



# MAGAZINE

## SEPTEMBER 2023

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*“There is no  
beauty without  
justice. This is our  
principle.”*

*-Alberto Peruffo  
da Montecchio*



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# Capitalism Must Be Stopped, Not Reformed

Alberto Peruffo da Montecchio, translation: Brian Tokar

**We have passed the limit of livability, therefore we must apply “the art of legitimate beyondness”.**

**Capitalism is one of the worst expressions of human arrogance [umana prepotenza]\***

The time needed for understanding is delaying the radical decisions that are needed immediately. This premise is fundamental. If we wait for people to understand fully, we do not save ourselves. We do not save the planet.

We need to go back to sitting around a fire to tell ourselves how beautiful life is in its splendor and how we can become free again. We must deprive all the old myths of evil of their authority. We need to “operationally” sabotage everything that capitalism and other legacies of domination have built upon the narrative of evil. Since there is no more time, it is necessary to “interrupt the evil”. “Evil” is understood as disease and death, industrial and global. Sabotage itself, classically understood as one clog (sabot) that hinders evil – often by itself creating damage, side evils, uncontrolled spills, bad moods – does not work. We need to move on to a more refined and effective sabotage technique that I call forbisage – “forbiting” (forbitaggio in Italian) – from the Latin word scissors (forfex), but is also reminiscent of “polished tongue or style” (from the Germanic furbian – clean), i.e. the polished and scientific knowledge necessary to overthrow the false authorities (es-autorare in Italian: deprive of authority). We need to cut off capitalism and all the overpowering (pre-potenti in Italian) human practices – which we could call “human arrogance” (l’Umana PrePotenza in Italian – see endnote) – into non-communicating pieces, immediately, as soon as possible. Non-communication causes dysfunction. Only then will the flow of evil be stopped

and a new, livable world will be born in the cracks of the system.

## HOW TO DO IT

Here in brief is where to start:

- We need to create “forbiters” (forbitatori, a neologism in Italian). Affinity groups with scissors in hand. Mind and hands together. We need to form alliances for operational disruption now. Let them reach toward tomorrow, immediately at dawn. We need to form proximity groups that are inspired from a distance.
- We need to form an uncatchable alliance between the workers-operators and the minds/hands of the forbiters: the workers-operators can dissociate themselves from the forces of evil and – as uncatchable as they are – stop production. The interruption of production by cutting off its energy flows, including banking, is the main concept.
- We need to form an uncatchable alliance that elaborates and articulates with operational intelligence the conflict between generational paradigms, an alliance between new-paradigm operators who cannot but come into conflict with the old, dangerous positions of their forebears (whether biological or mainly ideological). New-operators can dissociate themselves from the forces of evil and – uncatchable as they are – interrupt the excessive consumption of their (literal or figurative) fathers and mothers. The interruption of dissolute consumptive practices through moral stigma and paradigmatic-generational dissociation is the most immediate way forward.



Collective weavers (Artwork by Autumn Skye)

These two great alliances cross, intersect, and exchange practices and objectives. They captivate each other to achieve the common goal: TO CUT-OFF CAPITALISM AND OTHER FORMS OF HUMAN ARROGANCE. And we can extend these alliances internationally, between territories that share the same troubles, issues, and enemies, overcoming the old division between global and local. The moral commonality of territories – the “terrestrial” of Donna Haraway – has no boundaries.

We propose three types of “operational sabotage” (forbissage) both practiced and practicable:

1. the conceptual-cultural interruption
2. the juridical-legal interruption
3. the physical-material interruption

Unlike the classically understood sabotage, which can create physical and material damage, when it is not only symbolic or programmatic – or the boycott, which causes often negligible “economic damage” – forbissage never produces significant material damage in its physical form, while it produces huge economic losses in all its forms. Forbissage therefore focuses on the economic aspects – economism is our great enemy – and its aim is to interrupt the flows of energy and money that are destroying the world.

### **WE MUST STOP SUPPLIES, NOT ONLY MINIMIZE CONSUMPTION**

Here is a brief description of the interruptions. Level 1 is integrated into level 2, and surpassed (moved beyond) at level 3. We can practice all

three, depending on the case, or choose the most suitable level as a priority in case of insufficiency of the other levels. All must be considered as viable. Our enemies know it!

1. **CONCEPTUAL BLOCKADES – Reputation-al blocks** of the bank accounts of the large industrial groups that devastate the earth and all its territories through cultural actions against them (attacking from the territories against reputational attributes extraterritorially). We need counterinformation campaigns that interrupt the lies and cultural propaganda subordinated to the established powers, by activating multi-faceted structured mobilizations and periodic community assemblies, primarily convened by the new-paradigm generation, with direct application of the same concepts of moral stigma on those who continue to accept failed paradigms. Also addressing and interrupting the “mechanism of debt” which our lives are caged in (I make you bankrupt and then I save you. I make you ill and then I cure you. You must consume and then pay. I forgive you of your guilt, but only if you pay) – We must end obedience to the Great Creditor which is often the State with its ancient military legacy, still present in national identities, today in the hands of global, transnational powers. We must stop the industrial production of weapons, luxuries, sickness and death. All are planned productions and for this reason they have become global.
2. **LEGAL BLOCKADES – Frontal processes**, radical lawsuits against multinational corporations and economic crimes, to obtain sanctions, punishments, expropriations, and arrive at a distribution of laws and regulations against unfettered economic liberalism.
3. **PHYSICAL BLOCKADES – Interruptions of flow lines, of supply**, be they of data (hacking), of energy (strategic, controlled, intelligent blackouts through alliances with the workers), and of raw materials (transit blocks) when necessary.

All these practices **must not cause damage** to people (non-violence) and to things (non-destruction) – because they would all be counterproductive in terms of human relationships and ecosystem impacts – but they **have to be strategic disruptions that demolish those intentions, desires, and perspectives** that now make the practices attacked directly by forbisage prosper, grow and spread. One fundamental principle of discrimination is to **never attack common goods**, especially the primary ones and all the shared traditions, such as air, water, a painting or a sculpture of pluriversal value. The current attacks on fountains, works of art and palaces are ridiculous symbolically and counterproductive for public opinion.

It must be clear for the children: he who drives a Ferrari or wears a luxury garment **must know that morally he is a “beggar”**. A moral waste, regardless of the intrinsic and technological beauty of the object. The surplus value of profit earned with those items is an affront to the dignity of every living creature. The energy and the work and the illicit load of profit and real waste that a specific object carries kills thousands of living creatures and corrupts entire ecosystems. **There is no beauty without justice**. This is our principle. Fathers and mothers, the overpowering big landlords, and others who are similar must know that they can be attacked and deprived of their authority at any moment by their own children. And, beyond age, by their companions.

**We have to attack the imaginaries** of those who believe that owning an object of “excessive” value – exceeding the dignity of the production itself – is in itself a value that is transferred to the person. It will be the contrary, a stigma, a condemnation, an infamy, because behind an excess of surplus value there is always a death or a moral, social injustice. All bearers of excessive surplus values in tangible goods will have to undergo a reputational infamy, without reservations and without concessions. By becoming owners of those rare and very expensive pieces, they inevitably become – given the objectivity of the socio-environmental damage

as scientific counter-proof – **beggars** (in Italian pezzenti from Latin). Moral beggars. Morally unacceptable people who ask (from the Latin petire, ask) their own children forgiveness for perpetuating and promoting global, systemic, planetary evil. Unfortunately the post-boom generations, who have embraced capitalism and other paradigms of excess, have failed.

## FORBISAGE EXAMPLES

Here are some general examples.

- Military bases, for example, may be subject to various forms of material forbisage: we may interrupt the flow of materials, services, supplies, investments, rentals; the military community must be excluded from the life of the city. We have to convince bakers not to make bread for them anymore, plumbers not to work for them, not to rent houses and grant land, etc. etc. Therefore a boycott not like of Coca-Cola (a symbolic action against a typical US brand, with little economic effect, given the spread of the drink and the strength of the hyper-capitalist propaganda), but a conviction to block the supplies that feed the same drink, such as the concession of withdrawal from the aquifers of our territories (where the Coca-Cola plants actually mine water). **WE MUST ATTACK FROM THE TERRITORIES, NOT GLOBAL STORES.** Interrupt supplies and proximity flows, not simply minimize or boycott specific items for consumption, which are strategically insignificant for the big globalized brands, endowed as they are with propaganda forces superior to the means available to activists.
- The same goes for large scale production and excessive estates. Luxury ships and excessive tourism must be stopped, as happened for the Great Ships (Grandi Navi) of Venice. It must be ensured that there are no longer morally safe ports in which to moor yachts. For jet skis – a luxury of the jet engine – you have to convince the children of whoever has them to take scissors and cut the ignition wires (the same for the terrible quad/dirt bikes!). Zac!, it only takes a second to leave your father's motorbike stranded (material damage is negligible/laughable and in itself does not cause any environmental damage). Or just grab the keys to the yachts or jet skis off your parent's or employer's keychain and throw them in the water. No one who has a luxury good, an "exaggeration", will have to feel safe anymore, because he knows that within his own family he will have his own forbiter. **That son who stops his father will become a hero of the climate struggle** who will save the world. Those "exaggerated" machines, not only in themselves, but also in terms of the money necessary for their ownership, are responsible for enormous injustices in the world.
- The same can be done with "fictitiously public" large works (such as motorways, high-speed trains, large construction sites run by private companies through inflated tenders or project financing), making sure that they are not placed in the hands of virtually enslaved, mainly immigrant labor, taken from outside the legislative framework that safeguards work in the territories. **We need to interrupt their constructions by scientifically deconstructing their projects,** taking away the funds they don't deserve.
- Another field is strategic hacking as a variety of forbisage. We need to cut data flows that we consider dangerous and that produce death. **For industries that produce weapons,** all over the world, their banks must be the first targets of forbiters. The same banks serving the multinational companies will have to feel exposed to the scale attack by arbitrators, **to the attack from nearby** (from territories) **by account holders who will demand transparency of the data** – a forbisage in the open – of all the dirty or clean business they do.

## POLITICAL SURGERY

Ours is the cutting force, which cuts. **We are at the opposite extreme of violence. We use the scalpel**

**to cut accurately and painlessly, we use the thread to sew.** We are the first surgeons of politics. We are a Political Surgery Group and for this reason we are indefinable/inexplicable and uncatchable, without fixed identities, identities in motion, which we term “diventities”. We are the children, the fathers, the mothers, the unidentifiable active citizenship, we are everywhere, interstitial, intersectional, interchangeable, without hierarchies, without infantile individualisms, we are authors aware of our singularity, authorship, uniqueness. We are social ecologists, communalists, municipalists, territorialists, radical democratic confederalists, activists fighting for the common good, **aware of the common evil.** Let's cut capitalism to pieces. Nothing more, nothing less. We are for sufficient ownership and post-potency. The power of our hearts and not of prejudices or forced inheritances/identities that believe themselves legitimate to dominate and destroy the world.

THE FORBISAGE is therefore **the weapon of paradigmatic/generational** revolt. It is the rigorous and highly civilized weapon of children against capitalist and overbearing fathers, bearers of the future against the destroyers of the present, be they young or old. FORBISAGE will be the collective inspiration to arrive before it's too late for the “rehumanization” of society, for the revaluation of the deep common goods (deep commons), to res-comunanza, to the principle of a life where active common action has won over passive public property, corruptible by the hunger of private individuals, humans, capitalists.

**Forbiters of the world unite, human arrogance will collapse.**

## **CAPITALISM MUST BE STOPPED, NOT MODERATED**

The art of legitimate beyondness – of operational sabotage – is legitimized by a logic of imprecision with two distinct dimensions. First is that of the enemy, who continues to operate thanks to his “spannometry”, an Italian word meaning science made with fraudulent approximation – inspired

by the President of the Veneto Region, Luca Zaia, who became famous for his approximate expressions and actions, such as his vague hand-spans or ‘hand-waving’ limits on PFAS contamination set in 2018. Second are those perpetrated by our friends, our mates and also activists who make errors of merit and of method. These imprecisions, if they create irreversible damage (silent deaths, climatic disasters), must be faced head-on (immediately and directly). **With legitimate pushes and never reductive compromise**, but always on the rise. There is not only solidarity, care – our primitive principles – but also and above all frontal action: rigorous and immediate to avoid the Necrocene (as described by John P. Clark); the era of the death of the Earth built by human arrogance; a more subtle concept of the Anthropocene. These are now principles of urgency which generate the fundamental elements of struggle, of collective action.

Fundamental elements of the struggle, to be refined, will be:

- **the weapon of the polished word**, of critical thinking, which Capitalism cannot handle;
- **the conflict/paradigmatic-generational leap**, i.e. bringing young people (by age and/or paradigm) into the active field, who will form groups and assemblies of active citizenship, convened and self-managed by themselves, listening to the non-degenerate parts of the human arrogance-capital-system;
- **the authorship**: we are authors of our actions and we can have more authority than any authority, thanks to them;
- **the concrete geography**: we know and defend every inch of our land. Powered by digital portability. We must develop the proximity and transferability of our actions, thanks to the power of walking together in physical and digital territories. No one will stop us if we walk together.

