



MAGAZINE

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“Exploitation of nonrenewable resources has a structure where few people and foreign companies win a lot of money, a few people get poor-paying jobs and our resources are exported. The social and environmental costs are never taken into account.”

-Natalia Greene



www.znetwork.org

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Glimpses of Gaza — Anwar's Story

Eros Salvatore

Another family died yesterday. A dozen families die everyday. They usually manage to pull a few bodies out of the rubble. The rest remain. No one has the energy to dig them out. They're too busy being tired and hungry. Besides, what would they do with the corpses? They don't have funerals anymore, just mass graves. Their homes have become their final resting places.

Anwar Ghilan tells me he's been a refugee in Rafah since the sixty-eighth day of the war. That's when his apartment in Gaza City was blown up by the Israeli Defense Forces with just a few minutes notice. In his Facebook photographs he's tall, handsome and well dressed. He's young, and newly married. His wife's beautiful, and his baby's cute. He has a Master's degree and teaches English. He was living the dream. Not anymore. Now there are no jobs. There are barely any houses. Everyone's on the streets.

Twelve members of the Ghilan extended family share a small tent. They barely have room to lay down and sleep. They have to scrounge to eat. Everyone has a daily task to complete. Find clean water. Wait in line for handouts. Search for diapers. Yesterday, while the Hamads were being murdered, Anwar's family consumed three full meals. They haven't had a day like that since the beginning of the war. All courtesy of his GoFundMe campaign. At least he's social media savvy. Those who aren't, don't raise money. They starve instead.

Anwar says his aunt's family is dead. Bombed to pieces. They resided in one of three houses that were destroyed by a single missile. I look up Arabic words to say my condolences. All responses listed pertain to the death of one person. That seems so small and inadequate. No words for entire families being exterminated. How could

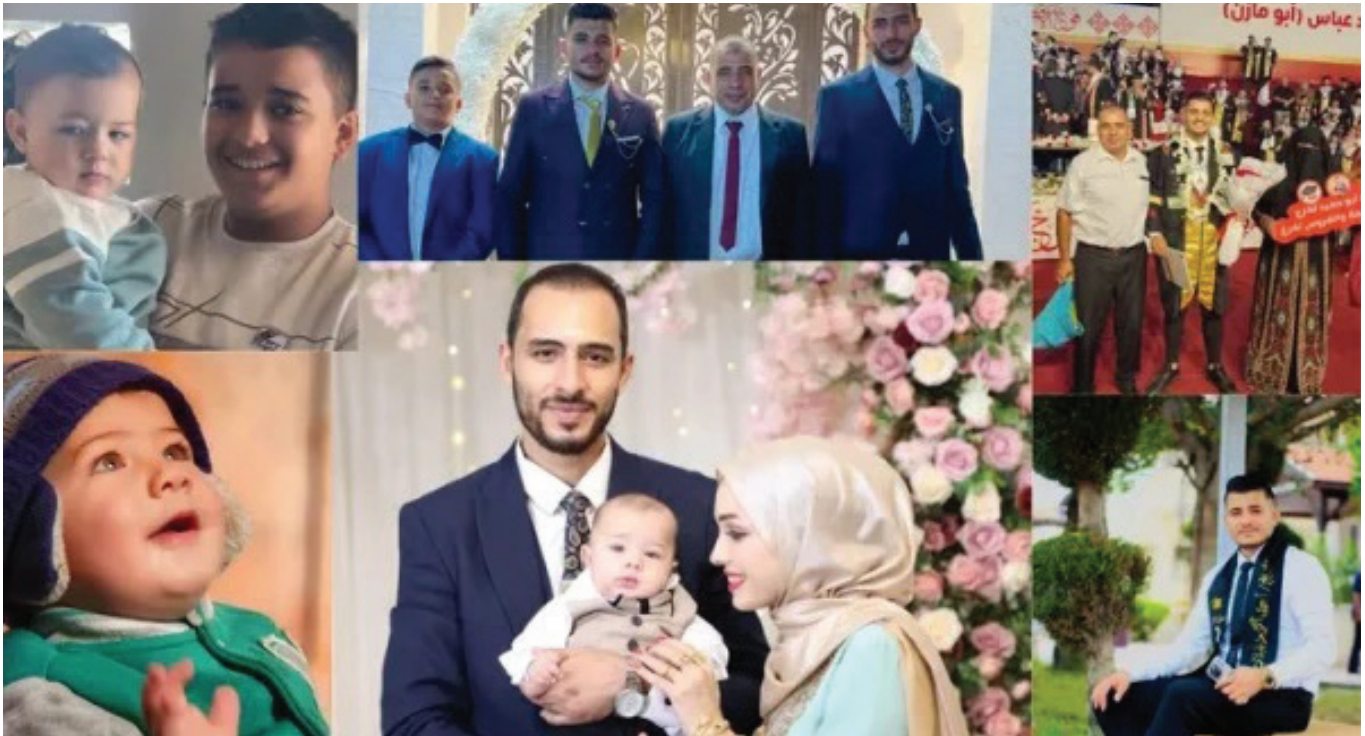
there be? Anyone who sees a whole family being murdered can't be consoled. Anwar tells me the magic word everyone uses to convey their pain. Silence.

He's waiting for the IDF to invade Rafah. That's when there will be no escape. If they die, the family hopes they die together. No one wants to be the sole survivor. The only thing they have left is each other.

Anwar rarely smiles. In his current photos he has the "I hate life" look that refugees all over the world take on, when their lives have been ruined. Everyday there's a new loss whether it's weight, sanity, or life. As we talk, my questions tread the line between dignity and denigration. I decided to tell him more about me to ease the uneasiness. I have a foster daughter who spent her early years growing up under the Taliban. Her last name is Anwar. I tell him this and sense him smile through the messaging app. He says she must be a nice girl. Why are the oppressed always so polite?

I detest social media, but that's where I met Anwar. Some would say that makes social media redeeming. But it doesn't, because now I find myself worrying about Anwar and his family. I feel sick to my stomach. But I can't go back. I've wanted to help refugees since I watched the massacres in Bosnia on TV. Now the doorway lies open, and I have experience with tragedy. Murder haunts my social worker memories, and I count the suicides among friends and family.

Anwar posts a story on his Facebook of a terrified mother cat, fangs bared, claws out, clutching one of her kittens, surrounded by rubble and soldiers. All the cute, innocent things we post on social media are being infiltrated by horror. How to save the children? Stop them thinking about



Meet Anwar, a 29-year-old English teacher, his wife, a 25-year veteran elementary school teacher, and their sweet 9-month-old son. Life in the Khanyounis refugee camp turned upside down when war struck.

their fate? Everyone has a smartphone or tablet. We need online programming for refugees. Comedy, puppet shows, education, nature. Distract the children, distract the adults. Keep them all busy. Anything but being real. Then Anwar sends me photographs of kids flying kites. They play in muddy streets, full of laughter, dirt and grime. A brief respite.

For fifty cents a day Anwar gets a Wi-Fi card and a password. He only talks at night. During the day most of the bandwidth is used up. Even so, communications are choppy. The connection breaks off every minute. We can't do video chat like that. I just hear broken sentences, like he's an English student all over again. I'm ten hours behind. I sleep in, and wait for his messages, while he's up early trying to survive. At least he's not in northern Gaza where the food trucks get swarmed, looted after the IDF causes a stampede by shooting the police. There, desperation prevails. Famine sets in.

Life is expensive. Thirty-five dollar chickens. One hundred dollars for a box of diapers. Want

a solar panel to charge your phone? Five hundred dollars. Anwar wants help promoting his GoFundMe campaign. I tell him which states to target. The left coast of course, plus New England and New York. It must be humbling to beg. He needs four hundred dollars a day to take care of everyone in his family. He's raised four thousand dollars in a little over a month. I don't know which is more amazing: digital technology or the kindness of strangers. Regardless, it's still not enough. Ten days of supplies for thirty days of living. The generals should be forced to have fundraisers, not civilians.

I end our conversations with Inshallah. That's an Arabic word that means God willing. God willing we will talk again. An ominous phrase.

Over the coming weeks the suffering continues. One time Anwar spends three days without sleeping, so he can promote his GoFundMe. He has twenty-three thousand dollars in donations. But he's not happy.

"I can't go on anymore. I can't live like this. I can't get these images from my mind."

I try to tell him about people I've read about who've survived genocide. Many are Jewish Holocaust survivors. He doesn't care.

"Nothing will erase these images from my mind. Everytime I close my eyes I see bodies and destruction. I saw a pregnant woman with her belly ripped open and her burned baby laying on top of her. I saw a five year-old girl with her insides torn out. I can't take it anymore."

I'm as lost as he is. I spent half an hour searching the internet for words of wisdom. No luck there. But then, by a miracle, they appear.

"Anwar, I have watched you over the past two weeks taking care of your family and helping them with your GoFundMe. You have never given up. You are an inspiration to me, and you will be an inspiration to others once they read your story."

A wave of peace sweeps over me.

He feels it too:

"Thank you so much. We suddenly found ourselves as Palestinian warriors, trying to protect our own."

That is the answer. To continue fighting for the survival of your family and your people. No matter what the pain, when you share it, it lessens the burden on everyone.

That would be the perfect ending, but there is no perfection in war. The first magazine that read this story accepted it. But then they did the unthinkable, they asked for an attribution for Anwar's mentions of the dead. Anwar became enraged, and sent me a video of his aunt's son discovering his mother's body in the rubble. I listen to the screams. I listen to the pain. I let Anwar have his space. Let him retract the story and give it to someone with more common sense. Someone who knows not to question a victim of genocide, such as whoever put this printed page in your hands.



Palestinians inspect the ruins of a building destroyed in Israeli airstrikes in Khan Younis in the southern of Gaza strip, on October 8, 2023.

Killing Humanitarian Workers as a Strategy: Israel's Endgame in Gaza

Ramzy Baroud

Israel described its clearly deliberate killing of seven humanitarian aid workers on April 1 as a “grave mistake”, a “tragic event” that “happens in war”.

Israel is, obviously, lying. This entire so-called war – actually genocide – in Gaza, has been based on a series of lies, some of which Israel continues to peddle.

For some, in the mainstream media, it took months to accept the obvious fact that Israel has been lying about the events that led to the war and the military objectives of its constant targeting of hospitals, schools, shelters and other civilian facilities.

So, it was only logical for Israel to lie about killing the six internationals, and their Palestinian driver, of the World Central Kitchen (WCK). Notwithstanding an event as atrocious as this, it is implausible for Israel to start telling the truth now.

Luckily, few seem to believe Israel's version regarding WCK, or its continued massacres elsewhere in Gaza. Israel “cannot credibly investigate its own failure in Gaza,” the US-based NGO said in a statement on April 5.

The issue of targeting these internationals, however, has to be placed within a larger context.

Israel was hardly secretive about its intentions to deny Palestinians even the most basic necessities of survival in Gaza, epitomized in the words of Israeli Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant on October 9: “There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed.”

Initially, this statement, and many others, were understood at the time to be an outcome of Israel's desire to punish Palestinians for the October 7 Al-Aqsa Flood operation, by resorting to its typical tactic of collective punishment.

With time, however, and based on statements made by other Israeli officials, it became clear that Israel wanted to ethnically cleanse Palestinians altogether.

The Israeli stratagem was immediately rejected by Egypt, Jordan, Arab countries and, eventually, by other governments around the world.

Israel, however, persisted. Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said that the “voluntary migration” of Palestinians in Gaza is the “right humanitarian solution”. Netanyahu concurred. “Our problem is (finding) countries that are willing to absorb Gazans, and we are working on it,” he said.

But for ethnic cleansing to take place, several prerequisites had to be fulfilled:

One, the bulk of Gaza's 2.3 million people had to be forced to the south, as close to the Egyptian border as possible. This has been achieved.

Two, all aspects of life had to be destroyed throughout Gaza, including all hospitals and clinics.

The most obvious examples were the grisly massacre of the Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital on October 17, and the bloodbath and eventual total destruction of Gaza's largest medical complex, Al-Shifa, on April 1.

When the Israeli military pulled out of the Shifa area, they left behind one of the most tragic scenes in the history of modern warfare. Hundreds of bodies were hurriedly buried in mass graves amid charred buildings and indescribable ruins. Limbs of children were sticking out of the dirt, whole families tied and executed together and other crimes that would take the world a long time to fathom, let alone explain.

Still, and nonchalantly so, former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennet said that “not one civilian” was killed in Al-Shifa. Again, Israel is lying.

Three, most shelters, bakeries, markets, electric grids and water generators had to, from an Israeli perspective, also be targeted so that the hapless population, especially of northern Gaza, would realize that life there is simply unsustainable.

Becoming fully aware of Israel’s ultimate plan of inducing a famine in Gaza, Palestinians fought back. The counter Palestinian strategy was predicated on ensuring that as many Palestinians as possible remained in northern Gaza, and that those concentrated in Rafah were not pushed into the Sinai desert.

