



# MAGAZINE

DECEMBER 2022

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Z Originals

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Curated Highlights

A black and white photograph of a person wearing a puffy jacket and a knit beanie, holding up a large black sign with white text. The sign reads: "MAY WE RUSH INTO THE STREETS TO DO THE WORK OF OPENING EACH OTHER'S EYES." - ANDREA GIBSON. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people and a sign that says "KING".

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*-Noam Chomsky*



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# Dear Hope

Michael Albert

Who the hell is Hope? Hope is, hopefully, you. But, if you are over 50, or perhaps over 40, maybe even over 30, getting into the Hope column is likely to depend on folks younger than you prodding you along and even blazing paths for you to pursue. If you are over 60, much less over 70 and headed toward 80, like me, well, let's do our best, but the reality is that the future lies with young people. So, Hope is young people, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30 years old. And this is a message to Hope.

First, a word or two about words. Reading is good. It matters. But to read, means others must write. Where are the young who are writing, and writing well? Some are certainly doing so, but still too few. Why?

Some oldsters solicit, urge, and prod—but the flow from the young is still only a growing stream compared to the youthful oceanic deluge that society needs. And worse, what about reading? Reading was once a part of life like breathing, but reading is becoming a lost art steadily dissipating into morbid disuse. Yes, many people survey social media nuggets, but those nuggets are often sterile and short. So how will rich insights get learned, taught, and shared?

And what about the streets? Post sixty year olds—even post 50 and likely also post 40 year olds—cannot flood them properly. Too many ties hold oldsters back. Family responsibilities, health, and interminable schedules interfere. Cranky perfectionism and creaky exhaustion interfere. And then there is cynicism, not to mention me-firstism. Only the young can make sufficient space in their lives, minds, and desires to detonate dissent. Only the young can make the world turn in new ways. Only the young have sufficient vigor, sufficient numbers, sufficient mobility, and sufficient capacity to spur sufficient innovative insight, wisdom, and commit-

ment to win a new world. Are some young people trying to do just that? Yes they are. But is it enough? No, it isn't.

Okay, this may seem unfair. Some old timer—me—lucky enough to have spent his critical years in the cauldron of creativity and commitment called the Sixties, now, a near lifetime later, berates, cajoles, and entreats the young to generate much more energy, information, activism, and construction. By what standard, dare I do such a thing?

Surely, if success is the standard, my generation has no right to cajole. Yes, we got off to an impressive start, raucous and righteous. Our efforts did restrain the warmongers. Our efforts did birth women's, Latinx, environmental, gay and lesbian, movements. There was heroism. There were gains. But we wanted the world and we wanted it now! We did a lot, no one can deny that. But as time passed our energy and commitment aged. What's our legacy—well, look around.

What did we bequeath to those who followed? Some knowledge, some memory, some organization, some media, even some mentors and lessons. But, honestly, certainly not the world we wanted you to have. Whatever else we accomplished, we failed at that, and that was the point of it all. So where do I get off asking you to deliver what we didn't deliver? Well, what's the alternative?

Now, like it or not, it is your turn. Are you going to do better? Or is everyone going to get cooked, drowned, starved, or blown to smithereens? That, it seems, is the real choice.

Today's trends could not be more obvious. Surveillance is stratospheric. Poverty and centralized wealth push us back toward the sixteenth century. War and its machinery has seemingly become life's

prime want—at least when life marches to the beat set by capital and power.

Massacres are commonplace. Incarceration is the new slavery. Person by person, way too often it is goodbye glory, hello hate. Look yonder. Is that a new Nazi party organizing our deathbeds over there? You bet it is. Meanwhile, oceans rise and storms multiply. People drown, melt, freeze, or just plain shuffle into what looks like a grim, dismal future. What's blowing in the wind now? A permanent Hard Rain. What's that sound? Boom. Die by drone. Boom. Die by missile. Whoosh. Die by rising tides and howling winds. Fukushima or Facebook, which is worse?

In my formative years, the Sixties, I was never apocalyptic. But now, paranoia is the new wisdom. What do you see in your future? Buzzards? Or struggle? Hey, hey, look anywhere. Blatant evidence says it is time for thorough, militant, sustained activism. If not, it will be buzzards for all.

What makes it not fair for me to berate the young

as if they are not fulfilling their destiny is that it was so much easier for my generation to rise up. Who am I to urge today's young to do what was easier in my day, and yet what we ultimately didn't succeed at anyhow?

Back in my generation's glory days, we enjoyed a perfect storm of innovative, inspiring, and role-breaking phenomena from hipsters, to sex, drugs, and rock and roll. Couple that to daily discovering utterly shocking revelations in southern bus stations, northern riots, and interminable impressions of Indochina bombarded to near oblivion. USA, USA. All lies. USA, USA destroyed the city to save it—again and again. All this together engendered what we then called a massive mind fuck. The world wasn't what we had been told. It wasn't what we expected. Our synapses somersaulted. Our nerves combusted. We felt unbridled anger at ubiquitous hypocrisy. We went to books. We went to barricades.

But hold on. Let's not exaggerate. Even in those



heady days, it was never everyone who read, marched, and fought. Indeed, it was never more than in sum total, counting every dissident path, perhaps ten million, or lets even say twenty million, who greatly or even just loosely self identified as part of what was percolating, and most important it was far fewer who really, seriously, fully turned on to making fundamental change—and yet that was nonetheless a whole lot. And some of us even stuck with it for decades, right to now. So what is different about your situation, Dear Hope? Why can't I just scream at you: Get up and do it again. Do it the way we did it, but much much better.

The answer is, to replicate the path followed then is no longer possible. There is no contemporary shock at hypocrisy to fuel activism, nor will there be. When people today hear that your every word is recorded, that the sky is falling, that drones devastate over there and are being stockpiled here too, nothing much happens. Ho hum. Life goes on, however debased. It just doesn't matter what is revealed. High water rising. Heat waves cooking. Bombs a dropping. Just seeing horror doesn't really shock folks. It doesn't newly outrage folks—including most young folks—because most everyone takes for granted that things are way worse than any event ever reveals. We know they spy on everything. We know they assassinate with impunity. We know they discuss invasions like they are highway repair projects, with as much regard for human corpses as they have for rodents that get in the way of earth movers. We know they tally broken homes, starving kids, and guns spewing death in American schools, churches, and malls, as signs of elite victory over the threat that the population might become too educated, too involved in anything but fearful survival.

And we the people say to it all, yes, sure, it is horrid, but what's new on TV, in the movies, at the Apple store—because, well, we can use what is new in “culture” and in the commodity market, but we can do nothing about what is new in the trouble tally, in the inhumanity index. Poverty climbs so that over a fifth of America's children endure it and suffer its lifelong repercussions—and, around the world—billions more. Ho hum. What's new? Antarctica is melting.

Yeah, sure, but what's happening in La La land? Deep down, everyone knows everything is broken. So reports of the bad fail to provoke resistance and instead only nurture hopeless cynicism.

So what distinguishes now from back in my generation's day is that for Hope to take to the streets—in the millions, in the tens of millions, and much more—and not just to take to the streets but to develop and retain and act on lessons of resistance and of serious thought about desires and aims for a worthy future will require something very different than what jump-started the Sixties. It will take really hard work. Revealed horrors won't yield much. People will have to constructively, productively, continuously reveal what can be better and how to attain it.

There is another factor as well. Back in the day, when some young people on a campus were shocked by revelations that all was not remotely as we had been told, we went rogue—meaning, we became criminals in the eyes of America, in the eyes of our parents, neighbors, friends, and faculty. We became walking, talking, horribly threatening oddities, and we had a place to go to look for allies. We could hang out and recruit wherever other young people had been already acclimated to rebellious inclinations by the also emerging hippie phenomenon—which was pretty much everywhere young folks congregated. Do not fold, spindle, mutilate. My radical long hair teamed up with your hippie long hair. My radical mattress on the floor joined your yippee mattress on the floor.

The point is, recently, highly politicized activists had a giant pool of ready—and in some cases even eager—young people to recruit help from. That advantage that we once had is missing now. Nothing quite like what propelled resistance then exists now. First, there is no outraged shock and horror at revelation. There is not a naiveté to offend. That simply can't happen anymore. Everything bad is expected, and worse. So nothing is revealed. Second, also missing is any prospect of really easy sustainable organizing. Alienation at ticky tacky prospects, coupled to music becoming incendiary, coupled to people having a lot of time on their hands, created a ready army of

potential partners, back when, but that is in the past. So we have to face the hard truth—for Hope to surface beyond nooks and crannies, and to become intense and solid—will take hard work. First, break passivity in oneself. Second, break passivity in others. Become goal seeking. Maintain ourselves against the grain of every self oriented collectivity denying pressure around us, not only from the mainstream, but even from most of so-called alternative culture. And then, finally, move past passivity to galvanize passionate positive desire. Move past wild negative anger to share unswerving positive vision. Seek gains now, over and over, conceived to lead to more gains later, until we achieve our vision.

In bad economic times, it is hard to break from financial accounting practices. In self-centered harping/whining times, it is hard to consider wider aims and implications. Without breaking from financial accounting practices and without considering wider aims and implications, however, we can't sustain ourselves to tirelessly seek better. When one doubts that anyone else will ever do anything lasting, it is hard to motivate oneself to do something lasting. Yet without achieving lasting commitments, there is nothing. Make struggle last: tenacious, tireless, continuous.

But, wait, maybe I am being just a little too hard on my own generation. Think back again, not to 1968, but earlier, to 1962, say. What became the full blown Sixties just a few years later had its foundations laid then—and earlier, too. And who did that? Lonely people who risked their friendships, their family ties, their future, and even their health and safety. Lonely people who dissented when dissent was simply unheard of.

So, it is certainly harder now, in some ways, but it is also easier in other ways. There was no digital megaphone with which to reach large audiences then. At the outset, look at all the lonely people. Then some resisted. Some persisted. Some burned or sold out—but first all woke up. Maybe that is the real analogy to now. We need to wake up, not as in those past times to escape utter ignorance and attain anger—but in these current times to escape lethargic

defeatism and attain vision-fueled desire.

But, hell, you are too negative, some may reply. Weren't Occupy, and Me Too, and Black Lives Matter huge? Yes, they certainly were, and that's partly a reflection of the easier aspect. People's underlying cynicism about contemporary relations—and anger at contemporary crimes—provided a substrate and modern internet tools provided quick communications. So we had massive surges, seemingly arising on the spot. And that kind of surge will happen again. But the issue we now face isn't to have a one- or two-year surge that devolves over the long haul. The issue we now face is having a surge able to construct lasting movements, lasting organization, lasting vehicles of outreach, and able to construct carefully conceived and truly inspiring examples and messages.

Can Hope do that? If we are talking possibility—the biology and even the physics of it—of course Hope can do that. But will Hope do that? I don't know. It will be a matter of will, psychology, and personality. It will require the courage to be different not only in values, but also in actions, and not so much in the exciting visible aspects—easy to jump on that—but in face-to-face organizing aspects and in reaching out to those who disagree with aspects, and not so much in the celebratory aspects, as in the learning and teaching aspects.

Is it already starting to happen in labor organizing, reproductive rights organizing, anti racist organizing, anti-fascist organizing, and ecological organizing, each and all clearly on the rise? I think maybe it is.

What we can certainly now say is that this time around it is not sufficient that the young rebel because folks are suffering immensely—as occurred in the Sixties—but the world needs the young to rebel this time out of positive desire and because there just aren't going to be any more chances. Hope comes through now, or we all watch a horrendous planet wide debacle unfold.

So, Dear Hope, what's next?

# Biden Wants to Prevent a Strong Primary Challenge

Norman Solomon

Joe Biden has directed the Democratic National Committee to reduce the danger that progressives might effectively challenge him in the 2024 presidential primaries. That's a key goal of his instructions to the DNC last week, when Biden insisted on dislodging New Hampshire — the longtime first-in-the-nation primary state where he received just 8 percent of the vote and finished fifth in the 2020 Democratic primary. No wonder Biden wants to replace New Hampshire with South Carolina, where he was the big primary winner.

The White House and mainstream journalists have echoed each other to assert that Biden would face no serious challenge to renomination if he runs again. But his blatant intrusion into the DNC's process for setting the primary calendar is a sign of anxiety about potential obstacles to winning renomination.

Unlike all other states under consideration for early primaries, South Carolina is not a battleground state. Everyone knows that the Democratic ticket won't come close to winning in deep-red South Carolina in 2024. But that state — which Biden obviously sees as vital to his renomination — has a party apparatus dominated by Biden's powerful corporatist ally, Congressman James Clyburn.

The Biden plan to reorder the 2024 schedule “includes a subtle but effective ploy to minimize the chances that he'd face a left-wing challenger in the primaries if the 80-year-old president, as expected, seeks a second term,” centrist Walter Shapiro wrote approvingly in *The New Republic*. “More than that, Biden has created a template beyond

2024 to lessen the odds that future versions of Bernie Sanders will get liftoff in the early Democratic primaries.”

But serious public discussion from candidates with a range of outlooks is badly needed in the process of selecting the presidential nominee. From health care, extreme economic inequality, labor rights and racial justice to military spending, foreign policy and the climate emergency, voters in Democratic primaries need to hear crucial issues debated.

The current prevailing attitudes are retrograde. While Democratic politicians and pundits weigh in on whether Joe Biden should run for president again, his party's voters are presumed to be little more than spectators. But the decision on whether Biden will be the nominee in 2024 shouldn't be his alone. A party that has been emphasizing the importance of democracy should not be so eager to short-circuit it in the presidential nominating process.

Very few congressional Democrats have been willing to publicly depart from the party line that Biden would be a fine standard-bearer. The few dissenting voices among them are usually furtive. The *New York Times* reported after the midterm election that a House Democrat — speaking “on the condition of anonymity to avoid antagonizing the White House” — said that “Biden's numbers were ‘a huge drag’ on Democratic candidates, who won in spite of the president not thanks to him.”

Fears of antagonizing the White House have



Photo: Christopher Michel

sealed Democratic officeholders inside a bubble that carries them away from the party's grassroots base. This fall began with most Democratic voters not wanting Biden to be the party's nominee next time. Even amid post-midterms euphoria among Democrats, they are now evenly split on the question. But Democrats on Capitol Hill and other party leaders remain frozen in place, rarely casting any doubt on the wisdom of renominating this president.

The disconnect from the party's base is in sync with a refusal to acknowledge the facts indicating that Biden at the top of the ticket would be an albatross around the necks of Democratic candidates in 2024. While voters are evenly divided between the two major parties, Biden's public-approval deficit has exceeded 10 percent almost all of this year. Nine out of 10 young adults — a key cohort for Democratic prospects — don't want him to run for re-election. In midterm exit polling, two-thirds of voters said they didn't want Biden to run. Yet, when asked about those survey results, the president fell back on "watch me" bravado.

We're told that smoke-filled rooms are a thing of the past in national politics. But when a president wants to run for re-election, the anticipated mode is not much better. Looking ahead, the only way to inject participatory democracy into the Democrats' nominating process for 2024 is to insist that the nomination should be earned with the party's voters, not bestowed from on high.