**We are the authors of our territories. No one will defeat us!**

# Twenty-First Century Socialism: What It Will Become and Why

Harriet Fraad, Richard D. Wolff

The real left is not the caricature crafted by the U.S. right. Alongside parallel right-wing political formations abroad, that caricature tries hard to revive and recycle Cold War demonizations no matter how far-fetched. Nor is the real left what Democratic Party leaders and their foreign counterparts try hard to dismiss as tiny and politically irrelevant (except when electoral campaigns flirt with “progressive” proposals to get votes). The real left in the United States and beyond are the millions who at least vaguely understand that the whole system (including its mainstream right and left) is the core problem. As those millions steadily raise their awareness to an explicit consciousness, they recognize that basic system change is the needed solution.

On the one hand, the real left divides into particular social movements (focused on areas like ecological survival, feminism, anti-racism, labor militancy, and sexual rights). On the other hand, those social movements increasingly understand themselves to comprise components of a new unity they must organize. One key unifying force is anti-capitalism. Correspondingly, the different system they seek will likely be some new sort of socialism—with or without that name—particularly suited to 21st-century conditions.

The other big problem for the real left—besides unified organization—lies in its lack of a compelling “vision”: a clear, concrete, and attractive image of the social change it advocates. To succeed, a new socialism for the 21st century needs such a vision. Socialism in the 19th and 20th centuries had a very successful vision as evidenced by its remarkable global spread. However, that vision is no longer adequate. In 19th- and 20th-century socialism’s vision, militant unions and socialist political parties partnered to: 1) seize state power from the employer class; and 2) use

that power to replace capitalism with socialism and eventually a minimally defined communism. Seizing state power could happen via reforms and electoral victories, direct actions and revolution, or combinations of them. Socialists spent immense energy, time, and passion debating and experimenting with those alternatives. Seizing state power from the employer class was to be followed by using that power to regulate and control private employers or to substitute the state itself (as representative of the collective working class) for private employers. Either way, the transition to socialism meant that the workers’ state intervened in economic decisions and activities to prioritize social welfare over private profit. Beyond replacing capitalism with socialism, possibly subsequent moves toward communism were mostly left vague. Communism seemed to be in and about the (perhaps distant) future while politics seemed to call for socialists to offer immediate programs.

So socialists everywhere over the last two centuries concentrated on seizing the state and thereby regulating markets, raising mass consumption standards, protecting workers in enterprises, and so on. Workers increasingly supported a socialist vision that foregrounded how socialist parties would use state power directly and immediately to help them. This vision fit well with socialist parties’ partners in labor union movements. The latter contested employers in enterprises, while socialist parties contested the employer class’s hold on state power. Thus socialist political parties and labor unions formed, grew, and allied nearly everywhere in the 19th and into the 20th centuries. Together they built effective, lasting organizations. After one of them prevailed in the 1917 Russian Revolution, most socialist organizations and parties split to form coexisting entities (ideologically similar yet often competing): one called socialist and the other “communist.”



After 1917, the socialist parties (and most independent socialists too) articulated programs for “progressive” social reforms. The reforms aimed to control capitalism’s market structures—its labor, tax, housing, health care, and transport systems—and its cultural superstructure (areas like politics, education, and religion). Communist parties usually supported socialist reforms, but they went further than the socialists to favor state takeovers of capitalist enterprises. Communists viewed state-owned-and-operated enterprises as necessary not only to achieve but also to secure the reforms socialists advocated.

The socialists’ and communists’ shared programmatic focus on the state complemented their critiques of capitalism in its predominantly private form across the 19th and 20th centuries. As socialism and communism grew across those centuries, they became the great theoretical and practical oppositional forces to capitalism. The more moderate among them defined socialism as a state elected to control and regulate private employers and thereby lessen private capitalism’s hard edges, inequalities, and injustices. Scandinavians and other Europeans experimented with such moderate versions of socialism. In Soviet socialism, the state’s economic intervention went further. Its communist party leadership replaced private employers with state officials fulfilling a state-generated economic plan. In yet another version of socialism—China’s hybrid one—a mix of Scandinavian and Soviet socialisms

includes large segments of private capitalists and state-owned-and-operated enterprises. Both are subordinated to a powerful communist party and state.

The common quality of all three socialism was the focus on the state. What most of the socialists involved in the three forms (Scandinavian, Soviet, and Chinese) missed was a shared omission. On the basis of admitting and overcoming that omission, a new socialism for the 21st century emerges complete with a compelling vision.

The state focus of 19th- and 20th-century socialists, besides being a source of their greatest expansionary success, proved also to be a source of their greatest weaknesses and failures. Socialists’ and communists’ focus on the state combined with neglect of the internal structures of enterprises and households. But what if changing the macro-level relation of the state to the private economy from capitalist to socialist required also changing the micro-level of workplaces: both the workplace inside enterprises and the workplace inside households? What if socialism, to be achieved, needed interdependent changes at macro- and micro-levels of society? What if socialist changes in one level cannot survive without correspondingly socialist changes in the other?

Human relations inside factories, farms, offices, stores, and households were rarely transformed by what 19th- and 20th-century socialists achieved because

they rarely were objects of their social criticisms and debates. Enterprises were internally divided after socialists took power much as they had been divided before. Employers continued to confront employees as buyers of labor power, directors of the labor process, and exclusive owners of the products. States continued to control dimensions of that confrontation—more in moderate socialism than in capitalism—but the basic confrontation persisted. In versions of socialism where state officials replaced private citizens as owners and operators of factories, farms, offices, and stores, the persisting employer-employee organization of human relations inside enterprises invited criticisms. Some socialists thus referred to such systems as types of state capitalism, not of socialism.

By theoretically not criticizing capitalism's signature employer-versus-employee internal organization of enterprises, socialists, and communists took a big risk they likely did not understand. When the socialisms they constructed left the employer-versus-employee relationship of enterprises unchanged, that relationship reacted back to undermine those socialisms. Where moderate socialists used state power merely to control capitalists—leaving them their private profits—those capitalists could use the profits to battle socialists and socialism. As socialism's history in Scandinavia and Western Europe exemplifies, capitalists have always done exactly that. They sought and continue now to seek increased private profits by reducing or removing whatever state controls constrain them. In that way, Scandinavian and European type socialisms undermined themselves.

Where socialist state officials function as employers, the oppositional impulses arising among employees (strengthened by earlier socialist movements) will focus on the state. Worse still, employees struggling against employers in societies self-described as socialist may well come to identify their problem and adversary as socialism. In that way, such variants of socialism too undermine themselves.

The socialist and communist traditions largely neglected the internal structures of households as well as enterprises. Thus socialist experiments

in constructing new societies mostly omitted the transformation of those structures. Employer-employee relationships inside enterprises inherited from capitalism largely remained: so too did the inherited spousal and parent-children relationships inside households. We say "largely" because there always were exceptions such as communal households, collective consumption, and larger communes. Yet they remained marginal to the main developments and rarely proved durable. For example, early in Soviet Russia (1917-1930), Alexandra Kollontai initiated major programs of state responsibility and direct support for children and housework. However, European-style nuclear family households, constructed in and for capitalism during the transition from feudalism (see Jacques Donzelot's *The Policing of Families*), remained the basic household organization under socialist societies as well.

In the capitalist system's prevailing household structure, men functioned as household "heads" responsible for disciplining and providing for subordinate wives and children. Wives were to offset the burdens of men's labor in capitalist enterprises, prepare them for that work, and "raise" children to reproduce identical households. Such households should not only support families but also support the state with taxes (thereby reducing the employer class's taxes) as well as soldiers. Efforts by households to obtain and secure state supports (schools, day care, subsidies, even veterans benefits) were systematically opposed or limited by the employer class. Even when won by mass mobilizations assisted by socialists such supports were never secure.

To this day, the employer class that dominates in capitalism blocks raising the minimum wage, mandating paid maternal and paternal leave policies, and funding an adequate public education system or adequate health insurance system. That employer class keeps the traditional household in place or else financially constrains individuals fleeing traditional households to serve the employer class's needs. The authoritarian structure of enterprises (complete with CEOs as dictators inside corporations) reinforces parallel structures in households. Socialists must recognize and act on the premise that the reverse holds as well.

The solution for socialism in the 21st century is to correct for the omission earlier socialisms made. Socialism now needs to add a critical analysis of capitalism's micro-level organization inside workplaces and households to its macro-level analyses. The focus of 21st-century socialism should balance the overstressed macro-level by a concentration on the micro-level: not as an alternative focus but rather as an additional focus deserving special attention.

The solution for socialism and communism in the 21st century is a new, non-state-focused vision. Socialism becomes the movement to transform 1) the top-down hierarchical organization inside capitalist enterprises (employers versus employees) into a democratic organization of worker cooperatives, and 2) the top-down hierarchical organization inside households into democratized alternatives.

Inside enterprises, each worker will have one vote to decide the major issues facing enterprises. Such issues include what, how, and where to produce as well as how to use the resulting products or, if products are marketed, what to do with the revenues. The difference between employers and employees disappears; the workers become collectively their own boss. Profits cease being the enterprise's top priority or "bottom line" because that maximization rule prioritizes employers' gains over employees' gains and capital's interests over those of labor. In democratized enterprises, profits instead become one among many democratically determined enterprise goals. Each worker has an equal opportunity to fill in the outlines of such a version of socialism with the creative imaginings of what such a transformed enterprise may make possible.

Inside households, socialism must stand for the freedom to construct different kinds of human relations. Kinship becomes only one of many options. Among adults, democratic household decision-making becomes the rule. Broad rights and freedoms are given to children. Responsibility for raising children becomes shared among parents, democratized households, democratized residential and enterprise communities, and a democratized government. The specifics of such shared responsibility will be among

the objects of democratic decision-making by all. Whatever may remain of centralized and decentralized state apparatuses will support the new socialism's households generously as capitalism never did. The twin reproductions—of democratic households and democratic enterprises—will be equal social responsibilities: 21st-century socialism's notion of work-life balance.

Such reorganizations of enterprises and households define socialism for the 21st century in a new way. Social change becomes a lived daily experience in each enterprise and household (more profound than mere changes from private to state-regulated, controlled, or owned enterprises). Such a redefined socialism can defeat the anti-socialist movements that have long contested state power versus individual power and that dogmatically endorsed the nuclear family against all alternative household structures. It revives elements of socialism's complicated history of alliance with anarchism.

Democratic worker cooperatives become a key institutional foundation of whatever state apparatus survives. Worker co-ops, democratized households, and individuals will be the state's three revenue sources and thus key sources of its power. They will democratically decide how to divide the provision of such revenue among themselves. Undemocratically organized institutions—such as capitalist enterprises or traditional households—will no longer undermine democratically organized politics. Instead democratic economic, political, and household organizations will collaborate, interact, and share responsibilities for social development and social reproduction.

Democratically transformed enterprises and households are socialist goals well worth fighting for. So too is a state controlled by and thus responsive to individuals within democratically organized households, residential communities, and worker-co-op enterprises. Together these goals comprise an effective, attractive new vision to define and motivate a socialism for the 21st century. One of its banners might proclaim, "No king or dictator in politics; no boss or CEO at work; no patriarch or head at home."

# Money Matters: Giving and Receiving

Michael Albert

Imagine you receive hundreds of millions of dollars tomorrow. What would you do with it? Suppose you decide to generate desirable outcomes. How should others judge your choice?

First, we should note that to have hundreds of millions of dollars and the gargantuan influence that accompanies such wealth should not happen in the first place. Though central, this is generally ignored. But suppose you inherited the bonanza in our rotten society. It is a fait accompli. We should note the social inequity and judge society for that. But you've got the piles of money. Now what?

Second, suppose you say "I want to do good things with my piles of cash." Well, it likely means that you have certain values, beliefs, and understandings and in accord with those you want to abet certain outcomes. Next, you decide to seek recipients you expect would do good things of the sort you desire to aid. So far I might prefer if you felt that you alone shouldn't wield such great influence so you set up a team with folks from realms you admire to disperse the funds, but I wouldn't castigate you for choosing to give it out yourself, including choosing who to give it to. This much holds, I think, for the simple act of choosing to give to advance what one believes in whether you are the right-wing Koch brothers with disgusting politics and aims, or, as in the controversy now playing out due to a New York Times cover story, you are leftist Neville Roy Singham with a mixed bag of politics and aims.

Third, what if you instead decide to seek still more power or income for yourself, and you disperse your funds in pursuit of such personal gains? Your donations advance various causes,

but just to cover your real intentions. You give to the Chicago symphony, but you don't care about music. You give to a California literacy program or a New York food bank, but you don't care about illiteracy or hunger. Behind your false facade, you seek only credibility, tax breaks, and perhaps a building with your name on it. Now we should abhor you shouldn't we, like we abhor the methods of the murderous Sackler family of Purdue Pharma ignominy?