Aside from the ongoing battle between the Israeli army and Palestinian Resistance in Gaza, there was another type of war taking place: Israel’s push for the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians and the latter’s desire to survive and remain within the Gaza borders.

This is precisely why Israel killed countless Palestinians involved in the work of facilitating life in northern and central Gaza.

According to the United Nations, prior to the killing of the six internationals, Israel had already killed 196 humanitarian aid workers.

This number does not include doctors, medical staff, civil defense workers, police chiefs and officers, and anyone contributing to sustaining life in areas that Israel wanted empty of its inhabitants.

Even when, under international pressure, Israel had allowed limited aid to enter northern Gaza, the Israeli military repeatedly killed and wounded Palestinians who desperately gathered in the hope of receiving the life-saving supplies.

According to an April 4 report by Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, Israel has killed 563 Palestinians and injured 1,523 when it bombed people waiting for aid at designated spots in northern Gaza, or when it bombed distribution centers and workers responsible for distributing the aid.

The Kuwait roundabout area, in Gaza City alone, witnessed the murder of 256 starving refugees, while 230 others were killed on Al-Rashid Street, elsewhere in the city.

Israeli bombing was not random, as Israel also targeted and killed 41 police officers who had worked with volunteers from various Gaza clans to help the UN refugee agency, UNRWA, distribute the aid among the famine-stricken population. Even the clans themselves were targeted in equally merciless bombardments.

And similar to the outcome of the attack on the WCK workers, each time the entity responsible for the aid would declare that they would no longer be involved in aid distribution. This is how Gaza’s hunger turned into outright famine.

The latest killing of the internationals in Gaza was done to serve the same goal: ensuring that no aid distribution mechanism is allowed.

Ironically, the involvement of the World Central Kitchen was itself an outcome of a US negotiated agreement that would deny the Gaza authorities and even UNRWA any role in receiving and distributing aid.

Israel must be stopped at any cost, and Israeli war criminals must be held accountable for one of the greatest genocides in modern history.

When Starvation is a Weapon, The Harvest Is Shame

Kathy Kelly

In a work entitled “Irish Famine 4,” Palestinian-American journalist and artist Sam Hussein combined grass and paint to commemorate a bitter time in Irish history when starving people died with their mouths stained green because, according to historian Christine Kinealy, their last meal was grass. Shamefully, British occupiers profited from exporting out of Ireland food crops so desperately needed. Over a seven year period, beginning in 1845, one million Irish people died from starvation and related diseases. It was a conscious mass killing. One of the most horrific means of execution we can read about or imagine was employed. The result, an excruciating descent into despair, delirium and bodily immobility while one’s attention, and character, is gradually reduced to extreme hunger and pain.

Now, in the occupied Gaza Strip, weapons dealers benefit from increasing military shipments to Israel. Palestinians, like the Irish, have resorted to eating mixtures of grass and animal feed. The past five months of Israeli siege, bombing, and displacement have killed more than 31,000 people – mostly women and children. The onset of famine will expand that number exponentially, particularly among children.

Human Rights Watch says the Israeli government is starving civilians as a method of warfare in the Gaza Strip. Aiding and abetting this war crime, the U.S. government has approved 100 military sales to Israel over the past five months. U.S. bullets, bombs and guns have helped prevent crucially needed aid from reaching millions of Palestinians. The bombs have buried or destroyed much of the food supplies which could have partially mitigated this horror. Continued attacks have forced vast populations to flee, huddling in the occupation force’s next target, Rafah. The United States continues providing resources and support for this genocide.



Occupiers in Rep. Jim McGovern's office
(Photo: Leahy Fast for Palestine Committee)

On March 11, eight U.S. senators signed a letter to President Biden insisting that ongoing weapons shipments to Israel violate U.S. laws forbidding military aid to regimes obstructing U.S. humanitarian aid.

Additionally, 25 prominent humanitarian and human rights organizations delivered a letter to the President echoing the Senators’ message.

Even as Israel faces mounting pressure from world leaders to stop attacking people in Gaza awaiting relief and stop impeding humanitarian relief shipments, Israel turned back another aid truck. The reason? The shipment included children’s medical kits with scissors useful for applying bandages or cutting away clothing to reach shrapnel.

The Israelis forbid the scissors as a potential dual use weapon. Meanwhile the United States keeps sending Israel guns and bombs which present a far greater threat.

Each day brings new reports of Palestinians, 40 percent of them children, succumbing to disease and death because they are deprived of food, fuel, clean water, medicines, and shelter. Hellish conditions worsen as infectious contamination spreads from decomposing bodies and the chemical contaminants from the shell casings of thousands upon thousands of Israeli and western-supplied bombs dropped on Gaza.

In Northampton, Massachusetts, six activists are on day three of occupying the office of Representative Jim McGovern. They are demanding he call on the president to immediately halt all weapons shipments to Israel, even if Israel allows humanitarian aid into Gaza. And they want Rep. McGovern to publicly call for the United States to stop vetoing U.N. cease-fire resolutions.

“These are desperate times,” says one of the occupiers, Peter Kakos. “We must call for immediate action, and nothing less.” He’s particularly mindful of 17,000 Palestinian children in Gaza who are estimated by UNICEF to be currently unaccompanied or separated from their parents.

Save the Children’s March 12, 2024 report questions what five months of carnage, flight, starvation and disease, on top of nearly 17 years of apartheid blockade, will do to the children in Gaza who survive the brutality now afflicting them.

During a recent visit to Amman, Jordan, I witnessed the anguish and frustration felt by many Palestinians denied any means of relieving the suffering of loved ones.

They had this response to photo-ops taken of U.S. aid drops.

“Are you going to feed starving people so that they can then face genocide from the Israeli Army with a full stomach?” asked my host. “What’s the logic in that? The only humanitarian thing to drop would be to drop all support for Israel’s war on the people of Gaza.”

In May of this year, an Irish NGO called AFRI (Action From Ireland) will hold an annual “famine walk” to commemorate when hundreds of desperate people trekked in cold and stormy weather to beg mercy from British officials designated to assess who would qualify for small portions of food or tickets to enter a workhouse.

“The weather was terrible,” notes County Mayo’s official record, “with wind and hail beating down upon them. When they arrived in Delphi the Guardians refused them food or their tickets to the workhouse. Needless to say many of them perished on the return journey as fatigue and exhaustion from hunger took hold. Some of those that had energy to start the journey back to Louisburgh were swept into the lake by the heavy squalls.”

Each year, the organizers of AFRI’s famine walk focus on a place in the world afflicted by famine. “This year’s famine walk will focus on the unspeakable horrors being visited on the population of Gaza,” says AFRI’s coordinator, Joe Murray, “with ‘Irish’ President Biden forgetting his history and playing the part of a ‘Black and Tan’ in providing the means to obliterate an entire population.”

It’s heinous to ignore the plight of starving people as was done by the British relief officials in the spring of 1847. But how much crueler is it to bomb the people you are deliberately starving, forcing people to wonder if they will face a quick death or a long and tortuous one?

Yes, these are desperate times. People in the United States ought to occupy local offices of every elected official, denouncing all forms of violence, insisting on an immediate end to any support for Israel’s genocidal war against Gaza. It’s time to acknowledge the futility of war and call for a collective home to be shared by Muslims, Jews, Christians, Bahais, Druze and many others in a secular democratic state encompassing Israel and Palestine. Similarly, the elected representatives should occupy the Oval Office until the President takes action.

Apologists for Israel's Mass Murder in Gaza Fall Back on "Antisemitism" Claims

Norman Solomon

If we condemn Hamas for its October 7 attacks in Israel, we're not accused of anti-Arab bigotry. Nor should we be. Nothing could possibly justify the atrocities that Hamas committed against hundreds of civilians, who were the majority of the 1,200 people killed as a result of the attacks by Hamas forces. And nothing can justify the taking of civilian hostages.

But if we condemn Israel for its actions since then, we might be accused of antisemitism. Meanwhile, nothing could possibly justify the atrocities by Israel in Gaza, where the death toll is now estimated at 32,000, while uncounted thousands of other Palestinian people are buried under rubble. Seventy percent of the victims have been children and women.

The U.S. government continues to make the atrocities possible. As retired Israeli Major General Yitzhak Brick said midway through the second month of the war: "All of our missiles, the ammunition, the precision-guided bombs, all the airplanes and bombs, it's all from the U.S." He added: "Everyone understands that we can't fight this war without the United States. Period."

Because of federal laws and minimal decency, the U.S. should have cut off all military aid to Israel long ago. A single standard of human rights should apply. But adhering to that simple, basic precept can provoke the virulent epithet of "antisemitism."

The gist of the trick is to equate Israel with the Jewish religion — and then to equate opposition to Israel with antisemitism.

And so, writing in the New York Daily News last November, an official at the American Jewish Committee declared that a "virus of antisemitism has spread to the U.S., where college campuses and city streets have been taken over by anti-Israel protesters raging, 'From

the river to the sea!' — a call for the mass murder of Israelis, and 'Globalize the Intifada!' — an appeal to kill Jews worldwide."

As Peter Beinart pointed out in a 2022 essay, "Under the definition of antisemitism promoted by the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee and the State Department, Palestinians become antisemites if they call for replacing a state that favors Jews with one that does not discriminate based on ethnicity or religion."

While Israel continues to slaughter children, women and men — no more guilty of anything than a crowd you might see at a local supermarket — the extreme misuse of the "antisemitism" charge often boils down to: Be quiet. Don't protest. Don't even speak up.

Of course antisemitism does exist in the United States and the rest of the world, and it should be condemned. At the same time, to cry wolf — to misuse the term to try to intimidate people into silence while Israel's atrocities continue in Gaza — is an abuse of the word antisemitism and a disservice to everyone who wants a single standard of human rights.

Last week, 17 rabbis and rabbinical students went to Capitol Hill urging a ceasefire and an end to the unconditional U.S. military aid to Israel. Rabbi May Ye said: "We are rabbis representing hundreds of thousands of Jews affiliated with Jewish Voice for Peace Action imploring our leaders to end their complicity in the Israeli military's genocidal campaign in the name of tzedek (justice) and real safety for all people."

Are we supposed to believe that those rabbis are antisemitic?

The Jewish American author Anna Baltzer grew up learning about the evils of antisemitism. "Much of my



family was killed in the Holocaust,” she wrote. “My grandparents arrived at Ellis Island traumatized by the unfathomable murder of their families in the gas chambers of Auschwitz while the world let it happen.” And she added: “We must get clear that Israel’s wiping out of entire families in Gaza is not simply revenge for October 7; Israel is continuing its long-existing practice of forcing Palestinians out of Palestine and closing the door behind them.”

Do Baltzer’s words make her antisemitic?

In mid-October, 43 Jewish American writers, academics and artists — including Michael Chabon, Francisco Goldman, Masha Gessen, Judith Butler, Tony Kushner, and V (formerly known as Eve Ensler) — released an open letter to President Biden saying: “We condemn attacks on Israeli and Palestinian civilians. We believe it is possible and in fact necessary to condemn Hamas’ actions and acknowledge the historical and ongoing oppression of the Palestinians. We believe it is possible and necessary to condemn Hamas’ attack and take a stand against the collective punishment of Gazans that is unfolding and accelerating as we write.”

Along with denouncing Israel’s “war crimes and indefensible actions,” the statement added: “We write to publicly declare our opposition to what the Israeli

government is doing with American assistance.”

Do those words mean that the signers of the statement are antisemitic?

Or how about the more than 100 Jewish Americans who signed the statement released this week denouncing AIPAC, the Israel-is-never-wrong lobby?

Ten years ago, 40 Holocaust survivors issued a statement condemning Israel for its “wholesale effort to destroy Gaza.” The statement, also signed by 287 people who were descendants of Holocaust survivors or victims, called for “an end to all forms of racism, including the ongoing genocide of Palestinian people” and decried “the extreme, racist dehumanization of Palestinians in Israeli society, which has reached a fever pitch.”

Were the 327 Jewish signers of the statement antisemitic?

For that matter, when I write here that the Israeli government has been committing mass murder and genocide in Gaza, does that mean I’m antisemitic?

There’s a word for seeing — and saying — that Israel is engaged in large-scale crimes against humanity. And that word isn’t “antisemitism.” It’s realism.

Unprecedented Strikes in the North of Ireland But Can They Lead to Something More?

Bridget Meehan

Throughout 2023 and into 2024, the North of Ireland ^[1] has witnessed the largest and most sustained public sector strikes in all of its jaundiced, gerrymandered 100-year history.

The strikes are about pay for public sector workers. For several years now, public sector pay in the North has not kept pace with inflation. Real pay, adjusted for inflation, fell by 4% between 2021 and 2022, and fell a further 7% between 2022 and 2023. Public sector workers finally reached breaking point and decided their only recourse was to strike.

