggle why we see the need for a qualitatively different approach if real freedom and justice is to be gained, and a truly democratic, cooperative, bottom-up society created. This struggle might in certain circumstances have an armed (military in this sense) character, but the types of struggles that most create the forms we wish to see in the future are strikes, mass protests, occupations, etc. These bring people together in cooperative and democratic relationship to one and another, or at least potentially so.

I continue to think that the core of our agreement is: 1) We stand for local, grassroots, democratic movements that are democratic and libertarian in their current practice and their vision for a future society; 2) We support people in struggle against capitalist bosses, imperialist dominators, and other oppressive forces, *even where they do not agree with us (at least at whatever moment in time) about revolutionary anarchism more broadly. Thus, we support a strike for better pay and working conditions even if:* a) it is being led by union leadership that is non-revolutionary and undemocratic to one degree or another; b) the struggle itself is over 'reform demands' that fall well short of what is truly needed; and, c) the people involved in the strike have illusions in both their leadership and the system. We seek to expose people to our point of view, and believe that people are most open to making connections when they are in struggle. Conversely, we don't sit on the sidelines and say, 'nice struggle, but we're not really with you on this until you come around to our point of view on the future of the world.

I think the continued exploration of this is valuable and, like you, hope that others will join in our discussion.

Rod

---

*(Editor: Below is the article Sylvie referenced in her May 30 post.)*

From: <[a-infos-en@ainfos.ca](mailto:a-infos-en@ainfos.ca)>

To: "en" <[a-infos-en@ainfos.ca](mailto:a-infos-en@ainfos.ca)>

Subject: (en) Harbingers of a Palestinian Shoah? by Amitai Ben-Abba (Anarchists Against the Wall),

Posted on May 23, 2018 by Clownmonkey  
Date: Monday, May 28, 2018 3:17 AM

"It really makes no odds to us if we kill someone." Heinrich Himmler.

As a Jewish Israeli descendant of Holocaust survivors, I believe the comparison of the conditions in Palestine to those preceding the Shoah is not only justified, but necessary. Israel is ideologically prepared to enact a genocide on Palestinians right now. If we do not act, it will march into its new decisive stage-up to the 6th million Palestinian and over.

I study and write speculative fiction. A lot of my writing contemplates Israeli future, envisioning brutally grotesque scenarios as a kind of warning for my culture. But these days, whenever I nail another period at the end of a new chapter, my sense of accomplishment is cut short, as reality towers over my imagination. No author could foretell insanities such as the split screen on live Israeli television on May 14th: the Netanyahu and Trumps smiling whitely on one side, the Palestinian protesters carrying their dead on the other, and that night-the Gazans weeping over corpses as tens of thousands of Israelis dance in Rabin Square, singing "I'm not your toy."

In the novel I am currently working on, I contemplate what a full-fledged Israeli genocide (and resistance to it) would look like from the eyes of a perpetrator and a victim. But while I started this project inventing the conditions in which such an event would take place, they have, to my horror, already ripened in Israeli society. I have woken up to the situation in which a dystopian future has accelerated into existence, and I can't hit pause and write ahead of the storm. The world is stuck on play, the news feed refreshes itself, and inexorably, the blood flows. I'm experiencing a peculiar, unnamed anxiety, witnessing a future which is too much like the past, crawling on the present.

The bleeding edge among Israeli politicians-MK Smotrich, Minister of Education Bennet, Jerusalem Mayor Barkat and their ilk-are nowadays advocating the move into the so-called "decisive stage" of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. To transgress from the status quo into a durable peace (incidentally, the title of PM Netanyahu's one and only book): a Final Solution for the Palestinian Question. That vision, a la Smotrich, is taken from the Book of Joshua, where the invading Israelites enact genocide on the native Canaanites, until Not a single soul is left to breathe, to paraphrase Rabbi Maimonides. According to the Midrash, there were three stages to that operation. First, Joshua sent the Canaanites a letter advising them to run away. Then, those who stayed could accept inferior citizenship and slavery. Finally, if they resisted, they would be annihilated. Smotrich has presented this plan publicly as the shift to the decisive stage of the conflict. If the Palestinians do not run away and

refuse to accept inferior citizenship, as any dignified people would, "The IDF will know what to do," he says.