Another factor is your method. Do you donate to recipients who of their own independent preferences desire to do things you respect and admire? Or do you find recipients from whom you believe you can elicit actions you favor regardless of their independent preferences? For the latter, for example, do you use the carrot of giving funds and the stick of terminating funds to coerce support for your aims? Do you threaten to end future grants that you have gotten a recipient to depend on to coerce what you want from them? In that case too, we should abhor your choices like we abhor the methods of the NRA and other lobbies and rich electoral donors who fund candidates to coerce desired behavior regardless of the candidates' own views.

Another factor always at a play is do we think the values, politics, and agenda that you favor are themselves desirable or heinous? Do we think your donations will generate good or do harm? This is in the eye of the beholder and undoubtedly I and you would find most really big donor agendas to be fed by warped personalities and mindsets formed by societies' most despicable institutions, and only a very few even somewhat good.

All that said, how might we apply such



Photo by Sivani Bandaru

observations to any particular situation? For example, how might we judge Neville Roy Singham, recently highlighted in a New York Times front page investigative report? The report tells us Singham ardently supports China and tries to disperse funds to increase China's visibility and influence. So? Everything I have been able to glean, which is not too much, suggests that Singham's views are sincere. He is not seeking wealth or power. He is not carrying out orders given by others. I would say the politics behind his priorities are flawed and his financial assets are so great as to raise concerns about the effects his funds may have on what does or doesn't happen on the left. But to attack Singham because he gives to what he likes and in particular to do so regarding Singham but not regarding banks, foundations, lobbies, corporations, Koch, Sackler, and the U.S. government who all also give to what they like is hypocritical bias, whether it's done by the likes of Marco Rubio or by liberals.

I have no way to know for sure, but I suspect the recent New York Times article about Singham and where his money goes was for its authors just a piece of investigative journalism about a valid subject. For the Times itself, however, I am confident that publishing the article so prominently but never similarly sponsoring and featuring countless other articles that could be undertaken to expose the motives and structures behind massive mainstream money matters, not to mention military matters, including the media's silence about such matters, was politically done to undercut progressives and not to reveal important truths. No surprise there, but perhaps possible evidence of more things to come, a matter for considerable concern.

I should acknowledge that I have just enough personal history with rich donors to speak anecdotally a bit about such issues. For example, second hand and many years back I heard about a rich progressive donor who financed anti war activism and later No Nukes activism but who made a condition for receiving her funds being silent on Palestinian rights and Israeli violations of those rights. Or, also many years back and second hand, I heard about a rich donor who financed a periodical and then shut it down by withholding expected funds due to not liking some content. Or, first hand but also years back, I have myself experienced a rich donor who made big promises, extracted endless time and uncharacteristic behavior from me, but then finally gave nothing. Or, also first hand, I have experienced rich donors who bemoaned and expected fealty for giving what were actually trivial sums compared to their means. And, to be out front and accountable, about two years ago, when I was soliciting new staff to re-conceive and maintain a new ZNet, a good friend of mine who had some contact with Singham offered to make a pitch to him to help the new project. The pitch was made and in response, Singham told my friend that though Z had been a big help to him as he first became radical decades before, since then

his views had developed and ZNet wasn't an institution he would want to support. Singham's priority was to support media that would use his help to be positive about China, my friend told me, and Singham knew the old ZNet wasn't a China fan and predicted the new ZNet wouldn't be either. I should note that had my friend called and instead said that Singham had some doubts for those same reasons but he nonetheless wanted to give ZNet a million dollars, I would have advised the new staff to take it, but also to not reconstruct their views or operations with the expectation of getting more funds later. For that matter, in earlier years Z had accepted donations—sadly, always very modest—from a few wealthy individuals, and to make a long story short, I had spent a lot of time soliciting two potential huge donors for very large support, but despite their promises, when the dust settled Z got nothing from what were certainly two of the most time consuming, demeaning, and fruitless pursuits of my life. So, regarding funding, questions arise for progressive recipients? What is okay to accept? What is okay to do? What is unwise or not okay or even seriously wrong to do?

Imagine you are in some progressive organization, perhaps an alternative media group, an activist campaign, an organizing team, or a political party. Along comes someone with huge sums who offers you what in your situation is a really large donation. Should you take it?

Again, there is nothing wrong per se, in our upside down world, with accepting rich donor support for doing what you wish to do. Problems arise if what you wish to do is no good or positively bad, of course; or if to get support you distort your own preferred agenda or you augment it with actions you would not have otherwise done or even with actions that you despise; or if you let your work become dependent on a big donor who thereby gains power over you; or, for that matter, if you jump through endless hoops perhaps in the

process distorting your personal habits and beliefs, only to fruitlessly gain nothing. Despite these possible problems, to honestly critique compromises that progressives make to get funds from a big donor, one might want to first note that it isn't only to get funds from a big donor that one might compromise but also, for example, to sell stuff or to induce small donor donations. In all fund raising, that is, issues that can arise include, for example, the slippery slope of dependency that causes a growing need to comply with donors' wishes followed by growing duplicity or self delusion to rationalize the situation. A donor gives a large sum. No strings. The recipient changes yearly wages and regular expenses to do more good in expectation of more donations to come. Later the donor wants different behavior so strings appear, albeit subtly. The choice becomes to comply with new donor desires so as to keep budgeted money coming, or to not comply, lose further donations, and then fail due to having reorganized in ways that require continued large donations.

Then there are also the optics and their implications. Is a donor so compromised in fact or even just in other's biased perceptions that receiving such a source's donations will undercut your credibility so much as to induce losses that outweigh whatever gains the donations financed? Not to mention do you misrepresent your views or needs or flat out lie to get donations from large or even small donors? Money matters are complicated.

While the mechanics of receiving donations, the possible dangers of becoming dependent, the dangers of losing credibility, and the possible warping of one's values and behaviors all require careful reckoning, as with assessing the acts of donors, with recipients too an additional key factor is how much good will recipient's actions achieve? Will it be enough to justify the recipient doing some unwanted or bad things to get funds with which to do good things?

Over decades of personally working on various projects I have actually had considerable first hand experience as a fund raiser and recipient of user donations, plus some fruitless solicitations such as the two mentioned earlier, and a few albeit modest successes with large donors. But I also had a quite unusual experience that perhaps has some relevance here.

When Hugo Chavez was alive and well, and Venezuela was pursuing what I felt and still feel were very desirable changes, I made a pitch for Venezuela to aid the international left as a whole. I proposed that Caracas host a set of yearly radical research and activism prizes with pomp, circumstance, and financial rewards similar to those of the Swedish Nobel prizes. I urged that such a Bolivar Prize could provide needed income and visibility to good projects based all around the world. At the same time, even more ambitious, I proposed that Venezuela publish Bolivarian editions of excellent books by very trustworthy and admirable left authors. This was partly to provide quality works in massive quantities to the Venezuelan population via a kind of Venezuelan domestic left book club and state subsidized publisher, which Chavez had already done with a couple of books. But the proposed innovation was that the state publisher would provide the authors of the chosen books New York Publishing House level advances commensurate to the millions of units to be printed and distributed. The authors would understand their advance was meant to aid left causes via the hope that the authors would donate their funds to achieve such ends. The peculiar details were conceived to make millions of dollars of transfers unprosecutable. Note that this would have been a foreign government providing funds to a state publisher to affect political developments by way of admired authors worldwide (sort of like the U.S. doling out fortunes and, except in the Venezuelan case, without control and for good and not evil). Diverse authors would hopefully choose recipients to give major funds

in legitimate ways that would in turn foster good results. All this would happen even though the funds had initially come from a foreign government. And, by the by, I was not just hypothetically considering this, I dreamed it up and proposed doing it, albeit unsuccessfully. The point of the story is that assessing money matters is often non trivial, involves many variables, and is highly context specific. To donate or to accept donations, the devil or the angel is largely in the contextual details as well as the social purpose. For those reasons, one overarching need regarding judging any kind of money matters is to provide sufficient transparency to allow reasoned assessment and warranted accountability.

So what does all this say about the current controversy regarding Singham and his recipients? First, we know—or we should know—that the New York Times publishes all the news (it deems) fit to print and that what it deems fit to print is whatever harms its enemies, enriches its allies, garners audience sufficient to attract advertisers, and doesn't repel or otherwise anger advertisers. How do I say this? The New York Times is a despicable institution that routinely whitewashes horror into history and manipulates resistance into perfidy. Second, we know—or we should know—that the situation the recent Times article highlighted will predictably provide fodder for a time for right-wingers around the world to China bash and to hypocritically use to castigate some or perhaps even all progressives. Beyond that, regrettably, the situation may also cause some people of good will to rush to judgements about Singham and his recipients way short of knowing and thinking through details. And finally, we can hope and more important we can try to facilitate that the situation will also cause some serious thought about ways to ensure that progressive donations flow in worthy manners to worthy recipients to enact worthy actions.

# Art of Distraction

**Ramzy Baroud**

‘Panem et circenses,’ said the Romans – ‘Bread and circuses.’

This maxim served the Romans well. In times of crisis and whenever they needed a distraction from military defeats or political infighting at the highest levels, they simply entertained the masses.

Caroline Wazir wrote an article in *The Atlantic* in 2016, linking entertainment and the need for political validation in the Roman Empire.

“The Exotic Animal Traffickers of Ancient Rome” is a good summation of how thousands of rare animals – at least rare for the Romans – were transported to Rome to be butchered at the Colosseum.

The practice was used in the early years of the Roman Empire to win approval for ambitious emperors and, during the age of decadence, to distract from the failures of struggling Caesars.

Ultimately, the entire exercise had little to do with entertainment for its sake and everything to do with distraction.

But the art of distraction is not wholly Roman. Ancient and modern, all governments, without exception, use entertainment to win validation, buy love and to distract.

It is ironic that two US-based billionaires, Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg, are resorting to the same tactic – political entertainment – this time, in the form of an actual ‘cage match’.

The two technology oligarchs have occupied headlines for weeks and sparked a conversation, which has roped in top officials and even governments.

The fight will be held in an “epic location”, said Musk on August 11. Italy’s Minister of Culture

and Education, Gennaro Sangiuliano, confirmed, though ruled out the Colosseum as the location for the – we are told – ‘much-anticipated’ match.

Many are now involved in the discussion. Even so-called social media influencers are offering elaborate analyses and enthusiastically taking sides.

It is strange how the news of the ‘fight’ has sidelined a more urgent discussion on the power of social media, its politicized and ideological censorships, and the destructive role it plays in our increasingly polarized lives.

For years, Zuckerberg has been on the defensive, unable to answer legitimate questions about Facebook’s – now Meta’s – role in the US presidential elections, in alleged foreign interventions, and in censoring foes and elevating friends.

Musk, too, has been in the eye of the storm since he acquired Twitter last October. He has done much to rebrand the company, now ‘X’, and fend against accusations of allowing hate speech to resurface on the popular platform.

Regardless, these two men represent a much bigger problem. They are the 1% of the 1% that rule the US, in fact, the West. The polarization they invite is, in actuality, a conflict among elites, not among the ordinary – people just like us.

We are told to ignore all of this because the ‘exotic animals’ are coming to the Colosseum, once more – bread and circuses.

The inequality gap in America continues to grow. But it is getting even more complicated than the typical statistic, of a tiny percentage owning many-fold more than their fair share of wealth.



Photo by Daria Nepriakhina on Unsplash

Kasha Patel wrote in The Washington Post on August 17 that the 10% of wealthy Americans are “responsible for 40% of the country’s greenhouse emissions.” This was the gist of a recent study by PLOS Climate.

An earlier study by the US Department of Commerce explained how inequality in the US is also geographic, as in a widening income gap “between richer places and poorer places”.

Despite talks about a flattening inflation rate, all indicators point out that inequality will continue.

In fact, there is much more to distract from, these days, than just income inequality.

The Russia-Ukraine war has invited much anxiety and direct harm to our lives. But it also exposed existing fault lines on a global scale.

Those who barely survived the energy crisis of last winter, due to unusually warm weather, might not be as lucky this coming winter.

And those who managed to put food on the table, despite the food crisis, might not be as successful in the coming months, now that the grain deal is no more.

One still hopes that these crises will bring out the best in us. Alas, there are those who are equally

keen on using crises to sow the seeds of chaos in order to ensure those on top remain on top.

For that to happen, they need to be able to do as they please, while the rest of us attend the global circus where Zuckerberg and Musk battle it out in an ‘epic place’, while US government’s ‘whistleblowers’ declare that aliens, in fact, do exist.

Instead of confronting real crises, like racism, war, hunger, refugees, it is far easier to blame someone else, shadowy far-away figures who are almost impossible to identify, let alone defeat.

