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Chomsky

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“The United States is threatening to attack any forces that come to the defense of the Palestinians”

-Medea Benjamin



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Noam Chomsky at 95: No Strings on Him

Michael Albert

“A habit of basing convictions upon evidence, and of giving to them only that degree of certainty which the evidence warrants.”

—Bertrand Russell

“Justice will not come until those who are not injured are as outraged as those who are.”

—Solon 560 BC

Sometimes a voice reverberates across space and time. Sometimes a voice feels missing somewhere, sometime. Sometimes a voice does both, simultaneously, forever.

For all the famous people who passed through MIT during my student stay there, or whom I have known in any other capacity since, or even who I have ever read from or read about, for all the great achievers who ever made a difference anywhere anytime, to my life the most important has been Noam Chomsky. His example has illuminated many paths that I and countless others have tried to navigate. Instead of throwing piddling pebbles at a giant, I prefer to just say thank you. And happy birthday, Noam, December 7. 95! Whatever befalls, may you be for us all, forever young.

I met Noam when I took his course “Intellectuals and Social Change” at MIT where I was a student. It was the sixties and we became friends—me a student, he a mentor nineteen years my senior, and, please take note, at that time nineteen years was a veritable lifetime—and yet we have stayed close for six decades since.

I have often heard people ask Noam “what makes you so productive?” I have often heard him fluster a bit and then reply that the only

thing he could see in his makeup that seemed different from most other people was that he could sit down at a project after having been away for a time and on returning get immediately back in gear. Other writers—I well know—typically waste time rereading and reintegrating when we return to projects that we earlier set aside for even just a day much less longer. But despite the surprising wisdom of his simple answer, I saw in Noam more defining differences than just that.

For nearly sixty years I have quite often enjoyed Noam’s input on and aid to my work and have occasionally even offered some ill-informed reactions to his. I have seen him in all kinds of interactions and shared all kinds of moments with him, personal and political, social and private, on stage and off. It has been a highlight of my life to not only have had Noam as a friend and guide, but also to have learned from and enjoyed so many of his stories and undertakings. It hasn’t even been annoying that whenever I have gone someplace to speak, from Florida to Ohio, New York to Alaska, Greece to Brazil, England to India, Poland to Australia, and Korea to Venezuela, invariably considerable time has gone to answering questions about Noam. How is Noam doing? Is Noam really an anarchist? What does Noam think about the invasion? Why did Noam say that stuff about Cambodia? How does Noam do it? How does Noam do it? How does Noam do it? And even, sometimes, can you explain Noam’s linguistics? Noam’s shine extends to everywhere. Literally everywhere. His voice reverberates. So here are a few snapshot answers about the incredible, the good, the problematic, and the incandescent I have had the privilege of seeing first hand.

Lydia Sargent and I went to Poland in 1980.

The trip occurred because South End Press had recently published the then young Polish writer Slawomir Magala's book on the uprisings in his country and the emergence of the Polish Workers' Party led by Lech Walesa. Lydia and I had gone for business at the International Book Fair in Frankfurt, Germany, and had then continued on to meet Magala to learn about events in Poland. I remember Lydia talking with a leftist General about feminism. He got woken. I also remember Lydia and I being in an apartment talking with Swavek—the author's nickname—and a number of his friends. At one point, I was replying to some question about America, and the subject of Chomsky's political writings came up. Later there was more general discussion, and as there was a linguist present, Chomsky's linguistic theories came up for some airing. As I was telling my hosts a story about Chomsky the linguist, just as I had earlier relayed stories about Chomsky the politico, someone said, "Wait a minute, how could you know both Chomskys personally? That's quite a coincidence."

I started to chuckle but realized the questioner was serious. It turned out these activists, who were certainly among the most cosmopolitan people in Poland, nearly all thought that there was one Chomsky who was political and wrote books about history, Vietnam, and revolution, and there was another Chomsky who was a linguist and wrote books about grammar, cognition, and human nature. On reflection, I realized that though I initially found the question weird, it was actually quite reasonable. After all, wasn't it more likely that two people would share one name than that one person would have two incredibly stellar but thoroughly unconnected careers. So first, what makes Chomsky so insightful and productive? Second, what makes Chomsky so admirable?

Partly Chomsky's insightfulness and productivity were inborn. But genetic endowment, while obviously desirable, isn't something we should praise and can't be emulated. We can be awed by Usain Bolt's incomparable speed, Fyodor Dos-

toevsky's magical prose, Adele's emotive voice, Einstein's physical intuition, Martin Luther King's speechifying brilliance, Dylan's transcendent lyrics, and Emmy Noether's mathematical creativity. We can enjoy seeing such traits at work. We can be wowed by them. We can be fascinated and enlightened by them. We can even be inspired by them. But it doesn't make sense to say that the owner is worthy of special respect, admiration, or emulation based simply on having been born with special abilities.

Noam's special memory could retain both broad strokes and also fine detail with computer-like recall. Everyone's memory tends to decline with age, even Noam's, but even at seventy five and then eighty five, and now ninety five Noam's memory dazzles. In the 1960s, in that course of his that I took, Noam would routinely give references from books he'd read and if asked would sometimes even refer to a page, or sometimes even a part of a page. But Noam's memory was by no means photographic, just profound, and even then, only for things he found important. At speaking engagements people would query all manner of important topics completely off his assigned speaking agenda, and Noam would almost always reply with in depth information whose range and precision in a field other than his own even experts in that other subject would marvel at. I saw this happen over and over with questions regarding prevailing conditions in countries he was visiting and also regarding ideas in linguistics, philosophy, history, cognitive science, and biological science. So, really, four and a half decades after the conversation in Poland—one, two, or many Noams? Judge for yourself. You can see such exchanges on Youtube anytime you wish.

Second, consider Noam's rapid and clear thinking. If he was a physicist, say, or a mathematician, we could better judge this in-born part of his capacity as only incredibly substantial, like for most any great scientist, or as out-right phenomenal, like for von Neumann or Feynman. But another Noam trait had inborn but also had



trained aspects that emerged from his effort and discipline. Noam routinely extricates himself from habit and familiarity to consider possibilities strikingly different than what most people contemplate. It isn't just that he would imbibe a wealth of data, or make connections and test logical possibilities that would exceed other people's capacities. Others born even with great memory and quick minds mostly just collect, enumerate, and detail what is known, or perhaps discover a new fact, or very occasionally even a new connection, but they don't repeatedly generate dramatically new insights that repeatedly transform a whole discipline. Again, visit YouTube. You can watch Noam repeatedly ask unexpected questions. He operates way outside every box. He entertains the otherwise unseen possibility. He sees the hidden connection.

Think of Einstein. What Einstein did that was phenomenal was to extract general physical truths from snippets of physical reality to gener-

ate previously unknown insights. To think about what would happen if someone ran alongside a light ray, or to think through the dynamics of a falling elevator, two of Einstein's guiding thought experiments, didn't require tremendous calculating capacity. Einstein didn't have to follow a logical train of thought through countless complicated steps. The genius Einstein exhibited was often not in the number of steps in his deductions, nor in their technical difficulty to compute. His genius was in undertaking the key steps at all and in then following them down paths that others didn't even notice or didn't dare traverse. His genius was in his leaps off the beaten path. Einstein's frequent way to leap was what scientists call thought experiments. These mental gymnastics pared away reality's inessential contingent details to better highlight its deepest core meanings. To do this, Einstein envisioned unattainable contexts and rendered them pure and pristine inside his head by removing endless detail. Then he turned the essence inside

out and upside down until he had a new explanation.

One way Noam has innovated has been by employing analogies (more or less like thought experiments) far more often and far more effectively than other people do. Noam would take a familiar situation—and this is a trait that we can learn from and try to emulate—and find another that was structurally like the first but regarding which his (and our) habits and biases would operate less powerfully or not at all. He would use this technique both to successfully communicate to reticent audiences assessments that if he had initially offered them about the first situation would have affronted people and been warded off by their prior prejudices or expectations—and he also used such context switching, I suspect, to himself discover new views. He did this magic by analyzing the structurally similar but less-controversial and less-familiar situation that he invented or that he remembered in analogy, and then showing himself (or us) the meaning the aloof setting held for the emotionally fraught setting whose implications were obstructed by preconceptions.

Physicists abstract away countless details, assume all kinds of simplifications that are in the real world unattainable, and view in their mind's eye what occurs in the imagined simpler world to discern innermost real world dynamics without letting endless cluttering facts and personal prejudices obscure the deep truth. Noam's analogy trick is similar, but it is more suited to the realm of worldly affairs, though I would guess that regarding linguistics he probably also used both analogies and thought experiments, or perhaps a cross between the two. In Linguistics, for example, one breakthrough he made, and he authored a great many, came when he asked how babies could hear only a very few examples of communication and then fully speak and understand a language. He wondered what had to be innately inside the baby, all babies, but not squirrels or even dogs, to allow that.

The analogy technique Noam used can be found all through his social writings. He would switch from talking about the U.S. in Vietnam (then obscured by emotional preconceptions and prejudices that the U.S. could do no wrong) to the role of Russia in Eastern Europe (where an American could see invasion and imperialism more clearly). He would switch from discussing the possibility of a U.S. invasion of Afghanistan (which deeply-held axiomatic U.S. beliefs biased against recognizing since the U.S. was never the bad invader) to the possibility of Iran invading Afghanistan (easier to conceive for someone from the U.S.). He would switch from assessing the criminality of the U.S. punishing Afghanistan's whole population for their country housing terrorists who attacked the U.S. (confused, after all, how could we be criminal) to Britain (if it had done so) punishing the U.S. for housing and financing IRA acts in Britain (easy to analyze since of course anyone else can be criminal). Or he would compare the media emphasizing 9/11 as terrorism but not seeing the U.S. embargo of Iraq as chemical and biological warfare waged on civilians. He would move from discussing U.S. media dynamics to discussing old Soviet media dynamics, or from discussing U.S. foreign policy to discussing the behavior of Mafia dons, and so on. The analogies would bypass confounding biases to reveal core features and then he would switch back to see them in more difficult to accept circumstances like scientists of with thought experiments more generally.

Noam, like virtually all geniuses, also worked hard. Has he been driven, compulsive, and even over the top when it comes to work? By everyday standards, yes, arguably he has. If you named twenty prominent athletes, actors, and musicians over the past thirty years, Noam would probably have heard of two or three, or maybe five at most, and he would be able to offer essentially zero information about any of them. No memory for that. Noam would see maybe two or three movies a year. He would see a few hours of TV other than news a year. He would listen to almost no radio. He knew what he wanted

to know, and in that realm his knowledge was incandescent.

Noam used to have a summer home in Wellfleet, Massachusetts. There was a motor boat and a small sailboat, and he and his then wife Carol lived on a lake in the summers and in a home in Lexington, Massachusetts the rest of the year. Over the course of each summer he and Carol would get out on the ocean in either boat barely more than a handful of times. They would visit the tiny beach of the lake they were alongside via a short walk way more often, including with guests, and Lydia and I were there many times. Mostly, though, Noam was ensconced in his study, reading and writing in the summer just like during the rest of the year. Hour upon hour he would read and write. Combine this diligence with his quick start ability and with very little editing needed since his writing winds up, I am guessing about this, pretty much the way it first comes out, and you get a lot of output, and actually you get way more output than most people familiar with either his political or his scientific production, or even with both, realize.

You see, Noam typically answered even short letters from unknown folks with long letters back to the extent of a small book's worth of correspondence each month. More, Noam revolutionized linguistics and what is called cognitive science—not once in a lifetime, but multiple times. Indeed, for decades at MIT, Noam taught a linguistics seminar each Friday that people came from near but also far just to attend. Why? Because each week Noam would present some original material that he had settled on in the prior week. This alone, even without his other involvements, was an unfathomable pace of production.

But meanwhile, there were other involvements. Another Noam churned out scathing denunciations of U.S. foreign policy, excoriated mainstream media machinations, and comprehensively clarified diverse political phenomena. Noam spoke publicly dozens of times a year and

wherever he went he would address that place's history and current events with almost the same incredible precision and innovation as he would offer about the U.S. Noam's talks often continued for hours. He did countless interviews, often a few each week. Each part of his life seemed virtually impossible, yet all the parts did happen, and they happened over and over. So, two, three, many Noam's?

Anyone's hard work is worthy of admiration though maybe in a desirable world no one would be quite as driven as Noam has been in our world. Indeed, in a desirable world, while Noam would still have worked tirelessly on his science out of the joy and accomplishment of it, he would undoubtedly have also been out sailing more often, weeding in his garden more often, and even laughing at movies more than he has done in our world. So his sacrifice to take so much time to tirelessly reveal injustices merits admiration. But the most admirable Noam, it has always seemed to me, has been the scrupulously honest Noam. Noam is another name for integrity in enormous supply. The most admirable Noam respects but does not condescend to others. He cares.