The most significant day of action took place on 18th January when 16 public sector unions decided to go on a 24-hour strike to demand pay increases. Around 150,000 public sector workers went on strike that day. That's a whopping 66% of all public sector workers in the North, and included nurses, doctors and other health and social care workers; teachers; further education lecturers; cleaners; refuse collectors; police; public transport workers; civil servants; and forestry and road service workers. Schools were shut and buses and trains were canceled. A skeleton health service operated with scheduled appointments postponed and emergency-only cases treated. Icy roads went ungritted, courts and tribunals offered limited services. The level of solidarity on 18th January among public sector unions and workers was unparalleled. Many of these workers were striking for the first time ever in their careers; many of these professions such as junior doctors were striking for the first time ever in their existence in the North. And though many didn't want to strike, they felt they'd been left with no choice.

Political backdrop

While these strikes have been going on, a bit of political theatre has been playing. The North is governed by Stormont, an administration devolved from the Brit-

ish parliament in Westminster. Stormont has no fiscal or any other decision-making powers of any importance. It can raise very limited revenue and depends predominately on a block grant from Westminster for pretty much all of its public funding. Stormont went into suspension in February 2022. I won't bore you with the details of why other than to say that the Democratic Unionist Party, a conservative and British party, threw their dummy out of the pram because they didn't like how the Brexit trade protocol was shaping up. The power-sharing feature of Stormont meant that their withdrawal brought the administration down.

No amount of cajoling or seducing on the part of the Tory government in Westminster could coax them to return to Stormont. So, the Tories did what the Tories do best: they fought dirty. They decided to use public sector pay as a political bargaining chip, or more accurately as a form of blackmail, by claiming they were powerless to increase pay and that only Stormont could make such a decision. That, of course, is one huge pile of horse manure and even the dogs on the street know it. All the money in Stormont comes from Westminster. With the stroke of a pen, the Tories could've increased wages. But they stubbornly refused any such move. Instead, they offered £600m for the wage increases as part of a bigger financial package, if and only if Stormont was restored. The legalities of such action, that of denying workers their rights in order to play political games, are dubious to say the least.

Again, I won't bore you with the tedious details of how the DUP eventually capitulated but suffice to say that the Stormont Assembly resumed in February 2024.

Despite that, there is yet no resolution to the public sector pay problem. Since coming into post, the new finance minister has offered pay deals to civil servants and health staff and to public transport workers. The new education minister has made an offer to teachers.



Photo: Nick Efford

The transport workers have rejected the offer and will continue to strike. The civil servants and health staff are still considering their offer, as are the teachers.

Social costs

The strikes have strong support from the public. Most people recognise why the workers are striking, they see it as only right that these workers get fair pay, and they accept that the workers don't want to strike but see no other way. The strikes are causing disruption to public services and to the local economy. The media of course have focused less on the plight of the workers and more on the negative impacts, such as the suspension of cancer treatment during the strikes and the impact on trade for the retail and hospitality sectors. Certainly, the negatives are real. I, myself, talked to an employee in the hospitality sector who said she supported the strikers but with there being no buses it meant she struggled to get to work, and either had to pay for taxis or miss her shifts altogether. The fact is the whole point of striking is to create disruption and to raise the social costs. The irony is that it's the most vulnerable in society or just average people who feel those costs most, and that can create animosity instead of solidarity, especially the longer the strikes go on. I can't help thinking about Yemen's Ansarallah and their current blockade of maritime traffic connected

to Israel that is traveling through the Red Sea. While the ideal would be the existence of no such campaign, of no genocide in Gaza, of no war anywhere, we are far from the ideal and Ansarallah are operating within the sad realities of our corrupted world. The Ansarallah goal is to force Israel to stop the genocide in Gaza. Their blockade targets Israeli economic interests, not human life; the blockade goes after ships associated with Israel, no other ships; the blockade doesn't sink or seize ships, but diverts them from their course. Ansarallah's blockade is about raising the social costs to those in power, hitting them where it hurts most. And while they haven't yet achieved their goal of ending the genocide, they're certainly causing damage to the Israeli economy, costing it billions of dollars and disrupting supply chains.

I wonder if we can learn from Ansarallah and pinpoint ways of raising the social costs to those with power as we travel the road of radical change. It's a thought and I'm not advocating that we buy helicopters and start commandeering ships. I'm using the Ansarallah campaign as an example of an intelligent and efficient use of resources to achieve an end goal.

But back to the North of Ireland and to the strikes here. What action can be taken by those seeking social change to minimise the social costs to the average

person who's just trying to make a living, while maximising the social costs to those who have the power to implement the change sought? And now that there are hundreds of thousands of people here energised and taking action, what can be done to maximise and prolong the potential of that activism?

Solidarity, vision and strategy

To my mind, this is where solidarity, vision and strategy enter the fray. Widespread solidarity and overarching vision and strategy are often missing from this kind of brave activism. Yet greater solidarity and greater unity in a common vision and strategy would go a long way to resolving the problem of who suffers most from raising the social costs.

Let's first look at solidarity. The public sector workers in the North have essentially formed a powerful workers' movement. The North already has several movements, some large and vibrant, others more muted and embryonic. There's the grassroots movement to promote and protect the Irish language, An Dream Dearg (Red Dream). In the summer of 2022, they held a rally in Belfast that was attended by nearly 17,000 people who filled the streets around City Hall. There's also a large pro-Palestinian / anti-war movement. This has become increasingly active since October 2023 and Israel's most recent onslaught on Palestine, and people have been turning out in their thousands, week after week, to protest. There's a Black Lives Matter movement here, brought into existence in 2020 following the callous murder of George Floyd. The Pride movement has also grown in popularity over recent years and energetic, carnival-style rallies take place every summer in major urban areas across the North.

These movements have members in common. An Dream Dearg have declared support for Palestine. Several of the trade unions involved in the public sector strikes openly support Palestine. Their members and leaders have joined the pro-Palestinian protests and spoken out against the genocide. There's even a Trade Union Friends of Palestine group. Many of those involved in the pro-Palestinian / anti-war movement are also involved in the public sector strikes and An Dream Dearg. It's stating the obvious that public

sector workers can be gay, black, support Palestine or want to protect the Irish language. And on and on go the many permutations of interrelationships between them all.

What they have in common is their desire for social change of one sort or another, although some struggle to get enough support to achieve the social change they want. They could reach greater success if they were in solidarity with the other movements. In fact, they would all benefit by having the support of each other. The other movements could, right now, join the public sector workers and support them in their efforts to win pay increases. Such solidarity would bolster the striking workers but would also send a loud message to politicians and decision-makers that better pay for public sectors workers is important to more than just the workers, it's important to wider society too.

It's worth considering what happens when a movement makes progress towards achieving its goals. If, for instance, the striking public sector workers win their pay increases, will they disband? Say the teachers take a pay deal but the health workers don't – will the teachers abandon the strikes and go meekly back into their trenches, leaving the others to continue alone? If they all take pay deals and end their strikes, where will that energy and momentum go? Will it disappear like smoke on the wind?

Which brings us to vision and strategy. Given the commonalities among these movements, would there be any possibility they could unite to create and then work towards a common vision and strategy? Could the energy and momentum be harnessed and prolonged to achieve not just a one-off reform but multiple non-reformist reforms? The public sector workers are striking for a single demand to meet their own needs. But what if that demand was one goal within a broader strategy to achieve a widely accepted vision for radical transformation?

What if the striking workers didn't stop at achieving their pay rise? Because wages across society are way short of equitable, what if the strikes were seen as just one tactic along the way for fairer wages? What if instead the public sector workers continued campaign-

ing, this time for a living wage for all workers in the North, where we understand a living wage to be a fair wage that increases based on the cost of living. What if they were joined by the other movements in doing so? And joined too by the hundreds of thousands of non-public sector workers living on poverty wages, who are denied wage increases, who were hardest hit by the bus and train strikes?

What if, in continuing this sustained and augmented strike action, all of these movements took measures to minimise the social costs to the regular people who are normally hit hardest by strikes? So, a strike by health workers would keep enough staff in place to treat emergency cases and provide critical care (I should point out that during the current strikes, health workers did take such measures). A strike by teachers would provide alternative day care for the children of those who stand to lose income if they miss work because of a strike. A public transport strike would offer a skeleton service to get people to and from work. Since all of these movements are united, a mega-strike could be organised to occur simultaneously across sectors so everybody is on strike rather than having to be at their place of work.

Putting such mitigating measures in place is certainly a challenge and they're rare applied. But going the extra mile to reduce the social costs to the people you don't want to hurt would serve to create greater solidarity. And having a movement of movements in itself would give strikers access to additional resources which in turn would make implementing the mitigating measure more plausible.

While all of that holds true, there's more at stake than a battle for wages. What if this movement of movements in the North decided that wages were merely the beginning and that once better wages were won, the next step was to achieve better working conditions such as secure jobs, a 4-day work week, subsidised childcare, participatory workplaces, or worker ownership altogether?

What if the united vision and strategy didn't limit itself to workers' pay and conditions? What if it was expanded to reach so much more? What if it included

participatory budgeting where the people would have a say in how public budgets were to be spent; a universal basic income; meaningful rights and equality for minority groups; mutual banking to retain local wealth and use it for the benefit of people and planet rather than the benefit of the global finance system; tax justice and progressive taxation; social and co-operative housing; a properly funded health service and education system; community- and publically-owned renewable energy to create energy independence and move away from fossil fuels; sustainable farming and food production; a demand for fiscal control or even better, independence from Britain and a return to the EU; the implementation of a local Green New Deal and a genuine and just transition to a post-capitalist society? What if the post-capitalist society in this united vision and strategy was to be a participatory society, free from racism, sexism, patriarchy, classism and authoritarianism and where there would be an alternative to the inadequate democratic system and existing family and cultural institutions? And what if this united vision and strategy was joined with international movements, forging alliances that could bring about radical transformation beyond Ireland?

What if indeed?

END NOTE

[1] Ireland was an English/British colony for over 800 years before it won partial independence in 1921, at which time it was partitioned into two jurisdictions: 1) the North or "Northern Ireland", made up of 6 counties with a majority Protestant population that remained under British rule (and remains so today); and 2) the South or "Republic of Ireland", made up of 26 counties and with a majority Catholic population that gained freedom from Britain. The North is governed by the British government at Westminster and has a devolved administration called Stormont. The 6 counties of the North were cherry-picked to ensure it would have a majority pro-British population, i.e. majority Protestant. Through gerrymandering and other policies e.g. denying civil rights to the largely Catholic Irish-identifying population, forcing them to emigrate for work, the North maintained its Protestant hegemony. That has changed in recent years, however, and today the Catholic and Protestant populations are almost equal in size.

Economic Adversity and Anxiety from Our Economic Model

Bruce T. Bocardy

Economic Model-Two Conditions

Our economic model generates and conflates two conditions that burden working people. The first is “economic adversity.” The second is “economic anxiety.”

Economic Adversity

The data shows that our economic model produces chronic economic adversity for large numbers of working-class and working-middle class people every four to seven years.

The corporate media often presents incomplete numbers from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).

For example, functional unemployment numbers from the Ludwig Institute of Shared Prosperity (LISEP) tracks the percentage of the U.S. labor force that does not have a full-time job (35+ hours a week), but wants one, has no job, or does not earn a living wage, conservatively pegged at \$20,000 annually before taxes. In February 2024, the functional unemployment rate was 24.9 percent.

The BLS number was 3.7 percent.

Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) measures household essentials for families in the U.S. In 2021, their index reported 41 percent of households in the U.S. were below the ALICE Threshold of Poverty; 29 percent of ALICE households earned just above the federal poverty level.

Compare the ALICE numbers to a BLS report in November 2023. It stated that 12 percent of Americans lived below the official poverty level in 2021.

The Census Bureau published a report in September 2023. It stated that the number of Americans living in poverty was 12 percent in 2022.

ALICE reports the percentage of American households living below or just above the poverty line is an unconscionable 70 percent.

Economic Anxiety

Economic anxiety is more subtle and ubiquitous than economic adversity. To better understand economic anxiety, it is important to review Maslow’s “Hierarchy of Needs.”

Psychologist Abraham Maslow created a “Hierarchy of Needs” in 1954. In the hierarchy, one element stands out as foundational to develop a healthy society. That element is “safety.” Safety is a need that must be fulfilled before other elements of living can be addressed. Maslow asserted that people wanted to experience order, predictability, and control in their lives.

At the foundation of the hierarchy is basic “Physiological Needs.” These are breathing, food, water, shelter, and sleep.

The next level that lists the first social association is “Safety and Security.” This level lists health, employment, property, family, and social ability.

Clearly, the principal need that allows all other needs to be realized is employment. For most working people, a job must provide the requisite conditions to reach the higher levels of Maslow’s hierarchy.

