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-Saurav Sarkar



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Campus Activism for Gaza Ignites

Saurav Sarkar

Students at more than 40 universities and colleges in the United States and around the world have lit a fire under the Palestine solidarity movement by setting up encampments on their campuses. They are demanding that their universities end their complicity with Israel's genocide in Gaza and the occupation of Palestine more broadly.

While the first and longest-running student takeover has been at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, it was Columbia University that lit the fuse for a widespread student movement and drew global attention. The administration's decision at the elite New York City school to sic the repressive New York Police Department on peacefully protesting students led to a global movement and gave hope for the first time in months to countless people. As of April 26, student occupations extended to France and Australia in addition to dozens of campuses in the United States.

Police repression at other sites besides Columbia has been fierce as well. At Emerson University in Boston, Massachusetts, the Boston Police Department was livestreamed manhandling protesters in the early hours of April 25. At Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, the police threw Caroline Fohlin, an economics professor who attempted to intervene in arrests of students, to the ground, her head hitting the concrete. The University of Southern California allowed officers to fire rubber bullets at students, and the University of Texas–Austin had local and state police on motorcycles, horseback, and on foot arresting students.

But the police didn't always have the upper hand. At Cal Poly Humboldt, students successfully barricaded themselves in a building. And, at the City

University of New York's City College, protesters pushed the police back and maintained the integrity of their encampment.

Through it all, students have grounded the protests in what matters: conditions in Gaza and their universities' ties to Israel. Even as establishment figures hemmed and hawed in the face of the student uprising—President Joe Biden tried to link them to “antisemitism”—two mass graves were uncovered in Palestine, which was from the aftermath of terroristic Israeli raids on two hospitals in Gaza. About 400 doctors, patients, children, and others were found dead, in some cases buried alive.

The higher-ups on campuses, in boardrooms, and in presidential palaces around the world appeared to have nothing new to say about Israel's horrifying and murderous tactics. The Zionist state's genocide in Gaza has already reached its 200th day, with at least 34,000 dead and an invasion reportedly imminent in Rafah, the southern city and place of last refuge for hundreds of thousands of Palestinians.

While some have claimed that the mainly U.S. student movement is a distraction, movement figures like Harsha Walia have noted the connections between racist state violence in the United States and in Israel and elsewhere. And, if nothing else, the student movement in advance of both the launch of the aid-carrying “Freedom Flotilla” and International Workers' Day has given countless Palestinian solidarity activists something concrete to do beyond doomscrolling horrifying images from Gaza for hours or attempting to carry on with their daily lives in the face of ongoing genocide.

Moreover, with billions of dollars in endowment



Photo: Tristan Sostaric

money, social capital, and, in some cases, direct links to the state of Israel, universities are an important site of struggle for the advancement of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement. For example, Columbia University maintains a campus in Tel Aviv.

The United States proves increasingly inhospitable to free speech, a cornerstone of democracy; and it seems nearly every private and public institution has been corporatized, militarized, or both. Reprising the historical role of univer-

sities as centers of knowledge and public interest as students are doing now could offer a site for pushback to not just the genocide in Gaza, but much more.

In the coming days, there may be many more encampments in an ever-widening range of sites around the world. The protesters are united in their purpose; as a common chant, "Disclose, divest; we will not stop, we will not rest!" is heard across the globe.

Columbia, NYU, The New School...MIT, Tufts, Emerson... Berkeley, Chicago, Chapel Hill... Everywhere...

Michael Albert

I went to MIT, class of 1969. It is now 2024 not the late sixties, but rebellion for change is again in the air. I think it is just getting revved up. I can feel it. I'll bet you can feel it too. And maybe, hopefully, it will not crescendo any time soon but will instead persist. And perhaps, hopefully, it will seek more than immediate changes. And maybe, and I think I can feel this too, it will be much smarter than we were back then, back in 1968.

The rebellious events at Columbia last week have spurred rebellions of students and sometimes others at a rapidly enlarging community of campuses, including at my personally much-despised alma mater, MIT. [Note, I am not unbiased about campus rebellion or about MIT. The former undergirds mass change, over and over. Have at it. The latter is an instance of elite, academic, grossly rotten business as usual. When I was president of MIT's student body, during steadily growing and intensifying rebellion, among the epithets I used for MIT was "Dachau on the Charles" because of its war research. Some on campus were too literal or too dense to see why I named it thus. For them, I would acknowledge the main difference, which was that MIT's victims were not local, like Dachau's—no, MIT's victims way back then were half a torn-up world away in Vietnam enduring American carpet bombing. And regarding Dachau, MIT's victims were not hanging like burned out lightbulbs in MIT's corridors nor lying breathless like fish out of water gassed in MIT's labs. And now, 56 years later, MIT's current victims are way off in Gaza enduring Israeli carpet bombing (but with American bombs). They are not being forcefully exiled from MIT's classes, dorms, playing fields, and clinic—not yet, anyway. My point: history sometimes repeats, sometimes with ironic differences,

sometimes with healthy differences.

One 1968 over-used, more hippie than political, and pretty stupid if catchy slogan was "don't trust anyone over thirty" (except maybe Chomsky). I doubt that this time that slogan will reemerge much less change to "don't trust anyone under seventy" so I hesitate to even write this reaction. Okay, hesitation finished. Being old may not bring wisdom but it doesn't have to stifle solidarity. Decades have passed. Wrinkles have proliferated. But I actually remember MIT better than anywhere I ever lived before or since. So I can't stop my elderly self from commenting.

Context 1: This past October, in response to decades of Israeli occupation, denigration, usurpation, and plentiful murder, Hamas orchestrated an escape from their open-air prison, and then raged and ravaged, including against civilians, and took hostages too.

The perpetrators' anger was understandable, I think, and even warranted. Those colonized should not celebrate their colonizers. The perpetrators' actions were also understandable, depending on your perspective and your capacity for objectivity. But the perpetrators' actions were certainly not ethically justified or strategically wise. Hamas's actions were instead stupidity and terroristic. But that was not because the jail breakers were militantly combative. Occupied peoples have a right to be—indeed ought to be—militantly combative. The colonized have a right to invade the colonizer. Not vice versa.

Context 2: Israel's IDF has responded ever since. It claims its actions are justified by Hamas' actions: Hamas struck first. Hamas killed innocent Israelis.

We Israelis have to defend ourselves. We have to make them reap what they sowed. We have to assault the entirety of Gaza with some of the most intensive bombing per acre ever unleashed on anyone, anywhere—at least by other than the U.S. We must incinerate infrastructure. We must demolish homes, hospitals, schools, and basically anything that's there to be hit. The U.S. in Vietnam said "anything that flies against everything that moves." We Israelis learned from and adapted our benefactor's ways. Thank you home of the brave. Thank you land of the free. But your Kissinger was too tame. We say, "anything that flies against everything." Yes, you heard us right, everything. More, we intentionally, overtly, proclaim it out loud, as our stated policy, that we have to starve them all. We welcome the ensuing deaths. Deaths and destruction are our point. Die or leave is our message. And like our benefactor, we are good at what we do, which is why much of Gaza is already uninhabitable. It is why kids have their limbs amputated in bombed out hospitals—without anesthesia, their parents already permanently dead. It is why preventable, curable diseases spread with our blessing. Kill the vermin or at least to make them leave. And so we block medicine, food, and water to defend ourselves. Of course we do. We aren't half-hearted about this. "Anything that destroys and kills against everything that exists wherever Hamas hides." So what would happen if Hamas rented a safe house in Berlin or, more likely, New York? Even if he was a little too tame, Kissinger is our hero. If he couldn't do it, we can.

Context 3: The U.S. government provides virtually endless supplies of bombs and any sought surveillance, and arguably just as important, the U.S. protects Israel from the UN and any other opposition. Those in Washington and on Wall Street literally cheerlead and celebrate Israel's actions, even as some serious cracks spread.

Context 4: Many people who watch Israel's horrifying actions unfold wring their hands, but stay silent. Some who watch root for the IDF, mostly that's Israeli citizens, but also some in the U.S., Germany, and various other places. At worst some who root for the IDF say, "okay, bomb the hospitals and

everyone in them. Get to it. Kids too. Extinguish the Vermin, babies and all. Nuke them if you have to." Others sincerely bemoan the excess but keep quiet about it. No unseemly public pronouncements or displays for them. Then there are also others, a whole lot of others, increasingly many others, who will answer, if asked, "this is barbaric. This is terrorism. This should stop now." And then, of those, some even express their disgust really loudly. Some chant it, some march and demonstrate it. Some pitch tents for it. And some may soon move inside from the campus courtyards to occupy offices and then buildings, too—all for Palestine. And, yes, it is true that some—but I bet very few—genocide protestors occasionally scream nasty, ill-chosen things not just wrong but also counter productive to their efforts. I suspect the few who do that, with their passion boiling over while they fear they may be risking their academic lives do it not least because Israeli and U.S. media and school administrators tell them that if you protest Zionism, if you protest genocide, you are anti-Semitic. What crap. So, they wonder, okay how are we supposed to demonstrate that we are not anti-Semitic but instead anti-anti-Semitic? "Say that, just that way" the authorities intone. "We do, but you refuse to hear us." "Okay, then chant 'we are Zionist. We support genocide,'" the authorities reply. "We'll hear that." Yes, that would work, administrators would hear that. But the students won't say that. And neither should anyone else say that. And the students will be heard.