Honesty is easy to understand. Noam always says what is on his mind, sometimes at a cost. Indeed, bad can come from good. Noam's unbreakable grip on the truth has interfered, at times, with other virtues, such as sensitivity to the impact his words might have on others. Assessing someone in Noam's position, I tend to think truth-telling should most often take precedence over what's called sensitivity but is sometimes little more than compromise or even hypocrisy—though others might disagree about this, and it certainly isn't one size fits all.

Integrity is harder to pin down. It presumably means being true to one's values, when one has values that one can be true to. Noam has had values and has been true to them. This too can reach levels that cause problems. Noam eschewed anyone affecting the choices of another

by anything other than logic and evidence. You can see the effects of this in his speaking style and in his writing, and it has caused Noam to be tremendously wary of and often even to deny his own notoriety. He has frequently worried that his words would be unduly attended by his listeners. This has often made Noam loathe to give advice to the point that he would withhold words that might usefully have been heard.

Respecting others had another kind of pitfall for Noam. He was constantly queried by people who were relatively ignorant of what they asked about. A person in a position like Noam's gets used to these kinds of questions. For Noam, respecting his questioners meant taking them seriously and answering honestly with patience and attention to communicating clearly. Noam did that, again at a level that closely examined might seem humanly impossible. Noam would receive letters out of the blue. Some would have ridiculous formulations or ask questions he had answered a thousand times. No matter. He would reply to everyone as if he was replying to a knowledgeable co-worker or to an interviewer chatting with him. But he also quite reasonably wanted such exchanges to move along and so a problem sometimes arose because Noam also means a very quick study.

When someone would start to ask Noam something familiar, sometimes Noam would tend to fill in the blanks. After hearing a few words, Noam would deduce the person's intent and interrupt to begin answering even before the person finished their question. This could on occasion sidetrack Noam from hearing what was actually being asked in the interests of saving time and even imposing accuracy when there were a bunch of people wanting his attention after a talk so that moving along and breadth of exchange were important. Experience edifies and so most often Noam actually helped questioners by making their questions more precise and complete. Other times, however, Noam would jump too quickly and misperceive the questioner's query due to thinking he recognized the

questioner's point when in fact he didn't. In other words, sometimes a person querying Noam or disagreeing with him had a different point than those who had previously used essentially the same initial words. Noam might then miss this difference, thereby seeming to be oblivious to the person's true intents and insights. It was not pleasant when it happened to you, but it was never ill motivated.

To understand caring is hard. There are people who routinely verbally offer sympathy and concern for others—have a nice day, they say—but who, at least in my experience, don't sincerely give a damn. Something that looks and sounds like caring is present, and many people are very impressed by its appearance, but minutes or even seconds later the seeming concern could be gone. Appearance without essence has little or no staying power and few implications beyond false appearances. For Noam, the caring was less evident, less demonstrative, less of a show, but it lasted and had implications.

Noam believes strongly in civility though I think many people who have gotten into debates with him and had their views dissected—sometimes with words like “trivial” punctuating the dissection—would find a belief in civility hard to believe. But for Noam, calling a claim trivial is not uncivil but honest. It is a comment about a thought and not a comment about the person who presented the thought. In this, Noam was a scientist in the sense that scientists routinely debate and mercilessly skewer one another's views. And scientists don't take offense at that, or even understand taking offense at that. Finding the truth and escaping falsehoods, which is the scientist's reason for being, demands this behavior. I have seen Noam publicly say an idea was dumb—not least some of mine—but I have never seen him publicly say a person was dumb.

Noam did not denigrate others to build himself up or to knock others down. Likewise, Noam did not evidence the kind of condescending and self-promoting or guilt-salving concern for

others that is all too frequent in many circles. Noam's caring was real. There was no pomp or circumstance. He did not performatively weep wildly or gush effusively. And his caring didn't follow a line dictated from elsewhere, but came from within. Noam remembered people's needs. He fulfilled requests. He noticed pain and tried to do real things to alleviate it. He was on time to not waste others' time. He was civil. You could even call Noam conservative in daily life characteristics. If there was a sign to stay off a lawn, Noam obeyed even if crossing the lawn would get him where he was looking to go faster. Indeed, I have watched Noam routinely abide almost all rules unless higher values took precedence. Noam is also another word for private. In fifty years I have seen him voluntarily talk about what he considered purely personal matters only rarely. I think few have seen more.

For Noam's seventieth birthday, twenty five years ago this December, as a present I arranged a kind of testimonial tribute. I put on the Internet a means by which people could write a message that Noam would receive in a bound volume on his birthday. About a thousand people entered messages online. Most of these were people who Noam had never closely or even at all known but who had read his work, or heard him speak and been dramatically affected by him and just wanted to register their thanks. Many other contributors did know Noam, and they also wanted to say their piece to their friend, ally, student, teacher, coworker, or what have you.

As I assembled the uniformly emotional messages, the entry I was most moved by was written by Fred Branfman, who was himself a very effective advocate of human rights and a supporter of the Indochinese people against unimaginably callous U.S. violence. Branfman wrote:

"When you visited me in Laos in 1970, I was at a real low point, anguished by the bombing and feeling almost totally isolated. Your passion, commitment and shared pain about the need to stop the bombing, and warm, personal support

and caring, meant more to me than you will ever know. It also meant a lot to me for reasons I can't quite explain that of the dozens and dozens of people I took out to the camps to interview the refugees from the bombing you were the only one, besides myself, to cry. Your subsequent article for the New York Review of Books and all the other writing and speaking you did on Laos, was also the only body of work that got it absolutely right. It has given me a little more faith in the species ever since to know that it has produced a being of so much integrity, passion and intellect. I feel a lot of love for you on your birthday—and shake my head in amazement knowing that you'll never stop."

Noam and I have had a few arguments over the years. Noam can be world-class stubborn, even if not demonstrative or flailing about it. Then again is it stubborn when you are right? Noam expected to be right because he almost always was right, and probably also because when he asserted something it wasn't reflex, he had thought seriously about it. But he also didn't like to be wrong. In his case, this may have been a bit like someone not liking to fall down when crossing a room, or not liking to slip in the tub. In other words, he didn't like to suffer something that was highly unfamiliar and also had a negative aspect. To some people this could feel annoying, frustrating, even hurtful. All in all, though, I have never known anyone smarter, with a better memory, with a greater facility for creatively escaping the bounds of acceptable thought, or, still more admirably, with more honesty, integrity, respect for others, real universal concern, and devotion to doing what needs doing. As with everyone, Noam is multi-sided. It is just that in Noam's journey there have been very few down sides, and the up sides have been huge. And would you believe, he is also a very funny guy.

Despite my managing to learn enough from Noam so I usually found myself agreeing with him, sometimes Noam and I would see what's out in the world a bit differently and feel responses ought to have slightly different attri-

butes. A couple of times we had a still larger disagreement. Here are two, each of which reveals Noam attributes in their evolution, I think.

The first was about what we might call a crowding-out effect, borrowing that label from economists. Noam went out and spoke a huge amount to very large audiences. A great many venues wisely wanted Noam to come talk. Many fewer venues ignored many other available speakers who, while not as excellent as Noam, would be way more than ample. The result was that Noam talked a huge volume but even with his great frequency, many places would settle for no one other than Noam and so would have no speaker. An unintended consequence was that undeniably worthy speakers who lacked Noam's notoriety, wouldn't get invites they ought to have gotten because if invited they wouldn't attract sufficient audience. What to do?

Over the years, I urged Noam to tell those asking him to come speak that he would not do so unless there could be a second speaker on the bill with him whom he would select. Each time he would go out in that scenario, so too would Steve Shalom go, or Holly Sklar, or Cynthia Peters, or Peter Bohmer, or Clarence Lusane, or Robin Hahnel, and so on. In this way, others would be seen, word of mouth about the quality of their talks would spread, and in time those other people would get direct invitations. Then those additional people, having become better known, could themselves do the same thing, bringing still more speakers to visibility. After a bit, many more people, steadily more diverse in background and experience, would be going around speaking and many more talks would be given and heard.

Noam almost never did this and we argued about it quite a few times. His resistance was partly ideological and partly personal. Ideologically, he didn't want to use his "bargaining power" to impose conditions on potential hosts—and he would also tend to deny that he could get a positive response by making such

demands, which was humility trumping reality. He also, personally, I suspect, didn't overly want to share the stage with a co-speaker, since that would have himself traveling just as far, taking just as much time away from other work, but speaking and dealing with questions for a lot less time. I have myself since our earliest disagreements about this issue spoken publicly quite a lot though only a fraction as often as Noam, and in doing so I have come to better understand his side of this dispute. Indeed, I came to understand and admire his not wanting to impose his will. And I also eventually got his not wanting to halve his air time. I now think what's needed is not to get prominent speakers to place demands on hosts, but for speakers' bureaus to impose conditions on behalf of a community of speakers.

A second disagreement has been over matters of vision, economic mostly, but otherwise as well. This has been a debate and even dispute where I have to say that, again, with passing years while he moderated somewhat, I moderated more than somewhat. Noam felt way back that trying to describe a future society could and indeed would overstep existing bounds of knowledge. It might also crowd out creativity by establishing aims prematurely. And it might tend toward sectarianism. He felt broad values for a better future were all that we needed to offer, plus practice, practice, and more practice that would yield on the spot day-to-day innovations that would lead to implementing new ways of being from the bottom up. Noam felt that to pre-think and set forth institutional vision in advance could curb such exploration. I instead felt this was all well and good as fair warning about negative possibilities to watch for, except that after a few hundred years of such efforts, we should have something more to show. How could the lessons of thinking hard, analyzing, and experimenting become part of broad movements, I wondered, if they were not presented, debated, refined, and finally advocated by broad movements?

To me, it seemed obvious that we needed answers to the question “what do you want” that went well beyond just offering worthy values. We needed answers that could provide hope, direction, and a positive tone able to inform both analysis and strategy, and I thought this entailed more than offering only a list of broad values and aspirations. I thought it required institutional substance. Noam’s concern, in contrast, was to ensure participation and to avoid elites emerging to impose a view on movements. I agreed with his aim but I also felt we would get what Noam feared if we didn’t have movements full of participants who understand, advocate, and continually refine a viable worthy vision able to motivate and orient sustained participation. The alternative to elitist vision, I thought, wasn’t having no institutional vision at all, but having the most accessible, widely shared, compelling, and substantial but not over-detailed and in any event quite flexible institutional vision we could write up, debate, refine, and advocate. In short, I thought I was right. But as time passed I arrived at greater awareness of the validity of Noam’s concerns and the need to attend to them even as I still believed in the importance of having core institutional vision. The point? Even on the rare occasions when Noam wasn’t totally right, even supposing this was such a case, he was always right enough to pay close attention to and not dismiss. That is—to disagree with Noam without very close consideration of his points and careful accommodation to them usually turns out to be quite foolish. In short, this guy is right even when he is wrong.

I remember a time in Noam’s office in a wing of MIT ironically largely financed since WWII by the Pentagon. It was 1969 or thereabouts. Robin Hahnel and I were being recruited by the Weatherman organization. I asked Noam his advice. Remember, Noam didn’t like providing personal life advice. He also felt he had little to offer about strategy and he didn’t want his words over weighted. Double whammy on answering. But in this case he answered anyhow. He said, roughly, Michael, the Weather-people seem courageous

and sincere, but they will blow up some stuff and perhaps themselves as well, and in doing so they will damage rather than aid change. Robin and I heeded his advice. Neither of us joined Weatherman.

I once wrote a piece propelled by the experience of reading Chomsky and its impact on people and in particular on me, and also by my wondering how Noam managed to constantly immerse himself in so much data about social pain and injustice without himself becoming jaded. It wasn’t that his burrowing in the blood drenched tombs of injustice didn’t take a toll. It did. There are times when Noam was brought low by the news he dissected and times when he was wired tight and became difficult. How family around him got through all that may be as amazing as some of Noam’s accomplishments. At any rate, the essay I wrote fueled by these personal thoughts and of course also by the problem of changing the world was called “Stop the Killing Train.” For me, it was an infrequent attempt at being poetic. Written in the lead-up to the first Gulf War, I think the essay is no less timely now than when it was first written precisely because lessons from Noam will never be anything less than timely. The message of that piece was that things all around are abysmal. Violence is even greater than it seems. Injustice is even more vile than it seems. The need to resist and seek better is evident and paramount. So don’t bemoan, seek better. And perhaps that message, his message, is a good way to move on from discussing Noam per se, to noting what Noam would reply to this essay. He would tell me to stop talking about him and his life, but if you must do that, he might say, then at least draw lessons about the world as it is and as it can be.

So finally, about knowing Noam, I might echo what Bob Dylan had to say about Dave Van Ronk: “No puppet strings on him, ever. He was big, sky high, and I looked up to him. He came from the land of giants.”

Political Tsunami Emerging?