If President Biden decides to seek the Democratic nomination, as now seems likely, credible primary challengers could enliven an otherwise stultifying process, making it robust instead of a bust. The corrosive effects of stagnated assumptions should be held up to disinfecting sunlight. New ideas should be discussed rather than suppressed.

Conventional wisdom insists that a president has the divine political right to be the party's nominee for a second term. But a president is not a party's king, and he has no automatic right to renomination.

# Why Vision? Why Strategy?

**Bridget Meehan**

Vision can mean different things in different contexts but for the purposes of this essay the most appropriate definition of Vision is “the ability to imagine how a country, society, industry, etc. could develop in the future and to plan for this”. By this definition, Vision is that which points to a time in the future and what is imagined or hoped for that future.

In creating Vision, we begin at some starting point and we picture our Vision point somewhere in the future. The journey that must be travelled between those points from here to there is what we call Strategy, the plan of action that will take us to our Vision. It's impossible to talk about Vision without also talking about Strategy for they are two sides of the same coin and they are both necessary. Without Strategy, we can never reach our Vision. Without Vision, our Strategy will meander aimlessly.

The first thing a person realises when they try to create Vision is that it's damned hard. Vision must be detailed enough to give a reasonable sense of what we desire and to inspire others to get involved. But at the same time, it can't be too prescriptive because it must maintain the flexibility to adapt to unforeseen and changing circumstances. And flexibility must be factored in too because we can't assume to know precisely what will be required in the future or what life will be like then. Vision calls for a certain amount of intelligent guesswork and a hefty dose of imagination. The only thing we can be certain about when creating Vision is that our present is not acceptable and that we want something better. All in all, Vision necessitates a very a fine balance that is difficult to get right.

The work of Left activists is nearly always future-oriented. For the most part, we're discontent with present conditions and know they're harming

us. We agitate for change that will take us from what we have now to some other more desirable state. We want better pay or more democratic workplaces. We want equal rights for people of colour, for women, for those with disabilities, for the LGBT+ community, for young people. We want protection for our environment. We want a fairer, more participatory political system. We want a more equitable distribution of wealth and a lower income gap. We want free healthcare for all, housing for all, education for all. We want reparations and justice for the Global South. We want an economy that puts caring for people and the planet above all else. Given the future-facing nature of the Left, it's impossible to understand the absence of Vision and Strategy in Left activism.

Without a doubt, Left activists are hard-working, dedicated and determined people. The effort that goes into campaigning and organising is enormous and is more often than not done on a shoestring budget by volunteers. And while there's no shortage of initiatives that have failed, there are plenty more that have won, and won against the odds. Famous successes include the ending of the Jim Crow Laws, suffrage for women, state pensions for older people, the growth of trade unions, the minimum wage, and the 8-hour workday. Or what about the National Health Service in Britain along with the safety net of a social security system; or banning seabed mining in New Zealand; or participatory budgeting in Kerala; or universal basic income in Alaska; or abortion rights in Ireland; or same-sex marriage in South Africa; or free university education in Sweden?

These victories are not insignificant and they should be recognised as cause for celebration. However, the Left can all too easily gloss over its successes. A win may suddenly seem little more than a miniscule speck when compared to the

enormous task of changing the dominant system. We can reduce our wins to mere morsels that have been nibbled off the elephant. Months, even years, of relentless organising and campaigning will have gone into even the smallest victory and by the time it comes to pass, the end result may seem anticlimactic and less than worth the effort, with many of those involved feeling burned out.

By contrast, it's routinely the case that the Right seems to be winning so much more or doing so much better. They are, of course, abundant with resources. They possess most of the wealth and power in society. They have access to whatever they need and can buy off political and other support. They can pay for advertising, or just buy up the media, to spread their message and propaganda. The Left cannot compete with any of this.

But the problem goes deeper. The Right doesn't have to do the very hard work of looking to the future and imagining the world they want. Why? Because the world we have now is exactly what

they want. Our current economic and political systems have been conquered by their ideologies. They don't need to develop new systems or argue for them or try to prove their worth or persuade others they could work. They don't need to do any of that because their Vision is already a reality and speaks for itself. The preoccupation of the Right is to simply maintain the status quo, which they're very content with. Any threat to that way of life, such as Left Vision, will be resisted with everything they've got. And while maintaining and defending the existing system takes substantial amounts of money and some exertion, it's still less exertion than imagining a whole new world and strategising how to get there. So, the Right has yet another advantage, yet another position of strength—as if they needed it.

The burden of proof lies with the Left because Vision is a promise of something better, not a guarantee. Greater effort is required to persuade people to trust that the unknown territory you're taking them into will be an improvement on what they

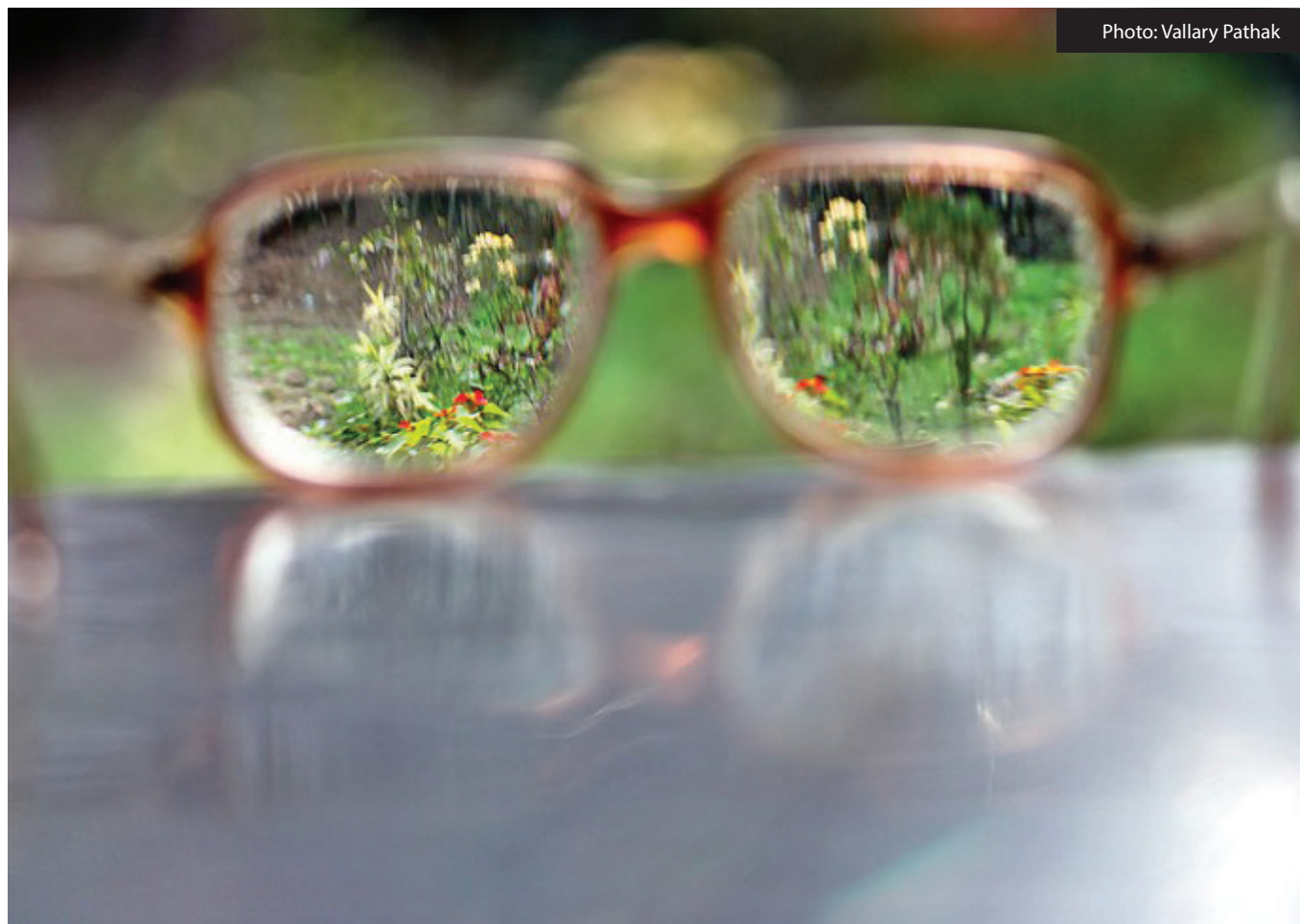


Photo: Vallary Pathak

have now. The sticky, pervasive belief that there is no (better) alternative (to capitalism)—a belief that many on the Left also hold in spite of themselves—is an enormous obstacle. People fear they will lose what they have now, regardless of how meagre or harmful it is. And what if the Vision is all wrong? It could take everybody to hell in a hand basket. In the end, for many of us, it's safer to stay in the misery we know than take a chance on something we don't know, regardless of what it promises.

And if all that wasn't challenge enough, there's another snag, this time from within the Left itself. The Left widely agrees that the current system is badly wrong and an alternative is needed. The Left has much less agreement on what that alternative should be. Essentially, we have no unified Vision or Strategy. Compare this with the Right who are united behind the neoliberal Vision which they developed over decades. Their Strategy involved testing it out in Chile in the early 1970s, followed by a subtle trickle of policies in other locations throughout the 1970s, and culminating in a final push in the early 1980s when they were ready for a full-on launch after the elections of Thatcher and Reagan. By then, they were determined to impose their Vision on the world and they had the power and resources to do so. They let nothing get in their way. Did Thatcher falter in her policies for privatisation even when faced with the miners' strikes? Did Reagan let mass protests of the labour movement deter him when he introduced budget cuts and regressive taxation? Not a chance. Unity of Vision, single-mindedness, was the key to their success. Okay, it's an example of Vision working in completely in the wrong direction but it's an example all the same and it demonstrates unequivocally the importance and necessity of Vision and its first cousin, Strategy.

The Left could learn a lot from this example. Our current approach is to work in silos on shorter-term goals, whether that's an increase in wages or a legislative change or a protest against a gas pipeline. While these initiatives are important, working in this way carries greater risk of burn out and feelings of defeat among activists in spite of

our successes. If instead we had a unified Vision and where all of our activism in its various forms was integrated and coordinated into a unified Strategy that took us towards that Vision, it would encourage and nourish us. We would be able to see where our own individual activism fitted within the context of the Vision and Strategy. When we achieved success in one of these initiatives, we would see that success not as an isolated, though happy, occurrence but as another triumph among many others that are contributing to the bigger picture that is our Vision. And we would take strength from the successes of other Left projects, knowing that those too contributed to the bigger picture.

The mere fact of being part of a wider ecosystem where others are winning, would further reinforce and embolden us because once we achieved one victory, we wouldn't stop there. We would move to the next step, building on previous accomplishments to go even further. Why stop at a \$15 per hour wage when the next step could be to have workers take over the workplace? Why stop at closing down a gas pipeline when the next step could be to end the use of gas completely? We could continue that march towards our Vision, sometimes fully involved, sometimes handing the baton over to others while we rest a while, but always moving forward, always standing on the shoulders of what went before. It's for these reasons, among others, that Vision and Strategy are so important.

Endless material is written on the problems of the world but much less is written about Vision and Strategy. Although valuable and requiring skill and expertise, we can accept that it's somewhat easier to critique and analyse the here and now than it is to expound on what the alternatives might be and how they might be achieved. ZNet has always recognised the importance of Vision and Strategy and has never ceased to elevate the work and writings of those who bravely look to the future and dare to dream of a better world. The new ZNetwork will endeavour to continue in that tradition, being the fanfare for the future and never doubting we will win!

# The Campaign to Free Julian Assange Is Akin to the Campaign to Free Nelson Mandela

**Matic Primc interviews Craig Murray**

*Hello Mr. Murray. Julian Assange is currently incarcerated and is fighting extradition from the UK to the US and it seems that the UK will stop at nothing to complete this extradition. But it is also clear that the US has been exerting significant pressure to induce the UK to extradite him. What is it about Julian Assange that makes the US so interested in him?*

There are a number of things. On the very obvious level, he was responsible for publishing the largest-ever leak of US official documents. That in itself is a feat of journalism that is a challenge to the established order. Then also you have to look at what lies behind that, and why these documents were so critically important. They were related specifically to American military and foreign policy and to the casual way with which the US breached international law, breached humanitarian law, and committed war crimes. Given that the US projects this image of the model power in the world, the defender of the rules-based order. When you have all this practical evidence of the American soldiers entering Afghan homes and shooting families while they are sleeping, of American helicopters shooting up journalists, American drone operators laughing as they kill civilians, and the torture happening in Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, and in an organized way around the world, that attacks the fundamental self-belief of the American system where they honestly believe, they genuinely, actually believe they are the moral power in the world and everybody else is evil. Julian held up a mirror to them, he showed them their own stuff. Nothing published was written by him, what he published were their own documents. By showing them their image in the mirror he outraged the American state.

*One of the beliefs in the western world is that we*

*live in societies operating under the rule of law and yet from your reports from the court in the Old Bailey it seems as if you are describing a state hell-bent on committing injustice while hiding behind a veil of legality. Is this perception correct?*

I think the single most fundamental example is the fact that under the UK/US extradition treaty political extradition is not allowed. That is specifically prohibited in the treaty and yet in Assange's case, it is clearly a political extradition. To get around this the court has argued that the extradition treaty has no force in UK law because it is not domestic legislation, and they claim that international law does not apply to domestic law. But if the treaty has no force how can you extradite Assange then, because the treaty is the only legal authority for extraditing him. So they are saying that when the treaty says no political extradition is allowed it has no force. On the other hand, when it says it is legal to extradite Julian, then it does have force. So some clauses of the same treaty have legal force and others don't. That is such a crazy logical contradiction right at the basis of the whole process that you realize very quickly that there is no coherent intellectual basis to what they are doing. And they do not even want to pretend there is a coherent basis. They are merely attempting to carry out a political *fait accompli*. And the whole judicial process is fake.

My other favorite example is the testimony of Mr. El-Masri who had been kidnapped by the CIA and taken away and tortured. Tortured terribly including with razorblades on the genitals for months before he was eventually returned to Germany, never charged with anything. Mr. El-Masri won his case in the European Court of Human Rights. He won the case against the CIA. Legally there is no doubt his ordeal was real; the ECHR had settled that question. But when he gave evidence in

the Assange case the judge ruled that he was not allowed to say, and nobody was allowed to say, that the US committed torture. It was not even allowed to be alleged. Assange's defense was not allowed to say it even though everybody knows the US is guilty of torture and extraordinary rendition. To have a process where the judge rules that it must not be mentioned is just astonishing. You sit there and things happen before you and it is hard to believe that it is happening. You cannot believe you are hearing this.

There were dozens of moments like that, where the power of the state was simply deployed in this Kafkaesque fashion. Where the court decreed that things that are obviously true must not be spoken.