Back in 1965, in my Freshman year of college, I was a member of Alpha Epsilon Pi one of the campus's Jewish fraternities, or I was up until when I demonstratively quit during the first week of my Sophomore year. But here's the odd current thing. Somehow, lately, my name got onto a mailing list of AEPi alumni so I have, very recently, received a flurry of emails from ex-brothers sent to other ex-brothers. The precipitant for the flurry was an invitation to get together in Cambridge during the fifty-fifth anniversary of the class of 1969. After the first invitation, there came a round of discussion by various AEPi alumni, spurred by one brother who wrote he would love to come to break bread with his fraternity brothers, but in protest over what in his view

was MIT President Kornbluth's horrible hesitance to protect Jewish students from what this brother saw as grotesque anti-semitism, he would not come to the reunion. This is a very well educated and presumably humane and caring guy. His sentiment and his outrage at students supporting Palestine was then seconded and thirded, a few times over, with escalating whining about the plight of Jews at MIT but with barely a sincere, intelligent word about Palestinians at MIT or Palestinians anywhere else like, oh, say, in Gaza. Are there courses on head-in-the-sand hypocrisy at MIT? I found some of the contents of some of my ex- brothers' inter-communications blindingly nauseating. And I take for granted you who are admirably and courageously protesting at MIT (and elsewhere) have already encountered similar and worse head-in-the-sand hypocritical castigation. Certainly those at Columbia have. Certainly you all will again, repeatedly.

Meanwhile, by way of offering something that may possibly prove useful, I think some of those who criticize you or who call for your expulsion (like some of my one-time fraternity brothers) will argue that decades of Israel's terror did not justify Hamas's few days of anti-civilian actions, yet somehow Hamas's few days of anti-civilian actions do justify Israel's now six month genocidal bombardment of everything and starvation of everyone in Gaza. They will tell you, utterly blind to their own illogic, that you are supporting terror. They may even say you are committing terror. Call them illogical, hypocritical, incredibly ignorant, or whatever you wish, but please say all that to yourself, in your own mind, if you must utter it at all. Please don't rail that at them. Don't curse them. Don't ridicule them. That was our biggest mistake in 1968. My point is, please work to make them your allies, maybe not all of them, but most. Hit them with evidence. Hit them with logic. Hit them with reasoning. And hell's bells, hit them with morality (but not holier than thou moralism). And also listen to them. Also address their words. Even sympathize with them. Don't compromise, but sympathize. You have likely already seen all the dysfunctional, dismissive, and self-corrupting behavior they manifest and in all likelihood there is more to come. But please don't mimic it. I am ashamed to

say—but actually happy to report—that too often I and my movement allies did mimic their hostility. We did get tribal against our critics. Provoked, we did leave our reasoning behind. We did get holier than thou at them. And for all that we did accomplish, those choices were not only not helpful they were largely responsible for us not accomplishing much more than we did. The good news, the happy side, is that you can do better. Be militant for sure. Get to the heart of things, by all means. We did that much too. And fifty-six years later you have to deal with fascist fanaticism. For bequeathing you that, I/we apologize. So do better than us. Don't repulse who should become and who can become allied with you. We repulsed too many, you don't have to. Don't only rebel, organize!

A lot of people are comparing now to 1968. That year was tumultuous. We were inspired. We were hot. But here comes this year and it is moving faster, no less. That year the left that I and so many others lived and breathed was mighty. We were courageous, but we also had too little understanding of how to win. Don't emulate us. Transcend us.

That year's election was Nixon versus Humphrey. Trump is way worse than Nixon. Biden is like Humphrey, and I even think somewhat better. That year's Democratic Convention was in Chicago. So is this year's. That year, in Chicago, the Sixties went wild in the streets. And Nixon won. And that event was part of why fifty-six years later you face fascist fundamentalism. This year, in Chicago, what? If there is a lesson from 1968 to apply, the movement must persist, but simultaneously Trump must lose. That means Biden—or someone else?—must win. And, of course, the emerging mass uprisings must persist and diversify and broaden in focus and reach. And hey, on your campuses, again do better than us. Fight to divest but also fight to structurally change them so their decision makers—which should be you—never again invest in genocide, war, and indeed suppression and oppression of any kind. Tomorrow is the first day of a long, long potentially incredibly liberating future. But one day is but one day. Persist.

Student Demands for Divestment Are Not New

Sonali Kolhatkar

The student-led movement against the genocide in Gaza that is sweeping college campuses across the United States, has made “divestment” from Israel central to its demands. It’s what the “D” in BDS stands for—Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions—a Palestinian-led international and nonviolent means of holding Israel accountable for decades of colonization, occupation, and war.

Now, just as apartheid South Africa lost global prestige after U.S. university students successfully forced many universities to financially divest from the then-pariah state, there appears to be some momentum toward a parallel impact on Israel. The administration of the prestigious Brown University is the latest to have agreed to explore divestment from Israel in response to student demands.

Divestment can mean different things depending on the nature of the institution’s financial ties. But the idea behind it is simple: It means removing all financial ties, such as withdrawing investments, and therefore ending direct complicity in criminal and unjust actions. American institutions of higher learning are economic powerhouses with massive endowments, and ultimately can be described as “big businesses.” Many of them use their funds to directly or indirectly invest in Israel. Harvard University, for example, was found in 2020 to have invested nearly \$200 million of its \$40 billion endowment in companies with ties to Israel’s occupation of Palestine.

While the latest wave of student-led encampments is new in its scope, motivated especially by the horrors of Israel’s latest wave of mass ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in Gaza, the student demands for divestment are not new. They are built on a decades-long foundation for protest constructed by an international solidarity movement in support of Palestinian liberation.

The BDS movement, launched by Palestinian unions and other civil society institutions in 2005, explains on its website that “Israel is only able to maintain its oppressive regime over the Palestinian people and avoid accountability for its genocide against 2.3 million Palestinians in the besieged and occupied Gaza Strip because of international state, corporate and institutional complicity.”

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), with a long history of organized and coordinated boycott and divestment campaigns, has crafted helpful guidelines on how to divest, and has offered context for such efforts: “[W]e recognize that the Israeli occupation is not the only illegal occupation in the world, although it is the longest and deadliest one.” Moreover, according to AFSC, “It is also the only place in the world from which a call was issued by the occupied people to the international community to use economic activism tools such as boycott and divestment to help end the occupation.”

Columbia University in New York, an epicenter of the current student-led campus actions, has a history of using divestment as a tool of protest that far predates the encampment launched by students on April 17. Although many media outlets cite Columbia’s 1968 sit-ins against the Vietnam War as a parallel, Omar Barghouti, Tanaquil Jones, and Barbara Ransby wrote in *The Guardian*, that the university’s 1985 anti-apartheid student sit-ins are even more relevant to today’s protest. The Coalition for a Free South Africa successfully pushed Columbia University to divest from apartheid South Africa. Nearly three decades later, a campaign called Columbia Prison Divest also forced the university to pull investments from for-profit prison companies.

And, four years ago, Columbia’s undergraduate school, called Columbia College, passed a historic student vote calling for divestment from Israel. The list of campus divestment-related victories specific



to Israel is surprisingly long. Nearly a decade ago, in 2015, the Associated Press called student-led divestment demands against Israel “increasingly commonplace on many American college campuses.”

What’s different today is that the pace of Israel’s atrocities against Palestinians has significantly ramped up and is a bona fide genocide-in-progress, so much so that Israeli officials fear the International Criminal Court could issue arrest warrants against them. The official figures of Israel’s victims in Gaza since last October number more than 34,000, with more than 40 percent of those being children. Israel has decimated so much of Gaza that authorities are unable to keep track of the dead, meaning the death toll is likely even higher.

Young people, including Jewish students, are deeply moved by Israel’s savagery and the resulting Palestinian suffering. They are closely monitoring the indiscriminate bombing of Gaza on social media, forming digital ties with Palestinians, and grieving over the deaths of Gaza’s children. It’s only natural that they are pouring their rage toward the institutions they have the most proximity to and power over: The administrations of the schools where they pay exorbitant fees to attend, and that have invested in or partnered with Israel.