Kim Scipes

On the front page of the Northwest Indiana Times this morning, November 11, 2023: a headline, top of page, “Middle East: Thousands Flee Hospitals” in bold dark print, with a large color picture of people fleeing, and below, another headline reads, “Gaza officials say death toll passes 11,000 as Israeli airstrikes pound sheltering civilians.” I think this shows the emergence of what will become a political tsunami in this country.

The significance of this is considerable. Northwest Indiana, while arguably the most liberal part of very conservative Indiana—the state is currently controlled by Republicans, who hold the governorship and two-thirds majorities in both the State House and Senate—is still part of Indiana. Indiana is basically the most northern Southern state in the country, as much of the state was settled by Kentuckians; only the northern sixth or so was settled from the East. The entire state is disproportionately affected culturally by evangelical Christians and conservative Catholics. A progressive stronghold it is not. To illustrate in political terms: national elections have been won by the Republicans in the state every year since 1932 except for 1936 (Franklin Roosevelt), 1964 (Johnson), and 2008 (Obama). Like I said, a progressive stronghold it is not.

About 1% of the state’s population is Jewish. While it might be a little higher in this region, and is influential, Jewish presence is quite limited; not as influential, the proportion of Muslims in only slightly smaller.

The Times usually features articles on crimes and prison sentences in the first section of the daily paper and you might get local business news, and maybe even a local “feel good” story here or there; international affairs, when covered at all, are relegated to the back of the first section, after local

obituaries. In other words, this is a newspaper that does not emphasize global events; in fact, it could be strongly argued that it does all it can to de-emphasize if not ignore global events.

Yet today, the horror of Israel’s over-response to the Hamas attacks on October 7, 2023, broke through to the front page of this very locally-focused newspaper. It was a heart-wrenching story and, unlike most of the earlier reporting on the war, illuminated the viciousness of the Israeli attacks on civilians and particularly hospitals. And the article noted that over 11,000 people in Gaza had been killed by the Israelis, with great physical destruction throughout especially the northern end of the Gaza Strip.

Interestingly, this broke out of the “unquestioning Israel” perspective which had so dominated mainstream media coverage immediately after the October 7th attacks by Hamas.

What this suggests to me is that interest in the war has broken out of its traditional confines of the upper Atlantic states, Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. These are areas generally considered “Democratic,” and whose media and politicians are generally very pro-Israel. As coverage of this war spreads outside of these liberal enclaves, I believe that traditional mainstream media is not going to have the hegemonic power it used to have regarding Israel.

The amount of money Israel gets from the US government annually is significant. According to Axios, a news gathering/reporting service U.S. aid to Israel: How much money the U.S. gives per year — and why (axios.com), Israel gets \$3.8 billion from the US annually. President Biden has requested another \$14.3 billion, on top of the traditional \$3.8 billion, for Israel this year (2023).



Between 1950 and 2020, Israel has gotten more of 80% of its arms imports from the United States, so the US government has been basically subsidizing US war corporations like Boeing, Raytheon, Northrop Grumman, etc., with millions of dollars per year over the last 70 years.

Where this becomes significant is that the US National Debt has climbed over \$32 trillion just since 1981, after being only \$.9 trillion across the preceding 192 years, from George Washington's administration to the end of Jimmy Carter's (1789-1980). (See my "Forty Years of the United States in the World (1981-2023)" at <https://znetwork.org/znetarticle/special-history-series-40-years-of-the-united-states-in-the-world-1981-2023/>.) While many mainstream reporters and analysts "pooh-pooh" this issue, the fact is that pressure is building globally to shift from the dollar to a basket full of foreign currencies to act as the global reserve currency; if this happens, the US will no longer be able to write "hot checks" to fund our country, its economy, and our war-making capa-

bilities. Since much of our economic well-being over the past 40 years has been funded by deficit spending—i.e., writing hot checks and not on solid economic production—this portends considerable social disruption and chaos in the forthcoming years.

We have got to get our economy in order. One of the best ways to do this is to stop funding wars, US military bases and forces, and militarization around the world. A good place to start this cut-back is to no longer provide Israel with military aid or imports.

If I'm right about the war breaking out of the confines of traditional areas, continued activism against the war might soon be seen as being in the best interests of the United States by a growing number of Americans—and another kick against the US Empire. The political implications nationally could be profound. And the following effects could affect global power relations.

History of Gaza: On Conquerors, Resurgence and Rebirth

Ramzy Baroud

Those unfamiliar with Gaza and its history are likely to always associate Gaza with destruction, rubble and Israeli genocide.

And they can hardly be blamed. On November 3, the UN Development Programme and the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) announced that 45 percent of Gaza's housing units have been destroyed or damaged since the beginning of the Latest Israeli aggression on Gaza.

But the history of Gaza is also a history of great civilizations, as well as a history of revival, rebirth.

Shortly before the war, specifically September 23, archaeologists in Gaza announced that four Roman-era tombs had been unearthed in Gaza City. They include "two lead coffins, one delicately carved with harvest motifs and the other with dolphins gliding through water," ARTNews reported.

According to Palestinian and French archaeologists, these are Roman-era tombs dating back 2,000 years.

The finding was preceded, two months earlier, in July, by something even more astonishing: a major archaeological discovery, of at least 125 tombs, most with skeletons still largely intact, along with two extremely rare lead sarcophagi.

In case you assume that the great archaeological finds were isolated events, think again.

Indeed, Gaza has existed not only hundreds of years, but even thousands of years before the destruction of the modern Palestinian homeland during the Nakba, the subsequent wars and all the headline news that associate Gaza with nothing but violence.

I grew up in the Nuseirat refugee camp located in central Gaza. As a child, I knew that something great had taken place in Nuseirat without fully appreciating its grandeur and deep historical roots.

For years, I climbed the Tell el-Ajjul – The Calves Hill – located to the north-east of Nuseirat, tucked between the beach and the Gaza Valley – to look for Sahatit, a term we used in reference to any ancient currency.

We would collect the rusty and often scratched pieces of metal and take them home, knowing little about the value of these peculiar finds. I always gifted my treasures to my Mom, who kept them in a small wooden drawer built within her Singer sewing machine.

I still think about that treasure that must have been tossed away following my mother's untimely death. Only now do I realize that they were Hyksos, Roman and Byzantine currencies.

Once Mom would diligently scrub the Sahatit with lemon juice and vinegar, the mysterious Latin and other writings and symbols would appear, along with the crowned heads of the great kings of the past. I knew that these old pieces were used by our people who dwelled upon this land since time immemorial.



Hyksos coin (Photo: Nick Thompson)

The region upon which Nuseirat was built was inhabited by ancient Canaanites, whose presence can be felt through the numerous archeological discoveries throughout historic Palestine.

What made Nuseirat particularly unique was its geographical centrality in the Gaza region, its strategic position by the Gaza coast, and its unique topography. The relatively hilly areas west of Nuseirat and the fact that it encompasses the Gaza Valley have made Nuseirat inhabitable since ancient times to the present.

Evidence of Hyksos, Roman, Byzantine, Islamic and other civilizations which dwelled in that region for thousands of years, is a testimony to the historical significance of the area.

When the Hyksos ruled over Palestine during the Middle Bronze Age II period (ca. 2000-1500 BC), they built a great civilization, which extended from Egypt to Syria.

So powerful was the Hyksos Dynasty that they extended their jurisdiction into Ancient Egypt, remaining there until they were driven out by the Sea Peoples. Though the Hyksos were eventually defeated, they left behind palaces, temples, defense trenches and various monuments, the

largest of which can be found in the central Gaza region, specifically at the starting point of the Gaza Valley.

Like the Calves Hill, Tell Umm el-'Amr – or Umm el-'Amr's Hill – was the location of an ancient Christian town, with a large monastery complex, containing five churches, homes, baths, geometric mosaics, a large crypt and more.

The discoveries of Tell Umm el-'Amr were recent. According to the World's Monuments Fund (WMF), this Christian town was abandoned after a major earthquake struck the region sometime in the seventh century. The excavation process began in 1999, and a more serious preservation campaign began in earnest in 2010.

In 2018, the restoration of the monastery itself started. The discovery of the St. Hilarion Monastery is one of the most precious archeological finds, not only in Gaza's southern coastal region, but in the entire Middle East in recent years.

There is also the Shobani Graveyard, tucked by the sea and located near the western entrance of Nuseirat, the Tell Abu-Hussein in the north-west part of the camp, also close to the sea, along with other sites, which are of great significance to Nuseirat's past.

A Gaza historian told me that it is almost certain that Tell Abu Hussein was of some connection to Sultan Salah ad-Din al-Ayyubi's military campaign in Palestine, which ultimately defeated and expelled the Crusaders from the region in 1187.

The history of my old refugee camp is essentially the history of all of Gaza, a place that played a significant role in shaping ancient and modern history, its geopolitics as well as its tragic and triumphant moments.

What is taking place in Gaza now is but an episode, a traumatic and a defining one, but nonetheless, a mere chapter in the history of a people who proved to be as durable and resilient as history itself.

Israel is Visiting ‘Useless Violence’ on Gaza

Stephen McCloskey

In his final book *The Drowned and The Saved*, the writer and Holocaust survivor, Primo Levi, reflected on ‘useless’ forms of violence. In the book, he notes that violence for some had the ‘sole purpose of creating pain, occasionally having a purpose, yet always redundant, always disproportionate to the purpose itself’. The moral voice of such a humanitarian as Levi cannot be lost to history at times like these and poignantly his thoughts speak to the events unfolding in Gaza. Israel’s current military assault on Gaza appears to meet Levi’s definition of ‘useless violence’. It’s consistent with the Dahiya Doctrine, the asymmetrical military strategy first implemented by Israel in its aerial strafing of Dahieh, the southern suburb of Beirut, in 2006. IDF commander Gadi Eisenkot articulated the strategy at the time when he said: ‘We will wield disproportionate power against every village from which shots are fired on Israel, and cause immense damage and destruction’. So, Israel’s prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu was being completely consistent with this strategy when he vowed following the Hamas attacks on 7 October: ‘All the places in which Hamas is based, in this city of evil, all the places Hamas is hiding in, acting from — we’ll turn them into rubble’. As the occupying power in Gaza, Israel is obliged under international law to ensure that Palestinian civilians are not held responsible for the crimes of Hamas or made to ‘suffer for acts they play no role in and cannot control’. UN human rights chief, Craig Mokhiber, concluded that Israel’s ‘systematic persecution and purging’ of the Palestinian people represents ‘a textbook case of genocide’ and he resigned in protest at Western complicity in the ‘horrific assault’.

The death toll alone in Gaza has been on an in-

dustrial scale with one in 200 people killed since 7 October which is 0.5 percent of the population, with 68 percent of the dead women and children. It is not only the indiscriminate civilian death toll inflicted on Gaza that reflects the application of ‘useless cruelty’ but the callous decimation of the civilian infrastructure designed to make life intolerable for the living. Bakeries, hospitals, schools, health facilities, ambulances, and water and sanitation installations, in addition to 45 percent of the housing stock, have been damaged or destroyed. Israel’s total siege of Gaza imposed on 9 October to include food, water, medicines and fuel – described by Oxfam as a ‘siege within a siege’ since the territory was already blockaded since 2007 -- is leading to the spread of infectious diseases. The World Health Organisation has recorded 44,000 cases of diarrhea and 70,000 acute respiratory infections caused by almost 900,000 internally displaced persons taking refuge in 154 UNRWA shelters, mostly schools. As Gaza faces into winter, 2.3 million people, of whom 80 percent or 1.7 million are refugees -- descendants of 700,000 Palestinians ethnically cleansed from their homeland in the 1948 Nakba – need urgent humanitarian support and shelter.

Primo Levi drew upon an interview with Franz Strangl, the commandant of Treblinka, in which he was asked ‘considering you were going to kill them all ... what was the point of the humiliations, the cruelties?’ They were necessary, argued Strangl, ‘to condition those who were to be the material executors of the operations’. In other words, argues Levi, the ‘victim must be degraded, so that the murderer will be less burdened by guilt’. When Israeli defence minister, Yoav Gallant, described Palestinians as ‘human animals’ and Benjamin Netanyahu called described the



war in Gaza as a ‘struggle between the children of light and the children of darkness, between humanity and the law of the jungle’, can these statements be interpreted as anything other than the dehumanisation of Palestinians?

Levi’s definition of ‘useless violence’ is also reflected in the vague and aimless goal of Israel’s military strategy on Gaza. ‘We will change the Middle -East’, said Netanyahu in the immediate aftermath of 7 October, and ‘uproot Hamas’. But how is Gaza to be administered without Hamas? As Haim Tomer, a former senior officer with Mossad, suggests: ‘I don’t think that there is a viable, workable solution for Gaza the day after we evacuate our forces’. So apart from wreaking what Amnesty International describes as a ‘cataclysmic assault on the occupied Gaza Strip’, amounting to indiscriminate deaths, mass civilian casualties and war crimes, what is Israel’s end goal? It has vowed to continue the assault on Gaza after the temporary pauses in bombing to facilitate an exchange of hostages for prisoners. The forced displacement of Gazans from the north to the south of the Gaza Strip has been followed up by an order to evacuate Khan Younis, the largest city in the south. This sug-

gests the beginning of a major and, for Gazans, catastrophic Israeli campaign in the south. The people of Gaza remain steadfast in opposing their forced transfer into Egypt’s Sinai desert – a second Nakba – which means 2.3 million people will be corralled into ever decreasing areas of land without shelter, food, water, medicines and fuel.