This is all happening with no self-introspection. Even those among Western leaders who dare suggest alternative understandings to global crises are shut out of the conversation, often humiliated publicly, even forced to apologize.

In the final analysis, the Musk vs. Zuckerberg’s fight does, in fact, matter. Not for anything related to two of the richest men in the world. It is relevant for us, because it is intended to be our circus.

Now, we have two options, either to develop the needed awareness and collective consciousness that should be enough to help us restate our priorities, nationally and globally. Or, to accept a mediocre existence, that of ‘panem et circenses’.

# Journalists And The Wars

**Boaventura de Sousa Santos**

The crisis of journalism has been talked about almost since the beginning of newspapers with large circulation. As early as 1919, Upton Sinclair published *The Brass Check*, a devastating critique of the power of capital to corrupt the press and journalists. But this critique has grown in tone since the beginning of the new millennium, when it became clear that the manipulation of the media was aimed not only at the interests of capital, but also at the interests of the national security state. It was with the invasion of Iraq (2003) that a new type of journalist emerged, the “embedded journalists”, i.e. reporters attached to military units involved in armed conflicts, who therefore report only what the military authorities allow, and are therefore subject to censorship or self-censorship. This creates a media consensus on wars that is just one dimension of the propaganda war. Patrick Lawrence, a great American journalist – as a curiosity, he covered the Revolution of April 25, 1974 in Portugal for the *Guardian* – author of the recent book, *Journalists and their Shadows*, shows that the manipulation of journalism to serve national security policy began with the Cold War from the 1950s onwards.

He says: “I lived through the Cold War but for its very first years, and my memories remain vivid. It is the hysteria in the press and over the broadcast waves that lingers most in my mind. These things have left scars that do not fade with time, and in this I cannot be alone. This hysteria was at its highest pitch during the nineteen fifties and some of the sixties. The major dailies and the networks gave that time its texture and timbre. They delivered the Cold War to our doorsteps, to our car radios, into our living rooms. They defined a consciousness. They told Americans who they were and what made them American and altogether what made America America. A free

press was fundamental to this self-image, and Americans nursed a deep need to believe they had one. Our newspapers and networks went to elaborate lengths to give this appearance of freedom and independence. That this was a deception – that American media had surrendered themselves to the new national security state and its various Cold War crusades – is now an open-and-shut matter of record. I count it among the bitterest truths of last seventy-five years of American history.”

One question stands out. Are Europe and North America today plunged into a new propaganda war, now over the war in Ukraine? I have no doubt that they are.

The most general questions that readers who are less intoxicated by propaganda ask are these. Do journalists believe the news they report and what they write? Or do they know that they are distorting the truth and misinforming, but that this is the only alternative to keep their jobs? These questions arise with particular insistence with regard to what war correspondents or special envoys report about the war. The answers to these questions, if they are ever possible, will not be for many years. Perhaps that’s why, for now, we can only report on journalists who were correspondents in previous wars, who were “embedded” before the term existed, but who nevertheless had the courage to independently observe what they saw and write as soon as possible about what had really happened. The most notable case is that of Curzio Malaparte (1898-1957) in his book *Kaputt*, first published in 1944 and considered one of the best books on the atrocities of the war.

Malaparte started out as a supporter of Italian fascism and an enthusiast of Mussolini, but broke with both in 1933 and was imprisoned several

times. From 1941, he began covering the Second World War for *Corriere della Sera*. He was on the eastern front (Ukraine) and on the northern front accompanying Nazi troops. Many of his articles were censored and only published later. Three cases cruelly illustrate the violence of war. These are atrocities committed by the Nazis with whom he was in close contact, but it can't be ruled out that the Allies didn't commit them too.

### **The Russian prisoners in Ukraine (then part of the Soviet Union).**

Gathered in a kolkhoz near the nearby village of Nemyriv, the prisoners were subjected to a test that consisted of assessing who could read well and who was illiterate or semi-illiterate. They had to read the *Pravda*. The result of the test given to 118 prisoners was as follows:

"The examination lasted for about an hour.

When the last batch of three prisoners completed the two minutes of reading, the colonel turned to the Feldwebel and said, "Count them!" The Feldwebel began counting from a distance, pointing at each man with his finger, "Ein, zwei, drei..." On the left were eighty-seven, on the right were thirty-one who had passed successfully. Then, at the colonel's bidding, the *Sonderführer* began to speak. He seemed like a schoolmaster dissatisfied with his pupils. He said that he was disappointed, that he was sorry to have flunked so many, that he would have preferred to pass them all. At any rate, he added, those who had not succeeded in getting through the examination would have no reason to complain, provided they worked and displayed a greater skill than they had displayed at school. While he spoke, the group of the successful prisoners gazed at their less fortunate comrades with a compassionate air, and the younger ones dug their elbows into each other's ribs and giggled. When the *Sonderführer* had finished speaking, the colonel turned to the Feldwebel and said: "Alles in Ordnung. Weg!" and he walked off toward his headquarters followed by the other officers who looked back occasionally and exchanged whispers.

"You'll stay here until tomorrow, and tomorrow you will start for the labor camp," said the Feldwebel to the group on the left. Then he turned toward the group on the right who had passed and harshly ordered them to fall in line. As soon as the prisoners formed a close line touching one another's elbows – they looked pleased, and laughed, glancing at their companions as if making fun of them – he counted them again quickly, said, "Thirty-one," and made a sign with his hand to a squad of SS men waiting at the end of the courtyard. He ordered, "Right about, turn!" The prisoners turned right about, marched forward stamping their feet hard in the mud and, when they came face to face with the wall surrounding the yard, the Feldwebel commanded "Halt!" Then turning to the SS men who had lined up behind the prisoners and had already raised their tommy guns, he cleared his throat, spat on the ground and shouted, "Fire!"

When he heard the rattle of the guns, the colonel, who was within a few steps of the office, stopped, turned abruptly; the other officers stopped and also turned. The colonel passed his hand over his face as if wiping away sweat and, followed by his officers, entered the building. walking past me. "Russia must be cleared of all this learned rabble. The peasants and workers who can read and write too well are dangerous. They are all communists."

### **Romania's Jewish prostitutes**

Young Romanian Jewish women were sent to the front to serve German soldiers and officers for twenty days in brothels. Malaparte visited one of them in Soroca on the Dniester River, now part of Moldavia. It was late in the evening and Malaparte talked to some of the young women. "Oh, no! After twenty days of this work we are not fit for anything. I saw them – I saw the other ones." She broke off and I noticed that her lips were trembling. That day she had had to submit to forty-three soldiers and six officers. She laughed. She could no longer bear life. The physical exhaustion was worse than the



An embedded civilian journalist taking photographs of US soldiers in Pana, Afghanistan.

disgust. “Worse than the disgust,” she repeated smiling.

“I learned that two days later they were taken away. Every twenty days the Germans provided a change of girls. Those who left the brothel were shoved into a truck and taken down to the river. Later Schenck told me that it was not worth while to feel so sorry for them. They were not fit for anything any more. They were reduced to rags, and besides, they were Jewish”.

“Did they know that they would be shot?” asked Ilse.

“They knew it. They trembled with fear. Oh, they knew it! Everybody knew it in Soroca.”

### **Suicides on the northern front.**

By 1941, many German officers were convinced that Germany could lose the war. On the northern front, as on other fronts, soldier suicide began to be so frequent that Himmler visited the front with a plan to reduce suicide ... by

punishing the suicidal. Report reproduced by Malaparte: “It’s awful! Always carousing, day and night, while suicides among officers and men are increasing at a dizzy rate. Himmler in person has come this far north to try and put an end to this epidemic of suicides. He will place the dead under arrest. He will have them buried with tied hands. He thinks he can stop suicides by terror. He had three Alpenjäger shot yesterday because they had tried to hang themselves. Himmler does not know that to be dead is a wonderful thing.” He looked at me with that look that the eyes of the dead have. “Many shoot themselves through the head. Many drown themselves in the rivers and lakes — they are the youngest among us. Others roam about the woods delirious.”

These are three atrocious war stories. How many atrocities of this or other kinds were committed in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, or are being committed today in Syria, Yemen and Ukraine? We already know a lot about the former, but we won’t know much about the latter until many years from now, if there are still journalists like Curzio Malaparte.

# One Day for Labor Day Is Not Enough

**Andrew Moss**

The state of labor this year is so fraught, so weighted with issues and problems, that a single day of homage and reflection doesn't seem enough. It's as if a year or more is needed to engage the issues, challenges, and possibilities facing American workers today. Consider the following:

Some 37.9 million Americans, about 11.6 percent of the population, live in poverty. But as sociologist Matthew Desmond has noted, about one in three Americans lives in a household with an income of \$55,000 per year or less, an income barely enough to cover the rising costs of rent, health care, and food. Some 10.2 percent of American households (13.5 million households) have been food insecure, lacking access at one time or another to an adequately nutritious diet.

At the same time, organizations that best represent the material interests of working people – labor unions – are at an all-time low in membership (10.1 percent), down from 20.1 percent of working adults in 1983, when comparable data was first available. As studies have shown, unionized workers tend to make wages higher than those of non-union workers, and they tend to be less vulnerable to such corporate labor strategies as outsourcing.

But outdated labor laws and weak enforcement continue to hamper the efforts of thousands of workers seeking to organize unions and achieve fair collective bargaining agreements. Despite some important successes (e.g. the wage raises and safety provisions recently won by UPS workers), major employers like Starbucks and Amazon stonewall negotiations, and union busting remains a lucrative enterprise: a highly effective instrument deployed by many companies.

To complicate matters, AI has entered the workplace, threatening jobs in call centers and other places of employment – and remaining a contentious issue in

ongoing strikes by screenwriters and actors.

Recent polling indicates that public support for unions (71 percent) is the highest it's been since 1965. But it's one thing to indicate approval on an opinion poll; it's another to express that support in concrete ways.

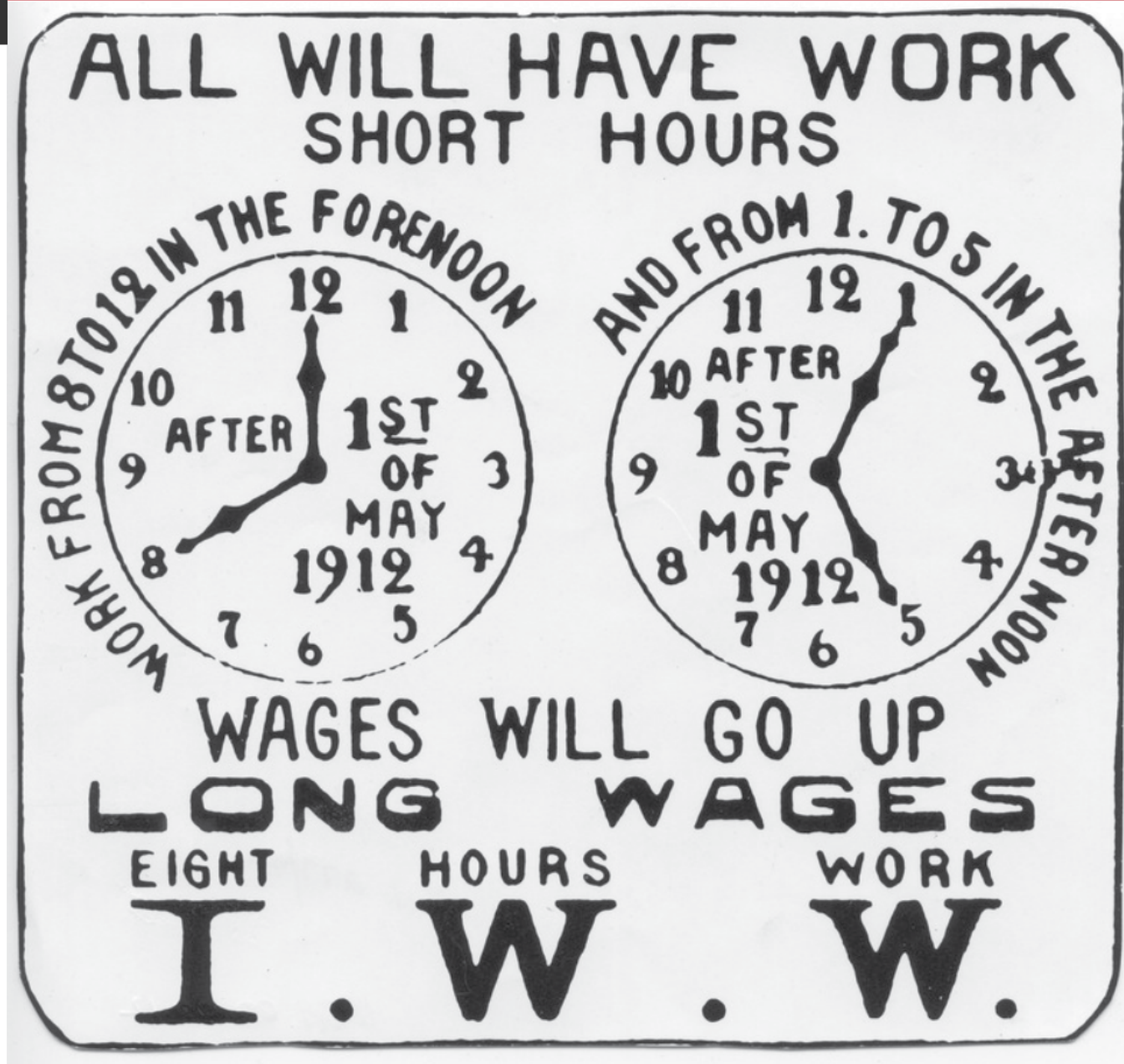
One way, of course, is to continue educating oneself about labor issues and the way they're played out in public discourse. With the 2024 election 14 months away, for example, one can scrutinize the words and actions of candidates who profess to care about working families.