Until the tide fully turns against Israel for being an oppressive apartheid state, educational institutions will embrace it as a matter of pride. Cornell University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, University of Central Florida, and University of Michigan are examples of schools that tout their collaborations with Israeli institutions. And there are Israeli efforts specifically aimed at legitimizing the colonial state at U.S. universities through donations of “Israel bonds.”

Whether or not calls for divestment by the current student-led movement and the long-standing BDS movement succeed or have a concrete result, the symbolic impact of labeling Israel’s actions as immoral can have a ripple effect, potentially discouraging schools from taking on such a controversial affiliation. The fact that students at Brown University, Northwestern University, and the University of Minnesota have successfully forced their schools’ administrations to vote on divesting from Israel is a major step toward delegitimizing Israel. Smaller colleges such as the Seattle-based Evergreen State College are also following suit.

Detractors of divestment say the efforts will have little effect on Israel. Others say they are antisemitic even though the initiatives are aimed at the Israeli state and institutions complicit in apartheid and genocide, not against Jewish individuals. Indeed, the current student movements in solidarity with Palestinians have the support and participation of many justice-seeking Jewish groups and individuals.

Minnesota’s congressional representative Ilhan Omar put it best in 2019 when the House of Representatives passed a resolution condemning the BDS movement. She said, “We should condemn in the strongest terms violence that perpetuates the occupation, whether it is perpetuated by Israel, Hamas or individuals... But if we are going to condemn violent means of resisting the occupation, we cannot also condemn nonviolent means.”

Students Demanding Divestment: You're on the Right Side of History

Marjorie Cohn

The following are remarks I delivered on Saturday, May 4, 2024 at the 55-year reunion of the Stanford University antiwar movement, in which I participated. On April 3, 1969, an estimated 700 Stanford students voted to occupy the Applied Electronics Laboratory (AEL), where classified research on electronic warfare was being conducted at Stanford. That spawned the April Third Movement (A3M), which holds reunions every five to 10 years. The sit-in at AEL, supported by a majority of Stanford students, lasted nine days. Stanford moved the objectionable research off campus, but the A3M continued with sit-ins, teach-ins and confrontations with police in the Stanford Industrial Park.

This reunion comes at an auspicious time, with college campuses erupting all over the country in solidarity with the Palestinian people. Once again, 55 years later, Stanford students are rising up for peace and justice. They have established a "People's University" encampment and they are demanding that Stanford: (1) explicitly condemn Israel's genocide and apartheid; (2) call for an immediate ceasefire, and for Israel and Egypt to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza; and (3) immediately divest from the consumer brands identified by the Palestinian BDS National Committee and all firms in Stanford's investment portfolio that are complicit Israeli war crimes, apartheid and genocide.

At this moment in history, there are two related military occupations occurring simultaneously – 5,675 miles apart. One is Israel's ongoing 57-year occupation of Palestinian territory, which is now taking the form of a full-fledged genocide that has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians. The other is at Columbia University, where the administration has asked the New York Police Department to occupy the school until May 17. Both occupations are fueled by the Zionist power structure. Both have weaponized antisemitism to rationalize their brutality.

The students at Columbia are demanding that the university end its investments in companies and funds that are profiting from Israel's war against the Palestinians. They want financial transparency and amnesty for students and faculty involved in the demonstration. Most protesters throughout the country are demanding an immediate ceasefire and divestment from companies with interests in Israel. More than 2,300 people have been arrested or detained on U.S. college campuses.

Israel has damaged or destroyed every university in Gaza. But no university president has denounced Israel's genocide or supported the call for divestment.

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement was launched in 2005 by 170 Palestinian civil society organizations who described BDS as "non-violent punitive measures" to last until Israel fully complies with international law. That means Israel must (1) end its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantle its barrier wall; (2) recognize the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and (3) respect, protect and promote the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their land as mandated by UN General Assembly Resolution 194.

Boycotts are the withdrawal of support for Israel, and Israeli and international companies that are violating Palestinian human rights, including Israeli academic, cultural and sporting institutions. Divestment occurs when universities, churches, banks, pension funds and local councils withdraw their investments from all Israeli and international companies complicit in the violation of Palestinian rights. Sanctions campaigns pressure governments to stop military trade and free-trade agreements and urge them to expel Israel from international fora.

“A particularly important source of Palestinian hope is the growing impact of the Palestinian-led nonviolent BDS movement,” according to Omar Barghouti, co-founder of BDS. It “aims at ending Israel’s regime of military occupation, settler-colonialism, and apartheid and defending the right of Palestinian refugees to return home.”

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has called the BDS movement an existential threat to Israel – an absurd claim in light of Israel’s arsenal of nuclear weapons.

The BDS movement is modeled largely on the boycott that helped end apartheid in South Africa. As confirmed by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the Israeli human rights organization B’Tselem, Israel also maintains a system of apartheid. Israel’s system is “an even more extreme form of the apartheid” than South Africa’s was, the South African ambassador told the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at the recent hearing on the legality of the Israeli occupation.

The U.S. has a long, proud history of boycotts – from the civil rights bus boycott to the United Farm Workers Union’s grape boycott. But at the behest of Zionists, anti-boycott legislation has been passed at the federal and state levels to prevent the American people from exercising their First Amendment right to boycott.

“The genocide underway in Gaza is the result of decades of impunity and inaction. Ending Israel’s impunity is a moral, political and legal imperative,” Palestine’s Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki told the ICJ. “Successive Israeli governments have given the Palestinian people only three options: displacement, subjugation or death; these are the choices, ethnic cleansing, apartheid or genocide.”

“Israel restricts every aspect of Palestinian life, from birth to death, resulting in manifest human rights violations and an overt system of repression and persecution,” al-Maliki said. “Through indiscriminate killing, summary execution, mass arbitrary arrest, torture, forced displacement, settler violence, movement restrictions and blockades, Israel subjects Palestinians to

inhumane life conditions and untold human indignities, affecting the fate of every man, woman and child under its control.”

The Israeli military is poised to compound its genocidal campaign by ethnically cleansing 1.4 million people sheltering in Rafah, who have nowhere to flee. The violence in Gaza did not start on October 7, 2023, with the killing of some 1,200 Israelis by Hamas. It is the continuation of Israel’s brutal Nakba (Arabic for “catastrophe”) that began 75 years ago.

The Ambassador of Belize told the ICJ, “No state reserves to itself the right to systematically violate the rights of a people to self-determination — except Israel. No state seeks to justify the indefinite occupation of another’s territory — except Israel. No state commits annexation and apartheid with impunity, except — it seems — Israel.” He said that “Israel must not be allowed such blatant impunity.”

Yet the U.S. government continues to fund Israel’s occupation and genocide, and protect the Israeli regime from any accountability. The U.S. also provides Israel with diplomatic cover, consistently vetoing resolutions in the Security Council that call for an enduring ceasefire.

Israeli officials believe that the International Criminal Court is about to issue arrest warrants for senior Israeli government officials, including Netanyahu, for their crimes, including the obstruction of humanitarian aid to the people starving to death in Gaza. Hamas leaders also reportedly face arrest warrants. The Biden administration is taking steps to shield Israelis from ICC arrest warrants.

Meanwhile, Francesca Albanese, United Nations special rapporteur for the occupied Palestinian territory, called for an arms embargo and sanctions on Israel. The amazing student movement that only promises to grow will hopefully be a game changer in stopping Israel’s US-backed genocide.

To the brave students following in our noble tradition, I say, you are on the right side of history. Dare to struggle, dare to win!

American Intifada for Gaza: What Should We Expect?

Ramzy Baroud

The mass protests at dozens of US universities cannot be reduced to a stifling and misleading conversation about antisemitism.

Thousands of American students across the country are not protesting, risking their own futures and very safety, because of some pathological hate for the Jewish people. They are doing so in a complete rejection of, and justifiable outrage over the mass killing carried out by the state of Israel against defenseless Palestinians in Gaza.

They are angry because the bloodbath in the Gaza Strip, starting on October 7, is fully funded and backed by the US government.

These mass protests began at the University of Columbia on April 17 before covering all of US geography, from New York to Texas and from North Carolina to California.

The protests are being compared, in terms of their nature and intensity, to the anti-war protests in the US against the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 70s.

While the comparison is apt, it is critical to note the ethnic diversity and social inclusiveness in the current protests. On many campuses, Arab, Muslim, Jewish, Black, Native American and White students are standing shoulder to shoulder with their Palestinian peers in a unified stance against the war.

None of them is motivated by fear that they could be drafted to fight in Gaza, as was, indeed, the case for many American students during the Vietnam War era. Instead, they are united around a clear set of priorities: ending

the war, ending US support of Israel, ending their universities' direct investment in Israel and the recognition of their right to protest. This is not idealism, but humanity at its finest moments.

Despite mass arrests, starting in Columbia, and the direct violence against peaceful protesters everywhere, the movement has only grown stronger.