There have been two contrasting responses to the assault on Gaza that will echo through history. The first has been the craven complicity of Western powers and political leaders, with Israel’s war crimes in Gaza. Indeed, a Federal complaint has been filed against President Biden and two of his cabinet, for complicity in genocide by the New York Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR). The second has been the millions of protestors across the world who have marched in solidarity with Palestinians since the start of the conflict. These protestors recognise, as Arundhati Roy puts it, that if we ‘allow this brazen slaughter to continue...we are complicit in it’. ‘Something in our moral selves will be altered forever’. So, the ‘useless violence’ must stop. A permanent ceasefire must be agreed. The siege of Gaza must be lifted. If not now, when? If not you, who?

Can US Threats Prevent a Wider War in the Middle East?

Medea Benjamin, Nicolas J.S. Davies

While Secretary of State Anthony Blinken has been frantically shuttling around the Middle East trying to stop the Israeli conflict in Gaza from exploding into a regional war, the United States has also sent two aircraft carrier strike groups, a Marine Expeditionary Unit and 1,200 extra troops to the Middle East as a “deterrent.” In plain language, the United States is threatening to attack any forces that come to the defense of the Palestinians from other countries in the region, reassuring Israel that it can keep killing with impunity in Gaza.

But if Israel persists in this genocidal war, U.S. threats may be impotent to prevent others from intervening. From Lebanon to Syria, Yemen, Iraq and Iran, the possibilities of the conflict spreading are enormous. Even Algeria says it is ready to fight for a free Palestine, based on a unanimous vote in its parliament on November 1st.

Middle Eastern governments and their people already see the United States as a party to Israel’s massacre in Gaza. So any direct U.S. military action will be seen as an escalation on the side of Israel and is more likely to provoke further escalation than to deter it.

The United States already faces this predicament in Iraq. Despite years of Iraqi demands for the removal of U.S. forces, at least 2,500 U.S. troops remain at Al-Asad Airbase in western Anbar province, Al-Harir Airbase, north of Erbil in Iraqi Kurdistan, and another small base at the airport in Erbil. There are also “several hundred” NATO troops, including Americans, advising Iraqi forces in NATO Mission Iraq (NMI), based near Baghdad.

For many years, U.S. forces in Iraq have been mired in a low-grade war against the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) that Iraq formed to fight ISIS, mainly

from Shia militias. Despite their links to Iran, the armed groups Kata’ib Hezbollah, Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq and other PMFs have often ignored Iranian calls to de-escalate attacks on U.S. forces. These Iraqi groups do not respect Iran Quds Force leader General Esmail Qaani as highly as they did General Soleimani, so Soleimani’s assassination by the United States in 2020 has further reduced Iran’s ability to restrain the militias in Iraq.

After a year-long truce between U.S. and Iraqi forces, the Israeli war on Gaza has triggered a new escalation of this conflict in both Iraq and Syria. Some militias rebranded themselves as the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, and began attacking U.S. bases on October 17. After 32 attacks on U.S. bases in Iraq, 34 more in Syria and 3 U.S. airstrikes in Syria, U.S. forces conducted airstrikes against two Kata’ib Hezbollah bases in Iraq, one in Anbar province and one in Jurf Al-Nasr, south of Baghdad, on November 21, killing at least nine militiamen.

The U.S. airstrikes prompted a furious response from the Iraqi government spokesman Bassam al-Awadi. “We vehemently condemn the attack on Jurf Al-Nasr, executed without the knowledge of government agencies,” al-Awadi said. “This action is a blatant violation of sovereignty and an attempt to destabilize the security situation... The recent incident represents a clear violation of the coalition’s mission to combat Daesh (ISIS) on Iraqi soil. We call on all parties to avoid unilateral actions and to respect Iraq’s sovereignty...”

As the Iraqi government feared, the Islamic Resistance in Iraq responded to the U.S. airstrikes with two attacks on Al-Harir airbase on November 22 and several more on November 23rd. They attacked Al-Asad airbase with several drones, launched another drone attack on the U.S. base at Erbil airport, and their allies

in Syria attacked two U.S. bases across the border in northeastern Syria.

Short of a ceasefire in Gaza or a full U.S. withdrawal from Iraq and Syria, there is no decisive action the U.S. can take that would put a stop to these attacks. So the level of violence in Iraq and Syria is likely to keep rising as long as the war on Gaza continues.

Another formidable and experienced military force opposing Israel and the United States is the Houthi army in Yemen. On November 14, Abdul-Malek al-Houthi, the leader of the Houthi government in Yemen, asked neighboring countries to open a corridor through their territory for his army to go and fight Israel in Gaza.

The Houthi Deputy Information Secretary Nasred-din Amer told Newsweek that if they had a way to enter Palestine, they would not hesitate to join the fight against Israel, "We have fighters numbering hundreds of thousands who are brave, tough, trained and experienced in fighting," Amer said. "They have a very strong belief, and their dream in life is to fight the Zionists and the Americans."

Transporting hundreds of thousands of Yemeni soldiers to fight in Gaza would be nearly impossible unless Saudi Arabia opened the way. That seems highly unlikely, but Iran or another ally could help to transport a smaller number by air or sea to join the fight.

The Houthis have been waging an asymmetric war against Saudi-led invaders for many years, and they have developed weapons and tactics that they could bring to bear against Israel. Soon after al-Houthi's statement, Yemeni forces in the Red Sea boarded a ship owned, via shell companies, by Israeli billionaire Abraham Ungar. The ship, which was on its way from Istanbul to India, was detained in a Yemeni port.

The Houthis have also launched a series of drones and missiles towards Israel. While many members of Congress try to portray the Houthis as simply puppets of Iran, the Houthis are actually an independent, unpredictable force that other actors in the region cannot control.

Even NATO ally Türkiye is finding it difficult to remain a bystander, given the widespread public support for Palestine. President Erdogan of Türkiye was among the first international leaders to speak out strongly against the Israeli war on Gaza, explicitly calling it a massacre and saying that it amounted to genocide.

Turkish civil society groups are spearheading a campaign to send humanitarian aid to Gaza on cargo ships, braving a possible confrontation like the one that occurred in 2010 when the Israelis attacked the Freedom Flotilla, killing 10 people aboard the Mavi Marmara.

On the Lebanese border, Israel and Hezbollah have conducted daily exchanges of fire since October 7, killing 97 combatants and 15 civilians in Lebanon and 9 soldiers and 3 civilians in Israel. Some 46,000 Lebanese civilians and 65,000 Israelis have been displaced from the border area. Israeli defense minister Yoav Gallant warned on November 11, "What we're doing in Gaza, we can also do in Beirut."

How will Hezbollah react if Israel resumes its brutal massacre in Gaza after the brief pause is over or if Israel expands the massacre to the West Bank, where it has already killed at least 237 more Palestinians since October 7?

In a speech on November 3, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah held back from declaring a new war on Israel, but warned that "all options are on the table" if Israel does not end its war on Gaza.

As Israel prepared to pause its bombing on November 23, Iranian foreign minister Hossein Amirabdollahian held meetings in Qatar, first with Nasrallah and Lebanese officials, and then with Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh.

In a public statement, Amirabdollahian said, "the continuation of the ceasefire can prevent further expansion of the scope of the war. In the meeting with the leaders of the resistance, I found out that if Israel's war crimes and genocide continue, a tougher and more complicated scenario of the resistance will be implemented."



Amirabdollahian already warned on October 16 that, “The leaders of the resistance will not allow the Zionist regime to do whatever it wants in Gaza and then go to other fronts of the resistance.”

In other words, if Iran and its allies believe that Israel really intends to continue its war on Gaza until it has removed Hamas from power, and then to turn its war machine loose on Lebanon or its other neighbors, they would prefer to fight a wider war now, forcing Israel to fight the Palestinians, Hezbollah and their allies at the same time, rather than waiting for Israel to attack them one by one.

Tragically, the White House is not listening. The next day, President Biden continued to back Israel’s vow to resume the destruction of Gaza after its “humanitarian pause,” saying that attempting to eliminate Hamas is “a legitimate objective.”

America’s unconditional support for Israel and endless supply of weapons have succeeded only in turning Israel into an out-of-control, genocidal, destabilizing force at the heart of a fragile region already shattered and traumatized by decades of U.S. warmaking. The result is a country that refuses to recognize its own

borders or those of its neighbors, and rejects any and all limits on its territorial ambitions and war crimes.

If Israel’s actions lead to a wider war, the U.S. will find itself with few allies ready to jump into the fray. Even if a regional conflict is avoided, the U.S. support for Israel has already created tremendous damage to the U.S. reputation in the region and beyond, and direct U.S. involvement in the war would leave it more isolated and impotent than its previous misadventures in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq.

The United States can still avoid this fate by insisting on an immediate and permanent ceasefire and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. If Israel will not agree to that, the U.S. must back up this position with an immediate suspension of arms deliveries, military aid, Israeli access to U.S. weapons stockpiles in Israel and diplomatic support for Israel’s war on Palestine.

The priority of U.S. officials must be to stop Israel’s massacre, avoid a regional war, and get out of the way so that other nations can help negotiate a real solution to the occupation of Palestine.

Assessing Protests and Counter Protests

Michael Albert

Controversies over protests and counterprotests about actions in the Mideast now rage in communities across the U.S. and particularly, it seems, on college campuses. For example, as of November 15th, The Institute for Public Accuracy reported that Columbia University suspended two pro-Palestinian student groups, Students for Justice in Palestine and Jewish Voice for Peace, from holding events on campus. Harvard University sent a letter to all students and faculty declaring that the slogan “from the river to the sea,” a widely-used call for freedom for Palestinians, whether they live in the Occupied Territories or in Israel, is antisemitic and its censorship is not a violation of free expression. Interestingly, Harvard—and this is not uncommon in these cases—lost at least \$30m in donations from pro-Israeli funders who believed that the administration was failing to rein in its students. It also faced a demand from Bill Ackman, billionaire hedge-fund manager, and Harvard donor, to release the names of students who had signed a pro-Palestinian statement, so that companies could avoid hiring them. At New York University, law student Ryna Workman was removed as president of the school’s Student Bar Association and subsequently lost a job offer from the law firm Winston & Strawn after she wrote a newsletter expressing solidarity with Palestinians. At Cornell University, Russell Rickford, an associate professor of history, was suspended from teaching after he described the 7 October attack as “exhilarating.”

The Intercept reported: “The U.S. Senate passed a unanimous resolution condemning what it called ‘anti-Israel, pro-Hamas student groups’ across the country following a day of walkouts.” A letter from the Anti-Defamation League and the Brandeis Center for human rights under law to presidents of colleges and universities, called for the group Students for Justice for Palestine (SJP) to be considered a material supporter of terror-



ism. SJP is a non-violent student group. The ADL and the Brandeis Center are essentially calling for young people engaged in lawful protest activity to be criminalized under a federal anti-terrorism statute. The chancellor of the State University System of Florida, in consultation with Governor Ron DeSantis, has ordered that chapters of SJP be deactivated. Senator Josh Hawley, R-Mo., has demanded the Justice Department investigate “far-left student groups” which have been critical of Israel. There is much more, of course, as well. So what is one to make of all this even beyond the hopefully obvious free speech issues?

In the week after the Hamas attacks, there were many protests of Hamas’s action. Suppose such a protest near you called the violence against civilians abhorrent and even horrific. Suppose it expressed sympathy for the families of victims. How would you react? I would have thought the protest was a valid expression of the feelings



of the participants. I would have also thought it didn't have much purpose beyond that self expression since virtually everyone in media, government, and wherever else was saying the same thing. So I would have found it emotionally valid but tactically at best redundant and at worst questionable since it might be seen as calling for collective punishment.

Now imagine the Hamas attack had, instead, targeted only military bases, no civilians. Suppose that had occurred and had elicited protest, but now it was protest against a purely military attack. How would you react? I would have thought such a military-targets action was warranted by decades of horrible material and violent suppression. I would have, however, wondered about its tactical wisdom given the likely consequences. I would have also wondered about the process—albeit ignorant of details—of Hamas undertaking an action whose consequences would likely rain down on the heads of a whole population without the whole population having been involved in deciding to proceed.