Yes, like in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, Israeli politicians are now suggesting policies on the basis of "scriptural precedence." In their reactionary theology they ignore commandments such as *tikkun olam* ("repairing of the world," the instruction to struggle for justice and equality), *ve'ahavta* ("love your neighbor as yourself," the idea with which Rabbi Hillel has taught the entire Torah), and Talmudic concepts such as *shiv'im panim la'tora* ("seventy faces for the Torah," meaning that dozens of stipulations can be derived of every verse).

As with Turks and Armenians, Hutu and Tutsi, Germans and Jews, genocide is justified on the grounds that there is a zero-sum game in which only one side can triumph. The Palestinians want to throw us into the sea, the Zionists claim, and *haba le-horgecha, hashkem le-horgo* ("he who comes to kill you, rise early and kill him first"). In his book, which, his assistants state, he sometimes uses in order to write his speeches, PM Netanyahu sees the "Palestinians" (he makes sure to mark them with quotes) as a "phantom nation," (p. 56) and denies their existence as a people with a unique culture and history. He sees them as a tool in the zero-sum game between Islam and the West. Prominent Israeli historian Benny Morris, who has thoroughly chronicled Zionist crimes of rape, murder, and ethnic cleansing in 1948, sees the displacement of only 750,000 Palestinians in that war as the greatest mistake of Ben Gurion. In his view, Ben Gurion should have finished the job, and that's precisely what leading Israeli statesmen are aiming for today.

The few forces in Israeli society that are trying to stop the ascent of this tendency are being marginalized and repressed. Israeli soldiers, as demonstrated to the world by the cheering snipers in Gaza, are instructed to see all Palestinians as death-worthy security threats. Israeli masses celebrate the early release of convicted murderers, as long as the victims are Arabs. Israeli crowds chant, "burn them, shoot them, kill them" as the US embassy opens in Jerusalem. From the foot soldiers to the big brass, from the flag-waving street folk to the height of academia, Israel is ideologically prepared to enact a Palestinian Shoah.

Some Jews will cringe while reading these words. *Asur le-hashvot* ("to compare is forbidden") is now a Hebrew proverb. It is forbidden to compare Jewish suffering to that of others, and I have made several comparisons. However, as a Jewish Israeli descendant of Holocaust survivors, I think these comparisons are not only justified, but vital. Israeli society is ideologically prepared to enact genocide on Palestinians right now, and if we do not make the comparison and act accordingly, Israel will march into the decisive stage, up to the 6th million Palestinian and over.



In his own comparison, Israeli Minister Gil'ad Erdan likened the killed Palestinians to Nazis, saying: "The number of killed (sic) doesn't indicate anything-just as the number of Nazis who died in the world war doesn't make Nazism something you can explain or understand." Evidently, counting the dead will not help awaken the Israelis to the grisliness of their actions. Only after the fall of their system-like the white South Africans on their regretted Apartheid-will they recognize it in horror. To stop the pending genocide, world leaders must cease talking and start acting. Arms embargo, economic sanctions, and arrests of traveling war criminals will be a long-overdue start. Anything short of that is compliance. As an Israeli, I am aware of the consequences these measures could have on my life and on the lives of my loved ones. These are all dwarfed by the consequences of the assault on Palestinian rights. Those will be felt the world over, especially by marginalized people, as Ann Coulter threatens, when she looks at the shooting of protesters and says, "Can we do that?" With 75% of the Israeli military industry slated for export, expect Israeli teargas drones to whirl over the next Standing Rock or Parisian revolt. Expect snipers to gun down Mexican migrants. Expect the storm to arrive before you begin to pay attention.

Written from a dark place after last week's Monday Massacre, the piece above trended on CounterPunch the day before.