On the other side, US politicians, starting with President Joe Biden, accused the protesters of anti-Semitism, without engaging with any of their reasonable, and globally-supported demands.

Once again, the Democratic and Republican establishments stood together in blind support for Israel.

Biden condemned the "antisemitic protests" describing them as "reprehensible and dangerous".

A few days later, the speaker of the US House of Representatives, Mike Johnson, visited the university under tight security, using language that is hardly suitable for a country which claims to embrace democracy, respect freedom of expression and right of assembly.

"We just can't allow this kind of hatred and antisemitism to flourish on our campuses," he said, adding: "I am here today joining my colleagues, and calling on President (Minouche) Shafik to resign if she cannot immediately bring order to this chaos."

Shafik, however, was already on board, as she was the one who had called for the New York

Police Department to crack down on the protesters, falsely accusing them of anti-Semitism.

US mainstream media has helped contribute to the confusion and misinformation regarding the reasons behind the protests.

The Wall Street Journal, once more, allowed writers such as Steven Stalinsky to smear young justice activists for daring to criticize Israel's horrendous genocide in Gaza.

" Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis and others are grooming activists in the U.S. and across the West," he alleged, thus, once more taking a critical conversation about US support of genocide into bizarre and unsubstantiated directions.

US establishment writers may wish to continue to fool themselves and their readers, but the truth is that neither Hezbollah or Hamas 'recruiters' are active in Ivy League US universities, where young people are often groomed to become leaders in government and large corporations.

All such distractions are meant to avoid the undeniable shift in American society, one that promises a long-term paradigm shift in popular views of Israel and Palestine.

For years prior to the current war, Americans have been changing their opinions on Israel, and their country's so-called 'special relationship' with Tel Aviv.

Young Democrats have led the trend, which can also be observed among independents and, to some extent, young Republicans.

A statement that asserts that "sympathies in the Middle East now lie more with the Palestinians than the Israelis", would have been unthinkable in the past. But it is the new normal, and latest opinion polls regarding the subject, along with Biden's dwindling approval ratings, continue to attest to this fact.

The older generations of American politicians, who have built and sustained careers based on their unconditional support for Israel, are overwhelmed by the new reality. Their language is confused and riddled with falsehoods. Yet, they are willing to go as far as defaming a whole generation of their own people – the future leaders of America – to satisfy the demands of the Israeli government.

In a televised statement on April 24, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described the protesters as "antisemitic mobs" who "have taken over leading universities", alleging that the peaceful protesters are calling "for the annihilation of Israel". His words should have outraged all Americans, regardless of their politics and ideology. Instead, more US politicians began parroting Netanyahu's words.

But political opportunism shall generate a blow-back effect, not just in the distant future, but in the coming weeks and months, especially in the run-up to the presidential elections.

Millions of Americans are clearly fed up, with war, with their government's allegiance to a foreign country, to militarism, to police violence, to the unprecedented restrictions on freedom of speech in the US and more.

Young Americans, who are not beholden to the self-interests or historical and spiritual illusions of previous generations, are declaring that 'enough is enough'. They are doing more than chanting, and rising in unison, demanding answers, moral and legal accountability and an immediate end to the war.

Now that the US government has taken no action, in fact continues to feed the Israeli war machine in its onslaught against millions of Palestinians, these brave students are acting themselves. This is certainly an awe-inspiring, watershed moment in the history of the United States.

Unfurling Love from the Window

Kathy Kelly

On April 30, when Columbia University student protesters took over Hamilton Hall, they renamed it “Hind’s Hall,” dropping a large banner out the windows above the building’s entrance. This was a hall famously occupied by students in the 1968 protests against the Vietnam War and against Jim Crow racism in the United States. The students are risking suspension and expulsion, and a very real black-list has already been generated against them, with Congress joining in to define criticism of genocide as a form of antisemitism that state universities and state-linked employers will not be allowed to tolerate.

I believe their love for Hind Rajab guides the movement so desperately needed to resist militarism. Hind was six years old when Israel used U.S.-supplied weapons to kill her.

If our civilization survives a looming ecological collapse that is helping to drive catastrophic nuclear brinkmanship, I hope future generations of students will study the “Hind’s Hall” occupation in the way that students of the civil rights movement have studied the Edmund Pettus Bridge and the story of Emmett Till. Hind’s story is tragically emblematic. Her cruel murder has befallen many thousands of children throughout the decades of Israel’s fight to maintain apartheid. Just in our young century, from September 2000 to September 2023, Israel’s B’tselem organization reports that 2,309 Palestinian minors were killed by Israelis and some 145 Israeli minors were killed by Palestinians, with these numbers excluding Palestinian children dead from deliberate immiseration via blockade or traumatized as hostages in prisons. We hear reports that thirty-eight Israeli children and some 14,000 Palestinian children have been murdered since October 7, deaths which can all be laid on the doorstep of the ethnostate project so lethally determined to keep one ethnicity in undemocratic governance.

No six-year-old poses any threat to anyone. Like the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children starved to

death during the U.S. imposition of economic sanctions against Iraq, none of these children could be held accountable for the actions of their government or military.

Hind Rajab committed no crime, but she was made to watch her family die and wait for death surrounded by their corpses. When the ambulance crew asked safe passage to come rescue her, she was used as bait to kill them as well. Her story must be remembered and told over and over.

As Jeffrey St. Clair writes, Hind was a little girl who liked to dress up as a princess. She lived in the neighborhood of Tel al-Hawa, an area south of Gaza City.

“Hind Rajab was in her own city when the invaders in tanks came,” St. Clair notes. “What was left of it . . . Hind’s own kindergarten, from which she’d recently graduated, had been blown up, as had so many other schools, places of learning, places of shelter and places of safety in Gaza City.”

On January 29, when the Israelis ordered people to evacuate, her mother, Wissam Hamada, and an older sibling set off on foot. Hind joined her uncle, aunt, and three cousins who traveled in a black Kia automobile.

The uncle placed a call to a relative in Germany which initiated the family’s contact with the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS). After the initial connection with the PRCS switchboard, the car was targeted and hit, killing Hind’s uncle, her aunt, and two of her cousins.

Hind and her fifteen-year-old cousin, Layan, were the only survivors.

Switchboard operators handling the phone contact with Layan had immediately notified ambulance workers that the little girls needed to be rescued.

But it would have been suicidal for a rescue crew to enter the area without first working out coordinates with the Israeli military.

Similar to the World Central Kitchen workers killed on Monday, April 1, they waited hours for the coordinated rescue plan.

On the audio tape shared by the PRCS workers, Layan's petrified voice can be heard. The tank is coming closer. She is so scared. A blast is heard and Layan no longer speaks. PRCS workers call back and Hind answers.

She pleads, "Please come and get me. I'm so scared."

St. Clair writes, "The [PRCS] dispatched an ambulance crewed by two paramedics: Ahmed al-Madhoon and Youssef Zeino. As Ahmed and Youssef approached the Tel al-Hawa area, they reported to the Red Crescent dispatchers that the IDF was targeting them, and that snipers had pointed lasers at the ambulance. Then there was the sound of gunfire and an explosion. The line went silent."

The tank-fired M830A1 missile remnant found nearby had been manufactured in the United States by a subsidiary of the Day and Zimmermann Corporation. Day and Zimmermann prides itself on having once received the U.S. National "Family Business of the Year" award—an Internet search for the award chiefly produces references to this company. The company states that it believes in civic and community service, with core values of safety and integrity; emphasizing their success as a team that hits its targets. But since last October, their business has been killing families like Hind's.

Although Israel predictably insists that Layan and Hind, and the additional slain paramedics, were all lying with their final breaths and that no IDF tanks were present to attack them, Al Jazeera's analysis of satellite images taken at midday on January 29 corroborates the victims' accounts and puts at least three Israeli tanks just 270 meters (886 feet) from the family's car, with their guns pointed at it.

When rescuers were finally allowed to approach the remains of Hind and her family on February 10, the car was riddled with bullet holes likely coming from more than one direction.

Hind's mother couldn't go to the site until February 12.

On May 5, Israel raided the offices of Al Jazeera at the Ambassador Hotel in Jerusalem and moved to shut down the television network's operations in Israel.

To remember Hind's story is an act of resistance. Commemorating her short life builds resolve to confront profiteers who benefit from developing, manufacturing, storing, and selling the weapons that prolong wars—robbing children of their precious right to live.

Universities should, in theory, be places to learn things of importance, and we can learn from the students of Hind Hall to throw comfort and ambition out the window while keeping hold of love, as the students clung to that banner and to the name of Hind Rajab. We can learn to keep hold of our humanity. We learn by doing, as these students are learning to do, drawing wisdom from people like Phil Berrigan who famously said, "Don't get tired!"