The Israeli response to the actual Hamas attack has elicited protests of the bombardments, of the intensified blockade of food, water, and fuel, and of the invasion. Pro Palestinian protesters have claimed Israel's actions are racist and Nazi-like. They have claimed the bombings of civilian shelters in schools and hospitals and the sought starvation of the whole population are morally repulsive and even genocidal. The supporters of Israel's actions have replied that the IDF actions justifiably and wisely defend against the risk of further Hamas attacks. They praise Israel and urge the IDF to proceed as it has been proceeding. The Pro-Israel protesters claim Palestinian intents are antisemitic and Nazi-like. No Palestinians are innocent civilians. Or even Palestinians are not human. Each side wonders how the other can be so blind to reality.

In other countries, some who are pro Israel want Palestinians silenced on grounds that anti-Zionist rallies and demonstrations are antisemitic and make Jews feel unsafe. They want Palestinians publicly branded as antisemitic to forestall their employment or want them fired to end it. In contrast, pro Palestinians want the repression stopped because it is racist and inhumane. They

justifiably protest genocide and seek peace. Some swastikas appear, it is true, a vile trend, but is that from Palestine's supporters or from long time fascist gangs? Some people of diverse sorts start to take the ludicrous ubiquitous equation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism propounded by all too many Israeli officials and Jewish Rabbis as gospel and, when those people do oppose Zionism, some begin to feel hostile to Jews *per se*. Who/what is causing that horrid result? What does/can one think reading that upon agreeing to let some fuel into Gaza an Israeli official says it is to forestall the probability of epidemics since an epidemic could endanger IDF soldiers and not just Palestinians? If the first victim of war is truth, not far behind human empathy dies as well, at least among those wielding the biggest weapons to defend the most vile colonialist policies.

How one reacts to all this tends to depend on what one wants to accomplish. If Israel and the IDF in particular want to eradicate or to at least remove not just Hamas but all Palestinian presence in Gaza (whether due to pursuit of off-coast natural gas resources, or revenge via collective punishment, or colonialist expansion), then their actions make a kind of devilish sense. Destroy the Strip to empty it. Bomb civilian shelters to kill civilian enemies. Bomb hospitals to get the new born too. Don't outcomes reveal aims? Bomb homes and refugee camps to chase civilians from the North to the South and then from the South to wherever. To paraphrase a Vietnam-era master of such strategizing, "Anything that flies on everything that moves." If the IDF's supporters want to loyally celebrate Israeli policy despite law, morality, or any other human concern, then to rightly condemn the Hamas attack for targeting civilians along with military bases while simultaneously wrongly and crassly praising when Israel targets the entire Gaza civilian population and a few military officials also makes some kind of self contradictory sense. Or, to keep the praise coming but avoid self contradiction, leads to perverse assertions that all Palestinians even including children are combatants or that

Palestinians aren't in fact human, so, hey, we are rational, our values are consistent, and there is no contradiction. If pro Israel protesters were right to criticize pro Palestinians who didn't express sympathy for Israeli civilians killed by the Hamas action and to excoriate Hamas for those actions—and they were right in that particular—then how could they not be wrong when they don't express sympathy for Palestinians whose homes are bombed to rubble and who are exiled or dead, and when they don't excoriate Israel for its actions but instead pledge allegiance to them? Are there pro-Israel protestors who agree? Sadly, I think so far not very many.

If Palestinians want to first survive, and second to gain enough international support and Jewish and Israeli dissent from IDF rampage to reduce and stop it, then it certainly makes sense for them to protest starvation and bombardment. But, while understandable, it certainly doesn't make sense to rail at Jews *per se*. Indeed, for Palestinians to sympathize with families who seek release of their civilian relatives not least because of the experience Palestinians have of the entire population of Gaza being held hostage, and to feel some degree of understanding and reasoned sympathy, makes sense for Palestinians and pro-Palestinians. Would any pro-Palestinian protestor disagree? I think not very many.

The higher purpose in all this is not to correctly identify, trumpet, and punish criminality and immorality. The higher purpose is to stop it to gain a ceasefire and an end to occupation and attainment of full economic, social, civil, and human rights for Palestinians whether in one nation or two, and in any case, "from the river to the sea." And to accomplish that, isn't it clear that Israel's support must be reduced, Palestinian support must be enlarged, and antisemitism must be made no more. Only saying "hooray for our side" and damn your side won't help accomplish any of that. But nor will denying the savage violence and self serving irrationality that is now rampant.

The Union Idea and Its Adversaries

Andrew Moss

American workers made great strides in 2023. Autoworkers, UPS drivers, Kaiser health workers, screenwriters, and actors all scored significant gains in earnings and benefits as a result of their respective unions taking tough, assertive stances in strikes and other forms of workplace activism. The agreements emerging from these actions will mean substantial improvements in the lives of hundreds of thousands of workers and their families.

But daunting obstacles face millions of other workers who've been attempting to unionize their workplaces or simply secure a fair and just contract when a previous contract expired. Global companies like Starbucks and Amazon, for example, have managed to avoid any kind of contract settlement with unionizing employees, and in my home city of Los Angeles, where existing contracts expired on June 30 for over 60 hotels, the largest hotel worker strike in U.S. history continues to drag on, soon into its sixth month. Only five hotels thus far have come to any tentative agreements with workers.

A major problem, particularly for workers seeking to unionize their workplaces for the first time, is that U.S. labor law places workers at a serious disadvantage with respect to employers. The latter can, for example, subject employees to "captive audience" meetings that promulgate anti-union messages, and can indefinitely drag out collective bargaining with virtually no penalties – a process that can simply wear workers down by attrition.

In a broader sense, however, the U.S. – unlike many advanced industrialized countries – is pervaded in its political culture and institutions by a deep anti-union ideology. Extending in the modern era as far back as passage of the 1935 National Labor Relations Act (Wagner Act), this ideology has guided a wide range of efforts to unravel the New Deal endorsement of government as a regulator

of corporate power and as a protector of workers' rights to organize and bargain collectively.

As early as the 1940's, business groups and conservative politicians advanced "right-to-work" legislation and litigation undermining unions by preventing them from requiring membership or dues from workers at sites where the unions represented all workers in collective bargaining. These legislative and judicial efforts portrayed right-to-work as a defense of workers' rights and as a counter to union racketeering and corruption. Since then, 26 states have adopted right-to-work legislation.

In addition, union busting emerged as a sophisticated way of countering union influence. Labor historian Nelson Lichtenstein documented how an attorney and Wal-Mart executive vice-president named John Tate helped perfect, from the early 1970's on, a highly effective strategy that fended off the most assertive efforts to unionize that retail giant's stores. As Tate declared in 2004 to a meeting of assembled Wal-Mart executives and managers, "Labor unions are nothing but blood-sucking parasites living off the productive labor of people who work for a living." Noting that unions represented a third of all workers in the private sector fifty years earlier, he said, "I am part of the reason that today they represent nine percent."

Since Mr. Tate uttered those words, the public approval of unions has shifted significantly upward in the wake of a major recession, an ever-widening inequality, and a devastating pandemic. In these altered circumstances, therefore, it's instructive to read a recent Harvard Business Review (HBR) article entitled "The Labor-Savvy Leader," in which three management experts associated with the Aspen Institute and MIT's Sloan School of Management advise corporate leaders to work with, rather than against, organized labor.



These experts (Roy E. Bahat, Thomas A. Kochan, and Liba Wenig Rubenstein) argue that companies choosing greater collaboration with labor can reap such benefits as improved employee satisfaction and retention, while companies seeking to bust unions can expose themselves to “existential risks,” including harm to their corporate brands, i.e. as consumers become more aware of companies’ treatment of workers.

This advice to corporate leaders is well-taken, but anti-union ideology is so pervasive that it will take a lot more than savvy corporate leaders to change the culture. The HBR authors may write that union busting poses an existential risk to companies that practice it, but a glance at the boiler plate language of corporate annual reports will find that unions themselves are often perceived by management as the existential risk. Marriott International, for example, the largest hotel chain in the world, tells stockholders in its most recent report that labor disputes and increased demands from labor unions could, among other things, “harm our relationship with our associates [employees], harm our relationships with our guests and customers, divert management attention, and reduce customer demand for our services.”

For the striking LA hotel workers I’ve come to know, these “increased demands” are for contracts that ensure meaningful levels of economic stability and security. In this regard, the workers are striking on behalf of the union idea, a concept that, by and large, informs all struggles for economic justice. Uniting the values of solidarity and social freedom, this idea affirms that all working people, no matter what their background or educational status, have the right to lives of dignity and well-being.

The struggle for this idea, for the values of solidarity and social freedom, plays out on the picket line – and also in courtrooms, legislative chambers, op-ed pages, think tanks, educational institutions, and places of worship. For the hotel workers I know, the union idea translates into the right to enough compensation that one needn’t sleep in one’s car or work two or three jobs to make ends meet. It means having time and resources enough to care for an elderly parent or a disabled family member, time and resources enough to be with one’s children and see them grow.

At the individual, human level, this is what’s at stake in the struggle for the union idea today.

Labor Struggles Emphasize The Need For Utilities That Serve People, Not Profits

Ken Bank

The recent electoral defeat of a ballot referendum in the state of Maine which would have established the first consumer-owned state-wide public utility in the United States was a disappointment to progressive activists, environmentalists and advocates for economic democracy. Nevertheless the struggle for economic democracy and public accountability in the utility industry continues. Continual exploitation by corporate predators of labor and consumers alike has resulted in a backlash characterized by worker strikes and consumer resistance to unjustified rate hikes and poor service. Environmental activists concerned about global warming, climate change and the need to provide for renewable sources of clean energy, have also come to realize that investment capitalism, the drive for maximum profitability, cannot be relied upon to reduce dependency on fossil fuels that contribute to ecological damage.

Although the struggle for clean, consumer-focused energy resources continues in states like Maine, in other parts of the US increasing efforts to organize utility workers and demand a greater share of utility revenue for workers and their families are also having an impact. Recently in New Jersey hundreds of utility workers, members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) employed by the Atlantic City Electric Company (ACE) went on strike. ACE is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Exelon, the largest corporate, investor-capitalist driven utility in the US. The workers went on strike to protest declining wages relative to living expenses, unsafe and intolerable working conditions, cuts to pensions and benefits as well as the lack of management responsiveness to worker concerns and relevant input. In addition to Exelon/ACE unfair labor practices, workers were also concerned about rising rates for

electrical service in excess of consumer income, customer abuse and neglect of service, insufficient staffing levels and greater reliance on nonunion subcontractors in an attempt to limit the collective bargaining power of union members. According to the workers, unsafe staffing and reliance on inexperienced, untrained nonunion subcontractors posed not only a significant danger to ACE employees, but also a serious threat to the safety and welfare of the community and its residents. In the meantime as wages were declining and rates for service were going up, ACE's parent company Exelon reported record net income and profitability from the company's performance.

As the strike continued for several weeks there were reported outages in several towns located near Atlantic City, New Jersey. Though the company accused workers of vandalizing equipment and assaulting nonunion contractors, preventing them from restoring power to affected customers, there was absolutely no evidence presented to civil authorities to justify prosecution or any criminal sanctions against the union. To the contrary, the union presented convincing evidence that the company's use of nonunion contractors was the main reason for delays in restoring power. The union pointed out that nonunion workers, mostly inexperienced and lacking proper training, were simply ill-equipped to deal with any emergencies that might occur. As long as privately owned, investor capitalism controls the utility industry, the use of cheaper, nonunion labor becomes more of an issue, presenting not only a danger to other workers and the surrounding community but customers, consumers and ratepayers as well.

Another weapon utilized by corporate predators against their employees is a divide and conquer



strategy, putting workers with greater seniority, benefits and higher pay against younger workers who are paid much less and receive fewer benefits for the same work. Striking workers are demanding at least a sufficient minimum of wages and benefits to assure every worker of a liveable standard for their labor. The pandemic of 2020-21 also increased worker awareness of the need to ensure that employee safety and security will always be more important than profitability and maximizing net income. Workers at Atlantic City Electric Company want to ensure that their exposure to hazardous working conditions such as working through the pandemic as well as extremely dangerous health and life-threatening conditions related to severe storms and other forms of natural disaster, won't be repeated. Included in those demands are specific policies and procedures to ensure that worker safety will always be more important than maximizing corporate profits and investor return on capital. This is essential to make certain that worker health and welfare will not be sacrificed for the sake of corporate profitability in the event of another catastrophic occurrence.

Democratizing the utility industry is also essential to achieve clean energy goals and negate the adverse impact of global warming, climate change. Privately-owned corporate utility companies, answerable to their investors instead of the people

and communities they serve, cannot be trusted to pursue policies and activities that discourage the use of fossil fuel resources rather than adopt environmentally friendly and safe alternative, renewable energy sources. Community ownership is the only way to ensure responsible management and utilization of clean, renewable energy to provide reliable service to residential, business and industrial customers.