Some more harbingers for the skeptical:

In response to that slaughter of defenseless peaceful protesters on the Gaza side of the fence that keeps them imprisoned, a senior member of the Israeli parliament Avi Dichter, reassured Israelis on live television on Monday that they need not be unduly concerned. "The Israeli army," he told them, "has enough bullets for everyone. If every man, woman and child in Gaza gathers at the gate, there is a bullet for every one of them. They can all be killed, no problem." Back in 2004 the Israeli demographer Arnon Soffer of Haifa University advised the government of Ariel Sharon to withdraw Israeli forces from within Gaza, seal the territory off from the outside world, and simply shoot anyone who tries to break out. "When 2.5 million people live in a closed-off Gaza," he said, "it's going to be a human catastrophe," He told an interviewer in the Jerusalem Post (11 November 2004); "The pressure at the border will be awful. It's going to be a terrible war. So, if we want to remain alive, we will have to kill and kill and kill. All day, every day, the only thing that concerns me is how to ensure that the boys and men who are going to have to do the killing will be able to return home to their families and be normal human beings." (-Source.)

<https://www.facebook.com/notes/roger-waters/a-message-from-roger-may-18-2018/2120732107941228/>

In one of the dark ironies of history, Sofer's care for the souls of massacring boys and men harkens close to Heinrich Himmler's care for the

souls of Germans:

"It is absolutely wrong to project your own harmless soul with its deep feelings, our kind-heartedness, our idealism, upon alien peoples.[...]They themselves were incapable of it, but we invented it for them.[...]We Germans, who are the only people in the world who have a decent attitude to animals, will also adopt a decent attitude to these human animals, but it is a crime against our own blood to worry about them and to bring them ideals.[...]I shall speak to you here with frankness of a very serious subject. We shall now discuss it absolutely openly among ourselves, nevertheless we shall never speak of it in public. I mean the evacuation of the Jews, the extermination of the Jewish people. It is one of those things that it is easy to say. 'The Jewish people is to be exterminated,' says every party member. 'That's clear, it's part of our program, elimination of the Jews, extermination, right, we'll do it.'[...] Most of you know what it means to see a hundred corpses lying together, five hundred, or a thousand. To have gone through this and yet apart from a few exceptions, examples of human weakness to have remained decent, this has made us hard." (-Source.)

<https://www.ourcivilisation.com/smartboard/shop/festjc/chap9.htm>

## A I N F O S N E W S S E R V I C E

By, For, and About Anarchists

Send news reports to A-infos-en mailing list

[A-infos-en@ainfos.ca](mailto:A-infos-en@ainfos.ca)

Subscribe/Unsubscribe <http://ainfos.ca/mailman/listinfo/a-infos-en>

Archive: <http://ainfos.ca/en>

---

# *Report from Barcelona*

**Eric Chester**

Barcelona has once again become a center of radical politics. After decades of brutal repression under Franco, the Left has returned and the city is alive with political activity. Of course, the Left of 2018 is not the same Left that controlled Barcelona during the first months of the Spanish Civil War.



## *The Struggle for Independence*

Media coverage of the situation in Catalonia has focused on the struggle for independence. There is no doubt that this has become a bitter confrontation. Those who support independence point out that there had been an agreement under which Catalonia was granted considerable autonomy. Yet when the Catalanian parliament approved progressive legislation, such as a ban on fracking and an end to bull fighting, as well as the levying of taxes targeting the affluent, the Spanish Constitutional Court stepped in to nullify the legislation. It was this decision that fuelled the upsurge in support for independence.

Nevertheless, popular opinion remains split on the issue, with a substantial segment of the populace continuing to hold the belief that Catalonia should remain a region within Spain. In this context, the push for independence has reached a stalemate, as Spanish courts continue to arrest and detain independence leaders on the charge of sedition. The lack of unity in popular opinion has prevented the supporters of independence from organizing the mass protests, occupations and general strikes that would be required to force the Spanish government to accept a binding referendum.