The list of Gaza solidarity encampments grows each day. Conscious of increasing famine in Gaza, students at Princeton University launched a water-only fast on May 4 as they continue to call for their University to divest from corporations selling weapons to Israel. The United Nations warns of a potential collapse of aid delivery to Palestinians with Israel's May 7 closure of the two main crossings into Gaza. These crossings are critical entry points for food, medicine, and other supplies for Gaza's 2.3 million people. The disruptions come at a time when officials say northern Gaza is experiencing a "full-blown famine."

With thousands of innocent lives in the balance, promoters of peace should take advantage of this crucial opportunity to follow the young people, learning alongside the students whose hunger for humanity reveals stunning courage.

May Day May Have Been Obliterated from US History, But It's Legacy Continues

Bruce T. Bocardy

May 1st is International Workers' Day and was established as such in celebration of the struggle for the introduction of the eight-hour workday and in memory of Chicago's Haymarket Affair, which took place in 1886.

May 1st is celebrated in over 160 countries with large-scale marches and protests as workers across the globe continue to fight for better working conditions, fair wages, and other labor rights. International Workers' Day, however, is not celebrated in the US and has in fact been practically erased from historical memory. But this shouldn't be surprising since US capitalism operates on the basis of a brutal economy where maximization of profit takes priority over everything else, including the environment and even human lives.

Indeed, the US has a notorious record when it comes to worker rights. The country has the most violent and bloody history of labor relations in the advanced industrialized world, according to labor historians. Subsequently, unionization has always faced an uphill battle as corporations are allowed to engage in widespread union-busting practices through manipulation or violation of federal labor law. The recent activities of Amazon and Starbucks speak volumes of the anti-union mentality that pervades most US corporations. Accordingly, unionization in the US has been on decline for decades even though the majority of Americans see this development as a bad thing.

The backlash against unionization and worker rights in general in the US also takes place against the backdrop of an insidious ideological framework in which it has been regarded as a self-evident truth that individuals are responsible for their own fate and that government should not interfere with the free market out of concern for social and economic

inequalities.

Social Darwinism first appeared in US political and social thought in the mid-1860s, as historian Richard Hofstadter showed in his brilliant work *Social Darwinism in American Thought, 1860-1915*, but it would be a gross mistake to think that it ever went away. The conservative counterrevolution launched by Ronald Reagan in the early 1980s and refined by Bill Clinton in the early 1990s aimed at bringing back the loathsome idea that the government should not interfere in the "survival of the fittest" by helping the weak and the poor. Progressive economic ideas have been on the whole an anathema to the US political establishment and violence against labor militancy has always been the norm for almost all of the country's political history.

Long before the movement for an eight-hour workday in the US, which can be largely attributed to the influx of European immigrants mainly from Italy and Germany, radicalism had set foot across a number of post-colonial states. Rhode Island, often referred to as the Rogue Island, had one of the most radical economic policies on revolutionary debt, which was wildly popular with farmers and common folks in general, and experimented with the idea of radical democracy. At approximately the same time, Shays' rebellion in Massachusetts was also about money, debts, poverty, and democracy. Naturally, the elite in both states pulled out all stops to put an end to radicalism, and the pattern of suppressing popular demands has somehow survived in US politics across time.

The pattern of suppressing social and political movements from below continued well into modern times. The Red Scare, climaxed in the late 1910s on account of the Russian revolution and the rise of labor strikes and then renewed with the anti-com-



munist campaign of the 1940s, played a crucial role in the establishment's fervent dedication to crushing radicalism in the US and putting an end to challenges against capitalism.

In light of this, it is nothing short of a shame that May Day has been all but forgotten in US political culture even though the day traces its origins to the fight of American laborers for a shorter workday.

Last year, after marching on May Day with thousands of other people in the streets of Dublin, one of the questions that was posed to me was how could it be that International Workers' Day is not celebrated in the US. I am still struggling to come up with a convincing explanation, as may be evident from this essay, but Gore Vidal was not off the mark when he said, "we are the United States of Amnesia."

Nonetheless, the US labor movement has not yet been defeated and is surely not dead. In spite of the bloody suppression and the constant intimidation over many decades, the US labor movement has made its presence felt on numerous historic occasions, from the Battle of Cripple Creek in 1894 and the 1892 Homestead Strike in Pennsylvania to being behind the historic 1963 march on Washing-

ton for Jobs and Freedom, and continues doing so down to this day. Scores of victories for the working class were achieved last year—and all against prevailing odds. Moreover, in 2023, labor strikes in the US jumped to a 23-year high and some of the largest labor disputes in the history of the US were also recorded last year.

So, while May Day may have been formally obliterated by the powers that be from US public awareness, the labor movement is still alive and kicking. Even a small victory is still a victory, though time will tell of the historic significance of each step forward. Indeed, it is highly unlikely that the unionists, socialists, and anarchists that made Chicago in 1886 the center of the national movement for the eight-hour workday had foreseen what the impact of their actions would be in the struggle of the international labor movement for democracy, better wages, safer working conditions, and freedom of speech. All these social rights have been amplified over time, though much remains to be accomplished and the struggle continues.

But this is all the more reason why we must not forget—and indeed celebrate every year with marches and protests—May 1st.

A Tale of Two Labor Candidates

Steve Early

In late October, 2018, East Bay DSA members and other progressives organized a pre-election rally at a Berkeley High School auditorium. A wildly-cheering crowd of several thousand came to hear Senator Bernie Sanders and Congresswoman Barbara Lee. Welcoming everyone to the event was 34-year old Jesse Arreguin, who was backed by Sanders when he ran for mayor of Berkeley two years before.

On the platform with them was Jovanka Beckles, a former Richmond City Council member then running—with backing from DSA, Sanders, and Lee—for a State Assembly seat against a corporate Democrat named Buffy Wicks. As the SF Bayview reported, Arreguin’s “repeated mention of Jovanka’s name evoked prolonged chants and a standing ovation for JO-VAN-KA!”

When the two appear on stage again this fall, Arreguin won’t be leading cheers for Beckles. That’s because they are now competing to represent Senate District 7, covering 850,000 residents of Berkeley, Oakland, Richmond, and smaller East Bay communities.

That contest to replace State Senator Nancy Skinner, in a liberal stronghold, has already become one of the most expensive in the state. Super PACs funded by Uber, Lyft, PG&E, McDonalds, associations of builders, realtors, and landlords, plus the California Correctional Officers union spent millions on mass mailings and TV ads to insure Arreguin’s March 5 primary victory.

In an East Bay echo of Hillary Clinton’s 2016 Democratic presidential primary race put-down of Sanders, Arreguin attributed his first-place finish to “a track record of not just being a strong progressive advocate, but getting things done. My approach to leadership is to be progressive and pragmatic.” (emphasis added) As CR noted in its last issue, Richmond— Beckles

home base—is “the only city in the United States with a DSA-endorsed city council majority,” thanks to 20 years of grassroots electoral work by the Richmond Progressive Alliance (RPA). So EBD SA volunteers joined forces with RPA, other community groups, Our Revolution, Teamsters Joint Council 7, the ILWU, and ATU Local 192 to build a small-donor based, grassroots campaign that raised \$170,000 for a black working-class candidate, who pays dues to DSA,

Labor Candidate Competition

Currently an elected member of the AC Transit Board and a retired Teamster, Beckles placed second in a field of five Democrats and one Republican. (Arreguin got 32% of the vote, while she received nearly 18%.) Among those who lost were Dan Kalb, a liberal Oakland City Councilor, who raised twice as much as Beckles, and Kathryn Lybarger, a heavily-funded first-time candidate little known outside labor circles.

Lybarger is president of the 2.3 million-member California Labor Federation and top officer of a big UC-system campus workers union affiliated with AFSCME. The latter spent a reported \$1.9 million on her disappointing fourth-place finish, while other AFL-CIO unions, along with SEIU, generated nearly \$500,000 in direct donations for her. (Despite his own \$200,000 worth of building trades donations, Arreguin had the chutzpah to complain about this “special interest” spending on Lybarger by other unions!)

According to multiple sources, Lybarger’s campaign relied too heavily on local union officials, their paid staffers, and a controversial political consulting firm. Its founder is a Sacramento lobbyist who has worked not only for unions but also for Chevron and other foes of California property tax reform. (This bad move was reminiscent of Wick’s campaign use of a San Francisco consultant whose past clients have

included Airbnb and, in 2018, the city's Chamber of Commerce.)

In the East Bay, some young workers like Antonio Gomez decided that Lybarger was not their preferred labor candidate. Gomez first got involved in electoral politics as a community college student in Stockton. After moving to Oakland to be closer to a job in Walnut Creek, he learned about Beckles' campaign from social media posts by the EBDSA electoral committee. Even though not yet a DSA member, he liked what he saw on Jovanka's website and decided to canvass for her throughout the district. "It was a scramble," he says. "Everybody else spent all that money. But, at the end of the day, it's knocking on doors that gets results."