*Do you think the fact that this case is so obviously conducted against everything that a legal process should be is also being done as an intimidation tactic to other people who might follow in Assange's footsteps? So in that way, it can function as a legal facade to people who are vaguely acquainted with the process but also serve as a terrifying example of what the state is willing to do for the people who are following the process closely.*

I think that is absolutely correct. I think it is an example of where the state is not even pretending to be just. The state is showing its ability to crush and kill an individual who crosses it. To destroy them intellectually, morally, and physically. And it is doing that on purpose before our very eyes to demonstrate its power in order to intimidate other people. There is no genuine pretense that this is justice. The state is merely saying, we have this power; we don't care what you think; we can do this to you.

*It turned out that the US apparently planned to just murder Assange.*

Those plans were made when he was still the recipient of political asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy. They thought it might not be possible to get him out of the embassy and arrest him. Mike Pompeo in particular was extremely keen on the idea of

assassinating Julian while he was running the CIA. There were also plans to kidnap him and take him to the US.

These are crazy ideas. The idea that you can be murdered for publishing something. Not only for publishing something, but publishing something nobody denies is true. Nobody is making any claim, not even the US, that Wikileaks published false information. They admit that everything Wikileaks has published is true. It is very hard living in a world knowing that is the case. That for publishing true information you can be killed.

*The media's response to these proceedings is also very interesting. This is a journalist, a publisher, one of their own, one would think, and he is being dragged through this Kafkaesque trial and a state's plot to murder him. And yet the response is quite muted. For a long time, even the supposed leftist media piled on to him and published all manner of fake and lurid stories about him. They disparaged his "disheveled" look and published made-up stories like him smearing feces on the walls in the Embassy and other stories. How does that come about? One would expect they would act in defense of one of their own and yet they seemed to be doing the opposite.*

The media reaction has been extremely disappointing. Part of that is because they don't see themselves at risk. They have no intention of publishing anything that embarrasses the United States. So they think; oh, this is some mad lefty and I am not a mad lefty therefore nothing will happen to me. It is only in the last year or two that the more intellectual journalists and the leadership of the major publications like The Washington Post, The New York Times, and The Guardian have changed from attacking Assange all the time to saying; Ok he is a very bad man, but journalism is important. They have started to realize at some level that the same legislation and the same arguments can be used against them if in the future they publish any secrets or classified documents. And of course, that is true and if Julian is guilty of espionage then so are The Guardian, Der Spiegel, and New York Times

because at the end of the day they published the same information he published. So there is some realization of that but it is tempered by the thought that what they are doing to Julian is terrible, but they would never do that to me. I think most journalists feel entirely safe. They feel the state won't touch them. It's just the "extremists" like Julian that need to worry. Until they feel genuinely in danger themselves I don't think we will see serious change.

*What of Julian Assange's project, Wikileaks? At the start of this travail in 2010 Wikileaks was very much in focus, even celebrated for doing more scoops than probably all the other media combined. Now however it seems it has disappeared from media discourse completely. Is the work continuing without Assange?*

The project very much continues and Wikileaks continues to publish whistleblower material. It is true that it hasn't had a big high-profile scoop for the last couple of years. The last one was probably the Vault 7 revelations. There had been others and

often they are ones that don't really catch the attention of the western media but catch a lot of attention elsewhere. Like the Saudi Diplomatic Cables, which didn't get much attention from the western media, partially because they concern Saudi Arabia and so were hushed up because Saudis are big money spenders and advertisers, so the western media rarely take them on. Partly of course because the source material was all in Arabic and so had limited interest outside the Arab world. Who knows when the next explosive revelation will come. They carry on their work, they haven't stopped working.

It is fair to say that of course there has been a chilling effect. Chelsea Manning went to jail, Julian went to jail, I am tangentially connected but I also went to jail. People don't want to go to jail and so there has been a realization that if you go to Wikileaks the state is going to come after you particularly hard. It would be crazy to pretend that doesn't have a certain chilling effect.



Photo: Kaja Fiedler

*Despite the media not doing its job informing people what is really at stake, or indeed even informing people of the basic facts of the matter, people seem to be more and more engaged in actually fighting for his release. Thousands gathered in October to form a live chain around the parliament. Does the movement grow, and do you see it having an effect on policies to the point that they might pressure the government into releasing him?*

I think definitely. The movement is growing, I have no doubt about that at all. I have been campaigning for 12 years, ever since he was arrested. And I see bigger, better informed, and more sympathetic audiences than I saw a couple of years ago. Also, there is increased involvement of young people. Generally, there is an increasingly better understanding of the issues that are at stake and that is very important. We are beginning to see that it is beginning to feed into the attitudes of governments worldwide. In Australia, in South America, in Europe, there are signs of the establishment beginning to shift. Particularly the establishment liberal media in every major state is switching from either hostile or ambivalent positions to supporting Julian Assange. A lot of progress is being made. The public climate of understanding is much better and I am buoyed by the reception I get as I go around speaking. How much progress needs to be made and how you make the popular will influence the political class and get them to do something is a much bigger question.

*What could people do to join the movement? How does one organize to help support Assange, especially for people not in the UK or the US?*

There are Assange groups worldwide in many places and in many surprising places. There is a good chance there is already a local Assange group. Even if there isn't you can still raise the issue with the groups of which you are already a member and ask for it to take a public position on Assange. Of course, you can take part in street activism or in other public activities designed to bring attention and if you can get local media attention for those it helps the cause.

There is also the question of lobbying; of writing to your members of parliament, your ministers. People think it is a dull thing to do but actually, it is surprisingly effective because for most members of parliament their number one interest in their whole life is to get elected again and keep their job. If a number of people write to them on one subject suddenly they realize that their constituents are really interested in this, and they must do something about it or they might not vote for them again. I've seen it many times and it is interesting that it does not take a huge volume of letters from a variety of people. If they think there is a lot of public interest they will respond. It is not too hard to organize that. There are ways forward and there are things people can do. All these individual activities add up.

Once you get five or six people together you can start local actions and that develops its own dynamic. People in the group will have different ideas about what to do and things grow. Activism is a great thing in itself. You may well find that the group formed initially on climate change starts to get active on Julian Assange as well. It can also be the other way around. You may form a group of friends because you are worried about Assange and you might become active on different social issues as well.

I think there is a real danger that in this consumerist society we get divorced from the community of peers and we lose a lot of social empathy so I think that activism is a good in itself. Personally, I do believe that we will get Julian freed. It is very similar to the campaign for the release of Nelson Mandela. It was worldwide and it created an enormous amount of pressure and it ultimately succeeded. Maybe it will take some time but for everybody involved, the acts of doing things for the right reasons, to try to affect society, to be socially involved, to be reaching out to people in your community for interests beyond your own personal interests. I think that will improve your life and improve your community's life so I think the action itself is a virtue.

# Art, Art Workers, & Artistic Activism

Alexandria Shaner interviews Andrew Mulhearn

*Welcome to the new ZNetwork.org, Andrew! I'm a fan of your art, and you are a fan of Z's work, which recently lead us into a conversation about art, labor relations, and activism. Thanks for agreeing to this interview, and sharing our conversation with the Z community. To begin, could you introduce yourself?*

My name is Andrew Mulhearn, and I work as a commercial artist. There are many different markets for commercial art, but I create illustrations for print and digital publications that accompany their articles. When I make an illustration, I try to condense complex socio-economic and political ideas into a conceptual piece of art that utilizes surreal imagery and visual metaphor. My work constantly forces me to explore new topics that broaden my understanding of major political issues around the world, and I hope in doing so, it does the same for the people looking at my art. Ultimately, I want the people who look at my work to become better-informed citizens that are more empowered to participate in our society.

*How did you become a political artist? Did you find art through politics or did art give you a means of expressing yourself? Are you involved in other types of activism or social change projects in addition to creating illustrations?*

I never considered myself to be a political artist until my interview with you, but it makes sense. I guess I became a political artist because politics and history have always been interesting topics for me. I've been painting and drawing for as long as I can remember, it's something I've always derived a great sense of meaning from.

I consider myself to be an artist first and foremost. It

just so happens that there is a market within the field of commercial art that suits the kind of work I create.

I donate to political campaigns when I can, but I'm not much of an activist outside of my art, and it didn't really occur to me that the work I make is a form of activism. For me at least, activism is something that is collective and has a set of objectives or plans that advance a political movement. The process in which I create my art is very individualized, though I work with art directors and send them sketches for feedback.

For the life of me, I couldn't tell you why I make my art the way I do. I could tell you about how I make my art, and I'm certainly passionate about what I do, but I can't figure out why. Some artists can write down explanations for why they became an artist specifically, but whenever I try to do this, I'm never satisfied with the answer. There's just this creative impulse that I have that I'm always called to fulfill in the back of my mind.

*I see art your art as political and as a form of activism because it is giving expression to ideas and information about society that should be accessible to all people, but is very often obscured. As you put it, "[you] want people who look at [your] work to be better-informed citizens who are empowered to participate fully in our society." You are empowering others with information, understanding, and even questions so that they can actually self-determine their response – this is a big part of social change, and though the process of creating art can be solitary, the effect is communal and participatory.*

*I know I'm supposed to be interviewing you, so I will*

*keep it short, but I'm also hedging against your humility by bringing this up. As an "activist", I hate calling myself an activist. So, I will spare you the discomfort and say that to me, your art is a form of activism. I see political art (including your art) as a strategic component of consciousness raising and commitment building, which are two foundational building blocks of any movement.*

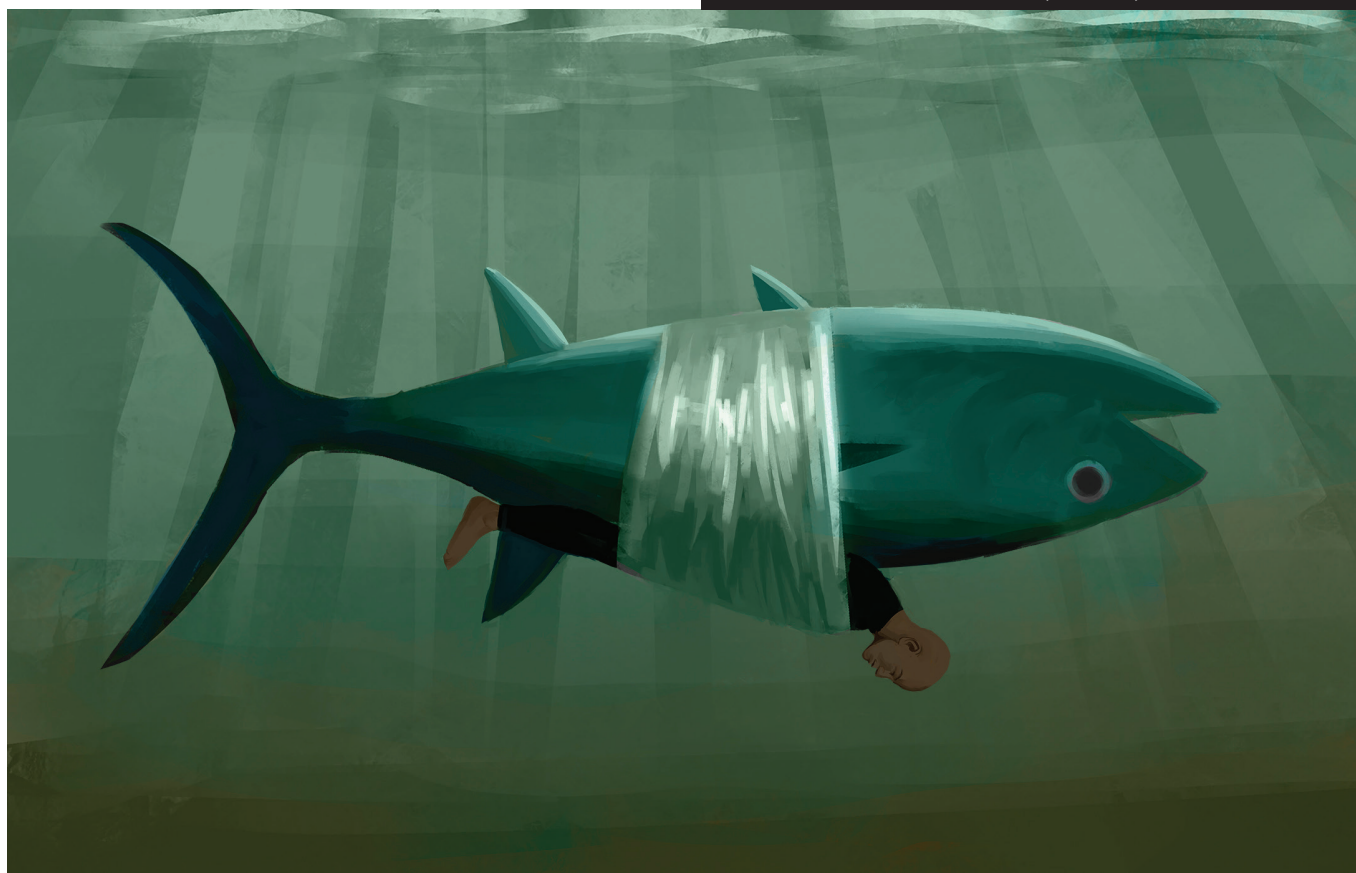
*Let's switch it up... It can be both a joy and a challenge (under our current economic system) to fuse your work with your passion, as a creative worker and as a political artist. This leads to the topic of artists as workers. I'd like to ask you to first describe your own experience of what it means to you personally, to be an artist in the context of labor relations.*

For most artists, you are a freelancer. There are some markets within commercial art like concept art for film/interactive entertainment or pattern design where you see some more staff positions. Mostly throughout its history, the field of commercial art has been freelance work and will continue to move more towards that as the economy moves away from salaried jobs. The pitfalls of the gig economy in terms

of health insurance and stability are well known, but staff artists have their own issues too. The big one I know of is that oftentimes when you work for a studio, they own the copyright of the work you produce. I can't speak much more about this, since I haven't worked for a studio myself and I wouldn't want to speak for those who have. In my experience and the experience of most artists starting out, it's very slow going. You have to cold email a lot of art directors who get hundreds of emails from other illustrators. For all illustrators, even the successful ones, the return rate you get for those cold email and postcard campaigns is 3-5 percent. As you get published more, the work you make becomes your self-circulating promo card, as Yuko Shimizu once explained to me in an email exchange we had.

*More generally, considering the sphere of economic relations, do you see artists as workers? What sort of systemic pressures and constraints do labor relations put on art workers? I am thinking of hot-button issues like AI-generated art, crowdfunding (and the*

'Plastic Destruction' by Andrew Mulhearn This illustration is about the discovery of microplastics in human bloodstreams. Plastic is not only destroying the ecosystems of marine life, but it's also contaminating our bodies, and will probably kill us too as soon as we destroy the ecosystems that sustain us.



*platforms that host the ability to crowdfund), and the gig economy that all pose precarity and a constantly changing landscape for art workers, but possibly all have systemic similarities.*

Artists are absolutely workers, but it gets a little tricky to classify them sometimes because of how diverse the field is. Generally, artists are self-employed professionals. Even artists with staff jobs typically run an art business on the side.

I've never used crowdfunding platforms myself, and I haven't read enough about them to be able to give you an intelligent opinion about them, I can tell you what I think about AI and art.