Consider, for example, South Carolina Senator Tim Scott's declaration, at the recent Republican presidential debate, that "the only way we change education in this nation, is to break the backs of the teachers unions." What does it mean to represent unions in this way – to erase any consideration of teachers as both parents and as members of a community?

And what kinds of legislation, what kinds of policies, best represent the interests of workers – like those at Starbucks and Amazon – who seek to organize and achieve fair contracts?

Consider the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, which, among other things, would make it illegal for employers to force workers to attend anti-union, captive audience meetings. The PRO Act was passed by Congress in 2021, but it has since languished in the Senate. What will it take for basic legislation like this to become law?

Behind these questions lies the fundamental issue of accountability. How to hold candidates and public officials accountable for stances and actions that help or hinder workers? How to hold ourselves accountable as citizens, willing to take the extra steps to look



beyond campaign rhetoric as educated and discerning voters?

And how to look around our own neighborhoods – informing ourselves of local labor issues, respecting (even joining) picket lines, and supporting workers' rights to organize whenever possible?

The need for accountability applies to unions and union members as well. In my home city of Los Angeles, where screenwriters and actors continue their strikes, 32,000 low-wage hotel workers have also been on strike for two months. In a city where exorbitant rents have made it impossible for housekeepers or hotel bartenders to live where they work, the union is demanding not only better wages, but,

among other things, a 7 percent surcharge on rooms to help fund affordable housing for workers.

Strongly contested by the hotel owners, this latter demand nevertheless shows a unique kind of accountability: not only a union's investment in fair wages, working conditions, and benefits for workers, but also an investment in the housing stock and well-being of entire communities.

This Labor Day will be marked by requisite speeches, marches, and other forms of observance. And it should. But may it also mark a deepening, an intensifying, of the ongoing struggle for workers' rights and labor justice.

# SEIU & The Carpenters

Steve Early

In a recent conversation with an otherwise well-informed young labor activist, I made a passing reference to Change to Win, a national labor federation formed in 2005 by defectors from the AFL-CIO. “Change to what?” she asked. “Never heard of it.”

Her response was not surprising, given the short shelf life of the organizational brand in question. Launched with much media fanfare, Change to Win initially represented 5.5 million workers, about one-fifth of the AFL’s total membership. Its founders—the Service Employees, Teamsters, Carpenters, Laborers, United Farm Workers, Food and Commercial Workers, and UNITE-HERE—saw themselves as the second coming of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CWA), the rival federation created in the mid-1930s to spearhead mass organizing in that era.

To “build power for workers” seventy years later, key CTW strategist favored organizational consolidation—in the form of more mergers between national unions and internal consolidation of members into larger regional or multi-state locals. One cheerleader for that approach, Professor Ruth Milkman, penned a NY Times opinion piece hailing CTW as “labor’s best hope — maybe its only hope — for revitalization.”

CTW did not live up to such hype. It was soon wracked by internal conflict, precipitated by then-SEIU President Andy Stern’s controversial restructuring of healthcare locals in California and his disastrous meddling in the internal affairs of UNITE-HERE. That organizing-oriented union and two other founders of CTW—UFCW and the Laborers—returned to the AFL-CIO and were welcomed back.

The United Brotherhood of Carpenters quit CTW but did not rejoin the federation. Instead, under

the heavy-handed rule of President Douglas McCarron, a former drywall hanger from Chatsworth, CA., the Carpenters continued to battle other AFL-CIO construction unions. Instead of contributing to any progressive political tilt by labor during the Bush Administration, McCarron became George W.’s biggest union backer, endorsing other Republicans like his brother Jeb when the latter ran for governor of Florida.

## Strategic Organizing?

Last year, under new and improved national leadership, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters finally quit CTW. This led SEIU, the still tiny Farm Workers, and my own union, the Communications Workers of America, an AFL-CIO affiliate which opposed the creation of CTW, to rebrand their current collaboration as a “Strategic Organizing Center.” The SOC maintains a small staff to produce what it calls “cutting edge research for innovative campaigns.” On its modest new website, Change to Win (and its original pledge to devote nearly a billion dollars to new organizing) is relegated to the memory hole, getting no mention at all.

More than a decade after the rise, decline, and now official disappearance of CTW, labor activists interested in strategic thinking associated with two of its founding unions should check out some new titles from the University of Illinois Press. In *Purple Power: The History and Global Impact of SEIU*, co-editors Louis Aguiar and Joseph McCartin have assembled a collection of laudatory essays, by labor-oriented academics, on SEIU’s history as a healthcare, public employee, and service sector union, how it developed signature campaigns among janitors and fast food workers, and then promoted its “organizing model” among labor federations abroad (even as CTW floundered back home).

Unfortunately, there is no Purple Power report on the current Starbucks drive, backed by Workers United, an SEIU affiliate acquired (at UNITE-HERE expense) during the Change to Win crack up. That more worker-led effort has gained far greater shop-floor traction—via hundreds of representation election wins and an on-going first contract struggle—than SEIU’s past more community-based agitation for fast food wage increases (aka “the Fight for Fifteen”).

Purple Power’s most interesting feature is its focus on the career of SEIU’s best known organizer, Stephen Lerner, the key strategist behind its multi-city Justice for Janitors campaign in the mid-1980s and later. Lerner got his start in labor, like many others, as a UFW volunteer, then organized factory workers and public employees. Within SEIU, he eventually became its building services division director and a national executive board member, before being pushed out of the union after Mary Kay Henry replaced Stern as president in 2010.

Lerner is now a research fellow at the Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, directed by Purple Power co-editor McCartin, a Georgetown University Professor. In McCartin’s view, as a labor historian, 1.8 million workers greatly benefit from the work that Stern, Lerner, former AFL-CIO president John Sweeney and many others did to make SEIU “the most successful union in North America, and one of the most influential in the world.”

### Restoring Dignity

In *The Way We Build: Restoring Dignity to Construction Work*, Mark Erlich, a now-retired regional leader of the Carpenters, provides a detailed account of the daunting challenges facing U.S. construction workers. A graduate of Columbia University, the author is a rare Sixties’ radical who joined the conservative building trades, rather than “colonizing” in white-collar or industrial union workplaces where left-wing labor traditions, however tattered, seemed easier to revive fifty years ago.

Erlich worked 13-years as a rank-and-file carpenter in Massachusetts. He was employed, for the next three decades, by either his state Building Trades Council or his own affiliated union. He was elected business manager of a small Carpenters local in Boston, before becoming a creative and energetic regional organizer for the union. In 2005, he won a contested election for Executive Secretary-Treasurer of a New England-wide Carpenters Council with 24,000 members and an appointed staff of 100. In that leadership role, he became one of the highest paid building trades officials in eastern Massachusetts. During his full-time union career, he penned two earlier books and, after retirement, returned to the Ivy League as a research fellow at the Center for Labor and A Just Economy at Harvard Law School.

Both *Purple Power* and *The Way We Build* include valuable studies of industries where workers once had bargaining clout and then de-unionization occurred, which required new membership recruitment strategies in response. In SEIU, this open shop trend hit its traditional core jurisdiction—building services. As Lerner recounts, “the original roots of the union were dying—cities were going non-union. The industry was getting contracted out [and SEIU] was accepting concessions in an attempt to protect union contractors from lower-paying non-union contractors.” As documented in *Purple Power* (and previous books or films like *Bread and Roses*, SEIU organizers succeeded in mobilizing a now largely immigrant workforce through strikes, building occupations, protest vigils, and civil disobedience which sought union recognition and master contracts in more than 30 cities in the U.S. and Canada. At its peak, Jff activity helped win improvements for several hundred thousand janitors by making their plight a much-publicized labor cause celebre, locally and nationally.

### Lost Market Share

Since 1971 in the building trades, Erlich reports, “real wages have plummeted by an astonishing 15%, a function of the decline in union density and the corresponding growth of the lower-waged, non-union sector.” The resulting two-tier workforce

included union members—on big projects with public or private funding in regional union strongholds—who have apprentice programs, good wages and benefits, along with workplace safety protections.

But a much larger pool of construction workers, particularly in the South, Southwest, and Rocky Mountain states, have “lower pay, unsafe conditions, no benefits, no collective voice, and periodic wage theft.” One key management tool for union-busting and lowering labor standards has been the widespread mis-classification of workers as “independent contractors.” In the race to the bottom in construction, nothing gets you there quicker than shedding normal employer responsibilities for providing group health insurance or workers’ comp coverage and paying payroll taxes for Social Security, Medicare, or state-level unemployment benefits.

As Erlich notes, the resulting loss of “union market share” led the Carpenters to “streamline and reduce the number of struggling locals.” Beginning in the 1990s—and with greater impact during Doug McCarron’s 28-year reign—the union “established regional councils as intermediary bodies to reflect changing dynamics in the industry, to mirror an increasingly regionalized group of employer counter-parts, and to replace the chaos of decentralized and sometimes contradictory decision-making by autonomous local unions with a more uniform set of policies and guidelines across multiple states.”

According to Erlich, “managing the tension between the efficiencies of a streamlined operation and the democratic nature of local grassroots activity” can be a challenge. However, as the author points out (without citing a single illustrative example), “centralization can come at a cost” because “centralized power can and has been abused.” As the Association for Union Democracy has documented for the past half century, top-down control in the building trades remains a major obstacle to their revitalization because it breeds organizational corruption, involving pay-offs from employers or rip-offs of union treasuries and benefit plans by officials already collecting outlandish salaries.

Despite having only 430,000 dues-payers, the Carpenters Union pays 73-year old McCarron more than \$600,000 a year—an amount twice Mary Kay Henry’s pay for presiding over a membership four times larger. Convention election of top Carpenters’ officers is tightly controlled and internal restructuring has deprived rank-and-filers of the ability to directly elect key officers in the union’s regional councils. (After Erlich retired, his own 6-state council was subsumed into a new North Atlantic States Regional Council that includes members from New York.) Under McCarron—like SEIU’s Andy Stern—dissident locals were put under trusteeship and members seeking more democratic internal structures were forced to disaffiliate.

In 2007, for example, thousands of British Columbia carpenters won a decade long struggle to create an independent union called the Construction Maintenance and Allied Workers. CMAW followed a trajectory similar to that of the 15,000-member National Union of Healthcare Workers (NUHW). The latter was formed in 2009 after Stern seized control over SEIU’s third largest affiliate United Healthcare Workers-West because the elected leaders of its 150,000 members had questioned his healthcare organizing and bargaining strategy.

### A Mega-Local Mistake?

In Purple Power, an Andy Stern loyalist heavily involved in that California fiasco, now seems to have developed second thoughts about top-down restructuring elsewhere in SEIU. In a chapter entitled “The legacy of Justice of Janitors and SEIU for the Labor Movement,” Stephen Lerner recalls his original advocacy of “creating larger locals within geographic areas that mirrored how the [building services] industry was structured” and could better coordinate organizing and bargaining involving common employers. But, when SEIU headquarters continued this consolidation trend—over Lerner’s objections, he reports—the result was multi-state entities like NYC-based Local 32BJ which now boasts 150,000 members from Boston to Miami.

According to Lerner, this restructuring was “a mistake which cut the heart out of Justice for Janitors”

because such “mega locals” began operating “as regional fiefdoms, focused on negotiating and organizing regionally [thereby] undercutting a national industry wide strategy.” Worse yet, SEIU now has giant affiliates “that in some ways mirror building trades locals in that they align with the industry and oppose ideas like rent control because the industry opposes it.” With great hind-sight, Lerner faults Stern and his SEIU e-board allies for believing they “could have a different kind of relationship with the industry that no longer required pitched battles.”

“We [in Justice for Janitors] believed in using our base and power to build a mass movement and exponential growth. They [Lerner’s bureaucratic foes] believed in incremental gains and finding ways to show employers the union could be a good partner. It was often called ‘peace plus.’ Meaning SEIU needed to convince employers that not only did settling with the union bring ‘peace’—no strikes—but the settling with the union also meant we would be their ally on issues like zoning, rent control, etc.”