That's an opinion shared by Beckles' campaign manager, Otto Pippinger, who coordinated a crew of well-trained and highly motivated volunteers like Gomez. "Progressive campaigns don't come easy," Pippinger says. "They depend on tireless outreach— in countless personal conversations at the doors and on the phone."

A Rematch Against Big Money

The SD-7 primary outcome sets up a re-match between Beckles and some of the same corporate interests whose unlimited spending prevailed six years ago in AD-15, when Beckles lost to Wicks, by 54 to 46 percent margin. A former director of Hillary Clinton's Super-PAC, Priorities USA Action, Wicks now represents AD-14 and favors Arreguin. For more on the \$3 million worth of independent expenditures (IEs) and direct donations that enabled big business to buy an Assembly seat for Wicks in 2018, see this still informative EBDSA website, <https://buffywicksmoney/>.

Pundits from Politico to local commentator Steven Tavares agree that in, the latter's words, Beckles "faces an uphill battle against Arreguin, who will have nearly every aspect of a campaign on his side—endorsements, fundraising, powerful IEs, and most unions." By that Tavares means more conservative labor organizations—affiliated with state and local

building trades councils and the Northern California Council of Carpenters. They've already spent heavily on Arreguin, along with employers in their industry.

The Berkeley mayor comes with his own family ties to organized labor, via the United Farm Workers (UFW). He is the son of farm workers and was mentored, as a ten-year old, by legendary UFW leader Dolores Huerta (who has endorsed him). By age 20, Arreguin was an elected member of the Rent Stabilization Board in Berkeley. Four years later, he was elected to the city council. At age 32, he beat a business backed candidate for mayor by portraying her as someone "in the pocket of developers, real estate interests, and landlords."

Ironically, that's how local critics view Arreguin today. As Jack Kurzweil, a retired engineering professor at San Jose State and member of Berkeley's Wellstone Democratic Club told me: "Jesse's become an obstacle to everything pushed by the progressive community. After getting elected, he did a 180 degree turn on development and housing. He went from extremely conservative NIMBY politics to becoming a conservative YIMBY in the blink of an eye." (Arreguin prefers not to use such "pejorative acronyms," he told Business Insider three years ago when interviewed about his evolving views on housing.)

A Fighter from Richmond

Working in Beckles favor, Tavares believes, is the fact that she's "a fighter and hands-down more progressive than Arreguin." Ten years ago, running for a second term on the Richmond City Council, Beckles and her fellow RPA candidates (one of whom is now mayor) overcame \$3 million in corporate spending against them and in favor of a pro-Big Oil slate.

That media blitz was funded by Chevron, the city's biggest employer, its right-wing building trades allies, the Richmond police and fire-fighters' unions. That's a story told in *Refinery Town: Big Oil, Big Money, and the Remaking of an American City*,

As part of Big Oil's pre-election onslaught against Beckles, she was repeatedly gay-baited and harassed

by old guard Black politicians and their supporters in Richmond, which is a 80% non-white city of 115,000. They claimed she wasn't a "real African-American" due to her background as an immigrant woman of color from Panama.

After the SD-7 primary in March, Beckles was endorsed by former State Assembly member Son-dre Swanson from Oakland, the only other African-American in the race. In early April, she won the backing of U.S. Representative Ro Khanna, a House champion for labor law reform, Medicare for All, and the Green New Deal, who is a leading critic of corporate PAC influence in politics. On her website, Beckles reminds voters that she is a "proud queer spouse, mother, and grandmother," with endorsements from the LGBTQ Victory Fund and Harvey Milk Democratic Club.

Within labor, Beckles is seeking to expand her base of support by signing up more small donors, volunteers, and individual endorsers here. She is also wooing the county central labor bodies and local unions that backed Lybarger in the SD-7 primary or, in the case of the National Union of Healthcare Workers (NUHW) remained neutral. These same local affiliates of SEIU, California Teachers, Auto Workers, and CWA, plus the California Nurses Association, backed Beckles during her general election fight against Wicks six years ago.

Lybarger's own AFSCME Local 3299 was among those labor allies then. At the time, she hailed Beckles as someone "strongly aligned with our values and so representative of our members... We are utterly confident that she will continue to fight for us when she gets to Sacramento." So far, neither she nor AFSCME has yet to make a similar post-primary endorsement of Beckles in this year's senate race. (Lybarger did not respond to several email requests seeking comment for this story.)

An Under-Represented Working Class, White or Black

The two working-class candidates in the SD-7 primary

took different routes to electoral politics. Lybarger was a left-leaning UC-Berkeley gardener and rank-and-file reformer when she made her original run for AFSCME local president. She later became a top leader of the AFL-CIO in California and more mainstream labor figure, while continuing to get arrested for causes like marriage equality.

Beckles spent her entire public sector career as a union rank-and-filer, doing very demanding child protection work for Contra Costa County. But, after hours, she worked her way up the traditional ladder of local politics—through her engagement with a neighborhood council, Richmond city commission work, and then 2-terms on the city council, before trying to become a state legislator.

Successful candidates for that body in California and others states tend to have professional, managerial, or ownership class backgrounds, with accompanying personal affluence or ties to others with greater wealth. They leverage their law, business, consulting, or incumbent office-holder connections to build big campaign war chests, filled with contributions from industry associations, corporate PACs, and wealthy individuals. With far greater ease than any blue-collar or service sector worker, they can take time off to campaign, particularly if they're already on the public pay-roll as an "elected" (like Mayor Arreguin). Due to class and race-based disadvantages, only 116 out of 7,400 state legislators in the entire country come from working class backgrounds, according to a recent academic study. Just 2% of the Democrats and 1% of Republican legislators "currently or last worked in manual labor, service industry, clerical, or labor union jobs."

Amanda Litman, who recruits young progressives to run for office, says this data confirms "it's really hard for people who aren't already rich—or already independently wealthy, have rich partners or rich families—to enter politics. And the gatekeepers at the state level have typically recruited candidates who were safe bets, which is a candidate who can independently raise money."

Uber's Safe Bet

Business-backed front groups—with names like JobspAC, Housing Providers for Responsible Solutions, and the Keep California Golden Ad Hoc Committee—definitely view Jesse Arreguin as their safest bet in Sacramento. While these corporate funders were demonizing and drowning out Lybarger’s pro-worker message, some also paid for unauthorized mailers touting Beckles, based on the assumption that she would be a weaker general election opponent against their best boy from Berkeley.

According to Tavares, a veteran political reporter in the Bay Area, Arreguin’s corporate funders conducted “a master class in negative campaigning that bordered on character assassination.” One of their main smears against Lybarger involved public safety. A glossy mailer from the JobsPAC, a “Bi-Partisan Coalition of California Employers,” painted her as “too extreme” for the East Bay because she “put the community at greater risk” by “calling for defunding local police.”

According to this hit piece—paid for by Uber, McDonalds, the California Building Industry Association, and other big donors—Arreguin has a “blueprint for safety” that involves “work[ing] with law enforcement to keep families safe” and better reflects true “progressive leadership.” Anti-union Uber alone spent at least \$250,000 on pro-Arreguin messaging like this, while buying \$800,000 worth of negative ads and mailers against Lybarger, according to the San Jose Mercury News.

Healthcare and Housing Differences

To counter a similar propaganda offensive against her this Fall, Beckles will try to shift the debate to voter concerns about healthcare and housing (which Arreguin cites as his “number one issue”). To make medical coverage universal and more affordable, she has long supported a single payer system. Arreguin is backed by the Political Action Committee of the California Medical Association, which does not favor replacing job-based medical insurance with a government-run universal healthcare program of any type.

The candidates are also likely to clash over rent control, given Arreguin’s backing by the Califor-

nia Apartment Association and California Realtors Association. The Tenants Union in Berkeley, which endorsed Beckles in the primary, argues that the mayor is “a danger to tenants, affordable housing, and every progressive issue.” In contrast, Beckles will have the chance to champion a ballot initiative that would, among other reforms, abolish current state-wide restrictions on the ability of cities like Richmond, Berkeley, and Oakland to expand the scope of their existing rent control measures. (Arreguin did not respond to an email request for clarification of his position on this hot topic.)

In early April, Beckles joined housing activists at a two-day strategy session in Los Angeles that included Sanders, Khanna, LA Mayor Karen Bass, and Michael Weinstein, whose AIDs Healthcare Foundation (AHF) helped get rent control expansion on the ballot again. (It was defeated in 2018 and 2020.) “There are 17 million renters in California—that’s 45% of the population,” Weinstein reminded the group. He called the Justice for Renters campaign “a battle for the poor and working-class people” who find housing in the state increasingly unaffordable.