The question of AI and art is a complex topic, but you can break it down into the technical and legal aspects of the problem. The technology is impressive in some ways, but when you read more into what it does, it isn't designed to do the same things that commercial artists do. From my rough understanding of the field, Artificial Intelligence has been divided into two warring camps since its inception. The first camp is symbol manipulation, which is based on manipulating abstract symbols and understanding how these symbols relate to each other. The second camp is called deep learning, which is where you train a program to look at billions of points of data and develop a statistical model that allows it to generate results based on how it reads the data.

The second camp has been dominant since the 80s and 90s and the current crop of image-generation programs is based on that. One might point out vague similarities with how artists will paint hundreds of times to improve and hone their skills, and how AI image generation programs will look at hundreds of images to dictate their output, but the similarities end here. When you design an image as an artist, what you're doing is arranging different shapes of different values into a composition that uses these abstract shapes to represent things like light, anatomy, perspective, good shape language, good composition, and visual metaphor, among millions of other things. These are tasks that involve symbolic, abstract thinking. Some of the things I mention, like "good shape

language," and "good composition" are very subjective. If the programs are given prompts like "Sketch a bicycle and label the parts that roll on the ground", or "Sketch a ladder and label one of the parts you stand on", they rarely, if ever produce the result you're looking for because of what I describe.

The current technology needs to incorporate symbol manipulation in a hybrid system if it even has a hope of achieving its goals, but even there I'm still skeptical of what it can do. Gary Marcus has been advocating for hybrid systems for years, though focusing on AI generally and not art programs specifically. I developed a lot of my reasoning and argumentation from his work here. Now it seems like the argument for hybrid systems is convincing even more mainstream researchers like Yann Lecun, Chief AI Scientist at Meta.

*So, at the technical level, you would not consider AI generated art a widespread threat to commercial artists, in the same way that technology has negatively affected workers under capitalism in say, manufacturing. The "products" you produce and the "labor" you sell cannot (as yet) be considered interchangeable with AI generated art. Perhaps it never will be exactly interchangeable, if people value art made by humans more than art made by AI. Or, perhaps people will come to consider AI just another tool that people can use to make art (like photoshop, illustrator, etc) therefore not replacing artists, but adding an option to their toolkit.*

*This is more of a debate about what is art and to who, but I'd like to drill down into the current situation of art workers and their struggle for just economic relations. If we consider AI generated art as a tool that could be used by people to make stuff, and also used by corporations to extract value and cheapen labor, what should art workers (and all workers) consider in their struggle?*

This leads to the other aspect of this problem as it relates to art workers, the legality of what independent research labs are doing with the technology, and I think in this scenario the problem is far more black-and-white. Not all, but some of the people

working on this technology are trying to generate images based on the style of specific artists. The end goal of this, I believe, is to replace artists with programs that can generate images the way they would for much cheaper. Assuming that AI overcomes all of the hurdles I describe above, the technology would necessarily change how fair use law operates. People get swamped in abstract debates about what is “transformative” in art, but ultimately it boils down to markets.

Copyright law in the United States is designed to protect and promote artistic production by giving artists a monopoly over markets that generate profit from the work they create. Personally, I don’t necessarily like the current system we have, and it’s liable to be draconian and abused by large studios, but it’s the one we have. I can talk more about alternatives in later questions.

Fair use law acknowledges that you can use someone else’s art in ways that don’t infringe on their markets and creates a new work of art (parody and satire are heavily reliant on these protections). A program that can be trained to generate images the way a specific artist would create them does not pass the test of being transformative, even if they’re “new” images, because they’re designed to infringe upon and undercut artists in markets that are typically reserved for said artists alone. If the programs are being used to create an image in the style of a specific artist and are being trained on examples of the artist’s work, I don’t see how you could defend that as anything other than derivative. If the courts let this happen, they might as well toss out the rest of copyright law too.

The response I’ve gotten to my opinion here is usually, “What if they type in the prompt (art in the style of this artist + this other artist)?” Some of my old art teachers believe that your style comes from the combination of your inspirations and influences, but I disagree here. In my experience, finding your personal voice as an artist is a matter of training your eye to observe, your mind to comprehend, and your hand to follow both. You may be inspired by the work of other artists, but what you’re really doing is chipping away and refining what’s already inside you, like carving a statue. Everybody has that innate potential, but some

have more of a drive and a knack to do so.

I love the pen and ink drawings of David Levine, and I’ve tried to do what he does many times. I can’t, but I can do what Andy Mulhearn does. Your work might end up having some similarities to your art heroes, but ultimately it comes from within. That’s why I don’t think the “this artist + this artist” prompt in an image generator would work, because art doesn’t really work like that, and as I mentioned before, AI image generators aren’t designed to deal with abstract ideas like “perspective” “good shape design” and “composition”.

If by some miracle this does change in the future, I don’t see it as something that will be used to cheapen art labor, because, by the time you create machines that can replace visual artists, there’s no reason to believe that you couldn’t create machines that could replace animators, musicians, and writers. It would be the death knell for small independent artists and big studios alike because everything they could produce could be gotten for free. Our society would need to find new ways to support artists rather than giving them a monopoly over markets that generate profit from the work they create. In some ways, that might not necessarily be a bad thing, but if you live in the U.S. that simply means that the arts won’t be supported at all.

*Could you talk about the various responses to these challenges and threats you have described? Is there a history of artists organizing as workers? Are artists also participating in the recent upsurge of labor organizing?*

It’s not easy, because the precariousness of being a self-employed professional makes it harder to organize for better working conditions. It’s a little easier for animators and other art forms where you need a lot of manpower and it’s more collaborative. The Screen Cartoonist’s Guild managed to organize all the animation studios by the thirties and forties. There was a strike at Activision this year, but it only dealt with quality assurance workers, and the union wasn’t recognized.

There is a union for my field of commercial art, the Graphic Artists' Guild, but the nature of the type of employment that members work in make it more of a copyright protection advocacy group, rather than a union as one would typically imagine it. They do offer healthcare and a legal referral network, so I do plan to join it one day when I make more money from my art.

*Of course, like all of us, artists are not solely workers and do not exist solely in the realm of economics. Art itself and therefore artists can be a source of care, connection, and expression in our community and kinship spheres. Art can certainly be political as a*

'Catherine's Palace' by Andrew Mulhearn

This illustration is about how entrenched power is always much weaker than it appears, and was based on John Reed's description of St. Petersburg right before the second Russian Revolution.



*form of either dissent or consent. It can be rebellion, celebration, solidarity, education, propaganda, etc. I'd like to widen our discussion and ask you about artistic activism. Could you talk a little about other artist activists whom you admire or specific works of artistic activism?*

The great all-time example of art as activism was Picasso's *Guernica*. Even though it was commissioned by the Spanish Republic to protest the Fascist bombing of *Guernica*, it still has power to this day. When Colin Powell went before the U.N. to ask for authorization to attack Iraq, U.N. officials covered up an embroidered copy of the painting that Powell was standing in front of. Of course, people still knew what painting was behind the tarp, and the fact that they felt the necessity to cover it up only highlighted the irony and terrible injustice of the situation more. That's what art as activism looks like to me.

My field of commercial art is not bereft of examples either. A powerful example of art as activism was the work of David Levine. During the Vietnam war, when things were beginning to look bad for the administration, Johnson circulated a picture of himself showing his gallbladder scar when it got removed. He had a reputation for liking to be seen as "tough" and that was him trying to do that. David Levine did a caricature of that but replaced the gallbladder scar with the topography of Vietnam. At that point in the war, the cartoon was devastating for the Johnson administration.

Another commercial artist who I really admire, Art Young, nearly got put in jail for one of his cartoons about WWI. Some of the artists and editors of his paper *The Masses* got put on trial for violating the Espionage Act for "trying to halt or obstruct recruitment of soldiers for the U.S. Army." His cartoon was of an editor, a clergyman, a capitalist, and a government official all dancing to a devil's tune and advocating for the war, and it was titled "War is Hell." Some people thought it was dangerous enough in those days that he should go to jail for it. Thankfully he was acquitted both times.

I know this is a little outside of the scope of the

question, but I think it's important to warn people on the left that they shouldn't take art for granted as a tool for social change. In historical terms, it's very unusual that art is being used to promote left-wing causes at all. For a long time, at least in Europe, art was used to legitimize the Catholic Church, absolutist monarchs, and the mercantile elites of the Dutch Republic and England. The latter is what gave us our current "fine art" market. Art can be used to envision a better world and rail against injustice, or it can be used to legitimize the status quo.

*We've covered a lot of ground and discussed the world as it is today, the struggle of art workers, and the roles that art can play in all our struggles. This wouldn't be a ZNetwork interview if we didn't finally dig into the political imaginary and ask, "what do you want"? What is the better world you seek? Have you personally engaged with any post-capitalist, liberatory, utopian, or other kind of vision that informs your struggle?*

Absolutely, I learned from Alexander Cockburn a long time ago that any transformative vision of the world ultimately needs a utopian vision to back it. My utopia is pretty simple, and in some ways pretty selfish. The world I seek is one where we use the greater efficiency of modern technology and a more rational organization of labor to drastically cut the hours of the working day, to a degree where everybody does jobs that are as necessary to the functioning of society (such as sanitation work) but have far more free time than they do working hours. This would ideally allow everyone to pursue art if they so wished. Artists wouldn't have to deal with the economic pressure of supporting themselves with their work, so issues like Copyright would become a vestigial organ of the bad old days. We're very far away from that vision right now, but everything can change faster than people ever expect, for better or worse.

*What does an artistic future look like? From the fiction of LeGuin, to Chambers, to solarpunk art, to music, there are endless creative ways we can imagine a better world and inspire others to fight for*

*it. How about we finish off with some of your recommendations...*

I talked a lot about visual art in our interview, so I'll start my answer off with some musicians. I think the reader will likely be familiar with names like Pete Seeger, Billy Bragg, and Phil Ochs, but they probably haven't heard of Leon Rosselson. He's my favorite left-wing folk musician, and I can't think of any other artist who's better at poetic metaphor than he is.

I already mentioned David Levine and Picasso, but I also like looking at WPA art, both the murals and the posters and graphics that were commissioned by it.

Molly Crabapple is a great artist too, and someone who combines reporting and art in a way that nobody else can compete with, in my opinion.

Yuko Shimizu makes brilliant illustrations and she's one of my inspirations. Steve Brodner is a masterful caricaturist too.

*Thanks again for this conversation, Andrew! How can people check out more of your work? And do you have any advice for others who want to make art and to make change?*

You can find my new work on my Instagram, @andy\_mulh, and on my website, <https://www.andy-mulh.art>. If I were to give advice to somebody starting out (which admittedly is not very far from where I am now) I would tell them to be patient. Building up a freelance career in the arts is going to take time, and early on, cold-emailing people will feel a lot like screaming into the void. If your work is good and you are quick and reliable, you'll most likely be able to support yourself. In the meantime, it's good to get a day job while you're building up your career. Whatever your goals in creating art are, whether it's to entertain or to change the world, don't sell out. What I mean by that is, don't create art that advocates against the world you want to see for money. To give a basic example, if you hate cigarettes and would think that the world is better without them, don't do an ad for cigarettes. The same goes for economic or foreign policy, whatever your beliefs there are.

# New Z Interviews Old Z

Fintan Bradshaw interviews Michael Albert

*Why did you and Lydia Sargent embark on South End Press and then later Z Magazine? Why did the magazine rise; why did it decline?*

With many others, including Lydia's son Eric, we had earlier begun and worked at South End Press, publishing books. After years of highly innovative book publishing we began to feel that as positive as that work was, having a more regular relationship with a stable and hopefully growing audience via a monthly magazine would be a good addition. Lydia and I had become frustrated that we had no way to engage more often and more directly with the people South End's books were reaching. While the length and breadth of the books was great, we wanted a more regular two-way connection. So we proposed a magazine. The South End collective felt it was too risky to tie the press to a new project of such magnitude, so we began it as a new project that was financially separate, but of course mutually supportive.

I think Z Magazine rose for an obvious reason. From years of publishing we had wonderful connections with many wonderful writers. Z's aim to provide analysis but especially vision and strategy was timely. So too was addressing race, gender, class, and authority interactively, without privileging one above the others.

I should say, a big factor in the life of South End Press and the early rise of Z was a number of particular writers and their books, for example, Bell Hooks whose first book, *Ain't I A Woman* we published at South End Press and who later wrote regularly for Z, Noam Chomsky whose books we had published and who wrote a long essay every month for Z, and also Ed Herman, and likewise Holly Sklar, Howard Zinn, Manning Marable, Jeremy Brecher, Alex Cockburn, and many others who became frequent or every issue contributors. I think Z's decline, much later, was also at least in part simple to explain. We had read-

er support but we had no funds beyond that. And over time the growth of the internet provided free content—and we did that as well via ZNet—which sufficiently undercut our paid audience to reduce our funds too severely to withstand.

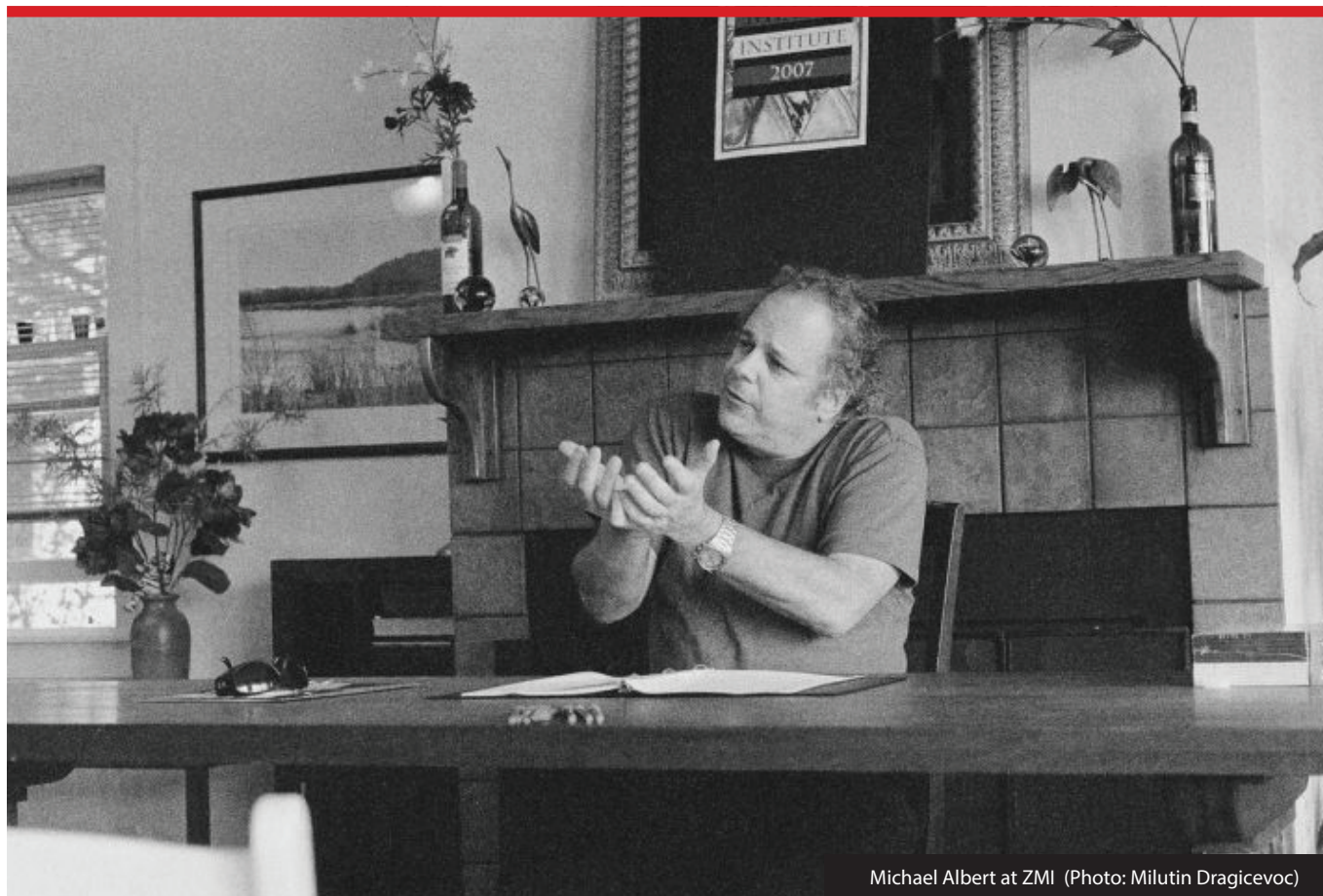
*You were partners with Lydia Sargent for just under fifty years. What impact do you think she had on Z and on you?*

Regarding the magazine, first the obvious things. She affected what was solicited, what was published, the layout, and everything about the product. Then there were crises that she helped navigate. Lydia also filmed and produced videos and assembled ZBooks, along with being incredibly strong and inspiring by way of her radical theatre work. Lydia also thought up and pushed for another big project, Z Media Institute, and her humor and energy, along with her teaching, set its tone. ZMI was, I think, arguably our most effective project, albeit only happening once a year.