Similar labor-management partnering and transactional politics have long been the conservative MO of construction unions—with the mixed results described by Erlich. Conspicuously missing from his argument for craft union innovation in the 21st century is much discussion of who can propel “the trades” in a better direction?

The Painters Union gets a shout out for electing its first African-American president, Ken Rigmaiden. Before his recent retirement, Rigmaiden took the enlightened stance that “we need to support our current members but also support those workers who want to do the same work we do—people of color and newly arrived workers in this country.” Just as SEIU, in its Justice for Janitors heyday, formed coalitions with immigrant rights organizations, some building trades affiliates have linked up with community-based groups fighting wage and hour law violations, worker misclassification, unsafe working conditions, and other exploitation of the undocumented.

## Agents of Change?

In other sectors of organized labor, institutional change of the sort favored by Erlich has required membership activity, inspired or led by reform movements operating at the local or national level. That’s not an “internal organizing” model that either Erlich, Lerner, or other contributors to Purple Power pay much attention to. Instead, they downplay or ignore the importance of union democracy in ousting entrenched leadership and making labor bureaucracies more effective vehicles for new organizing, effective contract campaigns and strikes, and greater membership participation in legislative/political fights.

In fact, Lerner’s catalytic role in rallying immigrant janitors didn’t deter him from later helping to crush a nascent network of SEIU members in California, who favored reforms like direct election of top SEIU officers and board members. Lerner’s reward for that 2008-9 UHW trusteeship work was getting purged himself not long afterwards, when he lost his “political fight” with Andy Stern’s successor over organizing strategy, a parting of ways obliquely referenced in Purple Power.

Meanwhile, Mark Erlich kept his head down in the domain of Doug McCarron, a key building trades CEO never mentioned once in *The Way We Build*. Erlich was able to leave the Carpenters without any publicly embarrassing push out the door, like Lerner got. And they are both now free to promote “best practices” for labor in books, articles, interviews, or campus-based consulting work. But any blue-prints for union revitalization—based on newly articulated critiques of SEIU or the building trades—aren’t worth much if workers have little decision-making power within those unions and few structural mechanisms to improve their organizational functioning.

Labor campaigns for dignity and justice on the job are essential progressive causes. But they would have more movement-building impact if the democratic rights of rank-and-file members were more widely respected and restored, rather than curtailed in the name of union modernization and consolidation.

# Goodbye to Political Zionism, Hello to Religious Zionism

**Dan Lieberman**

The meteoric rise of the Religious Zionists, a sleight of hand that outdoes master Netanyahu, surprises everyone and delights few. How did this happen, who let it happen, and what can be done after the entrenchment of those who hold a prayer book in one hand and a rifle in the other hand? What happened to Theodore Herzl's Political Zionism and its successor, David Ben Gurion's Labor Zionism?

Political Zionism traded destruction, oppression, and decades of suffering of the Palestinian community for a contrived state, an ideal nation where all Jews safely coalesced, free from persecution and physical danger. Several wars, continuous battles in Gaza and the West Bank, threats from Hezbollah and Iran, and conflicts between Israel's religious and secular populations reveal that the aspirations have not been fulfilled. Political Zionism erred in its judgments of what all the Jewish people wanted and in its relations with Mizrahi and Orthodox Jews. Its failures have forced the passage of leadership to Religious and Cultural Zionism.

## The Failures of Political Zionism

Casual observance of the growth of the state of Israel leads to the belief that Political Zionism appealed to the Jewish public, that it cleverly organized resources to gain adherents, and succeeded, by its own volition. Closer examination spotlights an illusion; fortuitous circumstances benefitted the Zionists and enabled them to create a state in a zero-sum game by which they won control of the Jewish community and the community almost lost its ancient heritage. Relating the history is worth a brief examination.

From its beginnings in 1890 to the start of World War I, Zionism proved a stagnant adventure. During that period, about 70,000 Jews came to Pal-

estine, not all of whom were Zionists, some being adventurists, utopian Socialists, and seeking new opportunities. By 1918, only about 40,000, of those who immigrated to Palestine remained and added to the approximate 30,000 who had been born in the Levant. Meanwhile, more than 2,500,000 Jews ventured to other places, mostly to the United States.

Destruction of the Ottoman Empire and issuance of the Balfour Declaration revived the comatose Zionist adventure. In addition, the League of Nations' certification of the British Mandate in Palestine prevented the formation of a national Palestinian governing body and provided opportunities for English-speaking European Jews to work in the British administration. They came with the blessings of a Balfour Declaration that certified their validity, and with protection of His Majesty's forces. From 1918-1922, approximately 24,000 Jews arrived in Palestine.

The year 1924 was fortuitous for the Zionists. The US Immigration Act closed the doors to mass Jewish immigration from East European nations and the Act steered Jews to migrate to Palestine. By 1931, Palestine housed 175,000 Jews.

During the 1930s and until the entrance of the United States into World War II, Nazi persecution of the Jews drove more than 60,000 German Jews to immigrate to Palestine. About 280,000 German and Austrian Jews migrated to other places, with about 125,000 refugees coming to the United States

The Ha'avara Transfer Agreement with Nazi Germany permitted the Zionists to use German Jewish assets, including bank deposits, for purchases of German products that were exported to the Jew-



Photo by Ehimetalor Akhere Unuabona

ish-owned Ha'avara Company in Tel-Aviv. A portion of the money from the sales of the goods went to the emigrants upon their arrival in Palestine in an amount corresponding to their deposits in German banks.

Revelations of the Holocaust and the plight of Jewish refugees after World War II gained worldwide sympathy for the Zionist cause. About 136,000 displaced Jews came to Palestine, many out of desperation and without intention to remain. The Cold War provided the most decisive benefit for Zionism - Soviet Union support for an Israeli state drove the United States to compete for Zionist attention. Votes from both nations, bribes, and arm twisting provided a narrow victory for United Nations Declaration 181 and the Zionists established their state.

The 1948 war between Israel and Arab states led Arab leaders to question the loyalty of their Arab Jews and placed the Jews living in Arab nations in a difficult position. Arabs by ethnicity and Jews by heritage, having lived in their surroundings for generations, these Jews were now regarded with suspicion. Zionist operations within their nations, military conflicts, and oppression of the Palestinians, provoked the Arab governments into hostile actions against their Jewish citizens who had no recourse but to find safety with those who had caused

their plight. Opposing narratives describe the Iraqi Jews as either eager to emigrate to Palestine or having little awareness of Zionism. One source quotes a communication that contends that "rest assured that if a plebiscite is made among the Iraqi Jews, you will find that 100 percent of them are anxious to emigrate from Iraq to Palestine." Another commentator alleges that before 1941, "There was no local Zionist movement in Iraq. The Jews had not experienced a Zionist 'awakening' and did not consider Palestine an attractive option." In one decade, about 800,000 Mizrahi immigrated to Israel. Iraqi-Jewish poet, Me'ir Basri, claims. "If Israel had not been established, nothing would've happened to the Iraqi Jews."

The last two great waves of immigration came from the Soviet Union. From 1970 to 1988, 291,000 Soviet Jews were granted exit visas, of whom 165,000 migrated to Israel, and 126,000 migrated to the United States. The Kremlin granted visas to Soviet Jews who had relatives in Israel, but the Washington Post, February 19, 1989, reports, "Most of the newcomers leave the Soviet Union on Israeli visas, but once they get to the halfway stop in Vienna, more than 90 percent jump ship and opt for the United States." Arrangements between Israel and the United States steered the recalcitrant back to Israel.

The desperate economic and social situation after

the fall of the Soviet Union prompted its citizens to seek more comfortable surroundings. Additional opportunities for Soviet Jews to migrate arose and 810,727 came to Israel during the last decade of the 20th century. Did these Jews come to Israel as Zionists or as refugees who had no better place to go? A report from the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS) leans to the latter conviction.

The exodus of Soviet Jews increased in 1989 with almost 90 percent wanting to resettle in the United States. Some estimated that as many as 50,000 to 60,000 would leave in 1989. There would be a dual-track system for Soviet Jews to leave the Soviet Union. They could either apply to go to Israel or apply for refugee status at the American Embassy in Moscow.... This arrangement of a two-track system in Moscow resulted in Israel becoming, “by default, the destination for the vast majority of Jews seeking refuge.”

The CIS report indicates that due to Israel granting Jews “the right of return,” Israel became a readily available and easily facilitated option to where the Soviet Jews could emigrate.

Unusual events accompanied and benefitted the Zionist adventure; a guiding hand that caused calamities and provided new Jewish immigrants to the British Mandate and to the state of Israel. Most Jews came for other reasons than their attraction to Zionism — as a temporary station while escaping repression and displacement (Germans, Soviets, post WWII DPs), social and economic (Soviets, East Europeans after the United States imposed severe quotas), and insecurity due to Zionist actions (Mizrahim). Zionism as a homeland for the Jewish people did not attract a preponderance of Jews to Palestine and Israel; economic and political circumstances forced Jews to seek another home, and the Zionists provided the only welcoming opportunity.

The Zionist agenda committed to giving the Jewish people a safe and secure home and free of discrimination. It has given the ingathering Jews years of constant wars, terrorism, worldwide enmity from hostile nations, and an internal prejudice of Jews

against Jews that exceeds all prejudice against Jews during contemporary times.

Statistics on casualties of Israeli Jews demonstrate that the gathering of the Jews has not made them more secure or safe. From the start of the British mandate in 1919 until the year 2021, 23,928 Jews have been killed and 36,260 have been wounded in the Levant. Due to identification of the Jews with Israel, attacks on Jews in the Western world have increased. Sheltered by high walls and a strong military, Israeli Jews have been able to defend themselves against embittered enemies. If ballistic missiles make the walls superfluous and Israel’s adversaries become militarily strong, the Zionist mission will turn into a modern Sicarii operation, repeating those who claim to speak for the Jewish people and bring them to eventual decline.

Want to find hatred of Jews - go to Israel, where the secular Jews despise the Orthodox Jews, the European Ashkenazi Jews are contemptuous of the Arab Mizrahi Jews, and all discriminate against the Ethiopian Falasha Jews. Maybe, there is less discrimination in 2023, but twenty years after being airlifted to Israel, the Falasha endured much hate.

TEL AVIV, 9 February 2012 (IRIN) – Growing up in Israel, Shay Sium became accustomed to being called a “nigger.” Sium, 32, has lived in Israel most of his life, but says he and other Ethiopian Jews are treated differently from other Israelis: factories do not want to employ them; landlords refuse them; and certain schools turn away their children. “The word discrimination doesn’t describe what we experience. There is another word for it: racism. It is a shame that we still have to use this word today,” he told IRIN. An estimated 125,000 Ethiopian Jews live in Israel, but while they are supposed to be full citizens with equal rights, their community has continued to face widespread discrimination and socio-economic difficulties, according to its leaders. A recent decision – as reported by local media – by 120 homeowners not to sell or rent their apartments to Israeli-Ethiopian families has brought discrimination against Ethiopian Jews in Israel back into the spotlight. After perceiving a hostile Arab world, the destitute

Mizrahim left their homes and belongings and arrived in Zionist Israel, where they suffered decades of discrimination. From *Post-Zionism and the Sephardi Question* by Meyrav Wurmser Middle East Quarterly Spring 2005.

The post-Zionist Mizrahi writers continue to live their parents' insults and humiliations at the hands of the European Ashkenazi Jewish establishment that absorbed them in Israel after immigration. Discriminatory policies created a continuing social and economic gap between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim. These academics promote the view held by many young Mizrahim that discrimination did not end with their parent's generation. The children — who, in large part, were born in Israel — continue to face discrimination and cope with social and economic handicaps. The radical Mizrahim who turned to post-Zionism tap into anger beyond the well-known complaints of past ill-treatment, including the maabarot, the squalid tent cities into which Mizrahim were placed upon arrival in Israel; the humiliation of Moroccan and other Mizrahi Jews when Israeli immigration authorities shaved their heads and sprayed their bodies with the pesticide DDT; the socialist elite's enforced secularization; the destruction of traditional family structure, and the reduced status of the patriarch by years of poverty and sporadic unemployment. These Mizrahi intellectuals' fury extends beyond even the state sponsored kidnapping of Yemeni infants for adoption by Ashkenazi families who lost their children in the Holocaust. The real anger Sephardim feel nowadays, and upon which these Mizrahi post-Zionists seize, comes from the extent to which, in their view, the Zionist narrative denied, erased, and excluded their historical identity.

ALBERT T. CLAY, writing in the *Atlantic* in 1921, as an observer of POLITICAL ZIONISM's incursion into the British Mandate, predicted the outcome of the bigotry perpetrated by Herzl's followers.

Those who are familiar with life in Palestine, where the feeling between Moslem and Christian and Jew is perhaps more intense than in any other land, are

fully cognizant that this scheme for a Jewish state not only accentuates and increases the animosities that have always existed, but invites another tragic chapter in the history of the Hebrews. The Political Zionists are simply intensifying this feeling, as well as the bigotry and fanaticism of the masses, by their efforts to force themselves into a sovereign position. And there can be no question that anti-Semitism, not only in Palestine but throughout the world, will increase more and more as the world, Christian and Moslem, becomes familiar with the situation.