Beckles is also the candidate most opposed to the Biden Administration sending billions of dollars to the Israeli military at a time when there are so many un-met social and economic needs in the East Bay. Throughout months of turmoil on the Berkeley City Council, Arreguin has blocked passage of a pro-cease fire resolution—quite a departure from the city’s many past official stances on controversial foreign policy issues.

Looking ahead to November, Beckles sees the general election in SD-7 as a contest “between a corporate-free and a corporate-funded candidate”—with her campaign being labor’s only hope of stopping big business from buying another seat in the legislature. It will be up to Beckles’ supporters who belong to unions—which bet heavily on Lybarger and lost badly—to remind their leaders that the fight is not over. Otherwise, organized labor in the East Bay will be handing a second-round victory to arch-enemies like Uber.

AI, Work & Unions in Germany

Thomas Klikauer

In the “not-so-artificial” minds of many, there is no doubt, that artificial intelligence (AI) is changing the world of work. Yet, corporate bosses are already sensing great “labor-saving potentials” – which is nothing new under capitalism.

That said, it is also nothing new under capitalism that workers fear for their jobs whenever new technologies arrive in the hands of bosses.

The neoliberal IMF, for example, predicts that “AI will affect almost 40% of jobs around the world”. At times, such glass-ball-like predictions go wild – particularly when plugging outlandish numbers out of thin air. It is rather commonly known that, “economists have successfully predicted nine of the last five recessions”.

Meanwhile, technical innovations like the steam engine, the Spinning Jenny, the diesel and electric engine, IT, digitalization, and now AI have not led to mass starvation or the end of capitalism – often on the contrary to dire prophecies.

Yet, the use of AI is already a common practice in many companies. AI brings with it both opportunities and challenges. In any case, AI is widely seen as a driver of innovations creating new markets for new (read: AI) products. Not unknown to corporate scandals, management consultancy McKinsey, for example, assumes that AI can create an additional value of a whopping €10 to €20 trillion per year – another wild prediction!

This would correspond to about three to five times of Germany’s gross domestic product. Much of this will come from the simple fact that AI – like most technologies – will increase efficiency.

With the help of AI, operational processes in many areas of work can be improved. These range from the intelligent evaluation of large amounts of data to the

automated processing of customer inquiries to quality controls. Many administrations are already using AI to select the correct process needed.

Beyond that, AI can quickly and accurately analyze large amounts of data to identify relevant patterns and draw insights, results, and recommendations useful to businesses. AI is already used in the field of mechanical engineering to issue predictions of the maintenance of systems.

AI can also detect when, for example, a passenger elevator might experience a failure. AI can even recognize even the smallest changes in operating times. In the field of e-commerce, it is already used to adjust the assortment of goods and tailor target marketing ever more to the individual.

In the area of customer services, virtual assistants and chatbots can improve connections to customers by providing fast and precise answers. AI can give helpful answers, for example, on product information and orders. Corporate bosses expect that the use of AI will save companies personnel, money, and time.

For example, in the area of recruiting and “onboarding” international specialists, AI can support faster integration of new recruits into companies – converting human beings into human resources.

AI-based translation tools can help to overcome language barrier and facilitate communication in multi-national teams.

In the area of HRM, chatbots can answer standard questions about company policies, work processes, and even organizational processes. AI can support e-learning by creating training models that are adaptive to individual skills, for example, of international experts. AI can also assist with formalities, visa documents, and employment contracts.

Virtually all of this can also lead to job losses. There are plenty of concerns that the introduction of AI into the world of work can lead to AI being a job killer. Others argue that this is rather unfounded.

In fact, numerous studies have shown that AI is probably more likely to create additional jobs and change existing ones than eliminating those jobs. At the same time, new job profiles, job descriptions, and job titles are also emerging.

It might no longer be the case that it takes a software engineer or an expert to train AI systems and adopt them to the specific needs of companies or industries. Activities such as “prompt engineering” – formulating the right prompts to AI for the best possible results – are more and more in demand.

Inevitably, there are ethical issues with AI as AI involves human beings. Very easily, the application of AI can lead to misinformation, discrimination, plagiarism, as well as copyright infringement when using data.

At least in Europe, there will be Europe-wide rules for the use of AI very soon. The EU’s AI rules are intended to ensure that AI systems are transparent, comprehensible, and non-discriminatory.

The EU will divide AI systems into different risk groups. In short, the higher the potential danger of an AI application, the higher the requirements to safeguard its use will be.

For example, AI that is used to manipulate or monitor human behavior will be banned in Europe. The EU’s act prohibits real-time biometric facial recognition in public areas – also known as face scanning.

At work, it is known that any changes in working arrangements often rely on the willingness of employees and trade unions. Both need to get involved in the technological change and AI. At the same time, many workers and trade unions are anxious about the potentials for change.



This is no surprise given the past experiences of trade unions and workers. It has become common for companies to use technological change to eliminate workers.

The firing of workers often occurred under the corporate euphemism of ‘restructuring’. It became so bad that workers started talking of “restructuring for the sake of restructuring”.

According to a 2024 study “Work, Workforce, Workers” by the corporate consulting company Accenture – which, after its involvement in the Enron scandal, quickly changed its name from Arthur Anderson to Accenture – it was found that six out of ten workers want more clarity from their employers about what the technology means for their future.

Self-evidently, those companies that have involved employees from the very beginning have reduced distrust in AI. As with many workplace issues – particularly on any sort of technological change – “trust” remains a key issue in the acceptance of AI.

Trust in AI can be achieved, for example, through a trade union engagement but also through employee training and regular workshops. However, all of this is nothing new.

Management experts have been talking about trust for decades. Perhaps ever since McGregor's "The Human Side of Enterprise" (1960).

Whether with or without trust, hardly anyone can currently assess where exactly the use of generative AI is heading in the world of work.

Meanwhile, according to a study conducted by US-based employee website "Indeed.com" which involved 16,671 "professionals" from eleven countries, it was found that only 41% of Germans have a positive view of AI in the workplace, while the figure is 57% in the USA, and 75% in India.

The same study also shows a "deep skepticism" about the use of AI in German workplaces. Much anxiety might be caused by uncertainties about one's own job security.

Indeed, 48% of Germans fear that AI could cost more jobs than it could create. At the same time, German corporate executives and their HR managers remain optimistic. Yet, their attitudes towards AI are still less positive compared to their international counterparts.

Despite the prevailing skepticism about AI in Germany, there is a relatively clear willingness to adapt to AI. An overwhelming majority of employees – a whopping 87% – say they are ready to adapt to changes and they are ready to learn the necessary skills.

Almost half of German employees – 47% – emphasize the need for further workplace training in order to be able to cope with technological change.

Interestingly, the proportion of those who believe that the required skills in their profession will change drastically in the next five years is 22% in Germany – compared to 27% globally, and 54% in, for example, India. This shows a certain reluctance in the German working population.

The study by job search engine "Indeed.com" also emphasizes the role of employers in supporting their employees through opportunities to participate in workplace education. 61% of the German participants

expect their employers to support them in adapting to new technologies.

In addition, 48% of Germans believe it is a company's responsibility to prepare its employees for the changes associated with AI.

In other words, continuing education and worker engagement remain imperative for the successful implementation of AI. Investing in the training of employees and engagement can reduce uncertainties.

It also strengthens ties with the company and thus both – workers and management – will benefit from the transformation in the long term.

These ties can further be reinforced when managers work with trade unions and with Germany's all important works councils. A recent study on this produce three core findings:

1. **Pro-Active Unions:** workers' representatives such as Germany's works councils do not simply adapt to AI. They do not follow a reactive and defensive approach toward AI. In some cases, unions and works councils have actually pushed companies to develop strategies for the introduction of AI. These strategies tend to follow the ethics of a human-centred design for AI;
2. **Engagement:** secondly, German employee representatives have adopted a "process-oriented" way of working on AI. Discussions on AI in workplaces are never a "one-off event". Instead, this is an ongoing dialogue with management and to establish work processes and committees to guide the introduction of AI;
3. **Monitoring:** lastly, employee representatives also monitor corporate digitalisation and the use of AI.

This makes it clear that there is a willingness and an ability to successfully meet the challenges of AI and adjacent technologies in the world of work.

Both companies and management on the one side as well as workers and trade unions on the other side, play a central role in this by providing the necessary support for the introduction of AI.

Why Doesn't the World Make Sense Anymore?

Jerry Harris interviewed by Bill Fletcher Jr.

Much of the Left would like to act as if nothing fundamental has changed in the way that capitalism has been operating over the last fifty years. Yes, some will acknowledge, the collapse of the USSR and the hegemony of the USA has been critical, but that seems to be where much of the analysis stops. The impact of dramatic changes in technology and, more importantly, the growing interconnections at a global level within capitalism are treated as minor tweaks to an otherwise firm system.