Ultimately, however, as long as investor-capitalists own and operate utility service providers there can never be a satisfactory resolution of the struggle between labor and capital for managing and operating electrical energy and other resources for the benefit of the people and their communities. Sooner or later power utilities must be answerable to the people, not corporate predators. Despite the recent defeat of the Pine Tree Power Company, a community-owned energy cooperative for the state of Maine, there is a model that can be used to point the way for other groups, activists and organizations to democratize the utility industry. However, no model for community ownership of utility companies can be implemented successfully without a strategic partnership and tactical alliance between consumers, community and organized labor, specifically the utility workers and employees who put their own health and safety on the line to support the community, especially in times of natural disasters. The defeat of community ownership in Maine was largely the result of opposition from organized labor, utility workers fearful of losing their right to collective bargaining, autonomy and job security from a state takeover with no guarantees of wages, benefits and working conditions. Any plan to implement community ownership of public utilities must include support from utility workers and include the right to collective bargaining and active participation in the management and implementation of policies and procedures to protect workers, consumers and the environment. Without workers participation, collaborative and cooperative management between labor and consumers of public utilities, community ownership cannot be successful.

Polish Elections: Hopes and Threats

Christian Kobluk

On October 15th, in Poland, elections took place. Many people believe that they have been the most important since 1989, when the Polish nation could, for the very first time after World War II, choose its representatives after more than 50 years of the communist regime. The fact that both sides of the political struggle—government and opposition—embraced this narrative shows how crucial it was for the majority of citizens. Until the last moments of voting, we did not know who would win. It turned out that a coalition of the three opposition parties defeated the national Catholic government.

One could say this is a step ahead because it's the end of homophobic and racist propaganda, the destruction of democracy, and anti-European politics. This victory seems to be a choice to embrace equality and liberty on the one hand and reject nationalist populism on the other. But that kind of optimism is premature. Why?

There are three different major parties in the new coalition ("major" because there are also many small organizations). The biggest one had already been in power for eight years. It is quite liberal now, although in the past it embraced more conservative stances. Its leader, Donald Tusk, had been prime minister for the longest time, and then he was unable to introduce such elementary things as same-sex marriages (or at least registered partnerships). During the campaign, he has been trying to convince voters that he has had a change of heart, and now he's not only in favor of equality for LGBTQ+ people but also supports some leftist agendas, like fighting against wealth inequality. Well, Mr. Tusk didn't convince me.

The second party is moderately conservative with liberal viewpoints on the economy. It is a combination of the oldest Polish political organization (the agrarians) and the youngest one, established three years ago by Szymon Hołownia, an ex-television personality. The leaders of this political group are openly saying that they will be against the liberal-

ization of abortion laws or same-sex marriage.

And, last and not least, New Left. If you think now about proper leftists, just stop. It is more third-way party. What is more, it seems they just gave up on many of their propositions (not only social but also economic) because of the conservatives' veto during the coalition negotiations. That is why the more leftist wing of this group refused to participate in the new government.

After eight years of archconservative government, the Polish people are tired. We have one of the most restrictive abortion laws in Europe, and we're still waiting for marriage equality. We also embraced welfare care more than a decade ago. The main question now is: will the new government follow the social changes or not? I'm afraid that in this situation, the conservatives will block the reforms, the liberals will pretend that they have tried, and the left will be convincing that they have had to find a compromise. But we make this kind of compromise all the time, and it always means the progressive propositions are rejected.

The only hope is in the activists and NGOs. It also seems that the youngest voters are not willing to accept the guise of change. They really want a more open and equal society. It can be achieved by reminding the politicians about their promises and, if necessary, by protesting against forcing the right-wing agenda. There's a rich tradition of resistance in Poland, and in the past eight years it has been evoked. Some people want to forget about it now. "We have a liberal, open government," they say, "and we should support it because things were worse. For now, let's focus on rebuilding democracy and leave aside the ideological debates." These people have forgotten that there is no democracy without human rights.

Will the new Polish government reform the country and establish a proper equality? I doubt it. Nevertheless, we have to remember what they promised us and remain faithful to our ideals.

Discussing Irish Unity: Ireland's Chance for a Do Over

Claire Mitchell interviewed by Bridget Meehan

ZNetwork staffer Bridget Meehan talks with Claire Mitchell. Claire is a writer and researcher from the North of Ireland. She is author of the *The Ghost Limb: Alternative Protestants and the Spirit of 1798*, a book in which a group of Northern Protestants retrace the steps of the United Irishmen who led the Irish rebellion of 1798. In this article, Claire talks about her unusual position of being a North of Ireland Protestant who is also progressive and republican; and she talks about the political situation in the North of Ireland at the moment and what she would like to see emerging from current discussions about Irish Unity, which gives Ireland a chance to create a new State. It might be useful, although not essential, to read Bridget's earlier essay on Irish Unity.

You describe yourself as an “alternative Protestant” and that’s a major theme in your book *The Ghost Limb: Alternative Protestants and the Spirit of 1798*. Could you talk a little about how that distinguishes you from the majority of Protestants in the North of Ireland?

I was just looking for a way to distinguish the kind of Protestant I was from Unionism and loyalism – a different Protestant tradition from that kind of “PUL” (Protestant-Unionist-Loyalist) identity package. I’m somebody who has always felt very Irish and I was reared in a house of left-wing politics. Those were the kind of things I was grasping at and that I wanted to write about.

I chose the name Alternative Protestants as I hadn’t really seen it anywhere. That’s a little nod to Stiff Little Fingers, bit of a two fingers-up to the whole classification system of Northern Ireland. Some people have taken it up and run with it. They’re not always people who have the exact same

politics as me. But there’s something in there about not just being defined by the constitutional question on the Unionist side, and being open-minded and up for creative thinking about Irish unity. I wanted to go with “Dissenter” initially but an historian said it would be a very bad idea because it’s such a specific religious concept. I think too, that even if people felt differently, they didn’t really have the words or a concept. Like, what are you? Neither? Other? The options weren’t really great. A nationalist? Like, who wants to be a nationalist in the twenty-first century? I didn’t intentionally try to create a vocabulary like “ghost limb”, “alternative Protestant”, but I get emails every week about it. There was one this morning from a person saying I’ve got a ghost limb and I’m an alternative Protestant.

So, I think I gave a softer way for people to opt into something that’s kind of low-key and not publicly visible. I have so many people who keep asking me what can they do now after reading the book and where can they join? But I have ME (Myalgic Encephalomyelitis), I’m far too tired to help set up a movement, and it’s not really my style anyway. But there is such a self-recognition happening with people who read the book which I find so interesting. And yeah, you will get people who say [this alternative perspective] didn’t get dropped off our history and it’s sort of true actually. The Ulster Scots writers and some Unionists and Orangemen have kept it [the 1798 spirit] going, but their version of it. And Republicans are excited or have continued to be excited by that history.

So, I just find it quite interesting in the book to wedge myself into that in a way that would make everybody kind of feel a bit uncomfortable but that also felt really true to myself, in that I was

a Protestant and I was a republican (as in a civic republican, in the sense of being completely against monarchy and for people's democracy) and just putting those to together. And, I don't know, but for myself it broke creative ground and yeah, I refused to let people stop me.

I can see your difficulty in being able to define yourself because how do you define yourself in a way that's going to actually express what you want to get across but not end up being a word that somebody else appropriates or uses to define you how they want. Language and choice of words here [in the North] can be precarious.

The 1798 spirit has been mostly scrubbed from [history]. In many Unionist areas, the public heritage, the history, the landscape, these are used to eulogise more recent figures such as British soldiers, but in some of those same places you discover that the United Irishmen were active. And while a lot of them were capitalists and merchants, which is very problematic in many ways, they were doing something really, really different. And once you start to pull on that thread, there's a really vibrant historical tradition. Sometimes living on the same road, there could be people holding vastly different political views, and that's a brilliant thought.

And now that level of diversity doesn't really exist. The political debate here has become very repetitive and stifled with the same arguments being rehearsed over and over. It doesn't really inspire much in the way of alternative thinking.

I struggle to listen to a lot of media in Northern Ireland at the minute because it's just reducing and framing this tiny little debate, like you say, over and over, and I think that's what people are reading and listening to, and most people are busy and they don't have the time to think about possible futures.

Although, I think this break in Stormont, this collapse, feels different to me. It feels like all the rest [of the breaks] have been spent wanting to make

Stormont work and get it back. But it feels to me that this break is prompting a lot of people to do some quite radical reassessments, and if you listen carefully you can hear that leaking out.

I wanted to ask you about Brexit in the context of Irish Unity. Brexit has been a mess, how it's unfolded, and even for people like myself who wouldn't be particularly fond of the EU – it has problems and needs reformed – but Brexit wasn't an answer to that. However, Brexit has brought the whole issue of Irish Unity back onto the table. I don't think since Partition, in my view, that it's been discussed with any seriousness. But Unity is being taken seriously now and for instance, the Ireland's Future initiative exists as a result. What do you think about Brexit and its role, if any, in the Unity debate?

I'm pretty radical in my politics, or in my head anyway [laughs]. I was raised with different, left-wing politics. But I would also say that Brexit radicalised me, in a way. Like you, I think the EU has so many faults and I have very nuanced opinions on it. But it was clearly a terrible plan for the North to think that Brexit would be good for us. I have vivid memories of watching the BBC Parliament channel and all the key votes in the Commons and there was this adrenaline roller-coaster with Theresa May, and I was thinking this has fucking nothing to do with me, this is, [with incredulity] I have absolutely no power. So for me, it just really crystalised the democratic deficit [in the North]. It was so stark. In the Commons, they were talking about taking back control and I was here thinking, I have never had less control of my democratic future. That is definitely the moment the book sprang from. It was like a kind of urgent itch to speak to the lack of democratic power that we have as citizens.

I think that Northern Ireland is at this point probably a failed State. I don't feel like I have any mechanism to be represented. All we can do is rearrange deck chairs and people aren't even up for doing that. So for me and a lot of people I know, Irish Unity is nothing to do with a sense of Britishness

or the upsurge of loving Mother Ireland. Like the United Irishmen, it's about democracy. I've never really voted for anyone who is able to change anything. I think it is the most logical question in the world to be looking at all of the different options, and Unity is one of them.

There's a way to ask that question [about Unity] that is not motivated by ethnic politics or nationalism, just rational, logical, future planning. I think that seed has grown in lots of different ways. Organisations like Ireland's Future are doing good practical work on the nuts and bolts, for example social security, health, equalities and rights. But it can sometimes feel quite top-down and I'm not sure it's yet a grassroots movement that is creatively imagining all that reunification could bring. I think Sinn Féin are also trying but I think they will need to have broader, messier, more imaginative conversations about Unity, so that a wider range of people feel included.

I think actually Matthew O'Toole gave a great speech the other night which was beginning to ask some of the questions that would be on my mind, just taking things on a few further steps.

And what are those questions that you're asking, the questions you feel need to be addressed?

Well, it's like this idea that we'll go from a neoliberal Union and a neoliberal peace, into a neoliberal Ireland. And there's the assumption that this will be funded by a tax surplus and Sovereign Wealth funds and Foreign Direct Investment funds; that we'll change a few flags and anthems; we'll cater for an imaginary Unionist and think up the imaginary ethnic symbolisms that they might want; then put all that down in the plan and then switch Tories. And that does absolutely nothing for me. I think it would be a disastrous form of Unity because that model is based on promises of growth in a time of catastrophic climate change and I cannot process [expressing disbelief] how huge economic claims can be made without that context. It just doesn't make sense to me.

What you're saying in that model, to loyalists, is that this is going to uproot everything you've known about your life emotionally, your [national] identity, all your sensibilities, and we're gonna tell you life will get better; but within 5 years you'll notice that everything is has gotten worse because everything is going to get worse unless governments get out in front of that problem. So, I think the sunlit uplands of Brexit was clearly a disaster, and to promise sunlit uplands with reunification would also be a disaster.

I've participated in Ireland's Future events – like, if there's any stage where anybody hands me a microphone, I will speak into it – and I think that's a good way to start the conversation. But we need to get further than neoliberalism and imaginary Unionists because I can't see it working. And would I even support it, I don't know? I'd need to see what's being said about the climate. If a Border Poll was going to take place in 5 to 10 years' time, I mean, think of the climate in 5 to 10 years time?!

I get that. I come from a Irish Republican family, several generations of them, and it's always been so important to me that we remove the British presence from Ireland and have a united Ireland. I've always believed strongly in that, but now I think, if we don't even have a planet we can live on, if we're dying as a species, it doesn't really matter if there's a 32-county [united] Ireland. What matters more right now is tackling the ecological and climate disasters that are happening, and doing something about the gross wealth and income inequalities we have, problems that are connected to capitalism. So, I agree with you, the idea that we're considering maybe having a Border Poll in 10 years' time is pointless. In 10 years' time we might not even have a society as we know it.

The meaningful part of it for me, the kernel in it, is we need in the North to be part of a larger administrative unit, quickly, and one that is functional. I mean, I'm big into grassroots democracy and co-ops and the commons, and that's the kind of politics I would like to see soon. But I think that

we do need to be in a State that can take state-level actions very, very quickly. Like you, I grew up really believing in reunification as a kind of arc of justice and I still believe that. But, practically, I just don't think that with the terminal neglect we have from Westminster, and the kind of structures that we have in the Agreement, and the embeddedness of the sectarian divide, I just cannot see that situation being climate-ready, equality-ready, or anything-ready, in 5 years' time. Nor can I see Unity being in place by then either.