For now, the broad coalition supporting independence has shifted the focus of its efforts to a defense of democratic rights. Signs calling for the freeing of political prisoners can be seen everywhere in Barcelona. A cluster of tents in the main square has been erected as a symbolic occupation in

support of those being held in jail. Whatever one's position on Catalanian independence, there can be no justification for the dictatorial acts of the Spanish government. Furthermore, the people of Catalonia have the right to determine for themselves whether they should remain a part of Spain or form an independent state.



### *International Women's Day*

Yet the struggle for independence is only one of several movements that are able to mobilize huge numbers of protestors. These demonstrations are able to bridge the divide arising for the call for independence. We arrived in Barcelona a few days after International Women's Day, March 8. On that day, a rally brought 500,000 people on to the streets of Barcelona. Men were encouraged to bring their children, thus assuming parental responsibility. Throughout Catalonia, even in small towns, there were similar rallies on March 8. Indeed, International Women's Day was celebrated by mass rallies in much of Spain.

The protests in Barcelona were coordinated by a network of grass-roots community based feminist organizations. While organizing the march and rally, feminist organizations began calling for a one day general strike. Both of the anarchist unions, the CGT and the CNT, were supportive, but the two largest unions, the UGT and the CCOO, were uncooperative. Finally, under pressure from their women members, both of the mainstream unions agreed to support a two-hour general strike on March 8, a considerable victory for grass-roots activists.

### *The Broader Movement*

Political activity takes many forms in Barcelona. During our time there, tens of thousands demonstrated in opposition to a cost of living increase for pensioners that fell far short of the rate of inflation. These protests reflected the enormous popular discontent with the drastic austerity measures



imposed by the European Union and the International Monetary Fund in the wake of the global collapse of a decade ago.

While the economy sputters, housing prices in Barcelona continue to soar. In part, this has resulted from the many tourists flocking to the city. In addition, neighborhoods in the city center have been gentrified as the very wealthy opt to own an apartment in this ancient and beautiful metropolis. Most of these flats remain unoccupied for much of the year as working people find themselves crammed into less and less space. Community organizations have mobilized to oppose gentrification and anarchist groups have been active in blocking evictions. Signs declaring that Barcelona can not be bought are highly visible in the contested neighborhoods.



www.gettyimages.com  
VV1-3023753

### *A Radical Party Arises*

Barcelona is a city with a revolutionary past and a radical present. It is a place of ferment where new ideas are welcomed and conservative traditions no longer hold sway. From this mix of social movements, a new political party has emerged, the Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP), bringing together activists from a range of political backgrounds, both socialist and anarchist. CUP developed out of grass-roots community organizations that first presented candidates at a municipal level. Since 2012, it has fielded candidates for the Catalan legislature. At the last election in 2017, the party received 4.5% of the total vote and elected four of its members to the Catalan parliament. Still, the CUP continues to uphold one of its core values by functioning as a decentralized organization in which a great deal of power remains at the local level. Electoral politics remains a secondary concern to movement building in communities and at the workplace.

General policy guidelines for the CUP for Catalonia are set every six months at an assembly in which every active member can vote. Currently, there are two thousand members who are active at the local level, most of whom participate at the assembly level.

The CUP is committed to a socialist feminist perspective and it works hard to ensure that women fully participate in the party. As a result, the percentage of women in the party has doubled, increasing from about twenty percent of the total membership to nearly forty percent. Of course, CUP women were active in organizing the International Women's Day demonstration and pushing for a general strike that day, but the commitment to feminism goes beyond this. There are strict term limits on those holding office and the party makes sure women are fully represented among those authorized to speak to the media. Furthermore, CUP members in the Catalanian parliament are held strictly accountable to the party's guidelines as determined by a democratic process.