Regarding me, I think Lydia enlarged my commitment to feminism, refined my commitments to participation and self management, moderated my tendencies to excess, and nurtured what good there was in me so I could do better, as well as making my days brighter.

*Why did you go online; why did that effort dramatically and rapidly rise, and a lot later slowly subside, and what makes you think it can now rise again?*

It is almost the same explanation as for the magazine. Going online could provide daily interaction, not just monthly, so it was another step up that path of greater connection, and that was the main impetus. I suppose it is similar to why bands like to perform live even after they don't really need it for promotion or income. This time I happened to have



Michael Albert at ZMI (Photo: Milutin Dragicevov)

some relevant learning to get things going so it didn't require excessive start up funds. And, again, because of our contacts and focus, our online projects quickly became, arguably, the place for serious anti capitalist, anti imperialist, anti racist, anti sexist, and anti authoritarian community. And it went beyond being against what was bad to emphasizing things to be for and how to attain them. So Z's online efforts grew quite quickly, though at the same time, there were various missteps and complications.

At the large scale extreme, we tried to argue for and even create a truly left alternative to Facebook and Twitter. In fact, we tried that before those platforms were widespread with something we called Shareworld, and then later, we also tried again when those platforms were dominant. The stories and what I saw to be associated lessons of those and other projects are related in the book *Remembering Tomorrow*. As far as decline, as time passed, there were steadily more sites doing what ZNet was doing, and thus ZNet came back toward the mean, becoming one among many.

As to the updated, rebuilt ZNetwork, I think it will rise dramatically because again the time is right for its particular inclinations, because it is so damn

attractive and user friendly, but even more so, because its international staff is incredibly talented and creative. I expect a year or two down the road ZNetwork will be a major destination with a whole range of innovative and original offerings.

*Can you remember some of the most scary moments of doing Z and particularly ZNet?*

For Z Magazine I guess what was most scary were the early fund raising appeals, and waiting for returns, knowing they were literally life and death. For ZNet, I suppose it was when we were under systematic hacker attacks and trying to deal with that and then recover from it. For both together, I suppose it was when the IRS repeatedly came after us with a vengeance that lawyers told us they had never before seen the likes of. We weathered it all, but I'd be lying if I said none of it hindered us. Psychologically, somewhat. Materially, quite a lot.

*Can you remember some of the most frustrating moments of doing Z and particularly ZNet?*

Well, if you set the bar really high, and I obsessively do just that, then even as you progress you will very



Lydia Sargent at ZMI (Photo: Milutin Dragicevov)

often fall short of your aims, hopefully to try anew. So there were plenty of such moments. For example, a somewhat unusual frustration was that with Z Magazine—and this was at the outset, for few years, so it was decades ago—when we would ask readers for their views on Z and their advice, those who responded would with considerable regularity say, “it is too long. There are too many pieces that are so good that I feel I should read them. But I don’t want to. Cut it back.” To us this seemed, to be civil about it, ridiculous. Why couldn’t they read what they wanted without feeling the rest shouldn’t be there at all. I remember saying, “You don’t say that about The New York Times, Scientific American, or Sports Illustrated. Why do you say it about Z?”

After a while we understood. Some people who responded—and we could tell it was by and large, and seemingly ironically, academics or, if not, then quite well read and privileged readers—were really saying, often quite explicitly, “give us Noam, Ed, and some other good stuff on international relations, and a little on current economics, and leave out the rest.” They were saying, in other words, “leave out the pieces focusing on race, gender, sexuality, and activism. Leave out the vision stuff. Leave out the strategy stuff. It is too much.” Of course we doubled down against that sentiment. Partly, we knew it was only a subset of readers, albeit the subset that was most prone to send us advice. Partly, even if it had

been every reader, we wouldn’t have complied. Our agenda was primarily political not primarily fiscal. We sought precisely to emphasize the stuff readers didn’t want to have to skip over. But when we thought more on it—it got even more distressing. The readers saying “cut a lot, I don’t even want it in the magazine, I don’t want to see it,” were saying, “look, at some level I know that stuff is important, and so I feel guilty when I don’t read it, and I would rather not feel guilty like that, so leave it out so I don’t have to feel guilty.” Really, that is what was going on, at least for a time, and for some readers. And that was indeed extremely frustrating.

For ZNet, honestly, I guess the most frustrating thing aside from sometimes getting analogous comments to the above, and the lack of response to our efforts to generate new social media, was the extent to which sites that reprinted from all over creation would steer clear of reprinting from ZNet. Maybe they didn’t like me or Lydia. Or maybe they didn’t want to acknowledge ZNet or contribute to its growth. But why? Maybe they didn’t like the distinctive views that came from ZNet, often addressing controversial issues like fund raising on the left, alternative media policy and structure, and new vision. Honestly I don’t know. No one ever said why. But it was true, and it was most true for anything that had vision in it, especially participatory vision. Hopefully that situation, if not entirely past, is largely past.

And then, for frustration, there was the year the World Social Forum asked us to put together a set of sessions on vision and strategy. They wanted it as a theme for the whole event so the Forum would have ample sessions devoted to a new world worth winning, and to how to win it, with Z chosen to organize lots of folks to attend and to present, and with the Forum promising to promote whatever we came up with very aggressively. This was posed to us, in other words, as them wanting us to help inject a clear visionary and strategic focus into the event. We were surprised but elated to get the invite. They also asked us to prepare promotion for this thematic part of the Forum, which they would circulate, and they asked us to help them get keynote presenters, even beyond

the people on our panels, and so on. It was a very big deal and we were excited, humbled, and motivated by their interest and trust. And so we assembled and brought about thirty folks from around the world to conduct about 20 interrelated sessions, including arranging housing for them. I don't remember exactly the number, but all of the sessions were on vision and strategy and they were interrelated to compose a thematic whole, as requested.

It is a long story and I think it's again in Remembering Tomorrow. Suffice it to say, at the last minute, literally a week or so before we were to leave for the event, and so after people had prepared and bought tickets to travel and after we had arranged rooms for everyone, and so on, some WSF higher ups pulled the rug out from under the whole effort. They sent us a cursory note, offering no reasons, saying they had decided to dump it all. Threats and demands followed and they finally said, okay, you can all come, and we will put your sessions in the schedule. And they did, sort of. They put our sessions in venues spread all over creation—not together as planned—and with no promotion despite our preparing and sending tons of materials which they just dumped. If someone attending did manage to find a venue where one of our events was held—literally like in exile, since to attend was very difficult and almost impossible without taking a taxi—the person would wind up so far from the main areas that they couldn't attend one of our sessions and then make it back to go to something else for the next session much less go much further to try and attend another of our sessions.

*What happened to cause the last minute about face? My guess was that those who invited us didn't have final power. They were totally sincere, but then those who had final power got wind of it, and they presumably didn't like the content and intervened. Ah well. It is distant past.*

Can you remember some of the most positive moments of doing Z and ZNet?

If you believe, rightly or wrongly, that something you do generally, or some specific thing you do, or

something that you provide, potentially matters, you feel good about that. And there was lots of that. We would sometimes undertake associated projects, gatherings, organizing campaigns, and so on. And when they worked well, it was a positive moment. Even just a good issue, a good article, was a good moment. But the truth is, speaking for myself, I always aim way higher than will plausibly occur, so even successes nearly always fall well short of hopes.

*Since the birth of Z, in a time pre-internet, has the media landscape changed much and did this affect the work of Z and ZNet?*

I suppose the biggest change has been the character of the media, and the implications of that. Back as Facebook, Twitter, and whatnot were first being born, Lydia and I were very harsh critics. We took a beating for that as even good friends felt we were being purist, and sometimes took our criticisms of the new social media as criticisms of them for using and even celebrating it, and bristled back. They were right in one sense, but wrong, I think, in another. The sense they were right was that we would lose audience relative to other progressive media by dissing social media and not using it, but we knew that. Actually, Lydia held her ground on that even better than I did. The sense they were wrong was that social media was and remains largely an abomination—though a left version of social media, which we tried and failed to create, could have been incredibly positive. So, perhaps it is self serving, but I think our losses on this front weren't so much because we were aggressively critical of existing social media and adventurist in trying to develop left social media, as they were because others were insufficiently critical of existing social media and unreasonably defeatist in not trying to develop left social media.

The continuing impact of change in media is, I think, huge but also hard to precisely pinpoint. Information is nuggetized. Attention spans are seriously decreased. Debate grows too often defensive and uncivil, by now often verging on violent. In the old old days, to organize something you had to go door to door and talk for an extended time with people. For that matter, to put written words in range of

eyes, you had to use a mimeograph machine for hours on end, and then put the leaflets under doors or hand them out on the street. The internet came along and reduced hours to minutes in various respects. That had promise. But with social media much progressive activity became mobilizing an already committed group via internet communications, but not talking to new people beyond the committed group's borders. You might say much activity became mobilizing but not organizing. Thankfully, or perhaps hopefully, I think that perhaps reaching out and organizing is again becoming a priority.

ZNet was one of the first websites to take the internet seriously as a publishing and dissemination platform and that seems to have contributed to its success. However, when the so-called "web 2.0" came along, that is, the social media platforms, you called for an effort for the left to develop its own, collectively self-managed social media platforms ("Z Social"), which never managed to take off. Talk about your thinking behind that, why you rejected the more popular privately owned social media platforms, and why the Z effort to create left social media didn't take off.

For those old enough to remember, back before the World Wide Web and in the days of dial-up connectivity, Z saw aspects of the coming future and so we became a dial-up provider. We wrote a connection program to use through modems, created the platform to connect to, solicited users, etc. It was a mini America On Line, for those who remember those days. Somewhat later, when the world wide web first appeared but dial-up was still dominant, we tried with some partners to create a collaborative online system for the whole left, a Left Online. We called it ShareWorld. Still later we tried, as you note, ZSocial. All of that is described in the earlier mentioned book, *Remembering Tomorrow*. And, referring back to other questions, there was a fair share of frustration and something akin to heartbreak in all that.

My antipathy to social media emerged at its outset. It seemed to me to be a vehicle for massive intrusion

and spying on the public and for replacing face to face communications with something far less social. I feared a dumbing down of debate and thus of creative thought. It turned out that social media provoked all those ills and that it was also a factory for anti social behavior and diminished attention spans. Like anyone, I could also see the potential good in the broad concept of social media, but I was dumbstruck, you might call it, by the number of left activists who thought mega corporations would be easily side tracked from having their way. You can see with a candle or you can get burned by a candle. If the candle is in the hands of the devil, get some burn ointment. Social media was in the hands of the devil.

Regrettably our efforts to provide an alternative social media in left hands floundered for various reasons, most of which were specific to the times. But for the effort you are referring too—ZSocial—part of the failure was a lack of resources, though the programmer who built it did a wonderful job. But I think the more basic and determinative problem was instead twofold. On the one hand, the corporate platforms by then had everyone signed up. On the other hand, there wasn't much feeling at that time that their having everyone signed up was a two edged sword. We could use social media some, it was true, but elites could direct it endlessly and destructively. So when it was time to sign up for ZSocial, people's understandable but I felt short-sighted reaction was that we wanted them to use a social network that nearly no one was on (that's how you start) when the network they were on, in their eyes, worked well. No thanks, they said. What are called barriers to entry in an industry are usually the very high cost of getting going as well as an uphill climb against entrenched, incredibly well heeled already well established actors. We more or less handled the financial obstacle to creating the project, though not to massively promoting it. But the other factors mentioned above sealed ZSocial's stillbirth.

*ZNetwork plans to concede the battle over social media and participate in its use. What words of advice would you have about what a responsible use of social media ought to look like for a radical website such as ZNetwork?*

I know the intent, and I can't take issue with it. There was a time when we could conceivably create a left-informed, popularly self-managed social media and that possibility may return, in which case I would certainly strongly favor it. But at the moment, just like you might use a bank, or you might get a vaccine from a grotesque pharmaceutical company, or you might even seek help from police, it is a simple fact that living in the world we currently inhabit requires that we sometimes dance with the devil in order to do what good we can even while we try to avoid becoming devilish. The trick to that is to not lose track of what is going on. Leftists use banks but we don't then start to think banks aren't so bad, so maybe capitalism isn't so bad. In the early days, folks signed up for social media and went from just using it to singing its praises and even singing the praises of the corporations behind it. Many ignored or were even hostile to critical insights about what was going on. So I guess the best I can offer by way of advice is if you use social media to reach out, don't succumb to the idea that that is organizing so that face to face work is unnecessary. Yes, convey information, but while doing so don't get bulldozed by what is commonplace on platforms into thinking everything has to be nugget-ized into a little package, with serious substance largely left behind.

*In the same period, has the left and political situation more generally changed and has this affected Z?*

Of course the left and political situation has changed, but at the risk of self serving, one large change that is very far along, and one that is percolating, weren't new for Z. Z had actually been pushing for similar but not identical change long before those two changes gained traction, indeed, all the way back to South End Press days. I have in mind the rise of what is called intersectionality and the rise of attention to what we desire, not just to what we reject. On the other hand, the intensification of defensive ad hominem and otherwise counter productive infighting, certainly by no means new, but also without doubt spread more widely than earlier, has been a serious problem. Another focus of ZNet and Z and earlier has been our emphasizing the existence of a third class and the implications of that for

organizing, program, etc. This too is getting greater attention now, including attention to economic vision not only beyond capitalism, but also beyond what has called itself twentieth century socialism.