Some people say having the conversation about Unity is divisive at a time like this but I actually think it opens things up because if you have the idea of a blank sheet, you can start having creative conversations about reunification. And our only hope is to get those concerns taken on board.

Matthew O'Toole said a few things about reconciliation and about redefining Irishness. That needs to happen immediately; it's already happening anyway: Protestants being Irish, refugees being Irish, and so on. But, we should be thinking about the language of [national] identity and independence. I mean, instead of an ethnic Ireland in which Protestants would be 'welcome', why don't we aim higher? Why are the Unity movements not talking about food sovereignty and energy independence? And using the language of Denmark or the Nordic models? And reframing ourselves as an island State with drawbacks and opportunities for wind energy? And taking a leaf out of Scotland's book?

So, there's two things we should do. We should open up [national] identity to be civically inclusive, saying you're here, brilliant, what can you contribute and what can we do together? And then we should redefine that old language of independence. I mean, what does getting rid of Britain even mean? We'll need to do geoengineering projects, probably, and we share seas with Britain and we'll need each other. So, getting the Brits out, as much as it can be satisfying for some people to say that, ourselves alone is not the way to go. We are interdependent. There's just such an opportunity

to rethink an island economy and democracy and gosh, nobody's talking about that.

I'm interested in what you said about having this different language, and that challenges me, from my background. We have to move away from language we've been used to because it's divisive. I like that idea you talked about where we could have language that's common sense and that speaks to the problems we've got now rather than trying to create a State that's based on something from the past.

And there's the Unionist issue. I live in a Unionist area and I've worked before with the UVF. No, I don't mean I've worked for the UVF [laughs], but I did some post-conflict work with them in the early 00s, the days of David Ervine and Billy Mitchell. And I still do quite a few events in Unionist and loyalist areas and I have lots of friends there. And whilst nationalists and Republicans and the South have this imaginary Unionist in their heads whose life revolves around loving flags and being British, if you go and talk to people, it's helplessness and hopelessness they're feeling – the same as me. [National] identity and symbolism matter too of course. But I think the root problem is the powerlessness. That's where Brexit came from, you know, late capitalism, take back control, people feeling that they've no control over their own lives and that real sense of loss. And the only language being offered to frame that loss at the minute is the loss of Britishness, loss of [national] identity, community. But actually, people are right to identify the loss of community and the loss of social bonds.

So, I really think that a redefined Unity is needed. You could do the flag bit, British citizenship, BBC, joint whatever, 12th of July, no problem. But have it be a new Ireland accompanied by a Green New Deal or some climate-ready, future-ready transformation that has a language of self-sufficiency and equality and jobs, where you'd go to Larne [an extremely loyalist town in the North] as well as Leitrim [a county in the South] to recruit young ones to be green technology engineers. If you're not addressing the hopelessness of late capitalism



and the isolation of it, you could honestly be genuflecting to the King and have a new anthem and it wouldn't be enough for some people. Nothing would be enough. But it might be less traumatic if people could feel a bit of hope for their future.

I do feel the conversation is progressing, though. I think after Brexit, people didn't really know how to talk about Unity and it was dominated by anthems and flags for maybe the first 5 years. That's all fine, but now conversation has deepened. It seems obvious to me that there are other conversations going on, though not in public. People are talking about equality and jobs and putting social class back into the debate. Those conversations that might begin to solve the problems are starting to happen. Not all the problems because there are still people on the fringes who will never be ok with Unity, but it will go a long way [to addressing the problems].

I think there's a hard line constituency in loyalism, there's criminality there, a bit of fascism there, and a bit of the online influencer effect there as well. I think some have just accepted this brand on face

value, and think that's what loyalism actually is. But loyalism is so much more diverse than this. There are still many progressive loyalists on the ground, doing good work. Far right politics is actually a cross-community activity on the island of Ireland, you know, the fascism and the right-wing, social media personalities. There's a lot of common cause there and you do see the fringes of it moving in lockstep, for example the Catholic pro-lifers coming together with people on the fringes of loyalism to protest something like Drag Queen story-time. I honestly take Unionist and loyalist concerns about [national] identity and loss very seriously. But I think we can give too much reverence to a certain element within loyalism that is just basically very right-wing and that's a global issue.

That's a good point because you'll be aware anyway of the growth of fascism in the South, which just makes my mind boggle. The racism that's coming through, it's disgusting. Ireland's never been really challenged by racism because we've had a history of emigration rather than people

from different countries wanting to come here to live. But that's changing and more people from different countries are coming here to live, and then you see how some Irish people react. It's actually shocking. So, I think you're right that it's not just loyalists who have these attitudes. Fascism can be anywhere, it's Make America Great Again, it's Trump, it's what's going on in the South [of Ireland], across Europe, in Argentina, you can see that every country has that fascist potential. I agree that there's commonality between those people and it displays the most disgusting, base characteristics of human nature.

That's one way that I think having an open, re-framed reunification debate could actually be of use to the South. I do think the South leans toward discursive discussion, like their Citizens' Assemblies have shown. The South has an ability to have good national conversations. I think that having to accommodate Protestants [from the North] starts to redefine Irishness. What I'm getting to is that we need to be ready for climate refugees really soon and getting people excited and hopeful, rather than defensive, about a civic Irishness or whatever you want to call it. But that's the ground we need people to be on quickly.

It's very interesting, Patrick Costello [elected representative of the Green Party in the South] was talking about the 12th of July as a public holiday. Initially, I was like, why did he say that, you can't talk about that without a nuanced debate about the 12th and all its connotations. But, actually we don't really have time so he just threw it out there and the South had to go, oh shit, and realise maybe they're not as open as they thought they were. And even the Listowel conversation where it was said "could you not find anybody Irish to do it?" Hopefully those incidents will spiral off in a way that means people do take a look at what the category of Irishness is.

What kind of institutions would you like to see in a United Ireland, your ideal institutions economically, politically, socially, environmentally? I know you'll not be able to go into great

detail, but even to touch on some of them, those institutions you think should be there, how they should look, what would be their key priorities?

Obviously, in terms of issues, the ones that we've identified. They all go back to climate really, the collapse of late capitalism, overconsumption, and adapting to climate chaos very quickly. So, those should be key priorities and they have social implications, such as climate refugees. They lead me to certain conclusions about economic models that point to degrowth. Not that we should all be hunting and gathering, we can't do that, but yeah, taking a look at what some of the more interesting countries are doing and thinking of our own ideas, though I don't see anybody championing that [change] politically.

What I would like to see and going forward, I'd love to see more grassroots economics, co-ops, commons, people getting land access back, building big wind energy projects and community energy projects. A friend down the road from me has a field and he's set up a community farming co-op and it's working well; you've got to have a field to do that and so not everybody can do that particular thing. But everybody in the community is bucking in their surpluses and we're getting to know our neighbours a bit more and people who have time are going up to work on it. I think we need to do more projects like this. I mean, we're actively poisoning ourselves at the minute. The Lough Neagh situation is just so terrifying. Forty percent of our drinking water comes from Lough Neagh, yet we're living in this kind of lawless State where no one's taking responsibility.

A new model [for a United Ireland], some parts of that model need to look at energy independence. Surely somebody would have to take that up in a meaningful way at some point and soon, because it's just a no-brainer. But there are entrenched economic interests. The North and South of Ireland are heavily entangled with vulture funds and global capital and extraction. I'm not sure if much changed with the energy crisis because of Ukraine last year, not in the North anyway. Do we need 5

more of those crises [to make it change]? I think it's actually incumbent on all of us to start talking about those things and as often as we can, put those ideas into the conversation.

In terms of structures, it's really interesting because you would always assume, and certainly the academics' assumption and the politicians' assumption is that Stormont would be in place still in a reunified Ireland maybe for 10 years, maybe longer. I've always hated that idea because I think Stormont is totally dysfunctional and institutionally sectarian and it's quite hard then to square having Stormont with wanting grassroots democracy. I'd be happy for a free-for-all in the Dáil. I think there's plenty of Tories [North and South], there's plenty of coalition partners informally, and that leaves room for more progressive Left coalitions to come forward. I think British people should be guaranteed all sorts of protections in law, with rights, inclusion and equality – whatever they raise as important. But I'd be extremely wary about building in a formal, explicit idea of Unionists having permanent special representation. That doesn't allow for the fluidity of [national] identity and political change over time which is normal. What we've learned to do, or rather what we haven't learned but should have learned in Northern Ireland, from the peace process, is not to institutionalise blocs because they freeze people and identities in time. There's no room for organic change and flux. We've hung onto them for too long in the North, so I wouldn't be keen to see similar blocs built into any reunified State.

The logical idea is that if you get rid of Stormont then do you give local councils more power? That could be an interesting model. But then local and district councils, North and South, are also pretty dysfunctional. I can imagine a scenario in Unity where a Unionist dominated Council could become very focused on [national] identity and symbolism, to the detriment of ordinary politics. That said, Councils could be a way of helping people feel more empowered in areas where people did not vote for Unity. I would love to see the cultural work being done upfront, in the planning and

preparation, so people can get on with the urgent work of coping with climate ruptures, developing secure food and energy sources, making sure we can survive as a species.

The bottom line is that you're talking about having somewhere that's actually fit for purpose for now, that's dealing with the real challenges we're facing now, that's trying to neutralise the language as much as possible and quickly deal with the cultural and [national] identity issues. If the cultural and [national] identity issues get hold, they'll dominate the conversation and then you'll never get to talk about the other issues. That seems to be where we're stuck right now. And I actually think that situation suits a lot of people because you don't have to think when everybody's arguing over flags and allegiances; you can just let that happen and nobody will ask the hard questions about the economy, about what's going to happen with our environment, about how we're going to deal with energy insecurity, with food insecurity, how we're going to deal with climate migrants.

I think this is where the money comes in. There is a surplus [24] at the minute and if there was a Sovereign Wealth Fund, you could take a Unionist borough council and give them say a million pounds this year to get going on, but it has to be ring-fenced, for example, to train 200 engineers in renewable energy and to find a site for a community energy project so you can start selling energy back to the grid. So, the money is actually really important, you know, getting back to the 'Ireland's Future' idea. This way you'd get two for one: a transformed economic model and a more peaceful North, if you fund this work that we're going to have to do in 10 or 15 years anyway, when it'll be worse by then.

Well, I think we could probably end it at this point. Thank you for giving up your time to talk to me. I've really enjoyed our conversation.

I have too, thank you.

New Fascism and the Question of Socialist Strategy: Reflections on the Turkish Case

Sebnem Oguz

After the re-election of Recep Erdogan as President in the Turkish general elections held in May 2023, serious disappointment and despair prevailed among a significant part of the Turkish left. There were three reasons for this. First, unlike previous elections, this election was perceived as a referendum that would determine the destiny of the political regime. Second, it was assumed that the economic crisis, the earthquake, and the increasing tensions within the power bloc would weaken the Erdogan regime. Thirdly, because of the optimism that accompanied this assumption, broad sections of society directed all their energy to the elections. Therefore, in order to overcome disappointment and despair and continue with a new strategy, it is necessary to rethink the three reasons listed here.

First of all, the elections were, of course, important in terms of the transformation of the political regime, but they were not a matter of life and death because there was not a situation that could be called 'either fascism or democracy', but a 'new fascism' that was progressing as a contradictory process in Turkey, as well as in other countries.

New Fascism in Turkey

New fascism has an important difference from classical fascism. Classical fascism was institutionalized by abolishing the liberal state form and elections in order to mobilize war-like violence against revolutionary organizations of the working class in the face of a strong threat from communism. New fascism does not need to suspend elections because there is no threat of communism. On the contrary, the continuation of the parliamentary scene keeps the 'internal

enemy' alive as the interlocutor that right-wing populist leaders need to gather power and reproduce themselves.

Alongside the use of media and other ideological apparatuses of the state, one of the basic mechanisms of intimidating the enemy instead of destroying it is the use of the judiciary rather than police and paramilitaries within the coercive apparatus, especially in matters related to the continuation of the parliamentary scene. A typical example of this in Turkey is the Justice and Development Party (Turkish: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) government's intervention in the election process, not through naked violence, but through the Supreme Election Council, thus generating consent by bringing the issue to the legal sphere. In the last election, this mechanism was used to the fullest; still, political analyses were mostly made ignoring the fact that 'the dice were loaded from the beginning'.