Feeling safe allows people to think about other aspirations. In our country, working-middle class and working-class people are feeling increasingly unsafe.



Amazon's swift delivery network takes a million people to run. During Prime Week, workers took aim at disrupting this symphony of human capital with walkouts at four distinct warehouse types in its logistics chain—including one of its large air hubs in Southern California. Photo: Warehouse Worker Resource Center

It's plausible that some working people stay with Mr. Trump's views because he promises a return to tradition and stability. Unfortunately, that iteration of tradition and stability was often realized with considerable measures of discrimination, exclusion and inequality. Stability without inclusion is impossible. Accepting social differences without necessarily approving of them is considered healthy by psychological standards, but is absent in the MAGA worldview.

Exclusion is foundational to white, Christian, male supremacy. It is Mr. Trump's scabrous version of tradition and stability. It is antithetical to the traditional written values in the Constitution. Stability is a promise in that extraordinary document for its time.

The effects of economic anxiety are different from economic adversity.

For example, millennials are a highly educated demographic that identify as working middle class. A report in June 2023 from the Real Estate Witch concluded that 90 percent of millennials have non-mortgage debt, owing an average of \$90,590. About 70 percent of millennials are currently "living paycheck to paycheck."

Yet, another example of economic anxiety that permeates through working-middle class demographics was in a report by Statista in November 2023; it showed that 40 percent of college graduates were underemployed.

Lastly, a study published this January in the *Lancet* reported that people who attained a higher level of education extended their life expectancy. What stands out is that people who attained a higher level of education were able to earn more which allowed them to afford a lifestyle that was healthier. Again, economic anxiety is largely removed from people with adequate resources.

The study also found that:

"Married individuals benefit in terms of emotional and social support, pooled economic resources, engagement in preventive care, and healthier lifestyles." It is pooled resources that allow couples to live healthier lifestyles.

This raises the issue of our economic model excluding masses of Americans from healthy lifestyles; no one should be denied the opportunity to be healthy and live a long life.

Losing Status Implications

The best-known study of status loss was published in the estimable “Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences” (PNAS) in April 2018.

The PNAS study concluded that “losing status” was the determining factor for much of Mr. Trump’s support by white working people in the 2016 election.

However, the conclusions do not address the wider ramifications of “losing status.”

Status in this context has an undeclared economic basis. In our culture, it is primarily about material acquisition. Material acquisition brings some status; without it often brings subtle or not so subtle derision from others, and self-loathing. The idiom “keeping up with the Joneses” reflects the sentiment of conspicuous consumption by acquisition.

Our economic model creates the conditions for large swaths of working middle-class and working-class people to live with chronic anxiety that they will lose their employment and their lives will plunge into crisis.

Poverty Assistance Context

An issue rarely questioned is the occasional legislation that appears to improve the lives of considerable numbers of working people. For example, the Biden Administration proclaims the success of the Child Tax Credit among several programs that benefit working people.

In January Congress passed a revision of the Child Tax Credit.

It would lift approximately 16 million children out of poverty which is a considerable number. However, there is an issue ignored by the corporate media and often the small numbers of progressive media. That would be the actual living conditions of those 16 million children and their families. It is

not exactly worth throwing a parade as a real accomplishment.

As we see from the numbers above, many millions of Americans live below or just above the poverty line. Government programs, however well-intentioned temporarily ameliorate people’s lives but serve to maintain a structure of near poverty and poverty in perpetuity.

An excellent program that exposes the paucity of programs for poor Americans is the Economic Policy Institute’s (EPI) Family Budget Calculator. The Calculator shows the amount of income required to live a modest lifestyle in any area of the country by housing, food, childcare, transportation, other necessities, and taxes.

For example, in the Springfield, Massachusetts metro area, a working family of two parents and two children would require \$110,472 to meet an “adequate” standard of living.

In the Selby County, Alabama area, the amount required is \$107,568.

In the Charleston/North Charleston, South Carolina area, the amount is \$102,369.

In the Dallas, Texas Metro area, the amount required is \$101,877.

In the Fresno, California area, the amount required is \$100,676.

In the Portland/Vancouver/Hillsboro, Oregon area, the amount required is \$128,808.

An “adequate” cost of living across the United States is beyond the reach of a massive majority of Americans.

Health care is particularly devastating for Americans. The Commonwealth Fund published a report this October. It found that in the U.S. 51 percent of adults between 19 and 64 years of age had difficulties for them and their families to afford health care costs.

Remedy

We must think beyond the narrow, obvious interest of “economic adversity” and include “economic anxiety.”

Economic anxiety appears to be a chronic component for both demographics.

Any study not addressing the subtle question of what economic anxiety actually means to working people is truncated.

Union negotiations traditionally concentrate on wages, salaries and healthcare. These negotiations are essential and act as vital pressure points on our economic model. Perhaps it is time to recognize the undemocratic components our economic model and its chronic dehumanizing results for so many.

Don't Mourn, Organize

History does not travel in a straight line. Our economic model is failing working people in many ways, all readily documented.

To borrow the title from a powerful Russian novel in 1863:

What Is To Be Done?

There is no magic formula or singular plan that will turn the present trajectory of our economic model to sudden epiphanies of justice, fairness and morality.

Progressives from particularly faith-based organizations must form alliances and coalitions with each other and secular organizations. The downward trajectory of our economic model continues below the surface despite the distracting clamor from the corporate media. Regardless of those distortions and politicians' puffery, the U.S. economy is no longer the hegemonic world economy. That appears to be China or will be soon.

Another indication of U.S. economic declension is the developing BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa with more countries requesting to join that bloc.

If the underlying economy of the U.S. continues its decline, it is guaranteed that U.S. oligarchs will use every legal mechanism available to scam American working people of everything they can.

Information distributed to working people must explain the underlying nature of its economic relationships; chronic economic adversity and anxiety have become so normalized that practical consideration of other economic models appear to be chimerical.

The strategy of the obscenely wealthy is simple: control the media, the courts and political system with scads of resources. Just read the Republican Party's Project 2025. It's a blueprint to implement autocratic political constructs based on a neoliberal economic model devoid of our historical democratic values.

That model maintains the power and privilege of U.S. oligarchs while scapegoating minorities, undocumented immigrants, labor unions, government programs and LGBT people. It is a cynical distraction to hoodwink working people while padding their bank accounts and financial portfolios.

James Madison, a founder warned us in Federalist 10 about powerful factions that could dominate civil society. U.S. oligarchs fit that description.

The message that our economic model is the only realistic choice is constantly pounded into our heads or subtly whispered by the corporate media and both major political parties.

Progressives must work to elect candidates whose agenda is to advocate for all working people. It must work in tandem with peaceful mass movements.

This can result in serious political reform to begin to break the cadaverous economic grip of U.S. oligarchs on our political system.

Tax Day and War Resistance, Philip Berrigan Style

Brad Wolf

Each year Americans forfeit a sizable slice of their income to the United States Treasury to fund the government. Tax Day is dreaded. No one likes surrendering their hard-earned cash. But rather than a resigned shrug, Americans should look closely at what they are getting for their money when it comes to government services and policy.

In fiscal year 2023, the Pentagon received \$858 billion for the preparation of war. This doesn't include hidden costs for intelligence services, veterans' benefits, Homeland Security, or the Department of Energy which oversees the nation's nuclear arsenal. All totaled, over \$1 trillion a year is allotted for warmaking. By comparison, the 2023 budget for the U.S. Department of State, this nation's department tasked with making peace across the globe, was a relatively miniscule \$63 billion.

One way to register resistance to this profligate spending on warmaking is that of renowned peace activist and Catholic priest Philip Berrigan. During the Vietnam war, Phil initiated the destruction of U.S. military draft files in Baltimore and Catonsville, Maryland to save the lives of both Vietnamese and Americans, actions for which he received lengthy prison sentences.

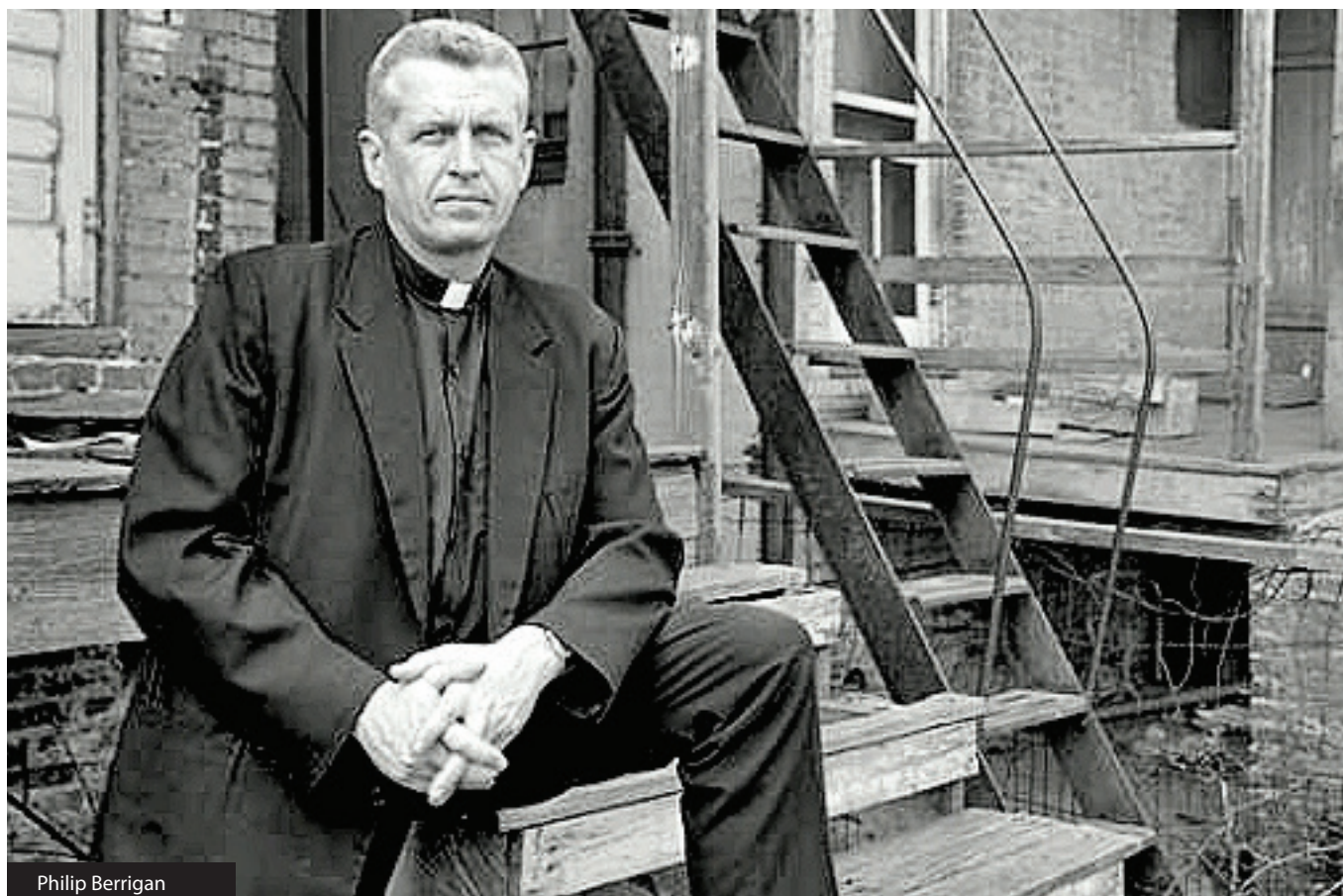
These draft file actions by Phil initiated a new form of resistance to the Vietnam War since no copies were kept of the draft files. Hundreds of similar actions followed at draft board offices across the country with hundreds of thousands of draft files destroyed, all stopping young men from being conscripted to kill or be killed.

In 1980, Phil initiated the Plowshares movement—which continues to this day—as he and others entered the General Electric Nuclear Weapons facility in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, pouring blood on weapons blueprints and symbolically hammering on the nosecones of missiles, “Beating swords into plowshares.” A Christian metaphor indeed, but a universal message. Since that first action, there have been over seventy Plowshares actions around the world.

Phil strongly objected to the notion that U.S. citizens should fund needless death and destruction abroad through their taxes, or possibly fund their own destruction by nuclear war. He repeated nonviolent actions time and again, serving a total of eleven years in prison to stop the slaughter of innocents and protest the use of U.S. tax dollars for arms proliferation, nuclear warmaking, and endless wars of choice.

For U.S. citizens, the well-known waste and fraud of the Pentagon should be one outrage. The Pentagon remains the only federal department to never pass a required federal audit. The Pentagon cannot account for 63% of the tax money it receives. That's our money. Gone. Unaccounted. Lining the pockets of weapons manufacturers.