The Zionists proudly show a state that is economically prosperous. Even that is suspect — all Western nations prospered after World War II, the Zionists received vast military and economic aid from Germany and the United States, and they had the benefit of a Soviet brain drain that scientifically and intellectually enriched the nation. Ignored from Israel's overstated miracle and progress is that in The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), an international organization of 39 countries, that works to build better policies for better lives, Israel has the third highest poverty rate (17%), just below Romania (17.6%) and Costa Rica (20.3%). The reasons for this anomaly — economic discrimination of Palestinians and Falasha and economic deprivation of the ultra-orthodox Jews.

### Moment of Truth

At the moment of their greatest success, winning the 1967 war and conquering Jerusalem, Gaza, and the West Bank, the Zionists realized they had not completely succeeded. What would they do with Jerusalem, Gaza, the West Bank, and the Palestinians who occupied these areas? Standing at the Western wall and looking up at their Temple Mount, completely empty of Jewish expression, the Zionists stood triumphant and in a dilemma.

The Jews sanctify Jerusalem with a negative memory - the destruction of a biblical Temple. Physical remains that describe Jewish heritage and previous control in Jerusalem are scarce. The Western Wall, a part of the bearing wall of the platform constructed by King Herod under Roman rule, is

supposedly revered by Jews as the most existing spiritual construction of their heritage. According to Karen Armstrong, well-received author on religious affairs, Jerusalem's Jews did not pray at the Western Wall until the Mamelukes in the 15th century allowed them to move their congregations from a dangerous Mount of Olives and pray daily at the Wall. At that time, she estimates that there may have been no more than 70 Jewish families in Jerusalem. Do 70 families determine the "most existing spiritual construction of Jewish heritage?"

After examining excavations that contain pottery shards and buildings, well-known archaeologists have concluded that the findings do not substantiate the biblical history of Jerusalem and its importance during the eras of a united Jewish kingdom under David and Solomon. Near Eastern archaeologist Margreet Steiner, in an article titled *It's Not There: Archaeology Proves a Negative*, Biblical Archaeology Review, July/August 1998, states:

...from the tenth century B.C.E., there is no archaeological evidence that many people actually lived in Jerusalem, only that it was some kind of public administrative center...We are left with nothing that indicates a city was here during their supposed reigns (of David and Solomon)...It seems unlikely, however, that this Jerusalem was the capital of a large state, the United monarchy, as described in Biblical texts.

With Jerusalem identified as a holy city and Israel administered by a secular government, how could Israel assert authority and expand its presence in Jerusalem? The answer: Exaggerate the importance of the Western Wall to Judaism, bring in the Orthodox Jews to pray at the wall, permit them to claim various neighborhoods, and incite them to harass the Palestinian inhabitants. A similar and more murderous pattern has occurred in the West Bank where the Orthodox Jews have become the shock troops for the government — occupying hilltops that become outposts, and eventually become settlements from where the nearby Palestinian villages are harassed.

Establishment of a state for Jews and security of that state have been the Israeli government's concerns. It needed land to expand the state to more secure borders. The problem with the Palestinians was not the land, the problem was the possible security risk they imposed. Having the Orthodox Jews settle the land and expand settlements in the West Bank solved that and other problems for the Israeli government.

- The nation would expand and military reasons for confronting the Palestinians would emerge.
- The practicing and devoted Orthodox Jews, who contributed little to national prosperity, would serve a national purpose.
- The practicing and devoted Orthodox Jews marginal economic life would improve by providing them with housing and healthier surroundings.
- The bothersome religious demands by the practicing and devoted Orthodox Jews would be less voiced in Israel and be transferred to isolated locations in the West Bank.
- Labor's arrogance and contempt for the Mizrahim brought its downfall. Being Arabs and not victims of the World War II Holocaust, the Mizrahim were approached with disdain by the Ashkenazi who felt that their European origins and Holocaust identification gave them a superior position in the Jewish hierarchy.

Because Menachem Begin addressed them with respect and appreciation, beginning in the 1970s, Mizrahi Israelis started to vote for the Likud in large numbers. According to Nissim Mizrahi, a sociologist from Tel Aviv University whose name identifies his origins, "politics of universality, seen from a liberal point of view as key to correcting society's ills, are experienced by the Mizrahim as an identity threat, a problem rather than a solution. 'We vote according to our culture, we vote for those who do not underestimate our faith, our traditions.'"

The Political Zionists came from Western nations where their citizenship described their status and their religious convictions were arbitrary. They placed Israeli identification before Jewishness. The

latter identification is attached to nationality, one of several available for Israeli citizens. The Mizrahim came from nations where their religious convictions described their status. It was this conviction that gave them identity and the religious attachment to each held them together in Muslim lands. They desire to be identified as Jews before being Israelis.

The Political Zionists brought Jews together in a common land. Rather than exalting Judaism, they diminished its role, reducing themselves to being observant rather than engaged. After shedding their attachment to the Arab world, the Mizrahim began to follow the doctrines of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, considered the founder of Religious Zionism, who looked at Zionism and the creation of the State of Israel as “bringing the Jewish people back into a full dialogue with God.”

The superiority position moved the Europeans to establish a state that framed the Jews with a new identity, a new vision, and a new direction. It took time, and the Mizrahi and Orthodox Jews seized the opportunity to reject the original Zionist vision and take control of their own destiny.

The competing visions of Jewish identity are described by Laly Derai, “born in Paris to parents who immigrated from Tunisia to France before moving to Israel and a Likud activist known for her right-wing and traditional positions.” In an interview with the Middle East Eye, Ms. Derai relates:

Living in Israel is for us, coming from Arab countries, the continuation of our Jewish identity. Whereas the programme presented by the left is cosmopolitan - in which nationalism is overcome - we, Mizrahi Jews, do not relate at all to this discourse, in which human and civil rights come before our Jewish identity.

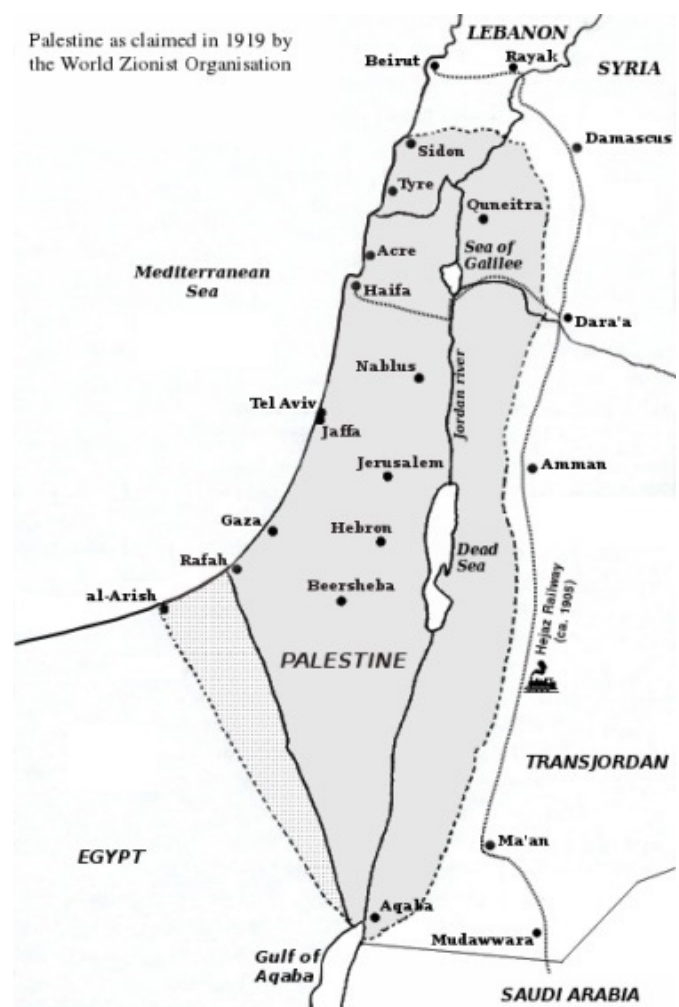
Choosing Netanyahu has nothing to do with the halaha [Jewish law] but depends on one's self-definition. The question Netanyahu and all of us ask ourselves is: how do you define yourself? Are you first Jewish or first Israeli? If you define yourself

firstly as Jewish, then we are in an identity story and not a religious one, and Netanyahu being religious or not doesn't matter at all.

You have to understand that for us, the natives of the Arab countries, the state of Israel was not created because of the Shoah [Holocaust], but because we wanted to realise a millennial dream.

## Conclusion

A hypocritical Labor Party paid a severe price for its neglect of the rights and needs of the Mizrahi immigrants — almost total dissolution. From the ashes of Political Zionism, the Religious and cultural Zionists reignited the Zionist embers and gave it a new direction. Led by the Mizrahi and Orthodox Jews, Religious Zionists have taken over the Zionist agenda and might intend to fulfill the boundary proposals expressed at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, which is shown on the following map.



## The New Israel

Israel enters a new and unpredictable phase with new questions:

### 1) Will the secular Jews leave?

Considering their skills and available options, many may take advantage.

### 2) Will the Israeli economy deteriorate?

LONDON, July 31 (Reuters) – “Israel’s economy may face ratings downgrades, falling foreign investment and a weaker tech sector if turmoil arising from the government’s contentious judicial reforms continue, investors and analysts warn.”

### 3) Will events divide World Jewry?

AP, PETER SMITH, February 23, 2023 - “An array of U.S. Jewish leaders are sounding alarms about what they see as a threat to Israel’s democracy posed by its new government, fearing it will erode the independence of its judiciary and legal protections for minority groups.”

### 4) Will Israel’s intelligence and military exercise more or less control?

Times of Israel, By EMANUEL FABIAN, January 15, 2023 - “On Monday, Herzi Halevi will enter office as chief of staff of the Israel Defense Force, as it marches into a political battleground, with members of Israel’s new right-religious government taking aim at the army’s chain of command. Under coalition agreements signed between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the leaders of the far-right Otzma Yehudit and Religious Zionism parties, control over the appointment of several generals and authority over some military units will be taken away from the IDF.”

### 5) Can Israel exist as a Jewish state with the Palestinian population in the territories at 5.3M in 2023?

Israel claims 7.1M Jews but about 1M live outside the country and the nation has 2.1 M Arab

citizens. Nowhere in the world does a minority oppress a majority under its control and few oppressions are as severe as that inflicted upon the Palestinians.

The age of Political Zionism is coming to a close. Israel embarks in a new direction, which can be defined as another Conquest. The Political Zionists conquered much of Palestine and established the state of Israel. The Religious Zionists are prepared to solidify the conquest of Judah and Samara and unite all Jews in a revival of the biblical kingdom.

The same Albert T. CLAY, who predicted an increase in bigotry against Jews, due to Herzl’s followers, clearly outlined the fallacy of the Zionist agenda. Writing in the Atlantic in 1921, as an observer of POLITICAL ZIONISM’s incursion into the British Mandate, Albert Clay noted”

A traveler returning from the Near East is at once struck by the utter ignorance of Europeans and Americans concerning the true situation in Palestine — an ignorance due largely to the fact that in London there is, practically, only one of the important daily papers that will print anything detrimental to the schemes of the Political Zionists.

Besides the English press, the other sources of information upon which America has been dependent for its news of Palestine have been the Jewish Telegraphic Agency and the Zionist propaganda. The latter, with its harrowing stories of pogroms in Europe, and its misrepresentations of the situation in the Near East, has been able to awaken not a little sympathy for the Zionist programme. But there certainly are reasons why Americans should endeavor to realize fully what is happening in Syria, and this quite promptly.

More than 100 years of unnecessary mayhem in Palestine and destruction of the Palestinians — predictable and preventable. Too few listening and too few with the capacity to exercise a change.

# A Nation Once Again: Ireland Has the Chance For a Do Over, But Will It Make Good on That Golden Opportunity?

**Bridget Meehan**

Back in April of this year, Joe Biden paid a presidential visit to Ireland that coincided with the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. There have been other presidential visits to the Emerald Isle but Biden's was a little unusual. It was less a state occasion and more an informal trip to the home of his forefathers and mothers. His stay began in Belfast, in the North of Ireland, where he spent a mere 18 hours (and for half of those he was asleep in bed). He couldn't hide his delight in getting across the border and into the South of Ireland where his first stop was Carlingford, his paternal ancestral home, followed by a visit to Dublin, and finally onto to home of his mother's folk in Ballina, County Mayo (that's not mayonnaise for short). There was a deeply personal moment when he had an unplanned encounter with the priest who gave his late son Beau his last rites. But there was also some humour. Joe couldn't come to Ireland and not treat us to at least one of his classic gaffs. He confused the All-Blacks rugby team with the Black-and-Tans (a nickname given to the brutal British militia sent to Ireland to suppress rebels in the early 1920s and whose improvised uniforms were a mix of dark green tunics which looked black and khaki British army trousers). Biden spoke of a distant cousin who played in an Irish rugby team that once defeated the All-Blacks, stating that "he was a hell of a rugby player; he beat the hell out of the Black and Tans." Nice one, Joe!