CUP views itself as a party committed to a set of principles grounded in the need for a revolutionary transformation of society. For this to be more than rhetoric, the organization needs to formulate a program that pushes the limits of the possible within a global capitalist system. CUP calls for an independent Catalonia that will be independent of the European Union and NATO. It also stands for the repudiation of enormous government debt incurred during the economic collapse of the last decade. CUP would also bring the banks into the public sector without any compensation, pointing to the vast subsidies given the financial sector during the crash. These demands are the start of a transitional program, although one that needs further development before it can provide the basis for a socialist transformation of society.

During the last year, the CUP has worked within a parliamentary coalition with the two larger, mainstream pro-independence parties. At the same time, the CUP sought to pursue its own socialist agenda. Obviously there is a tension between these two strategies. Recently the party has openly broken with the independence bloc by refusing to support a joint candidate for president of Catalonia. In doing so, the CUP stated clearly that it would focus its energies on building grass roots movements for fundamental change and would not limit its efforts to support for a broad coalition demanding the restoration of basic civil liberties.

The CUP has its problems but nevertheless it provides an interesting model for anti-authoritarian leftists in the more economically developed countries. It proves that a viable organization of radicals can be built in a post-industrial society. While linking itself to the past, especially the inspiring examples of worker self-management created during the Spanish Civil War, the CUP understands that it needs to take into account the distinctive consciousness of the current period.

Socialism cannot be built in one country, but rather it requires a revolutionary movement that crosses national boundaries. The CUP needs to strengthen its ties to groups with a similar perspective in Europe and throughout the world. Perhaps this time the radical Left can build an

international that is not dominated by one organization, but instead acts as a true federation of organizations committed to a common goal, the revolutionary transformation of capitalist society.





# Who We Are

(Originally printed in *Utopian 2*, 2001. Revised 2016.)



To look for Utopia means providing a vision for the future – of a world worth living in, of a life beyond

what people settle for as experience clouds their hopes. It means insisting that hope is real, counting on human potential and dreams.

Utopians do not accept “what is” as “what must be.” We see potential for freedom even in the hardest of apparent reality. Within our oppressive society are forces for hope, freedom, and human solidarity, possibilities pressing toward a self-managed, cooperative commonwealth. We don’t know if these forces will win out; we see them as hopes, as moral norms by which to judge society today, as challenges to all of us to act in such a way as to realize a fully human community.

We can describe some of these possibilities: worldwide opposition to the imperialist domination of the global economy; struggles against dictatorship in China, Syria, Egypt, and Venezuela; fights for national liberation in Ukraine, Kurdistan, and Palestine; cultural movements for the defense and recovery of indigenous languages and histories; changes in society’s acceptance of homosexuality, trans-gender freedom, and women’s equality, campaigns to defend the rights of immigrants and racial and religious minorities. The organized labor movement and the Black movement in the United States have – we hope – new utopian phases ahead.

But beyond these specifics, we are talking about something familiar to everyone, although difficult to get a handle on. In small ways, every day, people live by cooperation, not competition. Filling in for a co-worker, caring for an old woman upstairs, helping out at AA meetings, donating and working for disaster relief – people know how to live cooperatively on a small scale. What we don’t know, and no one has found a blueprint for, is how to live cooperatively on a national and international scale – even on the scale of a mass political movement. Nobody has described how the society we want will look, or how to get it, though we know what it will be – a society where people are free to be good.

This is a good time to be publishing a journal dedicated to utopianism, revolutionary socialism, and anarchism. The left is no longer in retreat. The struggles of organized labor, the Black and Latino communities, women, lesbian/bisexual/gay/transgender people, indigenists, and environmentalists

are gaining strength. Within the world of the organized left, the influence of anarchists and libertarian socialists has greatly increased.