But the more pressing concern with these war dollars is their use to initiate wars of choice, often against impoverished countries, because those countries have natural resources beneath the soil which the U.S. seems to think belongs to them. The cruel joke is, “How dare they put their country over our oil.” And so, we take it. With extreme violence and death.



Philip Berrigan

The U.S. currently has soldiers in northern Syria where massive quantities of oil is extracted for western fossil fuel companies. The war in Iraq was for oil. We are building new bases in Somalia where oil fields have been found. These wars for corporate profit have gone on for over a century. As decorated war hero Smedley Butler said in the 1930s about his many years in the U.S. military, “I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism. . . Looking back on it, I might have given Al Capone a few hints.”

Whether it be gold, fruit, rubber, or sugar in Latin America, oil in the Middle East, or rare earth minerals in Africa, the U.S. taxpayer has long funded the corporate theft of natural resources from indigenous lands for the benefit of U.S. corporations and their wealthy shareholders. Innocents in foreign lands die as a result, while U.S. taxpayers struggle to pay mortgages, rent, healthcare bills and food costs.

According to Brown University’s Costs of War Project, the United States spent some \$8 trillion in the last 23 years for the Wars on Terror. Six million people in foreign lands died because of those wars, most of them innocent civilians. Mothers and fathers and children.

And so, as this Tax Day approaches, perhaps we can reflect on the life and work of Philip Berrigan and undertake our own ministry of risk for peace in whatever form that may take, to ease the suffering, to restore human dignity, to challenge our doomed policy of warmaking. Only in this way can we reconcile ourselves with justice and democracy. Only in this way can we save ourselves, our country, and perhaps the world.

As Phil said, “These blind leading the blind have done more than threaten us with doomsday scenarios. They have, with a devilish ingenuity, convinced us that we ought to pay, through taxes, for our own destruction.”

How the Greedy Rich Cheat Working Americans at Every Turn

David McCall

The widowed single mom attacked grocery shopping with the doggedness of a Marine on a mission.

To provide for her family in the face of corporate price-gouging, she bought off-brand items and selected eggs for protein instead of higher-costing meat. She even worked multiple jobs to keep the family solvent.

And despite the challenges she faced, she never complained, recalled Denny Mitchell, a longtime United Steelworkers (USW) activist who's filled with admiration for the way the woman raised her family.

Ordinary working people like Mitchell's friend continue to build America with humble heroism, even as the greedy rich try to cheat them not only at the checkout line but everywhere from the workplace to the halls of power.

"It's a fight. It's always a fight," observed Mitchell, noting that Kellogg's CEO Gary Pilnick underscored the arrogance of the 1 percent when he flippantly suggested in February 2024 that struggling families eat cereal for dinner.

Pilnick, who pockets millions in salary and incentive compensation, runs a corporation largely responsible for the rampant price-gouging in the nation's grocery stores.

Kellogg's jacked up prices by more than 14 percent from the second quarter of 2022 to the same period in 2023, while announcing plans to shower shareholders with stock buybacks and dividends.

Other food-makers joined in the exploitation, raising prices, reducing the amount of product in their packaging, or switching to cheaper, lower-quality ingredients that enable them to pad their bottom lines on unwitting consumers' backs.

U.S. Senator Bob Casey of Pennsylvania released a report in December assailing numerous companies for "shrinking products to super-size profits." Among many other examples, Casey revealed that General Mills quietly shaved 1.2 ounces from boxes of Cocoa Puffs in 2021 while Conagra started skimping on ingredients in its Smart Balance spread in 2022, "resulting in a watery product that sparked consumer backlash."

Even Cookie Monster resents the unscrupulous sleight of hand. "Me cookies are getting smaller," the lovable Muppet groused in March 2024 in a hugely popular social media post shaming greedy food companies.

Mitchell said his friend, the single mom, worked so hard to provide nutritious meals that her kids never went without or even realized that she struggled.

Still, her sacrifices fuel his contempt today for millionaires and billionaires eager to fleece the working Americans who kept the nation functioning all through the pandemic.

"Let's get a little bit more out of them," said Mitchell, a retired member of USW Local 135L in Tonawanda, New York, summing up the mindset of the rich. "It's a constant squeeze."

Yet it isn't enough for the wealthy to take ever-larger portions of Americans' paychecks. They

also plot alongside right-wing politicians to inflict more pain on workers with no income at all.

West Virginia's corporate-friendly, Republican-controlled Senate just passed a bill not only intended to reduce unemployment benefits—supported by employer contributions—but also to impose the deepest cuts on those struggling the longest.

They'd rather force people into dead-end jobs than support them during the search for family-sustaining employment. That helps corporations exploit low-wage workforces while putting families on a course for poverty.

Fortunately, pro-worker lawmakers in Nevada stymied proposed cuts in their state's unemployment compensation program after publicly embarrassing the bill's Republican supporters for coddling the rich at the expense of working people.

"We fight over nickels and dimes and pennies in this place when it comes to poverty, and we give money away like it's a free-for-all when it comes to the most wealthy," declared Democratic State Senator Machaela Cavanaugh, who led opposition to the measure.

A coalition of workers and their allies in 2023 defeated proposed unemployment benefit cuts in Arizona, where Republicans float the idea from time to time either because they fail to recognize the potential impact or don't care, said Vikki Marshall, president of the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR) chapter in Tucson.

"We want to make sure our children are eating," she said, noting the cuts would have devastated single-income families. "We want to make sure they go to school with something in their stomachs and clothes on their backs."

"This is the only avenue they have. Nobody knocks on the door saying, 'I want to give you

some money to tide you over,'" said Marshall, one of the union activists who oppose measures like these across the country.

Unions provide workers with a path forward.

Even as it exploited consumers, for example, Kellogg's also attempted to deny its manufacturing workers a decent living. So in 2021, about 1,400 union members at four cereal plants staged a 77-day strike that forced the company to provide raises, pension increases, and other enhancements.

"It was a tough strike. They didn't want to give anything. They wanted to take, take, and take," Dave McLimans, a member of SOAR's Pennsylvania executive board, said of Kellogg's management.

Ultimately, "solidarity, sticking together," won the day for the striking workers, added McLimans, who showed his support by joining the picket line at Kellogg's Lancaster County plant.

Inspired by that victory, and other worker wins, more and more Americans seek to join unions to secure not only the higher wages and better benefits but the safer working conditions and the voice on the job that collective action provides.

The surge in union drives makes sense to McLimans, who took part in the USW's successful 105-day strike against Lukens Steel in 1991 and 1992.

McLimans credits the USW with paving the way for his middle-class life and secure retirement. And he knows that unions still serve as the only true bulwark for workers fighting corporate greed today.

"There comes a time when enough is enough," he said. "It's time we all come together and start kicking and screaming. We need to keep the pressure on."

Ecuador is Not For Sale

Alexandria Shaner

Teargas for mega-mines

Corporations and their government enablers prefer to keep the ecocidal and ethnocidal reality of extractivism hidden, but activists in Ecuador are exposing the truth.

The Ecuadorian government, led by the administration of President Daniel Noboa, is forcefully and illegally pursuing mineral and fossil fuel extraction without democratic consent, tear-gassing peaceful protestors in full public view, and doing far worse to remote frontline communities. In the Andean Cotopaxi region, where Canadian firm Atico Mining plans to extract gold and copper at the expense of a key water source, repression has been intensifying.

Ecuadorian law requires mining corporations to consult with impacted communities before starting operations. But last month, when the Palo Quemado community in Cotopaxi attempted to exercise this right, police and the military responded like Atico Mining henchmen, attacking more than 100 people and labeling them terrorists. One person was hospitalized and remains in critical condition according to a spokesperson from Extinction Rebellion Ecuador.

Refusing to let this violence stand, activists with XR Ecuador and fellow members of an anti-mining coalition joined with indigenous groups for multiple solidarity actions in Quito in March, starting with a protest in front of the Canadian Embassy. Officials took note, as became apparent the next day.

Surrounded by press on a busy city street, police bombarded protesters and onlookers with teargas during a peaceful sit-in at the Ministry of the Environment. “Something like this, in front of the me-

dia and the public, hasn’t happened in a long time in the city,” said a member of Extinction Rebellion from Quito. Despite the police aggression, the protesters managed to stay calm, regrouped, and continued with their planned rally.

Stop the gaslighting

Illegal mining isn’t Ecuadorian activists’ only ongoing struggle against extractivism. In a historic referendum in 2023, Ecuadorian citizens voted massively in favor of keeping over 726 million barrels of oil in the ground under the Amazonian Yasuní National Park. Celebrated as a climate victory around the world, the reality on the ground is that the battle to preserve this precious region, the most biodiverse in the world and home to two of the world’s last Indigenous communities living in voluntary isolation, is far from over.

To fund a crackdown against gang violence, Ecuador’s recently elected president Daniel Noboa has suggested a moratorium on the referendum, even though he vowed to protect the Yasuní when he was a presidential candidate. In a January interview to a local media outlet, Noboa said that he believed a “moratorium [to the referendum result regarding oil exploitation in the Yasuní] is a viable path”.

Pedro Bermeo is a spokesperson for YASunidos, a coalition of indigenous NGOs from the Amazon that led the call for the referendum. He said Noboa’s statement is “worrying, unwise, and undemocratic” as Noboa is saying he won’t abide by people’s votes.

As someone who voted in favor to keep Yasuní’s oil underground, Bermeo said that people like him feel their “hope is being taken away”. When the referendum took place, Ecuador was already facing extreme violence and poverty. But nevertheless,



Las Nueve Niñas, XR Ecuador, anti-mining groups, and indigenous activists march through Quito to the national court to demand an end to illegal gas flares in Yasuní National Park. | Image credit: @udapt_oficial

people voted to keep the oil in the ground. “There was a feeling of hope to protect life on the planet”, says the activist. So now Bermeo argues that voters feel defrauded and “have stopped believing in the State”.

Belén Páez, president of climate and indigenous rights NGO Fundación Pachamama, said Noboa’s statement “is very dangerous in several ways because it attempts against the citizens’ decision and puts democracy at risk”. Páez, who has worked to protect indigenous rights in Ecuador, added that Noboa’s remarks could result in a set back of other environmental policies.

On February 1, the indigenous Amazon Waorani Nationality declared themselves in a ‘territorial emergency’ and demanded that the government respect the referendum and announced that, if a moratorium is formally proposed, they will take legal action against the Ecuadorian State. Their decision to do so was supported by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon. “We are not going to allow our rights to continue being violated,” said Waorani Nationality presi-

dent Juan Bay, “it is time for us to have social and environmental justice”.

Since his remarks in January, president Noboa hasn’t referred to the moratorium again. But government insiders say that it is still a possibility. Petroecuador, the state oil company, has actually ramped up extraction since the referendum, reaching a new peak production in 2023 in an attempt to extract as much oil as possible before the referendum can be enforced. In Yasuní alone, Petroecuador operates more than 400 gas flares, many beside the houses of indigenous people. The flares cause cancer, decimate biodiversity, and emit more than 100 million tons of greenhouse gasses each year.

A successful lawsuit against the government to remove the flares was filed by Las Nueve Niñas, a group of young women from Yasuní. Yet three years later, the flares are still there, and the government is trying to wriggle free of the court’s order.

On March 12, UDAPT, an anti-extractivist NGO co-organized a march through Quito with XR Ecuador, joined by Las Nueve Niñas and 300 more



The Palo Quemado community, in the Cotopaxi region, have been subject to police violence for resisting a Canadian-owned mega-mine on their land. | Image credit: @xrecuador

activists, to demand compliance with the court. The coalition then followed up with a sit-in at the national court. More actions are planned for May and June to pressure the government to stay true to its word, follow its own laws, and accept that Ecuador is not for sale.

Leave it in the ground

The idea that Ecuador should forgo extracting some of its oil in exchange for international financial support from wealthy countries had been more than 17 years in the making - first raised in 2006 by the economist and incoming Minister of Energy and Mines, Alberto Acosta. The plan would also have kept an estimated 410 million tons of CO₂ – the major greenhouse gas driving climate change – from reaching the atmosphere.

Acosta's proposal was embraced by the newly elected president Rafael Correa. The following year, Correa announced at the United Nations that Ecuador was seeking to raise funding commensurate to half of the value of 846 million barrels of unexploited oil the Ishpingo, Tambococha and

Tiputini (ITT) oil fields in Yasuní. The plan was scrapped six years later when less than 10 percent of the target figure was raised. In 2013, Correa declared that Ecuador would move forward with operations in the ITT oil fields, proclaiming that, "The world has failed us".

The government folded under the immense pressure of development debt and the predatory global financial architecture upon which extractive capitalism vampirizes the global south. Correa was not wrong in his assessment that the world had failed Ecuador, and in fact it was poised to steamroll the people's consensus to reject ecocide and ethnocide in exchange for lining a few pockets with petrodollars.