*Noam Chomsky is a friend of the New ZNetwork. You have been friends with him for over fifty years. I won't ask you to reveal all about him, though no doubt it would be interesting to hear. Instead, what impact do you think he has had on Z and on you?*

I think for Z and also for me, Noam has been arguably the central locus of political, intellectual, and operational influence. It is partly his analyses, of course, but it is also his behavior: steadfast, always informed, always listening, just exemplary in so many respects. To have him as a friend, as someone to talk with about events, and as someone to publish, and whose interventions on our behalf were so powerfully helpful, has been a privilege, a model, and a massive aid. I doubt South End Press would have begun or lasted but for our relationship, and the same goes for Z right up to the present.

Back in South End Press days, in 1986, you co-authored a book titled *Liberating Theory*. There were six other co-authors Lydia Sargent, Robin Hahnel, Noam Chomsky, Mel King, Leslie Cagan and Holly Sklar. How did that happen? What was the process? And even more, what were you all saying and what role did the views play thereafter for yourself and South End Press and then for Z?

Well the ideas were circulating in the radically engaged air of the times, I suppose you might say they were blowing the wind, revolution in the air. Some of us called this aspect addressing the "totality of oppression," which at the time meant addressing class, race, gender, and authority. The idea of the book was to give those insights that were then circulating more coherence and momentum. The hope was that the multi-author approach would both improve any text that would emerge, and also lend some credibility and importance to the book. The project happened because South End pushed hard for it and the various folks got on board.

The process was to write a draft and circulate it to incorporate changes until everyone was happy to sign on to the result. I guess people can get the book and decide for themselves how well that approach worked. What we were saying, in a nutshell, was that societies inevitably have political, economic, kinship, and cultural/community spheres of life amidst surrounding international and ecological relations. More, each of those spheres are unavoidable and potentially (and indeed almost always) not just profoundly important regarding generating their own political, economic, gender, sexual, and racial, ethnic, and national hierarchies of oppression and domination (or of fulfillment and liberation), but also in that each of the spheres emanates influences throughout society that impact the other spheres to come into accord and that even bend other spheres such that they too become producers of the source sphere's hierarchy. So, for example, kinship relations generate sexism, homophobia, etc., but they also bend other dimensions of life, like the economy for example, to not only accord with sex/gender hierarchies, but even to reproduce them. And vice versa. And so on. Round and round for all combinations of the four spheres.

Liberating Theory addressed each of these four sides of life in turn. For three of the spheres, we mostly offered the concepts that had arisen from left practice regarding that sphere—thus concepts from existing feminism, anti-racism, and anti-authoritarianism—and beyond what was familiar from those approaches we mainly appended concepts to account for mutual interactivity, that was later called intersectionality. However, for one sphere, the economy, Liberating Theory critiqued certain underlying concepts of the associated dominant left perspective, which was then Marxism. Liberating Theory sought to add equal priority attention to the other three spheres to an economic approach just as it sought to add to the other approaches the interactivity of all four. Beyond that, however, in the economic case we sought to also add attention to a third class between labor and capital among other refinements.

The upshot of the book's offerings for South End Press and later for Z Magazine and ZNet was that

each of the media projects emphasized all four spheres of life, sought to clarify their accommodation to one another, sought to discern their reproduction of one another, and finally I think the book's approach also fed the idea of participatory economy, and then of participatory society, plus the need to address underlying institutions in all four spheres to conceive a really new world.

*Having talked a bit about one book, maybe we should take up some others. You and then later you and Robin Hahnel together wrote a few books dealing directly with Marxism and Marxist thought. How come? And what role did they play for your later pursuits? Do you think they are still relevant?*

Way back even before South End Press, and indeed I suppose setting the operational stage for that project's emergence, I wrote a book called *What Is To Be Undone* and Lydia and I produced it for a small press in Boston. For short, we called it WITBU and it offered an anarchistic, councilist critique of the then predominant Marxism Leninism, and at the same time as an alternative it began formulating the later much refined holist approach of *Liberating Theory*. Then, as you note, Robin and I focussed in on elements of Marxism, with a book called *Unorthodox Marxism* and with a two book set called *Marxism and Socialist Theory and Socialism Today and Tomorrow*. The critique in those books came up in articles and in other works, too. These works were consistent with but addressed a narrower focus than and preceded *Liberating Theory*.

The reason all this occurred was that we felt that the then prevalent Marxist and Marxist Leninist orientations, while of course having many insights, also had very damaging flaws. We agreed, for example, that economics and class affect all else, but we argued that affecting all else was also true for polity, kinship, and culture/community. We agreed that economic ownership relations could generate class differences and especially class rule, but we argued that the corporate division of labor by which some employees are empowered but most who labor are disempowered could also generate class division and class rule.



View from ZMI classroom (Photo: Milutin Dragicevov)

*One of the abiding constants of Z's history from South End Press days all the way to the present has been an almost obsessive focus on vision, and vision has occupied you personally over and over and arguably, in some people's perceptions, even obsessively. Why is that? Why write a book, and another, and another, on essentially one topic? Are you obsessed?*

The short answer is yes, I am, depending on how you define the word. My question is, why isn't everyone? We want a better world. Doesn't that make arriving at shared views about what that world can be something we should pursue?

*Take a step back. Why do people write yet another book on capitalism, or racism, or sexism, or imperialism, or why do they write three or four books on those, say, or eight or ten—when there aren't just some books on those topics already available, but hundreds and probably thousands of books on those topics already available?*

Well, the writer who writes another book on one of those topics presumably thinks that the subject matter (capitalism, racism, etc.) is very important. And the writer presumably thinks that a new book

may reach new people, or might perhaps clarify some related content, or both. I don't think motives are much different than that for someone writing repeatedly about vision for a new society, or, for that matter, someone writing repeatedly about a particular vision for one part of society—for example a book about participatory economics—than are the motives for someone writing repeatedly about, say, capitalism, or racism.

Is having shared vision important for answering the question, what do we want? Is having shared vision important for enriching our critique of what is, by way of our having a contrasting alternative that we seek? Is having shared vision important for not winding up somewhere we would rather not arrive, but instead winding up at a sought destination? Is having shared vision important for orienting our choices so they not only reject present injustice, but so they also offer a positive view of what is needed to attain future justice? Finally, do we need shared vision for all the above reasons in order to win a new world? I think we do. And do we want to win a new world? I do, therefore I keep at it, obsessively, if you like.

*There are lots of long works on Participatory Economics, the vision you are most associated with, but how about if we get personal about it? What do you think it adds that is new to anti-capitalist thought and activity? What difference have its ideas had for your own life choices?*

Participatory economics has five defining features: a commons of means of production, self managing workers and consumers councils, balanced job complexes, equitable remuneration for only duration, intensity, and onerousness of socially valuable labor, and participatory planning.

The idea that private ownership needs to be replaced is not new. The idea of a productive commons, even decades back when this vision was first introduced, was also not new, though I think we refined the meaning. Nor was the idea of having councils as sites of decision making new, though the idea of having self management as a basis for decision making within councils was new in the actual meaning we had for it, which is people having a say in decisions in proportion as they are affected by them. Balanced job complexes to replace what we called the corporate division of labor as a necessary condition to attain classlessness was new, though the concerns it addressed in an original way had much earlier precedent in certain past anarchist work. Equitable remuneration instead of not only profit seeking and income for bargaining power, which were familiar, was new in rejecting income for output and in being explicit about remunerating duration, intensity, and onerousness of socially valuable work. And participatory planning in place of markets and central planning was new, though many others had urged the need for such a thing but not developed it. Seeing what was called twentieth century socialism as an economic type in which a class empowered by their position in the division of labor dominates workers below—we called it coordinatorism—was also largely new, and attracted much hostility.

Why do the five institutions that I favor each work? How can they work together? Why will they deliver desired outcomes? What criticisms exist, and what answers do we have to those criticisms? These are

the kinds of focus that move efforts to advocate participatory economics from the above single paragraph to the long books you mentioned.

As far as a difference in my life choices, you have rightly noted that believing in the vision caused me to spend huge even obsessive amounts of time and effort advocating it, debating it, and trying to improve it in talks, interviews, articles, and books. It also led me to try to understand what trying to implement the visionary aims, even while living in current society, calls for by way of organizing and activism, and to advocate and try to act on that. I wouldn't say I am obsessed with vision to the exclusion of all else, but I would agree that I am obsessed with it to a degree beyond most anything else I focus on.

*What has been the biggest obstacle to advancing vision at all, and participatory economics in particular?*

I wish I knew the biggest obstacle, and all the lesser ones as well, with any real confidence. Maybe then I could do a better job of getting past them. Attention to vision at all, and therefore to arriving at a shared conception of what we seek—not arriving at a blueprint but at sufficient clarity about key elements to both orient our activities and overcome widespread skepticism that any fundamental change for the better is possible—has not been a widely shared priority. Books, articles, talks, and whatnot not only on economic vision, but arguably even more so on political, kinship, and cultural vision, and not just values but institutions—there is not so much of that. Why is that? I have heard many answers.

Some say, “it is easier to write about what is unjust and oppressive. When we do that we feel confident and are unlikely to make mistakes. When we venture to offer positive vision, we are not as confident and we may well make errors and get criticized for them.” Others say, “vision is not needed. What matters is understanding current relations and of course activism. Vision is too distant.” And still others say, “vision goes beyond what we can reasonably know” and for that matter some critics of vision wonder,

“who are we to prescribe anything for the future? That is for people living in the future to do.”

Of those three answers, I get the first one, and it is true enough, but I don't think it should deter us any more than the fact that organizing and activism are difficult should deter us from organizing and activism.

I think the second reason is just wrong. Understanding our current situation and being active are of course priorities, but vision helps with the former and provides orientation for the latter. Plus, having shared vision addresses the constituencies we encounter who really want to know what they are being asked to seek and why it will yield sustainable and powerful results.

The third concern, however, I agree with. That is, I agree that it is quite easy to fall into proposing things that are beyond our capacity to know to be necessary, and which in many cases, won't even be necessary. And I also agree with the sentiment that it is people in the future who should decide the details of their future lives. That is their job, not ours. So why aren't I deterred from trying to offer vision and from urging others to do so as well?

Well, I am deterred by those last concerns from trying to exceed what we can reasonably know. I am oriented to address only what is necessary for us to achieve if future people are to be in position to self manage their lives. That to me is what the shared vision I hope we attain needs to be: a proposal for whatever is essential in the domains that it addresses for people to be able to self manage equitably, socially supportively, and without domination of some by others. And that is why for me participatory economics has only five core features. I think we can now know that those five are each necessary if we are to have a classless economy that is equitable, self managed, and so on. For economy, beyond those five features, and even in the evolution of those five features, I think there will be countless contingent additions informed by the experiences and desires of future people.

*What do you think ought to be the main guiding principles for a left media project such as ZNetwork?*

Well, any such project should take into account, I think, its means, and its political leanings and given those it should decide where its work might best contribute what otherwise might not be available. So, if you can only reach a left audience with your content, recognize that. If you have means to reach much more widely, recognize that. If the audience you can reach is saturated with a certain type of material, and you think another type that is barely available is also important, recognize that. Some may disagree, but for me the point of creating a left media project, or the point of creating any left project, shouldn't be simply to persist. It should be to contribute to the struggle for social change. The size of your audience isn't the sole criterion of success. Tons of people accessing redundant material isn't very good, it isn't success. Even the quality of your product isn't alone important. Perfect politics conveyed in perfect words accessed by no one also isn't success. What matters is to utilize the means at your disposal to have a positive effect. There were plenty of times when Z could have done something that would appeal to more readers or to more donors, say, but to do that would not have been as much of a contribution as doing something with more movement benefit that was not yet popular. We didn't always get it right, I am sure. And certainly a case could be made that, for example, critically using social media instead of only critiquing and boycotting it would have helped Z have better impact. On the other hand, had we done that, would we have then conveyed the message we did, or would that message have been diminished, diluted, and perhaps even entirely jettisoned? It is hard to judge these things, even in hindsight, much less at the outset.

Throughout Z's iterations and your more than 45 years in left media and publishing, your work has been known as a constant in both elevating what is actually radical and worthy among left movements, as opposed to what might be proposed as radical at any given moment, and simultaneously as a constant in providing space for diverse voices and opinions that run against the grain. What advice do you have

for the current and future stewards of ZNetwork, and for anyone involved in media and publishing, for achieving this combination of consistency of worth and diversity of dissent? Especially in the age of the internet, social media, and algorithms, how might we both stay true to worthy vision and analysis while remaining open to taking risks and encouraging creativity?

To ask the question so clearly and eloquently, betokens that you will answer it well. Each situation that arises has its own special features which make providing the obvious answer important but incomplete. Do not jettison your beliefs just to accommodate widespread contrary views. Test your beliefs as best you can, over and over, against the evidence of reality and reason. That many say something doesn't make that something wrong or right. To stay true to worthy vision and analysis requires that you have a worthy vision, and that you continually test it. To remain open to taking risks and encouraging creativity requires, I think, that you understand that diversity of opinion and even presenting opposition views is part and parcel of participatory progress. Respect contrary views. Engage with contrary views. Of course, what makes all this difficult, is that if you are a media project, you want to do all the above but at the same time you don't want to give precious time and resources to views that are wrong and harmful. When you get down to specifics, what to do becomes a case by case judgement call. One thing that I think can sometimes help transcend the implied singularity of each situation is an advisory to debate contending views. When dissent surfaces, assuming it isn't just idiocy—and sometimes even when it is idiocy but lots of people relate to it—one very useful approach, is to say okay, let's debate these issues fairly, civilly, and without resort to impugning motives and otherwise straying from argument and evidence to defamation or to appeals to scriptural type authority.