But these are perilous times as well. The fabric of the post-World War II world system—a “democratic ideal” for Europe and the United States masking elite control and international domination—is fraying. In the U.S. and Europe we see ideals of openness and inclusion in collision with xenophobia and race resentment. The parties of reform – the Democrats in the U.S., the Social Democrats in Europe, the Christian Democrats in Latin America, the old nationalist parties in Africa and Asia (where they still exist) – have abandoned the idea of social reform and freedom from international capital; yet, at least in the U.S., the Democratic Party has lost none of its ability to absorb, blunt, and demoralize radical efforts at change from within. While the collapse of the Soviet bloc and China’s adoption of a capitalist economic system under a Communist political dictatorship have tarnished Marxism’s idealist image, they have also discredited, for many, the very idea of changing society fundamentally. As never since the early nineteenth century, many believe that market capitalism is the only path to human progress.

A highly problematic new phenomenon in recent years has been the rise of Islamicist or Jihadist religious fanaticism, which exploits radical hopes for escape from western domination as mass support for a tyrannical, socially regressive, and exceptionally brutal war against non-Muslims and the great majority of Muslims. This development is a response partly to the collapse of secular anti-imperialism in Africa, the Arab world, and Asia since fifty years ago, and partly to continuing European domination in these areas, now made worse by the anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim backlash in Europe itself. The road forward, clearly, lies in rebuilding a democratic, radical anti-imperialism, but how this may occur we don’t know.

Moreover, with a few exceptions, revolutionary anarchist and libertarian socialist groups remain small and their influence limited. Various kinds of reformism and Marxism still attract radical-minded people. Both these ideologies and their corresponding movements accept the state, capital-labor relations, conventional technology, and political authoritarianism.

But these are reasons why it is important to continue to work for freedom and speak of utopia. This racist, sexist, and authoritarian society has not developed any new charms. It remains exploitive and unstable, threatening economic collapse and environmental destruction. It wages war around the globe, while nuclear weapons still exist and even spread. Even at its best -- most stable and peaceful – it provides a way of life that should be intolerable: a life of often meaningless work and overwork; hatred and oppression within the family, violence from the authorities; the continuing risk of sudden violent death for LGBT people, women, and Black people; the threat of deportation of undocumented immigrants. The very major reforms

of the last period of social struggle, in the 1960s, while changing so much, left African Americans and other minority populations in the U.S. and around the world facing exclusion and daily police (state) violence, literally without effective rights to life. The videos we see every day (in which new technology makes visible what has always been going on) reveal, like sheet lightning, the reality of the system we live under. For this society, from its inception, to call itself “democracy” is a slap in the face of language.

This paradoxical situation – a society in obvious decay but without a mass movement to challenge it fundamentally – is, we hope, coming to an end. As new movements develop, liberal-reform and Marxist ideas will show new life, but so have utopian and libertarian ideas. We work with this in mind. We have to do what was not done during the last period of really radical social struggles in the 1960s and 1970s. Among other things, revolutionary anarchist and libertarian socialist theory very much needs further development, including its critique of Marxism, and its ideas about how to relate to mass struggles, democratic and socialist theory, and popular culture. And we need to reinvigorate the ideals of anarchism/libertarian socialism and the threads in today’s world that may, if we can find them and follow them, lead to a future worth dying for and living in.

This future, we state clearly, is an ideal, not a certainty. The lure of Marxism, for many, has been its seeming promise that a new world is objectively determined and inevitable. This idea is not only wrong but elitist and brutal: if the new society is inevitable then those who are for it are free to shoot or imprison everyone who stands in the way. That is the key to Marxism’s development from utopia to dictatorship, which everyone except Marxists is aware of. Nor do we believe in an inevitable collapse of the present system—capitalism can push its way from crisis to crisis at its usual cost in broken lives and destroyed hopes. We believe people have to make ethical choices about whether to accept life as it is or to struggle for a new society, and then about whether the society they are for will be democratic or authoritarian. The only key to the future is a moral determination to get there, a dream of a world in which those who were obscure to one another will one day walk together. We do not know where this key may be found, but we know the only way to find it is to search for it.

That is who we are.

**To contact the Utopian Tendency:**

Email: [tendencyutopian@gmail.com](mailto:tendencyutopian@gmail.com)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/utopiantendency](http://www.facebook.com/utopiantendency)

On the web: <http://utopianmag.com>

---