In the months that followed, the Correa administration advanced oil operations within the ITT via two separate legal manipulations. First, he asked the Ecuadorian congress to declare that these operations were in the "national interest", a constitutional prerequisite for drilling inside a national park. Ecuador's constitution also prohibits "all forms of extractive activities" on the territories of



Anti-mining coalition protest outside the Canadian Embassy in Quito | Image credit: @xrecuador

peoples living in voluntary isolation. In a bureaucratic maneuver to circumvent these protections for indigenous communities, his administration changed official maps that had shown the presence of isolated family groups living in and around the ITT oil fields.

Activists and affected communities, however, did not cave. In August 2013, YASunidos launched a campaign to gather enough signatures to force a nationwide referendum on the question of whether Ecuador should leave the oil under the ITT fields in the ground in perpetuity. By 2015, the activists amassed over 750,000 signatures, the majority of which were invalidated by the Correa administration. Nearly a decade and multiple legal battles later, Ecuador's constitutional court ruled in 2023 that YASunidos had enough valid signatures to force the referendum. Sadly, during that long period of litigation, the government had forged ahead with operations inside the ITT fields, which began producing oil in 2016.

The people of Ecuador have repeatedly made themselves clear through resistance in the streets, in the courts, and by voting for life - both for the rights

of nature and for the Indigenous people living in places like Yasuní and Cotopaxi. In 2008, Ecuador became the first country to recognize the rights of nature in its constitution, building to the outcome of the 2023 referendum as the nation's affirmation of the recognition that nature and all its constituent parts have inherent rights to life and wellbeing. In this paradigm, humans are a part of nature.

Trickle-down tricks

Natalia Greene, a political scientist, founding member of YASunidos, and executive committee member of the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature, rejects the implication made by Petroecuador and pro-oil groups that oil extraction is needed to alleviate poverty in Ecuador.

“We’ve had 50 years of oil exploitation and we’re still a very poor country,” she said. “Exploitation of nonrenewable resources has a structure where few people and foreign companies win a lot of money, a few people get poor-paying jobs and our resources are exported. The social and environmental costs are never taken into account.”



Anti-extractivist coalition actions in Quito in March | Image Credit: @memed.act

Activists are pointing out rising inequality as a result of neoliberalism and neocolonial economic relations and are promoting solutions for ending both poverty and extractivism. According to YAS-unidos, the income of the 110 largest companies in Ecuador represent 62% of the entire GDP. However, year after year the percentage of income taxes they pay continues to decrease while their profits increase. This trend is accentuated with the 20 largest companies that had a tax decrease of 10% while their income increased in almost the same proportion.

Reversing the trend of reducing the tax burden for the ultra rich is one way that activists propose to finance improved social welfare while leaving fossil fuels and other resources in the ground - and the numbers are impressive. If the corporate tax rate was increased by just 1.5%, more money would be raised than by the planned exploitation of the Yasuní. That is, in 25 years, more than \$20 billion would be generated, which would more than offset the \$18 billion that could be extracted from the natural reserve. These numbers do not even account for the many economic assets of Yasuní beyond oil.

Destroying this ecosystem and the communities who have made it their home for millennia is simply a bad investment.

Ecuadorians have learned from experience that the trickle-down economics promised by extractivist corporations and state enablers is a myth, yet the destruction it leaves behind is painfully real. Between 2007 and 2013, oil revenues of \$51.5 billion were generated - much more than the \$18 billion that could supposedly be obtained from the ITT fields of Yasuní. However, even with this influx of cash, Ecuador was not able to overcome poverty and debt.

It is empirically untrue when it is claimed that continued mass extraction will end Ecuador's miseries, as is currently being argued by the Noboa administration as well as fossil fuel and mining corporations. Equivalent money can be generated by other means without ecocide and ethnocide, without violating the Rights of Nature (inclusive of humans) in Yasuní, Cotopaxi, and elsewhere.



Anti-extractivist coalition actions in Quito in March | Image Credit: @memed.act

All out for transformation

The Constitution of Ecuador, in its article 317, declares that the State “will prioritize intergenerational responsibility, the conservation of nature (...) and will minimize negative environmental, cultural, social and economic impacts.” While these are beautiful words, this is not something that can be achieved in a vacuum, let alone the hostile, predatory vacuum of neocolonial extractivism. The governments of the world have failed to provide an efficient, coherent and organized response to climate change, hence the climate and ecological emergency continues to worsen; a fact that will affect the younger generations even more.

In a statement given on the long standing and growing coalition of anti-extractivist organizations and communities, YASunidos explains:

“We are a diverse and inclusive group of groups, we are people organized in defense of life in all its manifestations and forms, we seek active participation in the decision-making of our country and the world to determine our daily life and our future.

We start from a reality of environmental devastation and climate change, the product of an ideology that has put its efforts and expectations in the promises of a capitalist and anthropocentric society where life is nothing more than a commodity.

We want to transform our relationships with nature and other animals, in order to stop the history of destruction and death.”

As they prepare for ongoing struggle and brace for increasing repression from the current “business friendly” Noboa administration, activists in Ecuador are an example to the world - a world which must finally stop failing them by joining in solidarity against extractivism and for just alternatives.

This fight is a long-distance race, another lesson from struggle in Ecuador, but that doesn’t mean there is time to waste. “Join the movement,” says YASunidos. “We need to inform ourselves. Discuss alternatives. Share them. Get organized. Join collective actions in your community.”

Jason Hickel's Less is More: How Degrowth Will Save the World

Kim Scipes

Looking through the lens of climate change, Jason Hickel's 2020 book is a powerful indictment of capitalism. Finished in 2019, and after quickly reviewing the delirious changes taking place across the planet, he writes, "the only rational response is to do everything possible to keep warming to 1.5 degrees (Celsius). And that means cutting global [greenhouse gas] emissions to zero, much faster than anyone is currently planning." It is a sign of clarity and the need for action: "What's ultimately at stake is the economic system that has come to dominate more or less the entire planet over the past few centuries: capitalism."

He lays the groundwork for a profound understanding of capitalism, surpassing just the economic aspect of it: "it's organized around the imperative of constant expansion, or 'growth': ever-increasing levels of industrial expansion and consumption" (emphasis added). "Within this system, growth has a kind of totalitarian logic to it: every industry, every sector, every national economy must grow, all the time, with no identifiable end point."

It can be difficult to grasp the implications of this. We tend to take the idea of growth for granted because it sounds so natural. And it is. All living organisms grow. But in nature there is a self-limiting logic to growth: organisms grow to a point of maturity, and then maintain a state of healthy equilibrium. When growth fails to stop—when cells keep replicating just for the sake of it—it's because of a coding error, like what happens with cancer. This kind of growth quickly becomes deadly.

Further, under capitalism, global GDP [Gross Domestic Production] needs to keep growing by at least 2% or 3% a year, which is the minimum necessary for large firms to maintain rising aggregate profits. That might seem like a small increment, but keep in mind that this is an exponential curve, and exponential curves have a way of sneaking up on us with astonishing speed. Three percent growth means doubling the size of the global economy every twenty-three years, and then doubling it again from its already doubled state, and then, again and again. It is coupled to energy and resource use and has been for the entire history of capitalism. As production increases, the global economy churns through more energy, resources and waste each year, to the point where it is now dramatically overshooting what scientists have defined as safe planetary boundaries, with devastating consequence for the living world.

That is the basis of his argument: capitalism is destroying the planet.

Obviously, he's a much more sophisticated thinker than this, recognizing that capitalism has different forms, and that not all forms are equally culpable. He recognizes the distinction between "low income countries," mainly of the Global South, and those "high income countries" of the Global North. Thus, he argues that because the "northern" countries have developed capitalism further, thus contributing more to historical global emissions, that they should be required to drastically reduce their emissions further and faster than the "southern" countries.

He also recognizes the limitations of calls for a growth model based on "clean" energies, often

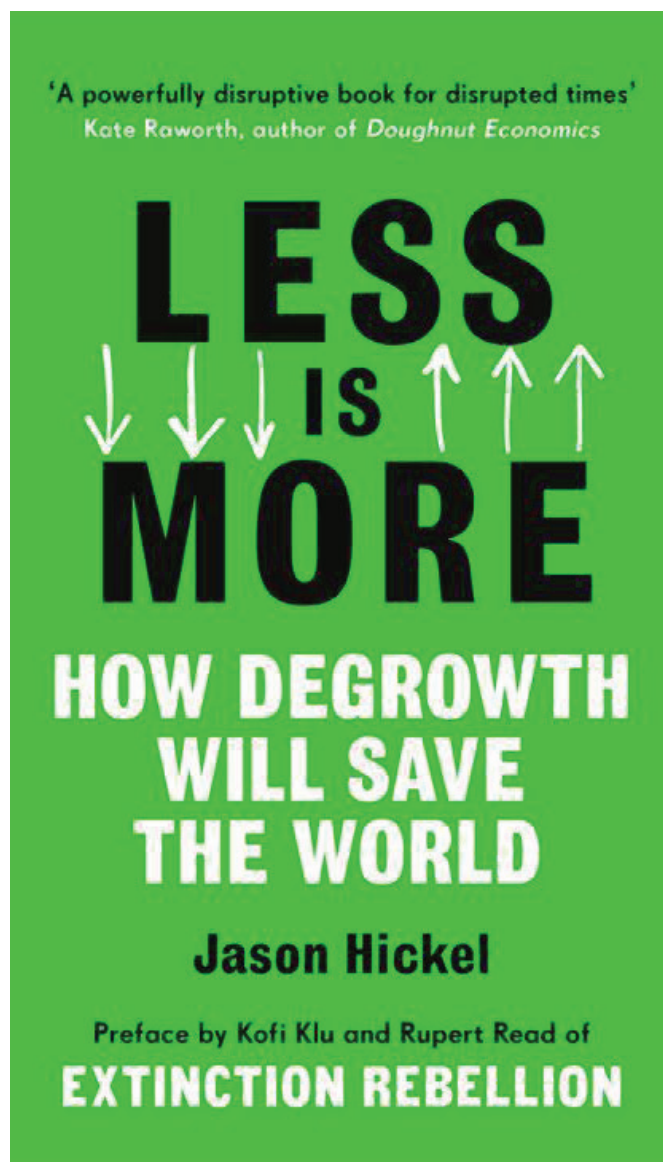
referred to as “renewables,” such as solar, wind, and wave energy. He states, “A growth-obsessed economy powered by clean energy will still tip us into ecological disaster.”

He spends time telling us that cultures in the “northern” countries are changing, with support of capitalism declining noticeably by younger people.

But he also goes back and tries to help readers understand the historical evolution of capitalism, discussing its philosophical base as well as the material reality. He provides a section focused on the philosophical developments relevant to the emergence and development of capitalism. Key is Rene Descartes’ “dualism,” which was key to shifting from seeing all living matter being integrated and connected to “men” being separated from nature and superior, leading to the domination of all things not human. [And, I would suggest, domination of men of women, and later, people of color by whites-KS.] It is this domination of nature that ultimately enables widespread appropriation of resources and people around the world.

Specifically, he sees the Enclosure Acts in England in the 16th Century as being the key turning point, turning the access of abundance into exclusion and privatization, limitation, and starvation. And he explains that colonialism was the extension of this “enclosure policy”—my term—to much of the rest of the world in response to peasant rebellions across Europe: “the rise of capitalism, enclosure and colonization were developed as part of the same strategy”:

The scale of colonial appropriation was staggering. From the early 1500s through the early 1800s, colonizers siphoned 100 million kilograms of silver out of the Andes and into European ports. To get a sense of this wealth, consider this thought-experiment: if invested at 1800 at the historical average rate of interest, that quality of silver would today be worth \$165 trillion—more than double the world’s GDP. And that’s



on top of the gold that was extracted from South America during the same period. This windfall played a key role in the rise of European capitalism. It provided some of the surplus that ended up invested in the Industrial Revolution; it enabled purchase of land-based goods from the East, which allowed Europe to shift its population from agriculture to industrial production; and it funded the military expansion that power further rounds of colonial conquest.

Hickel also recognizes the wealth garnered by slavery in the United States: “The United States extracted so much labour from enslaved Africans that if paid at the US minimum wage, with a modest rate of interest, it would add up

to \$97 trillion today—four times the size of the US GDP.” He points out this doesn’t include the extraction from slavery in Brazil and the Caribbean!

He elaborates on what this means regarding the environment. After noting that China emits almost double the amount of greenhouse gases emitted by the United States, he then notes,

But there are a number of problems with this approach [of focusing only on total emissions]. First, it doesn’t correct for population size. When we look at it in per capita terms, the story changes completely: in China, it’s 8 tons per person. By contrast, Americans emit more than 16 tons per person—double that of China and eight times more than India. Plus, we have to account for the fact that since the 1980s, high-income nations have outsourced much of the industrial production to poorer countries in the global South, to take advantage of cheap labour and resources, thereby shifting a big chunk of their emissions off the books. If we want a more accurate picture of national responsibility, we need to look beyond just territorial emissions and count consumption-based emissions too.