*Of all of the media and political projects that you launched and worked on during your long activist career, which one are you proudest of and why?*

I once wrote a memoir, mentioned earlier. I tried

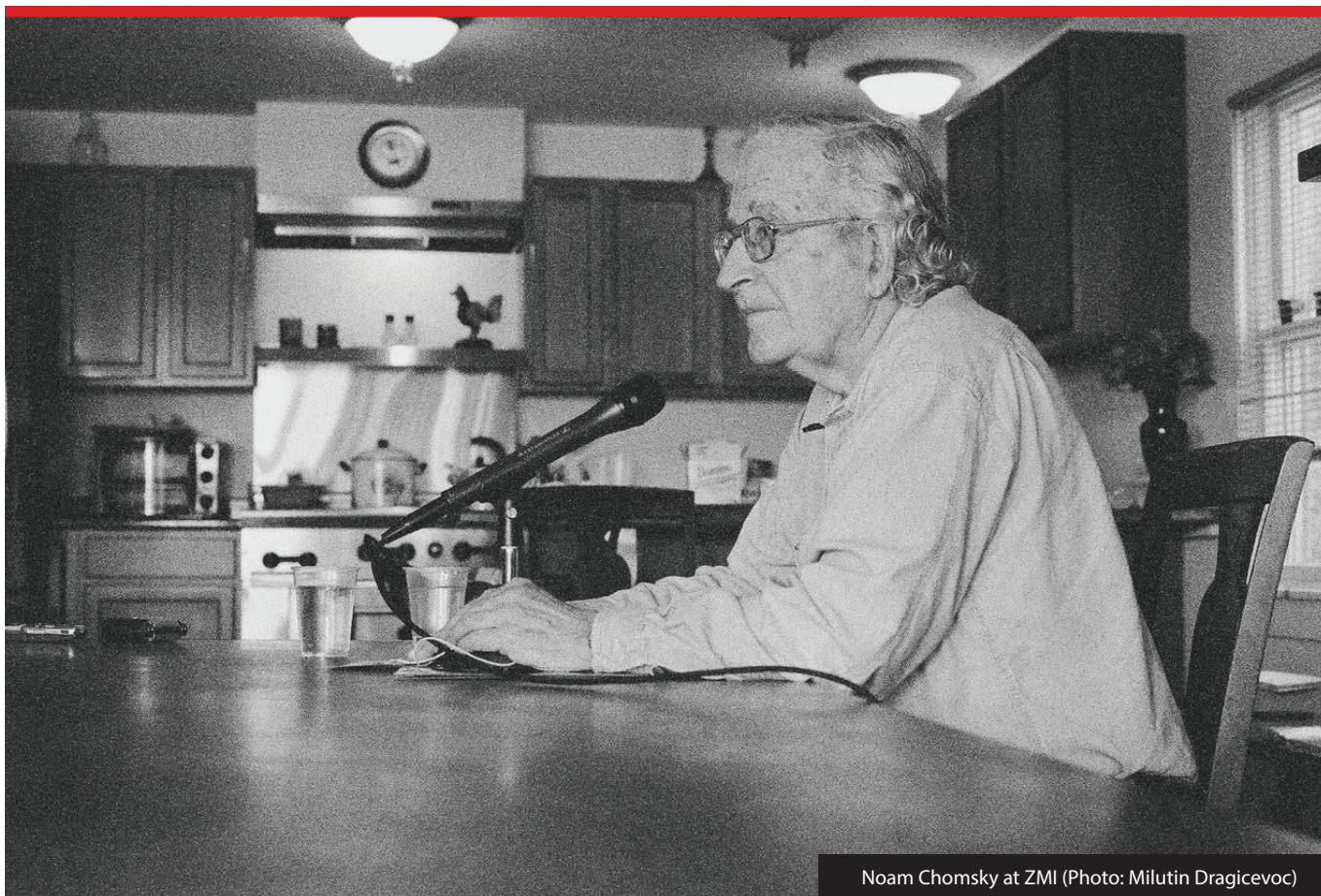
throughout it to describe events and projects in ways that would discern and highlight lessons. Since I worked on that, almost twenty years ago, this interview is, I suspect, the most time I have given to thinking about my past involvements. But to answer, I am honestly not proud, I think, of any of it. When I think about past projects, and I admit that I would rather not, I instead feel the gigantic gap between where we ought to be by now, as a country, as a left, and even as individuals, and where we are, and I wish I and my generation had been able to do better. But, that said, there was something about the Z Media Institute, in particular, that was quite special. The mood that Lydia's creativity and spirit imbued it with each year created an amazing atmosphere in which people shared and learned at a remarkable pace and with remarkable intensity. So I guess that is what comes to my mind, spurred by your question.

*As you take a step back from Z and forward into the future, how do you envision spending your time and energy unencumbered with daily activities of Z? Do you plan to Kayak off into the sunset to play Go for the rest of your days?*

Actually, truth be told, I am a bit afraid of not doing the daily activities, or not thinking about what to do with ZNetwork as a staff member. Will I have the wherewithal to fill my newly available time with other worthy activity? I haven't kayaked in some time. I do play Go, online, when I need a break. And honestly, I watch a lot of popular TV and read a lot of best selling books. When I get hard at work writing something long, it takes up most of my time and the TV and game playing diminish. But I don't know, and how can anyone know in advance, if I have any more of that in me. And if I don't, then there will be more time to fill. I hope it isn't more time with my eyeballs glued to the TV. I guess we will see.

*Perhaps we should have more sessions like this, but lest this one gets too long, one last question. Who else has by their words or actions been a major influence on Z and on you?*

I don't know how to answer that. Over the decades many friends, many people I have worked with have



Noam Chomsky at ZMI (Photo: Milutin Dragicevov)

of course influenced Z and me. But to list them seems inappropriate and impossible. Many writers, too, have influenced me. Anarchist and libertarian socialists, Pannekoek, Rocker, Kropotkin, Bakunin, and more. I can also remember some one-off writing that had a big impact. For example, there was an essay called *What Do Bosses Do*, by the economist Steve Marglin. Another essay called, *Why Don't Hungry People Steal*, by Wilhelm Reich, also sparked thought. And of course there was the essay by Barbara and John Ehrenreich on what they called the Professional and Managerial Class—and much else, of course. Really, I could go on like that for quite a time but the same problem arises. To do so seems inappropriate and to get it right and comprehensive would be, I am sure, impossible for me.

So, okay, to try to point to something, I will acknowledge that when I was just opening my eyes to the big old world in High School, and then for years thereafter until my path in life was solidly established and seriously proceeding, popular music—the Stones, the Beatles, etc. etc.—had a big impact on enlivening me, connecting me, and arousing me. In particular, via his words and his sound too, Bob Dylan did all that and also helped educate me.

Maybe I should have put the next two sentences at the top of the interview. Don't read this. Find a quiet place and listen to music that moves you, and which has real insight.

There was, as well, my friend and roommate from college, Robin Hahnel. He was in economics while I was in physics. I remember one day, in the MIT student union, after a Rosa Luxembourg SDS meeting, asking him to sit down and teach me Marxist economics. He did, and together, later, we got beyond it, and still later, our heads in sync, out popped participatory economics.

And then there was my other key teacher or mentor, I suppose you might call him. If you don't have a quiet place for music or you tend not to find and feel insight in it, and if Robin isn't a roommate, well, okay, open YouTube and sit down for a time with Noam.

I have to say, to be influenced by geniuses, like these three, was wise on my part.

# “We’re on the Road to a Form of Neofascism”

C. J. Polychroniou interviews Noam Chomsky

*Noam, since neoliberal policies were implemented more than 40 years ago, they have been responsible for increasing rates of inequality, destroying social infrastructure, and causing hopelessness and social malaise. However, it has also become evident that neoliberal social and economic policies are breeding grounds for right-wing radicalization and the resurgence of political authoritarianism. Of course, we know that there is an inherent clash between democracy and capitalism, but there is some clear evidence that neofascism emerges from neoliberal capitalism. Assuming that you agree with this claim, what’s the actual connection between neoliberalism and neofascism?*

The connection is drawn clearly in the first two sentences of the question. One consequence of the neoliberal social-economic policies is collapse of the social order, yielding a breeding ground for extremism, violence hatred, search for scapegoats — and fertile terrain for authoritarian figures who can posture as the savior. And we’re on the road to a form of neo-fascism.

The Britannica defines neoliberalism as an “ideology and policy model that emphasizes the value of free market competition,” with “minimal state intervention.” That is the conventional picture. Reality is different. The actual policy model threw open the doors for the masters of the economy, who also dominate the state, to seek profit and power with few constraints. In brief, unconstrained class war.

One component of the policies was a form of globalization that combines extreme protectionism

for the masters with search for the cheapest labor and worst working conditions so as to maximize profit, leaving decaying rust belts at home. These are policy choices, not economic necessity. The labor movement, joined by Congress’s now defunct research bureau, proposed alternatives that could have benefited working people here and abroad, but they were dismissed without discussion as Clinton rammed through the form of globalization preferred by those conducting the class war.

A related consequence of “really existing neoliberalism” was rapid financialization of the economy enabling riskless scams for quick profits — riskless because the powerful state that intervenes radically in the market to provide extreme protections in trade agreements does the same to rescue the masters if something goes wrong. The result, beginning with Reagan, is what economists Robert Pollin and Gerald Epstein call a “bailout economy,” enabling the neoliberal class war to proceed without the risk of market punishment for failure.

The “free market” is not missing from the picture. Capital is “free” to exploit and destroy with abandon, as it has been doing, including — we should not forget — destroying the prospects for organized human life. And working people are “free” to try to survive somehow with real wages stagnating, benefits declining and work being reshaped to create a growing precariat.

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The class war took off, very naturally, with an attack on labor unions, the prime means of defense for working people. The first acts of Reagan and Thatcher were vigorous assaults on unions, an invitation to the corporate sector to join in and move beyond, often in ways that are technically illegal, but that is of no concern to the neoliberal state they dominate.

The reigning ideology was expressed lucidly by Margaret Thatcher as the class war was launched: There is no such thing as society, and people should stop whining about “society” coming to their rescue. In her immortal words, “I am homeless, the Government must house me!” and so they are casting their problems on society and who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families, and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first.”

Thatcher and her associates surely knew very well that there is a very rich and powerful society for the masters, not only the nanny state that races

to their rescue when they are in need but also an elaborate network of trade associations, chambers of commerce, lobbying organizations, think tanks, and more. But those less privileged must “look to themselves.”

The neoliberal class war has been a grand success for the designers. As we’ve discussed, one indication is the transfer of some \$50 trillion to the pockets of the top 1 percent, mostly to a fraction of them. no slight victory.

Other achievements are “hopelessness and social malaise,” with nowhere to turn. The Democrats abandoned the working class to their class enemy by the ‘70s, becoming a party of affluent professionals and Wall Street donors. In England, Jeremy Corbyn came close to reversing the decline of the Labour Party to “Thatcher lite.” The British establishment, across the board, mobilized in force and climbed deep into the gutter to crush his effort to create an authentic participatory party devoted to the interests of working people and the poor. An intolerable affront to good order. In the U.S., Bernie Sanders has fared somewhat better, but has not been able to break the hold of Clintonite party management. In Europe, the traditional parties of the left have virtually disappeared.

In the midterm elections in the U.S., the Democrats lost even more of the white working class than before, a consequence of the unwillingness of party managers to campaign on class issues that a moderate left party could have brought to the fore.

The ground is well prepared for the rise of neofascism to fill the void left by unrelenting class war and capitulation of the mainstream political institutions that might have combatted the plague.

The term “class war” is by now insufficient. It’s true that the masters of the economy and their servants in the political system have been engaged in a particularly savage form of class war for the past 40 years, but the targets go beyond

the usual victims, now extending even to the perpetrators themselves. As the class war intensifies, the basic logic of capitalism manifests itself with brutal clarity: We have to maximize profit and power even though we know we are racing to suicide by destroying the environment that sustains life, not sparing ourselves and our families.

What’s happening calls to mind an often repeated tale on how to catch a monkey. Cut a hole in a coconut of just the right size for a monkey to insert its paw and put some delectable morsel inside. The monkey will reach in to grab the food but will then be unable to extricate its clenched paw and will starve to death. That’s us, at least the ones running the sad show.

Our leaders, with their similarly clenched paws, are pursuing their suicidal vocation relentlessly. At the state level, Republicans are introducing “Energy Discrimination Elimination” legislation to ban even release of information on investment in fossil fuel companies. That’s unfair persecution of decent folks who are just trying to profit by destroying the prospects for human life, adopting good capitalist logic.

To take one recent example, Republican attorneys general have called on the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to keep asset managers from purchasing shares in U.S. utility companies if the companies are involved in programs to reduce emissions — that is, to save us all from destruction.

The champion of the lot, BlackRock CEO Larry Fink, calls for investment in fossil fuels for many years ahead, while showing that he is a good citizen by welcoming opportunities to invest in still fanciful ways to get rid of the poisons that are produced and even in green energy — as long as profits are guaranteed to be high.

In short, instead of devoting resources to escape from catastrophe, we must bribe the very rich to induce them to lend a hand in doing so. The lessons, stark and clear, are helping to in-

vigorate popular movements that are seeking to escape from the shambles of capitalist logic that shine through with brilliant clarity as the neo-liberal war against all reaches its latest stages of tragicomedy.

That is the bright and hopeful side of the emerging social order.

*With the rise of Donald Trump to power, white supremacy and authoritarianism returned to mainstream politics. But isn't it the case that the U.S. was never immune to fascism?*

What do we mean by “fascism”? We have to distinguish what's happening in the streets, very visibly, from ideology and policy, more remote from immediate inspection. Fascism in the streets is Mussolini's Blackshirts and Hitler's Brownshirts: violent, brutal, destructive. The U.S. has surely never been immune from that. The sordid record of “Indian removal” and slavery mutating to Jim Crow needs no recounting here.

A peak period of “street-fascism” in this sense just preceded Mussolini's March on Rome. The postwar Wilson-Palmer, post-WWI “red scare” was the most vicious period of violent repression in U.S. history, apart from the two original sins. The shocking story is recounted in vivid detail in Adam Hochschild's penetrating study *American Midnight*.

As usual, Black people suffered the most, including major massacres (Tulsa and others) and a hideous record of lynchings and other atrocities. Immigrants were another target in a wave of fanatic “Americanism” and fear of Bolshevism. Hundreds of “subversives” were deported. The lively Socialist Party was virtually destroyed and never recovered. Labor was decimated, not only the Wobblies but well beyond, including vicious strike-breaking in the name of patriotism and defense against the “reds.”

The level of lunacy finally became so outlandish that it self-destructed. Attorney-General Palm-

er and his sidekick J. Edgar Hoover predicted an insurrection led by Bolsheviks on May Day 1920, with feverish warnings and mobilization of police, army and vigilantes. The day passed with a few picnics. Widespread ridicule and wish for “normalcy” brought an end to the madness.

Not without a residue. As Hochschild observes, progressive options for American society suffered a severe blow. A very different country could have emerged. What took place was street fascism with a vengeance.

Turning to ideology and policy, the great Veblenite political economist Robert Brady 80 years ago argued that the whole industrial capitalist world was moving towards one or another form of fascism, with powerful state control of the economy and social life. On a separate dimension, the systems differed sharply with regard to public influence over policy (functioning political democracy).

Such themes were not uncommon in those years, and to a limited extent beyond both in left and right circles.

The issue becomes mostly moot with the shift from the regulated capitalism of the postwar decades to the neoliberal assault, which forcefully reinstitutes Adam Smith's conception that the masters of the economy are the principal architects of government policy and design it to protect their interests. Increasingly in the course of neoliberal class war, unaccountable concentrations of private power control both the economy and the political domain.

The result is a general sense — not mistaken — that the government is not serving us, but rather someone else. The doctrinal system, also largely in the hands of the same concentrations of private power, deflects attention away from the workings of power, opening the door to what are termed “conspiracy theories,” usually founded on some particles of evidence: the Great Replacement, liberal elites, Jews, other familiar concoctions.

That in turn engenders “street fascism,” drawing on poisonous undercurrents that have never been suppressed and that can easily be tapped by unscrupulous demagogues. The scale and character is by now no small threat to what remains of functioning democracy after the battering of the current era.