So, in a process in which it was almost impossible to win an election within the structural constraints of the new regime, why did a significant number of socialists, like other opposition forces, perceive the elections as a matter of life and death and carry out such vigorous work with the slogan "We will definitely win"? There are two reasons for this, one subjective and the other objective. Subjectively, it was impossible to remain passive in a process that was indeed coded as a matter of life and death by political prisoners waiting to be freed if the elections were won, by people under statutory decree waiting to go back to work, by political exiles waiting to return to the country, and by other similar groups. And objectively, there was the expectation that the economic crisis, the earthquake, and the



cracks within the power bloc would weaken the regime. However, the AKP government managed the earthquake and economic crisis in a manner designed to consolidate its base, so these two factors did not create a rift in the AKP voters.¹ And it was not difficult to predict that the tensions within the power bloc would not weaken the regime, but on the contrary, Erdogan would consolidate his position by manipulating multiple centres of power against each other. In sum, the transformation in the state apparatus and power relations under the 21-year AKP rule was decisive in the election defeat. But of course, this should not prevent us from accounting for the mistakes made by the opposition.

As can be understood from what I have written so far, I think the first mistake was that a signif-

icant portion of socialists coded the elections as a matter of life and death. If, instead of attaching such importance to the elections, we had defined it as a process in which we could strengthen our ties with the social opposition, establish new ones, express ourselves, and accumulate power, we would be able to prevent the next disappointment, and we would not be trapped in the dilemma between acting in accordance with the sensitivities of the society in order to win the election and then trying to transform those sensitivities.

Combating Today's Fascism

All of this brings us to the necessity of discussing the question 'What kind of political regime are we in and what strategy should we follow against this regime?' Socialists have a strong experience

of fighting against classical fascism, military dictatorships, and authoritarian regimes under the guise of liberal democracy. Discussions around the question of 'elections vs. street movements' are based on this experience. However, this discussion does not offer a strategy to combat the specifics of today's fascism. When discussing the relationship between political regime and strategy from a Marxist perspective, I think roughly four different historical conjunctures can be considered. The first is the revolutionary situation in Russia in 1917 when the state's coercive apparatuses were at the forefront. In this conjuncture, Lenin proposed the "dual power" strategy, arguing that power should first accumulate in movements outside the state, in soviet-type organizations in which the people had a direct say, and then these organizations would seize the state apparatus and put an end to the dual power situation.²

The second historical conjuncture includes classic fascism and military dictatorship where elections are suspended. Nicos Poulantzas (1936-1979), who deals with the relationship between political regime and strategy in different historical conjunctures in a way specific to those conjunctures, states in his book *The Crisis of Dictatorships* (1975) that social struggles from outside the state do not have a direct effect on the collapse of such regimes, but rather these struggles accelerate the collapse of these regimes by deepening intra-state contradictions.

The third historical conjuncture is the concentration of power in the executive apparatus in the face of the deepening contradictions of capitalism since the early 1970s. In his book *State, Power, Socialism* (1978), Poulantzas defined the political regimes that emerged under these conditions as 'authoritarian statism' and proposed the strategy of 'democratic socialism' against these regimes. This strategy is based on a formula that could be summarized as 'both social movements and electoral politics', emphasizing the need for social movements that accumulate power through direct democracy to also try to

transform intra-state relations through representative democracy by means of political parties. This formula guided parties like Syriza to come to power and was also a meaningful option in Turkey before the June 2015 elections.

However, the historical conjuncture we have encountered in Turkey since November 2015 has different characteristics from all three. In this fourth case, elections are not suspended, but the transformation within the state apparatus itself evolves into a form specific to new fascism. Unfortunately, we do not have a sufficient repertoire of theoretical and practical experience regarding the strategy to be followed in this situation. When Turkey's uniqueness, especially regarding the Kurdish issue, is taken into account, we have to find creative formulas that go beyond the dilemma between elections and street movements.

After the electoral defeat, some sections of the Turkish socialist left returned to the formula that 'the real struggle should continue in the streets.' But under the conditions of new fascism, street movements have their limits too. In this case, I think it is necessary to move from "war of manoeuvre" to "war of position" in Gramscian terms, that is, from the strategy of "frontal attack on the state" to the strategy of "surrounding the state with counter-hegemony to be established within broader sections of society in the long term." This war of position does not need to be visible; on the contrary, it is critical to establish ties with different sections of society in a way that does not put their own future at risk.

The socialist left has serious historical experience on this issue, but this rich experience seems to have been forgotten as the social media age has accustomed everyone to being visible. I think that mobilizing the knowledge of this experience again and in more creative ways in the war of position against new fascism will be important in weaving a new strategy that will go beyond the dilemma between elections and street movements.

Comparing How the West and China Offer Loans to Developing Countries

John P. Ruehl

In October 2023, amid celebrations commemorating the 10th anniversary of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Beijing, Pakistan and Chinese leaders signed a multibillion-dollar deal for a railway project. As a pivotal component of China's efforts to promote economic integration and develop infrastructure abroad, Pakistan has received significant developmental assistance from Beijing through the \$62 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Nevertheless, Western nations and financial entities have also been strategically maneuvering in Asia, with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approving a \$3 billion loan for Pakistan in July, "saving it from defaulting on debt." Other countries in the region are experiencing similar competition. Bangladesh, for instance, inaugurated the BRI-linked Padma Bridge Rail Link in October, and weeks later received a \$395 million loan from the EU. That month, Sri Lanka struck a debt deal with China, while the U.S. extended a \$553 million loan for port construction in Colombo in early November.

As competition over infrastructure and investment has grown in recent years, standoffs between Western and Chinese lenders over debt restructuring and relief have intensified. Lenders hesitate to offer relief packages, fearing that one creditor's concession might allow a debtor country to use that relief money to pay off others. These impasses underscore the challenges being faced by the decades-old Western-dominated financial system and lending initiatives.

The foundation of this system was laid at the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944. The meeting established the IMF to ensure stability of the international monetary system and offer policy advice and financial assistance to countries in economic crisis. It has since

grown and comprises 190 member states, while its "sister organization," the World Bank, was created simultaneously and has grown to include 189 member countries. The World Bank focuses more on long-term assistance through loans and grants, supporting infrastructure and poverty reduction in developing countries.

Efforts to democratize these institutions have been made, but both the IMF and World Bank still remain under significant Western influence. Western countries are overrepresented on the IMF's board and voting arrangements, while all the IMF's managing directors have been European. All the World Bank's presidents except for Bulgarian national Kristalina Georgieva, who served as acting president in 2019, have been U.S. citizens, and the voting shares of the bank have not been rearranged since 2010. Both institutions are based in Washington, D.C.

In addition to the IMF and World Bank, other Western-dominated (or heavily influenced) multilateral development banks and institutions include the Paris Club, the European Investment Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the Asian Development Bank. Government initiatives like USAID, the U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA), and the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation, as well as private banks, also play prominent roles in advancing Western economic interests.

China's role in multilateral banks like the IMF and World Bank has expanded as its economy has grown. But Beijing continues to criticize the current global debt governance system as "dominated by the 'Paris Club-IMF-World Bank' structure of the West," and has chosen to create its own path to expand its economic influence globally.

China's state capitalism offers a unique alternative to Western infrastructure and development initiatives for the first time in decades. Through its robust, globally integrated economy, technological expertise, and extensive industrial power, Beijing can help fund and build projects on a scale that rivals the West in a way not even the Soviet Union could achieve. Furthermore, Chinese assistance does not require political and economic reforms typically attached to Western developmental initiatives.

China's approach has seen significant success. It has become the world's largest creditor since 2017, and is lending more than the IMF, World Bank, and Paris Club combined, said Brent Neiman from the U.S. Department of the Treasury in September 2022. With \$1 trillion spent and more than \$2 trillion in contracts, China's BRI has transformed global trade routes and economic development and is even garnering interest from the Taliban.

A Center for Global Development 2020 study estimated that Chinese loans generally have a 2 percent interest rate, in comparison to 1.54 percent for the World Bank's concessional loans, and the penalties for late repayments have increased since 2018, according to AidData. Nonetheless, most BRI partner countries view China's project positively.

To implement its vision, Beijing has deployed a network of national financial organizations, including the China State Construction Engineering Corporation (CSCEC), China Communications Construction Company (CCCC), China Development Bank (CDB), the Export-Import Bank of China, China Construction Bank (CCB), Silk Road Fund, China Investment Corporation (CIC), China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA), and the People's Bank of China.

Though China has largely focused on striking bilateral deals, it has developed some multilateral initiatives. The New Development Bank was created in 2015 and is headquartered in Shanghai. It is increasingly seen as a method to encourage transactions in China's currency, the renminbi, between BRICS member states. Meanwhile, the

Global Development and South-South Cooperation Fund (GDSSCF) is being used for China's software-focused Global Development Initiative (GDI). But China's major multilateral project is the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which was established in 2016. Now with 106 approved members, the AIIB focuses on lending to investment projects, infrastructure, transport routes, energy, and information networks.

Other countries, including Western nations such as Germany, have some influence in the AIIB. Nonetheless, the bank is dominated by China. It has an effective veto over major decisions and has been governed by China's former vice minister of the finance ministry, Jin Liquan, since its founding. China's dominance prompted the AIIB's Canadian communications chief, Bob Pickard, to resign in 2023.

A divided response by Western countries to China's initiatives has further undermined their traditional dominance. Many expressed interest in the AIIB as it was being formed, and Washington failed to dissuade them from joining the bank. The U.S. then attempted to counter the AIIB with the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which came into force in 2016. However, the U.S. left the organization in 2017 under former President Donald Trump, and the project was repackaged into a smaller one.

China's newfound leverage has seen it confront the West around the world. In 1990, for example, Western countries accounted for 85 percent of infrastructure construction contracts in Africa. Yet from 2007-2020, Chinese entities provided \$23 billion in funding for infrastructure projects across sub-Saharan Africa, more than double lent by banks in the U.S., Germany, Japan, and France combined, according to a study by the Center for Global Development. In 2020, Chinese entities were responsible for 31 percent of all infrastructure projects in Africa valued at more than \$50 million, up from 12 percent in 2013, while the West's contribution to the projects in Africa declined from 37 percent to 12 percent during the same period, according to the Economist.

Brazil and Mexico enjoy significant investment from China, and Argentina officially joined the BRI in 2022. In August 2023, China highlighted its increasingly important role in Argentina's economy by providing a \$3 billion loan that allowed the South American country to avoid default. Even in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, China has spent billions of dollars linking countries to the BRI.

Nevertheless, the U.S. and the collective West maintain considerable economic influence and have responded assertively. The U.S. passed the BUILD Act in 2018 and the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) in 2022 to increase investment and infrastructure development in developing countries, and the EU put forth its Global Gateway program in 2021, "the bloc's new infrastructure partnership plan that's seen as an alternative to China's worldwide Belt and Road Initiative." Meanwhile, the World Bank's lending to sub-Saharan African nations soared from \$26 billion in 2019 to \$49 billion in 2023, while the World Bank and the ADB also overtook Chinese entities during the COVID-19 pandemic to become Southeast Asia's biggest sources of funding, said a report by the Lowy Institute.

The U.S. and the EU have also expressed support for developing a new transport corridor connecting India, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean Sea. Furthermore, the West has presented a united economic response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, including the World Bank halting all its programs in Russia. The AIIB's \$100 billion fund also still pales in comparison to the IMF's \$800 billion mobilization capacity.

Both the West's and China's economic lending and infrastructure practices, however, have faced criticism. Former Chief Economist at the World Bank, Joseph Stiglitz, has stated that the conditions placed on borrowing countries by the World Bank and IMF often cause significant pain for local populations and stifle economic development in these nations. UN Secretary-General António Guterres stated in 2023 that the IMF and World Bank benefit richer countries at the expense of poorer ones, urging for change.

China's projects have faced criticism for predominantly employing Chinese companies and workers, as opposed to making local hires, resulting in protests and attacks against them. BRI deals are also criticized for being opaque in terms of financing and implementation, and countries struggling to repay loans have found themselves giving up some autonomy to their export revenues. And while allegations of Chinese debt diplomacy are often exaggerated in Western media, Chinese economic opportunism has increased debt burdens and debt-for-equity swaps with BRI partners.

Pakistan's multifaceted economic challenges persist despite its engagement with Western and Chinese lending and infrastructure institutions. The country is grappling with neighboring Afghanistan's instability, its longstanding rivalry with India, the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, devastating flooding in 2022, systemic corruption, and soaring energy prices caused by the conflict in Ukraine.

While these challenges remain complex, investment stands out as a potential remedy. Rather than engaging in blind competition, a more effective use of funds for all parties involved could be achieved by acknowledging and pursuing greater coordination between Western and Chinese economic interests in the country, such as increasing Pakistan's energy efficiency. Amid their competition, the AIIB and World Bank signed a framework for cooperation in common areas of interest in 2017, and the AIIB has similar agreements with the Asian Development Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

Despite the rise of alternative markets, China stands as the sole challenger to the West's established lending and infrastructure development networks. This rivalry has already prompted slow reform in the decades-old financial system, offering support to emerging powers and impoverished nations. While more equitable economic statecraft may prove elusive, borrowing countries have an opportunity to leverage the best deals essential for their progress.