And then he points out that the majority of the problem is due to the United States and Western Europe.

In fact, he points out that a safe level of planetary emissions today, as determined by climate scientists, are those that keep the carbon dioxide (and equivalents) proportion of the atmosphere to 350 ppm (parts per million) or less. [In late March 2024, according to NASA, it was at 425 ppm-KS.] He analyzes what he calls “overshoot emissions,” which are those leading to a higher CO₂ proportion in the atmosphere above 350. He reports:

The figures are staggering. The United States is single-handedly responsible for no less than 40% of global overshoot emissions. The European Union is responsible for 29%. Together

with the rest of Europe, plus Canada, Japan, and Australia, the nations of the global North (which represent only 19% of the global population) have contributed 92% of overshoot emissions. That means they are responsible for 92% of the damage caused by climate breakdown. By contrast, the entire continents of Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East have contributed a total of only 8%. And that comes from only a small number of countries within those regions.

This—combining an understanding of “growthism” based on capitalism, an understanding of the role of colonialism in expanding capitalism around the world, and an understanding of the ecological impact of all this on the rest of the planet—is an excellent analysis. There is a lot more that I could quote but get the book itself; Hickel brings many things together not usually considered, and I think he’s done an excellent job of putting this all together.

From there, in Chapter 3, he evaluates whether technology can save us. While he recognizes that while technology is necessary to address the problem of climate change, he recognizes it is not sufficient.

He decries the “triumphfulness” that came out of Paris in 2015, where the countries celebrated their efforts to keep the Earth’s temperature at 1.5 degrees C or less. [This is in relation to the planetary average temperature between 1850-1900, a time when industrialism spread around the globe; above 1.5 degrees C, according to climate scientists, we risk crossing planetary “tipping points,” which would be like a river boat heading over falls-KS.] Hickel discusses the agreement:

Here’s how the Paris Agreement works. Each country submits a pledge on how much they will be able to reduce their annual emissions. The pledges ... are supposed to be set in line with the goal of keeping warming to 1.5 degrees C. But if you add up all of the pledges that have been made by signatory nations as of 2020, you’ll notice

something rather strange: they don't come anywhere close to keeping us under 1.5 degrees C. In fact, they don't even keep us under 2 degrees C. Even if all the countries in the world fulfill their pledges—which are voluntary and non-binding, so there's certain no guarantee of this—global emissions will keep rising. We'll still be hurtling toward 3.3 degrees C of global warming by the end of the century. In other words, even with the Paris Agreement in place, we're on track for catastrophe. [Note: Donald Trump took the US out of the Paris Agreement for four years, although Joe Biden rejoined it-KS.]

Hickel argues strongly that technological “fixes” aren’t going to save us. He savages BECCS (Bio-energy Carbon Capture and Storage) solutions; he argues that “The scientific consensus against BECCS is now rock-solid.” He rejects “green growth.” He points out the limitations of recycling. He argues against “solar radiation management,” where either chemicals or physical reflectors are put into space to “redirect” solar energy from the Sun. He points out that none of these address the central problem; that of “growth.”

This brings us to the end of the first part of his book. I find his arguments informed, cogent, and compelling: I think he’s right on!

About the only criticism I have of the first part of the book is that I think he should have provided a quick, basic understanding of climate change to his readers, and that he should have come back at the end of the first part and reminded them of the now-crisis in which we face. Small potatoes, really; the first part is quite strong.

Then, however, we get to part two. Hickel moves from a direct, powerful style, largely based on physical reality to one more philosophical. He examines the gap between our understanding of economic growth and personal well-being and tries to understand it. After all, it’s well known that after a certain level of

economic growth, people don’t become happier. In fact, as he notes, once that certain level of economic growth is achieved, improvement of general social welfare is the factor that leads to more happiness among societal members.

Yet, as he cogently points out, today’s global economy is based on increasing inequality, and it is delivering the overwhelming amount of benefits to the top five percent of income earners in the world. (A great chart on p. 193!)

Hickel’s examination of this gap between economic growth and personal well-being goes back to the 17th Century philosopher, Rene Descartes, who saw the separation between God and creation and then took it one step further: creation itself is divided into two substances, “mind” and, for our purposes, “non-mind.” He saw those with “minds” as being part of God, and those without, well ... shame on them. It is this separation between humans and nature that leads to the exploitation of the Earth and those who depend on it.

Descartes was challenged by Baruch Spinoza, who saw everything as part of one “thing,” God. Spinoza, according to Hickel, saw the unity of life. Hickel then sums up these developments:

Europe faced a fork in the road. They had two options: the path of Descartes or the path of Spinoza. With the full backing of the Church and capital, Descartes’ vision won out. It gave legitimacy to the dominant class forces and justified what they were doing to the world. As a result, today we live in a culture shaped by dualist assumptions,

Much of the rest of this book is challenging that dualism, arguing quite persuasively that humans and nature are united as one.

Now, this is all interesting, and Hickel is eloquent. While there’s much I agree with this, I still am troubled by it: I think this second part of *Less is More* should have been focused much

more on today's physical situation, helping people to understand the crisis humans, animals and plants are currently facing, and much less on philosophy.

So, my following comments are to share where I think Hickel should have gone, following his own logic in much of the first part of the book.

After presenting an incisive analysis of capitalism, colonialism, and ecological destruction in the world, and labeling it a crisis, I think he should have moved toward presenting a solution: despite claiming in his subtitle "How Degrowth Will Save the World," nowhere in the book is a meaningful discussion of "degrowth," what it might look like, how it might be implemented, how it would solve the problems he so carefully explicated. Now, I'm not suggesting it had to present the solution, but at least one substantive enough to stimulate discussion and debate, to get other people thinking about these issues if not actually entering the debate.

Again, not expecting "perfection" or "resolution," if he didn't have a solution to propose, then I think he should have at least advanced principles on which he thought any solution had to be based. I would argue that any solution had to try to address his earlier argument that the so called "northern countries" had to reduce their emissions sufficiently to get the carbon dioxide proportion of the atmosphere down to 350 ppm by 2030, and the "southern countries" to this level by 2050, levels he himself had proposed as being necessary; or at very least, making substantial, binding moves to meet them in order to address the current climate crisis. It is this resoluteness needed to even have a chance of keeping Earth's temperature rise below 2 degrees C.

Instead, he proposes a number of "immediate steps" we need to take to challenge capitalism; he argues we need to end "planned obsolescence" of goods produced, with policies suggested including mandatory extended warranties

on products, a "right to repair," and switching to a lease model for large appliances and devices; cut advertising; shift from ownership to usership; end food waste; scale down ecologically destructive industries, including the fossil industries as well as cattle ranching; all good things that I support, but these things, in and of themselves, do not challenge capitalism as a rapacious, destructive economic system; they do not challenge the growthism that he spent the entire first half of the book excoriating; they do not acknowledge the crisis we are currently in; nor do they even lay the cultural groundwork to prepare people to think about doing these things! (Although not a Marxist, I accept Gramsci's understanding that we need cultural preparation—which Gramsci calls "wars of position"—before initiating changes to the status quo; without the preparation, even if we were to act to achieve our goals, "wars of maneuver," they would probably be rejected by most Americans at our expense!)

Within this limitation, throughout the book, Hickel doesn't give us all of the tools we need to understand the world. While he is quite good at discussing the deleterious effects of colonialism, he does not seriously discuss "imperialism." The problem here is that imperialism encompasses not only colonialism, but also neo-colonialism, the efforts by the former colonizer to maintain the exploitive economic ties developed under colonialism after the country is granted its political independence. To put it another way, "independence"—whether after armed revolution or through colonial grant since the costs have gotten too much and the benefits too low for the colonizer to continue—is really only political independence with the former colonizer seeking to maintain economic control. Hickel does not address the neo-colonial aspect of imperialism.

And this is tied into the terminology he uses throughout the book. He speaks of high-income countries or those of the Global North, leaving unquestioned how these countries

gained these higher standards of living, etc.

The reality is that these imperial countries stole the raw materials, natural resources, and sometimes people of the then-colonized countries which, because of gaining political independence, should be now referred to as “formerly colonized countries.” These thefts were often done with much death and destruction of indigenous peoples and often of their respective cultures (think of the epistemicide currently being carried out by Israel in its war against Gaza). They took these stolen resources back to the imperial country from which they came and provided them to the latter for the benefit of economic and social development. At the same time, they did not concern themselves at all with the economic, social, and cultural devastation of the colonies that resulted from this theft. We should quit undercutting the strength of our analysis and utilize the best, most accurate terms possible: imperialism, imperial countries, and formerly colonized countries.

With that, there is nothing suggesting that we work to limit/reduce/end imperial countries’ abilities to military dominate the world, or even parts. The US spends approximately \$1 trillion a year on its military as it seeks to dominate the world; and has spent over \$18 trillion in direct military expenditures between 1981-2021 (from Reagan to the end of Trump’s administration) just for “defense.” This is prior to backing Ukraine against Russia. This money is going mostly to the arms producers, such as Boeing, Northrup Grumman, Raytheon, etc., and it is being used to field a military that has caused the most death and destruction in the world since World War II. And Hickel says nothing about ending it...? Accordingly, there’s no understanding that the US is the homeland of the US Empire.

Where this comes together is in the US National Debt. After 192 years (from the beginning of George Washington’s administration to the end of Jimmy Carter’s), the US National Debt was

less than \$1 trillion; \$ 909 billion, or \$.9 trillion. This is after paying for the War of 1812, the Civil War, the wars against Native Americans on the Plains, the Spanish-American and Philippine-American wars, World War I, World War II, the wars in Korea and Vietnam, the electrification of the Tennessee Valley, the Interstate Highway System, and the Space Program. Since 1981 and the beginning of the Reagan Administration, the National Debt has grown in barely over 40 years by over \$33 trillion! What economic growth we’ve had in the last 40 years has been based, not on solid economic performance but on writing “hot” checks! And while I’m probably being unfair here to Hickel, who is based in the UK, but these things are not being considered by most Americans, including activists!

Yet the thing I miss most in Hickel—as much as I like the first part of this book—which I would argue should have been much better discussed throughout his entire book, is the worsening crisis of climate change. He says little to nothing about it after mentioning it at the beginning. According to Jonathon Porritt, an English activist, it looks like we’ve blown through the 1.5 degree C level of additional heat over the 1850-1900 average, and it may be unstoppable at 2 degrees C. One.five, according to scientific consensus as I’ve noted above, is the level by which the Earth System is probably safe; any higher—and the odds worsen with additional heat—and we risk exceeding “tipping points,” where things get out of control; the metaphor I like to use is like a river boat going over falls. Once that happens, it looks increasingly bad for the very survival of humans, animals, and most plants after the turn of the next century.

In short, a powerful, trenchant, and well-informed first half of the book. There is much to be learned from it, and there’s much I’ll be able to use in my writing. The second half is good, but works for a calmer time, after the climate crisis is averted.

Venezuela's Election in the Crosshairs of New U.S. Regime Change Scheme

Walter Smolarek, Zoe Alexandra

As Venezuela prepares to head to the polls in July, the U.S. has already started drumming up suspicion and doubt around the electoral process.

Twenty-five years after Hugo Chávez took office and began the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela, U.S. officials have still not tired of dreaming up new plots to overthrow the country's government. Five years ago, following the last presidential election, they attempted to install Juan Guaidó—a politician most Venezuelans had never even heard of—as the country's head of state. And now, with the date for the next presidential election officially set for July 28, the Biden administration is gearing up for the biggest regime-change push since the Guaidó coup attempt.

Venezuela has long been a target for U.S. intervention because of its efforts to build an alternative model to the neoliberal capitalism pushed by institutions like the IMF and World Bank. First theorized and implemented under the leadership of Chávez, the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela puts forward a new model that emphasizes using the country's resources, such as its oil revenue, to fund crucial missions. These then guarantee rights such as education, food, housing, transportation, culture, and sports to historically excluded majorities, to decrease longstanding socioeconomic inequality. A central part of the Bolivarian Revolution is the political and cultural transformation of the people through the promotion of Venezuelan national culture, internationalism, anti-imperialism, and the empowerment of all people as political subjects with rights and responsibilities. It is a project in direct contradiction to U.S. interests in the oil-rich country and the region Washington considers its backyard.

The 2024 Elections

President Nicolás Maduro is running for re-election as the candidate of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) and the broader Great Patriotic Pole coalition. He has built his campaign around a program referred to as the “Seven Transformations,” proposing major new initiatives in the fields of economic modernization, asserting national sovereignty, safety and security, ensuring social rights, political participation, the environment, and geopolitics. These aim to maintain the pro-poor, socialist orientation of the country's development model while enacting reforms to stimulate greater economic activity and counteract the impact of crippling U.S. sanctions.