While there was no scarcity of cheering crowds to meet Biden at each of his Southern destinations, the town of Ballina outdid them all. The throngs who descended upon the town queued for hours and endured strict security checks just to get close to where guest of honour was going to speak. Those

interviewed for TV were simply beside themselves with joy; they gushed with glee at how this was the greatest day of their lives and expressed great pride that the President of the USA (who "just loves being Irish" apparently) was one of their own. It was painful to behold. The town itself, which even has a mural of Biden, was decked out like Philadelphia on the Fourth of July. There were some Irish people with the good sense to see Biden for what he represents and who staged anti-imperialist, anti-war and pro-Palestinian protests but they were kept well out of sight.

What the Biden visit demonstrates more than anything is that Ireland, particularly the South of Ireland, is nothing more than a lapdog, happy to serve masters of its own making like the US, the EU and England too (though to a lesser extent these days). Being Irish myself, I explain this as a hangover from colonialism where we seem to still need somebody to rule us. This colonised mindset has prevented us from developing a more mature national psyche. Instead of being strong and courageous against injustice, instead of joining forces with other oppressed nations (in any meaningful way), we have instead become the grovelling poster child for neo-liberalism and Western dominance.

Ireland's actions over the last century seem to support this claim. For example, the Southern government has practically given away the country's fossil fuel assets. In the 1970s, the government issued petroleum-prospecting licences to speculators at a cost of £610. Compare this with the British who were selling off equivalent-sized areas for exploration for £1m and above. The concessions the Irish were giving were so unusual that they were referred



Image of: Kilmainham Gaol, Dublin by Giuseppe Milo

to as amazing and exceptional. Then in 1989, the government reduced the state's share in its offshore oil and gas interests to zero, and abolished royalties thus ensuring the country would never benefit from any resources found. Leaving aside the ecological disaster that fossil fuels are and the fact that they should stay in the ground, the issue at point is why any country would want to discard its resources. There was nothing to stop them setting up a sovereign wealth fund like in Norway to ensure the revenue from the fossil fuel resources benefited the country. Or they could've placed a windfall tax on fossil fuels to fund public services or grow a publicly-owned renewable energy sector.

The South of Ireland also has a policy of military neutrality and yet it allows the US military to use Shannon airport as a base, including for rendition-linked flights. Ireland is infamous for light-touch tax regulations and incentives that enable corporations to use and abuse the country and avoid paying taxes in their own counties. This, it would be claimed, is the reason for the South's economic success in leading up to and following the Great Recession of 2008. Talking of 2008, Ireland

accepted without a whimper the punitive, austerity-imposing economic adjustment programme from the EU, a bailout that cost the state its fiscal sovereignty. Whether this was the right or wrong thing to do, the fact is, obedient little Ireland rolled over and said yes.

I could go on but you get the idea. The South is a country with very little self-esteem.

Maybe it's all you can expect from a country that endured 800 years of English colonisation. After centuries of rebellions and risings against this ruthless oppressor, the Easter rising of 1916 became a catalyst for an ensuing war (involving the aforementioned Black-and-Tans) that soon after brought about the creation of a new Irish state, the Republic of Ireland (aka the South). But that Republic was only made up of 26 of the 32 counties in Ireland and the remaining 6 counties in the northern part of the country remained under British rule and became Northern Ireland (aka the North). Thus, the country was partitioned and remains so to this day.

The aspirations of the rebels back in the early 20th

century were impressive. They wanted a socialist republic and had drafted a Democratic Programme. A brief but bold vision, it declared that there should be public ownership of the means of production, of natural resources and of wealth; that the country should be ruled in accordance with the principles of liberty, equality and justice; that the state should provide for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of children and for their education, should provide for the welfare of the older members of society, and should provide for the health of the population in general; that industry should be developed along progressive co-operative lines; that foreign trade should be mutually advantageous; and that cooperation should be sought with other countries to develop an international standard for lasting improvement in the conditions under which the working classes live and labour.

The Irish republic of that emerged after Partition could not have been further from the Republic envisaged in the Democratic Programme and economically, both the Northern and Southern states embraced capitalism, and later neo-liberalism, with open arms. In the years that came after partial independence, the South focused on the mammoth task of establishing itself as a sovereign state; it became ultra-conservative and dominated by the Catholic Church, aided and abetted by political rulers; that regime was nearly as oppressive as colonial rule had been. The North was equally socially conservative and oppressive, in this case ruled on behalf of the British by Protestant elites who had no intention of sharing power or even basic civil rights with the Catholic population. Over time, those across the island grew accustomed to Partition, resigned to it even, and as decades passed, those who wanted the full independence of Ireland and removal of the British presence from the island (i.e. Irish republicans) dwindled in numbers. The conflict in the North that ended with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 was a war against the British but it took anti-Catholic discrimination to trigger it, not anger at Partition. Since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, there's been no genuine or credible attempt to bring about unification of the country. At best there's been rhetoric but more

often than not, the idea of unification has been treated with various shades of apathy, derision and hostility.

However, in the last number of years, the Irish unity debate has been rekindled. It is now, for the first time, being taken seriously at all levels of Irish civic society and not just by marginalised groups. This has happened not as a result of any drive from within Ireland but as a consequence of Brexit. The irony is painful, not just because it's British interference in Irish affairs again but because we didn't seem to have it within ourselves to make it happen.

Regardless of how it has come about, the unity debate presents Ireland with a rare opportunity that few countries get: the chance for a national do-over that fits better with the aspirations of the long-forgotten Democratic Programme. The question is: will Ireland finally grow a spine and become the nation state those last-century visionaries fought and died for?

The early signs are not encouraging.

The primary vehicle that has been established to take the unity debate forward is known as Ireland's Future. A civic organisation, their aim is to prepare for a referendum on Irish unity but learning from the mistakes of the Brexit referendum. That at least is wise. But that might be where its wisdom begins and ends.

The Board is a motley crew comprising of an entrepreneur, a PR professional, a singer, a human rights/constitutional solicitor, an historian, a journalist, and an academic. The organisation has also organised events and published reports. Those invited to contribute to these events and reports have included politicians, business people / corporations, celebrities, neoliberal economists, mainstream journalists, trade unionists, ethnic minority representatives, academics, spiritual representatives, sports people, musicians, and community workers. The events and reports have overwhelmingly placed an emphasis on national identity, sovereignty, citizenship, the constitution, the Good Friday Agree-

ment, the need to establish a Citizens' Assembly, the impact/relevance of Brexit, and the institutions of governance/democracy. None of this should be a surprise. It's a debate on unity, after all.

But Ireland's Future should do more than grapple with this narrow set of issues. It cannot be serious about creating a new sovereign state without taking a deep dive into the problems facing our modern world. Moreover, it has a duty to take into account all the institutions that are necessary for the functioning of a healthy society, for example, the institutions of kinship, of community, of culture, of the economy. It has a duty too to consider the responsibility that this new state would have in tackling the biggest threat to human life on earth outside of nuclear annihilation: the ecological crisis.

For the most part, these vitals are missing from their work thus far. Citizens' rights, education, housing, culture and heritage are fleetingly referred to, and if there's any acknowledgement of the rising anti-immigrant attitudes towards communities of migrants and asylum seekers, I didn't see it.

They do have a report dedicated to health but it presents, without resistance, the Southern healthcare system as the model of choice, playing down the NHS in the North, which for all its faults is a free universal health system. While it's true that the Southern healthcare system is of a high quality, it is also a two-tier system with only about 37% of the population entitled to a (means-tested) medical card granting them free healthcare. Everyone else pay fees, albeit subsidised, and about 40% of the population has private insurance, the highest percentage in Europe. Health insurance can cost an annual average of €1,925 per person with charges placed on prescriptions and visits to the doctor and Accident and Emergency. Just to note, the NHS has come under heavy media criticism since the Covid pandemic and this has only bolstered opponents of free healthcare who want to see the NHS privatised. But it's not the NHS model that is the problem, it's repeated Tory budget cuts, and a socially-responsible media should condemn the cuts instead of the NHS.

Ireland's Future does give the economy a little attention though from what's on display to-date, there's no sense that the United Ireland they envisage will stray far from capitalism or from neo-liberal policies. They clearly favour the Southern economic model. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is deemed instrumental to the increased wealth in Irish society since Partition and is lauded as a success. Economic growth as essential and GDP is the single measure of economic success. Corporation tax should be harmonised across the island. Take that as code for lowering the 25% corporation tax rate in the North to match the notoriously low 12.5% rate in the South (a rate that is a major component of the successful Southern economy).

A superficial comparison is made between the economies North and South. The reason for the decline in the North's economy since Partition is blamed on the conflict and on the economic constraints created by Partition, i.e. the lack of fiscal powers and control from Westminster. While these are certainly factors, globalisation was also a major factor and that is not mentioned. They have high praise for the economic model of the South and they point out that the South had the second fastest growing economy in world after the Good Friday Agreement was signed in 1998. In reality, the extraordinary growth in the Southern economy, often called the Celtic Tiger, had started at least three years before 1998 and multiple compounding factors were responsible for that growth. Of course, the Celtic Tiger was an unsustainable bubble that fell on its sorry, non-resilient ass once the 2008 crisis struck. Ireland's Future fails to highlight this because many of the Celtic Tiger policies, including FDI and low corporation tax, remain at the forefront of the Southern economy.

Some of the Ireland's Future reports remark upon the need to restructure health, education, infrastructure, and business development on an all-island basis using a programme similar to the German reunification programme, a programme which, by the way, was a master class in disaster capitalism that practically asset-stripped East Germany.

In one report, there's a small reference to the ecology from an author who writes about the need to address the ecological crisis on an all-Ireland basis. He states that we have to radically change our economic system to tackle this crisis and criticises the Celtic Tiger for creating much of the wealth and environmental inequalities in Ireland. It's notable that the only mention of a re-think on the economy or the need for an alternative to neo-liberalism is practically hidden away in a report about the environment rather than having a presence in the materials that focus on the economy. Given the urgency in dealing with the ecological crisis, Ireland's Future seems out of touch with the reality of modern Ireland and the world.

Overall, Ireland's Future offers an expected but still disappointing approach that is reductionist in most of its analysis. Their proposals assume that the neoliberal South is on the right track. They accept neoliberalism without debate or doubt, and accept too that there is no better alternative to capitalism. In fact, it's worse than that. Ireland's Future is so firmly wedded to capitalism it doesn't even entertain the notion of the need for an alternative.

Ireland's Future seems so certain of the validity of the Southern approach that they have conveniently overlooked major problems in southern Irish society today. For instance, consistent child poverty sits at 5% of children and 13% of children are at risk of poverty, while 14% of the general population is at risk of poverty. Rates of pay in the South are higher compared to the North and many other European countries but so is the cost of living; the cost of essential goods and services in the South is 40% higher than the EU average, and the South is officially the most expensive country in the EU. The South also ranks 32 out of 34 among OECD members for income inequality before taxes and transfers, and after taxes and transfers it ranks 15 out of 34, making it one of the worst for income inequality in the EU. Wealth inequality in the country is also high: the wealthiest 10% own about 40% of the coun-

try's wealth. In spite of these inequalities, the country's GDP shows the Southern economy as a very healthy one. Ireland had the second-highest GDP in the EU in 2022 and per capita, the South is considered one of the wealthiest countries in the world and the most affluent in Europe, second only to Luxemburg. This shows the great danger of using GDP as a measure of economic health. The South also has an enormous housing crisis caused by increases in house prices and rents over the last decade. There is an inadequate supply of affordable housing and house prices are now seven times the median income. In 2021, Dublin ranked as the 6th most expensive capital city in the world to rent in and 90% of earners find average rent unaffordable. This crisis can be attributed to government policy on housing which gives free rein to private companies that seek to maximise profit rather than to provide homes.

Sadly, little of what Ireland's Future has put on the table inspires much confidence that a 32-county Ireland would be a more equitable, democratic, participatory or environmentally sustainable place than the two divided states that exist now. The voices of grassroots activists with progressive ideas have been largely excluded from the debate, at least this far. Those voices are small. They're not part of the great-and-the-good of Irish society. They have little in the way of resources although they still manage to make progress and achieve successes through tireless, diligent work. They go unnoticed by the powers that be and are even at times impeded by those powers.

Ireland's Future may not hear these voices but one thing is for certain, it is they who hold the seeds for what a new 32-county Ireland must become if we are to emerge from the climate crisis and eliminate the crippling social and economic injustices of our day. It is they who can seize this unprecedented opportunity and transition Ireland into a nation fit for a better world beyond capitalism.