*Some are arguing that we live in a historic age of protests. Indeed, virtually every region in the world has seen a sharp increase of protest movements over the last 15 years. Why have political protests become more widespread and more frequent in the age of late neoliberalism? Moreover, how do they compare to the protest movements of the 1960s?*

The protests have many different roots. The trucker’s strike that almost brought Brazil to a halt protesting the defeat of the neo-fascist Bolsonaro in the October election had some resemblance to January 6 in Washington, and may be reenacted, some fear, on the day of the inauguration of the elected President Lula da Silva on January 1.

But such protests as these have nothing in common with the remarkable uprising in Iran instigated by the death in police custody of Jina Mahsa Amini. The uprising is led by young people, mostly young women, though it is bringing in much broader sectors. The immediate goal is overturning the rigid controls on women’s attire and behavior, though the protesters have gone well beyond, sometimes as far as calling for overthrow of the harsh clerical regime. The protestors have won some victories. The regime has indicated that the Morality Police will be disbanded, though some doubt the substance of the announcement, and it barely reaches the demands of the courageous resistance. Other protests have their own particularities.

Insofar as there is a common thread, it is the breakdown of social order generally in the past decades. Commonalities with ‘60s protest movements seem to me thin.

*Whatever the connection may be between neoliberalism and social unrest, it is nonetheless clear that socialism is still struggling to gain popularity with citizens in most parts of the world. Why is that? Is it the legacy of “actually existing socialism” that hinders progress toward a socialist future?*

As with fascism, the first question is what we mean by “socialism.” Broadly speaking the term used to refer to social ownership of the means of production, with worker control of enterprises. “Actually existing socialism” had virtually no resemblance to those ideals. In western usage “socialism” has come to mean something like welfare state capitalism, covering a range of options.

Such initiatives have often been suppressed by violence. The red scare mentioned earlier is one example, with long-lasting effects. Not long after, the Great Depression and World War evoked waves of radical democracy throughout much of the world. A primary task of the victors was to suppress them, beginning with the U.S.-U.K. invasion of Italy, disbanding the partisan-led worker- and peasant-based socialist initiatives and restoring the traditional order, including fascist collaborators.

The pattern was followed elsewhere in various ways, sometimes with extreme violence. Russia imposed its iron rule in its own domains. In the Third World, repression of similar tendencies was far more brutal, not excluding church-based initiatives, crushed by U.S. violence in Latin America, where the U.S. army officially claims credit for having helped to defeat liberation theology.

Are the basic ideas unpopular, when extricated from the imagery of hostile propaganda? There is good reason to suspect that they are hardly below the surface and can burst forth when opportunities arise and are exploited.

# Indigenous and Black Communities Find Common Cause for Land Justice

**Pennelys Droz**

Historically, Indigenous and Black folks have been turned against each other by colonizers and enslavers. Now, communities are learning from one another and finding solidarity in efforts to reclaim stolen lands.

Land creates people, and, as ancestral herbalist Ayo Ngozi says, “Land is a true source of power.” This understanding of land as living spiritual power itself is a shared experience across Indigenous nations. There is an emotional and mental power that comes with knowing there is a home to return to. In contemporary capitalist societies, the economic power of owning land is critical, allowing the building of equity to access resources to fund education, businesses, more land ownership, and more self-determination for one’s descendants.

Today, Black and Indigenous communities are navigating these relationships to land while mapping and acting to build community economics that are decoupled from exploitative systems of production and trade.

The Indigenous-Led Land Back Movement Achieving justice includes restoring power through the reclamation of land and through reparations. For Indigenous people, the Land Back movement embodies the push toward justice and healing. The movement works to reclaim more territories once occupied by their ancestors, to extend Indigenous care and governance to homelands that cannot be reclaimed, to push toward the dismantling of exploitative economic systems and policies that limit Indigenous peoples’ power, and to build economies and systems that are expressive of Indigenous values.

A central tactic of the Land Back movement is to

utilize land trusts to remove land from speculative markets and place it into collective care. Examples include the Native Conservancy, the Wiyot Tribe’s Dishgamu Humboldt Community Land Trust, the Native Land Conservancy, and many others.

Nations and organizations are also partnering with one another to purchase land that was lost and stolen, including the exemplary model of the Yurok Tribe. The Yurok Tribe has restored 2,424 acres of privately owned culturally and ecologically significant timberlands in Northern California, resulting from its partnership with investment firm New Forests. New Forests worked with the Trust for Public Land, which supported the Tribe in accessing funds from the California Natural Resources Agency.

This wasn’t the first time the Tribe pursued a partnered land purchase. In 2006, it partnered with Western Rivers Conservancy to buy back 50,000 acres of ancestral lands from Green Diamond, a logging company, including the watershed of Blue Creek, a critical salmon refuge. In 2019 the Tribe began caring for these lands as a salmon sanctuary and community forest.

According to Frankie Myers, Yurok Tribal vice chairman, “As Yurok people who have been literally locked out of these lands—some for up to a hundred years—just the ability for our members to go out and to access these lands and to harvest and gather, interact with the forest; the shift in land management itself, to allow Indigenous people back onto their landscapes ... I think that’s absolutely key.”

Indigenous peoples are also working to extend their care and governance to traditional territories



Lucha by Catalina Belen

that are out of their legally recognized land tenure—a vital part of the Land Back movement. The Cultural Fire Management Council and the Indigenous Peoples Burning Network are notable leaders, working extensively with the state of California and the Forest Service to establish integrated management plan agreements. The Karuk Tribe is another exemplary leader in re-establishing Indigenous care of lands, developing a groundbreaking “Eco-Cultural Resources Management Plan” and holding leadership within the Western Klamath Restoration Partnership.

Other Indigenous organizations and nations are utilizing contemporary legal entities to resist dispossession by collectivizing new regenerative businesses to ensure care of the land and people. One

example is Akiing, a nonprofit organization based in the Great Lakes region. Akiing is transitioning its business operations to become a collaboration of cooperatives working in agriculture, renewable energy, and hemp production. It has also incorporated the Akiing Land Trust to protect lands for the future of the Anishinaabe people.

**Black-Led Movements to Reclaim Stolen Land**  
Black folks across the country are also continually working to gain access to land, albeit using different approaches to Indigenous communities. Their efforts include attaining farmland, fighting redlining and racist financing systems to achieve land and homeownership, and building political movements to push for the restoration of lands taken from Black families through historical vi-

olence and eminent domain. In September 2021, in response to a powerful organizing effort led by the Bruce family and Kavon Ward, California Gov. Gavin Newsom signed a bill restoring beachfront land in Southern California, known as Bruce's Beach, to a Black family driven out by white supremacist violence from their lands almost a century ago.

After this win, Ward, with her colleague Ashanti Martin, went on to found a groundbreaking national organization, Where Is My Land, working to reclaim Black folks' land and help them obtain financial restitution for violations of their civil and human rights, lost wealth, and business.

Organizations have been working to turn the tides of Black dispossession using a diversity of strategies. The Black Family Land Trust supports the retention of land within Black communities through planning, education, and networking. Meanwhile, the Black Farmer Fund offers investment into capitalizing Black-owned farms and food systems businesses. At a local level, in Michigan, the Detroit Black Farmer Land Fund works to rebuild intergenerational Black land ownership in the Detroit area through funding, networking, and capacity building.

In a manner that echoes the Indigenous-led Land Back movement, Black community members and organizations have also been utilizing cooperative structures to advance land justice. The Acres of Ancestry Initiative/Black Agrarian Fund is a community-controlled land and financial cooperative supporting the development of Black family land commons through providing non-extractive financial resources, legal support, and advocacy, rooted in spiritual and community tradition.

Another example is the East Bay Permanent Real Estate Cooperative, which creates community cooperative solutions to the catastrophic levels of displacement in the Bay Area of California by taking land out of the market and placing it into community land trusts, thereby ensuring the affordability of housing, cultural continuity, and

common-good values in the East Bay.

There are also efforts to skill up and resource Black communities to access land and resources. Nexus Community Partners of the Twin Cities is a community organization whose strategic vision centers on a restorative, regenerative, and just economy that includes land access; strong, culturally grounded leadership; and a move away from individualistic capitalist processes. To support this, Nexus offers a North Star Black Cooperative Fellowship, as well as training and consulting.

What sets Nexus apart from many other Black-led land-reclamation projects is its solidarity with Indigenous efforts. Nexus is in shared cohort community with NDN Collective, an organization designed to build power, advance Land Back, and decolonize wealth through moving land and wealth back into Indigenous communities. (Disclosure: I am a program officer with NDN Collective.)

Both organizations are creating funds specifically designed to invest in building the economic power of individuals and seed intergenerational prosperity while redefining the concept of wealth to reflect the cultural and community values of those they serve. This work is supported by the Bush Foundation and, as such, is in service of communities in the tri-state region of Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Nexus has designed a community-guided Black Community Trust Fund, while NDN Collective has developed the Collective Abundance Fund, to open in 2023.

Nexus and NDN Collective shared a joint statement about their allyship in this work:

"We know Indigenous sovereignty and Black liberation are tied to one another. While our people have unique histories and current needs ... neither of us will be free without the other ... When we talk about alternatives to the current systems, we are talking about building community wealth and regenerative systems that aren't extractive of people or the planet ... Black and Indigenous solidar-

ity means building something new, together with our people.”

#### Building Collective Futures, Together

Coming together to build power is not easy. Historically, Indigenous and Black folks have been turned against one another by oppressors and colonizers. The U.S. government compensated Indigenous nations for capturing escaped enslaved people. The “Five Civilized Tribes,” the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole—nations who determined that their best chance of survival was to imitate their colonizers—were known for their practice of using slavery both before and after their removal from their lands during the Trail of Tears.

Buffalo Soldiers—Black men who enlisted in the military in the late 1800s when white enlistment was low in an attempt to achieve equal rights as citizens—ended up being utilized to put down Indigenous resistance to colonization and oppression in the West.

Black and Indigenous peoples both have historically adopted beliefs and constructions of white supremacy as a survival technique, resulting in the presence of anti-Blackness within Indigenous communities, and colonial narratives of Indigenous primitivity and land subjugation within Black communities.

Yet Black and Indigenous people have also supported one another over time, through offering refuge from violence, sharing knowledge, and becoming family. Ngozi shares her powerful lineage of herbalism on Turtle Island, reaching back to ancestors in Virginia and South Carolina who learned their herbal knowledge in part from Indigenous people, saying, “Our people share common threads of experience—from land reverence and kinship, to violence, displacement, and genocide—so it makes sense that we would work in solidarity to free ourselves.”

#### Building Power Through Solidarity

Soul Fire Farm, a Black-owned farm in upstate

New York, is an impactful story-creating, community-building advocacy and training center, creating a space of land connection and training for Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) in culture-based agroecology. The farm is committed to both Black land reconnection and Indigenous homeland governance, doing the work of learning and growing toward liberated futures together. Hundreds of BIPOC farmers have been educated in Soul Fire Farm’s farming and construction immersion schools, benefiting from its community-supported agriculture food shares and culture-building initiatives. A newer initiative, called the Braiding Seeds Fellowship, provides funding and mentorship to continue the Black-Indigenous agrarian tradition.

Leah Penniman, co-executive director at Soul Fire Farm, recognizes that Land Back is “squarely an Indigenous movement,” while also honoring that Black folks have rights to secure land tenure as well, and to create a place to build connection and hold ceremony for the sources of life and ancestors. The lack of stable family land in Black communities is illustrated by the fact that Soul Fire Farm has received many requests from Black families to spread the ashes of their ancestors on the land, a place they know they will be able to return to honor their ancestors.

Soul Fire Farm organizers have worked with the Mohican Nation, whose land they live on in upstate New York, to establish cultural respect easements, enabling Mohicans to access their homeland occupied by Soul Fire Farm. They have learned, built devoted relationships, and stood alongside the Mohican in their organizing, protesting, and direct-action defense of their sacred Papscanee Island from pipeline development. The organization sees this kind of relational reciprocity as building power.

Stephanie Morningstar of the Northeast Farmers of Color (NEFOC) Land Trust underscores the criticality of built relations, sharing, “Relationships are central to all aspects of land, kin, and community care. The core of our work ... considers how

we can be in reciprocal relationship with the land and each other in a restorative way that recognizes we not only desire to have a relationship with land, but we also have a responsibility to it, and that colonial relationships to land are the reason we're currently experiencing systemic inequity in every sphere of our human and non-human experiences."

NEFOC has outlined a practical path forward to build relations between various BIPOC communities, establishing an Indigenous Community Consultation Policy when acquiring lands for the trust. This policy includes "stages of consultation ranging from initial relationship building to formalizing protocols and partnerships (if desired) that resituate Indigenous land practices, rematriate land, [offer] exclusive ownership, shared ownership, holding rematriated land in trust as an act of solidarity, cultural or conservation easements and agreements, rights of first refusal, decision-making authority in land use decisions, and pathways to storymaking and knowledge transfer through oral history and languages on land through truth-telling projects, and consultation about project plans."

Their work also includes a grouping of four programs that, together, resource farmers with education, advocacy, and networking, and a policy initiative with a special lens on climate justice. The organization hosts a Reparations Map, sharing farm and land tenure projects across the nation in order to connect people looking to dismantle white supremacy through reparations. NEFOC is also creating fertile soil for the building of a co-powered future through convening what it calls "Braided B.L.I.S.S." (Black Liberation and Indigenous Sovereignty in Solidarity), a space to dig into the real conversations, truth telling, and healing necessary to build collective power.

#### Dismantling Racial Capitalism and White Supremacy—Together

Healing journeys such as the one modeled by B.L.I.S.S. are not simple or easy given the fraught histories of Black and Indigenous communities. Amber Starks, an Afro-Indigenous organizer,

activist, and thought leader, says, "I fundamentally believe our arrival at Black liberation and Indigenous sovereignty will certainly require us to remember who we are outside of our oppressors' institutions, ideologies, and imaginations ... to remember that both of our peoples have always been the authors of our liberation and the architects of our deliverance."

Organizers within the Indigenous-led Land Back and the Black-led movements for reclamation and reparations see themselves in common cause, striking at the heart of the colonial-capitalist belief system and economic infrastructure. According to organizers deeply involved in the movements, their work is aimed at ending wealth extraction from the homelands of others and amassed capital at the expense of the people, ending white supremacy. It is also focused on the powerful work of all peoples, across cultures, to commit to this transformation through restorative investment in Indigenous and Black communities, and to engage in the active dismantling of systems of power that benefit the white and the wealthy.

As Nkuli Shongwe of Nexus Community Partners describes, such work "demands investment beyond organizations. It requires investment in cultural work and community leaders; in giving us the time and space needed to fail and try again, to engage in the conflict and tension. ... [We need] the spaciousness to collectively imagine, practice, and reimagine what liberation looks like in the context of our world today."

Fundamentally, Black and Indigenous land, power, and liberation struggles, forged in the violent imposition of individualist capitalism, racial and economic hierarchy, and private property law, are a threat to the continuance of those systems. Black and Indigenous communities increasingly see that creating healing relationships with one another is at the heart of building true transformative power to achieve land justice, with seeds of healing being planted every day. This generational work appears to be well underway.