The opposition is divided into several different camps. The largest coalition of opposition parties is called the Unitary Platform and consists of parties or factions of parties controlled by the Venezuelan elite who were displaced from positions of power as a result of the Bolivarian Revolution. The Unitary Platform has taken part in several rounds of negotiations with the government over the past year leading up to the elections and signed an agreement last October known as the “Barbados Agreement.”

In this agreement, the opposition was granted concessions on issues related to the organization of the electoral process, and in exchange, the United States agreed to loosen some sanctions relating to Venezuela's oil and mining industries. The Barbados Agreement stipulated that only opposition figures who are eligible according to existing laws would be permitted to run. At this stage, the Unitary Platform has not chosen a candidate. The specifics of how the electoral process will be

carried out, regulations on campaigning on media platforms, participation of electoral observers, and the updating of electoral rolls were outlined in an agreement signed on February 28. The agreement was the product of dialogue among over 150 political and social organizations and was based on over 500 proposals. Ninety-seven percent of the political parties registered with the National Electoral Council participated.

Nonetheless, U.S. officials have presented this electoral process, subject to such extensive deliberation and approved with such wide support, as an attack on democracy.

María Corina Machado and the Fraud Narrative

The approach of the U.S. government follows a familiar script—wage a campaign in the media and through international organizations to cast doubt on the integrity of the electoral process so relentlessly that the result can be presented as fraudulent no matter what the actual evidence is on election day.

The key piece of the “electoral fraud” narrative is already in place and revolves around the disqualification of the opposition figure María Corina Machado.

Machado is the oldest daughter of Henrique Machado Zuloaga, who was an executive of Sivenza. One of Venezuela’s largest steel companies, Sivenza was nationalized in 2008 under Hugo Chávez. Since the start of the Bolivarian Revolution, Machado has been active in the right-wing opposition and has gone so far as to support destabilization campaigns and attempts to overthrow Venezuela’s democratically elected governments. She served as a member of Venezuela’s National Assembly from 2011-2014.

In July 2015, the Venezuelan comptroller general’s office announced that Machado was barred from holding public office for a period of one year after

neglecting to disclose the extent of her earnings while she held public office.

The investigations into Machado continued. In July 2023, opposition deputy José Brito requested an update on Machado’s eligibility for holding public office given the upcoming presidential election and her stated intention to run. The comptroller general’s office responded, confirming that the disqualification of Machado was maintained and constituted a 15-year ban due to her support of regime change plots.

Though she initially refused to participate in the process, Machado appealed her ban through the Barbados Agreement procedure, which also stated that all candidates must defend Venezuela’s independence and reject violent actions against the government. In January 2024, the Supreme Court of Venezuela issued a sentence rejecting Machado’s appeal of the ban.

The Biden administration immediately sought to use economic coercion to undermine this decision by an institution of Venezuela, a sovereign state. As part of the Barbados Agreement, the U.S. government issued licenses to certain oil companies permitting them to resume operations in Venezuela despite the sanctions. At the end of January, the State Department announced that the sanctions waivers issued to these companies would not be renewed once they expire on April 18.

At the same time, there is endless media reinforcement of the position that an election without Machado cannot be considered legitimate. On January 30, a few days after the Supreme Court rejected her appeal, Machado went on the television network CNN and was presented to viewers as “Venezuela’s main opposition leader.” An earlier Washington Post article is also typical of this narrative, headlined, “She’s the front-runner in the race to oust Maduro. He’s out to block her.” This combination of economic and political pressure is what has led to explosions in right-wing street violence in the past, following the 2013 presidential election when Maduro was first elected.

Machado: Regime Change Operative?

In 2002, following the short-lived coup d'état against Chávez, Machado signed the decree which established an unelected government under chamber of commerce head Pedro Carmona. In 2005 she met with former U.S. president George W. Bush at the White House to discuss “democracy” (i.e., the overthrow of the Venezuelan government). More recently, she has been a key supporter and leader of the numerous right-wing plots to overthrow the democratically elected President Nicolás Maduro. These include the 2014 and 2017 guarimba protests which saw extreme violence against security forces and chavista supporters, as well as the destruction of infrastructure.

In 2014, Machado was removed from her post in the National Assembly after she attended a meeting of the Organization of American States (OAS) in the place of the Panamanian representative in order to testify about 2014 protests, to speak out against the government, and to call for foreign support for her cause. The move was widely condemned as a violation of both the Venezuelan constitution and Panamanian law, and in response, Panamanian civil society and movement organizations filed a lawsuit against her for usurping a public post.

Machado has also celebrated the effectiveness of the illegal sanctions regime imposed on Venezuela in applying political pressure for regime change, and on several occasions, has called for even more sanctions. The sanctions have had devastating consequences for the Venezuelan people, well documented by different UN bodies and rapporteurs, human rights organizations, and think tanks. United Nations special rapporteur Alena Douhan noted that “[t]he announced purpose of the ‘maximum pressure’ campaign—to change the Government of Venezuela—violates the principle of sovereign equality of states and constitutes an intervention in the domestic affairs of Venezuela that also affects its regional relations.”

In 2019, Machado supported the push by Juan Guaidó’s parallel, fictitious government to request that the OAS apply the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR) against Venezuela to end the “usurpation of power” by Maduro. The activation of TIAR would have provided a legal justification for foreign military intervention, (more) economic sanctions, and a commercial blockade.

Machado participated and benefitted from the looting of the state companies and assets that the Guaidó “government” had illegally seized such as Monmeros and CITGO.

U.S. Seeks to Delegitimize Venezuela’s Democracy

An examination of the actual facts of Machado’s political career shows how the truth is much more complicated than the mainstream narrative about a government baselessly repressing an opponent.

After years of political instability caused by right-wing plots to overthrow the democratically elected government and even assassinate the leader, the Venezuelan government has pursued a straight-forward principle: political forces of any ideological variety can participate in elections as long as they do not conspire with foreign powers to undermine the independence of Venezuela or its sovereign institutions. This is in line with practices around the world. In the United States, for instance, there has been a great deal of public attention to the clause of the 14th Amendment that bars those guilty of insurrection from public office.

As the July 28 elections approach, tensions between the disparate elements of the Venezuelan political scene are bound to intensify. But the Biden administration is bound to be guided by the same overarching goal that has animated the policy decisions of Democratic and Republican administrations alike—remove from power one of the most long-standing opponents of Washington’s dominant role in the western hemisphere.

Labor Holds the Line in Argentina

Liam Crisan

This March, Argentina's school year began with empty classrooms. The price of learning materials rose by 502 percent over the past year, leaving many children unprepared for the year to come. And the teachers? On strike after President Javier Milei announced deep cuts to their salaries.

There's something much larger happening here: Workers rights are under attack in an already vastly unequal society. Labor income inequality has been on the decline in many Latin American countries like Chile, Colombia, and Mexico. In Argentina, it's been on the rise.

Since the 1960s, Argentina has been in an unprecedented period of macroeconomic instability. Stagnating in the lead-up to, and during, the dictatorship years (1976-1983), the country's economy has reeled from crisis upon crisis — punctuated with the occasional period of recovery and growth. As the decades wore on, public distrust and discontent produced a deep social divide. Argentines call this phenomenon *la grieta* (“the rift”).

During his successful presidential bid last year, Milei seized upon these conditions. TV personality and self-proclaimed anarcho-capitalist, the eccentric economist promised to correct Argentina's path and make what he called the “political caste” pay for their mismanagement of the country. Wielding a chainsaw while he campaigned, Milei vowed to eliminate state ministries, abolish the central bank, roll back abortion rights, and dollarize the economy.

Now that he's had a chance to implement his platform, working families — not an elite “political caste” — are footing the bill for his far-right economic project.

In the two months before Milei took office in December, inflation was running between 143 and 161



“President Javier Milei signed the Decree of Necessity and Urgency containing reforms designed to liberalize the Argentine economy.”
(Photo: Casa Rosada)

percent. In February, inflation soared to more than 254 percent and the poverty rate reached 57 percent — the highest in decades.

Argentina's labor movement has quickly mobilized widespread and effective opposition to his policies. While strikes and protests continue, we can already begin to draw lessons on resisting the far-right's rise worldwide.

Milei takes a chainsaw to workers rights

After taking office on December 10, 2023, Milei acted swiftly. Declaring “There is no alternative to shock,” the president immediately devalued the peso by 50 percent, lifted price controls, and dissolved half of the country's ministries.

Milei's government then launched an offensive on workers rights. On December 14, the newly appointed Minister of Security announced a new



Anti Milei protests (Photo: Phoebe Moore)

protest protocol. Consolidating control of Argentina's security forces and creating a registry for organizations suspected of "instigating" the protocol allowed federal forces to use increased surveillance and violence.

Days later, Milei signed the "Decree of Necessity and Urgency 70/2023." Dubbed the megadecreto ("mega-decree") for its sweeping scope — cutting severance pay, weakening collective bargaining rights, deregulating the rental market, and otherwise undermining existing protections — the 366-article document is an unconstitutional abuse of executive powers.

Making matters worse, Milei cut public subsidies on utilities and transportation. Hypocrisy shone through his already vague definition of the "political caste." As one Argentine told a journalist, "The caste doesn't take the train nor any form of public transit. We workers and students do."

Milei's aggressive measures roused a prompt response from Argentine labor. In late December, the country's largest unions announced plans for a January 24 general strike — the quickest to be orga-

nized under any president since Argentina's return to democracy in 1983.

Millions join the general strike

Forty-five days after Milei took office, 1.5 million Argentines took to the streets. Workers from all sectors joined the strike: transit, aviation, government, banking, and sanitation, just to name a few.

"Not one step back," one associated union declared on the day of the strike, "for the unity of the workers movement is essential in protecting the rights we've achieved."

The protesters' outrage centered on Milei's Omnibus Bill. The proposed legislation contained sweeping changes to Argentina's economic and political structure, including the privatization of state-owned companies and an unprecedented expansion of executive powers.

The bill would also codify Milei's unpopular "mega-decree."

"[Milei's 'mega-decree'] destroys individual rights

of workers, collective rights and seeks to eliminate the possibility of union action at a time in which we have great inequality in society” said Héctor Daer, the Secretary General of the General Confederation of Labor. One of the world’s largest unions, the CGT represents roughly two-thirds of Argentina’s unionized workforce.

Shortly after the strike ended, the National Congress of Argentina rejected Milei’s Omnibus Bill. Initially approved by the Chamber of Deputies in a 144 to 109 vote, majority support faltered when it came time for an article-by-article review.

The first Omnibus Bill consisted of 664 articles. Now, two months later, they are struggling to push an amended 269-article version — with hefty concessions for the left.

Milei’s uncompromising approach played no small role in killing his first Omnibus Bill. But the general strike served a critical blow to his already weak coalition.

Aftermath in Argentina, implications abroad

Beyond their victories in the streets, Argentine labor has also made notable gains in the courts. Successfully challenging the legality of Milei’s “mega-decree,” the General Confederation of Labor blocked the roll-out of several critical anti-worker measures.

Following January’s general strike, February and March witnessed a patchwork of smaller strikes, placing continued pressure on the government. The most recent have come in the aviation, healthcare, and education sectors. The Argentine Workers’ Central Union (a federation with 1.2 million members) held a “national day of struggle” on March 12 — and united with other groups to block 500 roads throughout the country on March 18. More strikes are planned for March 28.

On March 14, the Senate voted down the Decree of Necessity and Urgency. Though the “mega-decree”

remains in force unless the lower house also opts to reject, the upper house vote represents another massive blow to Milei’s government.

Instrumental in defeating Milei’s first Omnibus Bill — and otherwise slowing the pace of his anti-worker disaster project — Argentine labor’s recent victories offer an important reminder: Working-class people are a potent political force.

These victories also offer lessons in resisting the far-right’s rise worldwide: Organized labor can serve as an infrastructure for mobilization and a counterbalance to democratic backsliding. At their best, unions provide checks on abuses of executive power and ensure that working people always have political representation — no matter who occupies the presidential palace.

With nearly 30 percent of the workforce unionized, the labor movement is strong in Argentina. The United States hasn’t seen that degree of union density since the 1950s, though now the tide might be turning.

With 64 countries holding national elections in 2024, this year will be a watershed moment in world history. And with the far right on the rise, there’s never been a more critical time to mobilize in defense of dignity and democracy.

Here in the United States, there are over 85 million poor or low-income eligible voters. As Inequality.org’s co-editor Sarah Anderson writes, “If this bloc voted at the same rate as higher-income voters, they could sway elections in every state.”

The Poor People’s Campaign is working to mobilize this often ignored voting bloc. With 42 weeks of action, the campaign aims to propel working-class concerns to the center stage of U.S. politics and draw more infrequent voters into democratic engagement.

This year will be a defining moment for democracy. Whether that’s for the better or for the worse, it’s up to us. History will judge.