This interview, with noted Global Studies expert Jerry Harris, challenges this framework and is aimed at helping the reader appreciate the dramatic changes which have taken place within global capitalism and the various consequences that have unfolded, including vis a vis the nation-state, tensions among nations, and the class struggle. This will, hopefully, help us consider the implications in terms of international solidarity, struggle and organization.

With that in mind, let's jump in.

You are one of the originators of an analysis of global capitalism which is often called the "transnational capitalist class" analysis or TCC. This framework began to rise in the early 2000s. What are the key elements of this analysis and how is it different from what preceded it?

Capitalism was established as a global system with colonialism. But it goes through historic changes. This was recognized by Lenin and other revolutionary thinkers who analyzed imperialism. Globalization is a continuation of this process. As global capitalism becomes more integrated and widespread it changed how production and

finance is carried out, which changed labor conditions and the character of the capitalist class. Imperialism was a nation-centric system in which the Global South was used for resource extraction while most production was carried out in the imperialist center. International competition was mainly through the export of goods produced by national champions, promoted and protected by their national states. Today the TCC rules over global assembly lines, vast flows of capital across borders, and joint investments. This doesn't work through protected national capital versus foreign national capital, but an integrated global financial system. For example, 40 percent of US stocks are owned by foreign investors, which mixes with US wealthy investors. This creates a capitalist class rooted in transnational relationships and accumulation, rather than their own limited national markets.

There are many opponents of the TCC thesis. One of the most famous was the late Samir Amin, the Egyptian Marxist known for his argument about the need for countries in the global South to "delink" from imperialism. He identified what he called the "Triad," a bloc of the US, Western Europe, Japan, as the dominating forces of global capitalism. These seem to be the major forces of capitalism. How do you respond?

The Global South didn't delink from imperialism, just the opposite. The anti-colonial capitalists of the Third World matured into business partners with Western imperialism. About a third of the TCC consist of multi-millionaire and billionaires from the Global South, and about a quarter of all foreign investments come from this TCC faction. Historic inequalities still exist from the old imperialist hierarchy, and so the greatest wealth is

still in the Triad. The power of the US dollar as a global currency is another inequality. Old ideologies, habits, relationships, and culture don't simply disappear. The TCC is rife with contradictions, just as national capitalist political factions and industries have competitive contradictions. Nevertheless, there is a common project to build a unified global system of capitalist penetration shared by the leading capitalists of the Triad and the TCC in the Global South. But different ideas and interests over how to accomplish it exist, and often these reflect the historic development of each country. It's a dialectic between the old and new, the previous Western imperialist hierarchy and the new transnational relationships. Since about 1980 the process of globalization has been hegemonic, but the changing balance of forces creates ongoing contradictions.

Where does the existence of various imperialist powers fit into the TCC analysis? If the capitalist classes of all these states are united into a TCC, why do we see conflict between the USA, China, Russia, etc.?

First point, there is not a "united" TCC, but an internally competitive one only united around a common project. But as to the other issues you raise, there are always winners and losers in capitalism. Economic restructuring under globalization with its neoliberal policies hurt large sections of the working class. Workers in the West who had benefited from post W.W. II Keynesian social and industrial policies underwent a profound change in their living conditions. Much of the social contract was torn-up, deindustrialization meant layoffs for millions, unions with their decent pay and benefits were undermined, inequality and insecurity grew. After the severe economic crisis of 2008 these social contradictions came to a head with a loss of legitimacy in Western governments and for ruling political parties. Mass movements erupted both to the left and right throwing neoliberalism and globalization into crisis. We are in a period now in which different blocs in the ruling class are seeking different solutions to the crisis. Essentially regaining legitimacy and stability through

post-Keynesian and environmental reformism, or authoritarian stability based in the "legitimacy" of white supremacy. Within the context of this crisis contradictions between countries have reemerged because nationalism, both for the reformist and authoritarian wings, is an important tool to regain internal political and social control. But underneath all the hot rhetoric, hundreds of billions of dollars in foreign investments continue. Over 6,000 US companies sued the government over Trump's tariffs. And even when you look at Biden's multibillion dollar subsidies to compete with China, a lot of that money is going to Taiwanese, Korean and Japanese firms. In a crisis period of shifting and competing hegemonic blocs complexities multiply, and so tensions between national and transnational interests increase.

What is the role of state actors and the TCC in global capitalism, i.e., in whose interests are they operating? Does the legitimacy crisis affect them both to the same extent?

I think Lenin once spoke of state leadership as the executive board for capitalism. In other words, they hold responsibility to oversee the general stability of the system rather than the interest of any one economic sector. When a new historic hegemonic bloc becomes dominant, they begin to exert control over the state. Through the control of political power, they reengineer laws, regulations, trade rules, taxation, and so on to serve their economic needs and strategic vision. Think of the large number of new bureaucracies created in the first 100 days of the New Deal to carry forth Keynesian economic restructuring. This process aligns the politics of the state with the strategic economic needs of the capitalist system. But a disconnect occurs during a period of deep crisis, when consensus around the hegemonic bloc breaks down and there is a crisis of legitimacy. The loss of political legitimacy not only occurs among the general population, but within ruling circles also. Today the TCC wants to retain as much of their global system as possible, but they are split over how to do so. They always had tactical differences, but now they are confronting strategic

political and economic questions. Some realize the excess' of neoliberalism have created such economic inequality they are willing to renew the social contract, take advantage of Biden's billions in green subsidies, while attempting to limit restrictions on global production and financial flows. What they term "high fences around small yards" in relationship to China.

Others believe they can ride Trump's nationalist rhetoric to authoritarian stability, defeat the labor upsurge, and get more tax breaks. They may need to concede to some protectionists trade restrictions to keep the populist base in-line, but overall, they think a billionaire transactional president will align with their neoliberal politics and global financial desires. There is a real protectionist drive among sectors of the working class and certainly among small and mid-size business folks. Additionally, there are right-wing Congressmen whose districts have little to do with TCC interests and are ideologically committed to reactionary nationalism. Just as left social movements can extract concessions, so can right-wing populist movements. But I think the TCC is trying to figure out how to ride the tiger without being eaten. So, the basic division is over what type of social concessions are needed to maintain globalization, and how to manage protectionism. There are a lot of moving parts because neither bloc has achieved hegemony, and the balance of forces are evenly split. State and political elites are in the forefront of attempting to consolidate a social consensus that can obtain stable rule for one or the other hegemonic project. And in doing so national political concerns may become paramount over the transnational economic concerns of the TCC. But the country is so split I think we're in for a long period of instability.

What is the difference between the TCC analysis and World Systems Theory? Why does it make any difference?

World Systems Theory has a lot to offer, but I think it was more relevant during the period of anti-colonial struggles following W.W. II. At that

time, you could say there existed a Third World bloc opposed to imperialism that encompassed the suppressed national bourgeoisie in the Global South. But that time has come and gone. Some of today's leading World Systems theorists like Chris Chase-Dunn have focused on social movements. But too many people take the theory to divide the world into competitive blocs, i.e. the semi-peripheral and peripheral versus the imperial center. But the big capitalists of the Global South, which encompasses the semi-peripheral and peripheral, are part of the TCC. They are not compradors or subservient, they are full and powerful partners. The wealth and power of TCC members, both from the South and North, is dependent on their common relationship and integration. Furthermore, if we use class analysis, we can say there is a semi-peripheral, peripheral, and center inside each country. Oppressed national minorities in the US are in the semi-peripheral, working-class people with livable wages in the peripheral, and capitalists in the center. World Systems Theory divides the world by states rather than class. If the center oppresses the semi-peripheral based on state identity, where does that leave oppressed national minorities inside the center. Marx called on "workers of the world to unite," but if we divide the world into blocs of competitive states, we divide the working class. That was the basis of the split between the Bolsheviks and social-democrats in W. W. I.

There are some on the Left who argue that the Left in the USA must concentrate on opposing "our own" bourgeoisie. From where does that assertion originate? Given your TCC analysis, how would you respond?

I think this comes from a left acceptance of the foreign relations establishment Realist School that originated with George Keenan and carried forward by Henry Kissinger and others. It has unfortunately achieved a type of ideological hegemony including many on the left. Realists, like World Systems Theory, divide the world into blocs of competing countries. The Realists take the side of US imperialism and its allies, while Left Realists



create a bloc of anti-US countries and apply it to all international situations. This had some relevance during the era of anti-colonial struggles in the Third World. But the TCC faction, which has dominant influence in states of the Global South, doesn't constitute an anti-US bloc. There are trillions of dollars invested between China, India, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Turkey, Mexico, Indonesia, Angola, alongside many others, with Western capital. And these are mutual investments that benefit the TCC factions in all countries. Moreover, can we consider India and China in the same bloc when their troops are killing each other on the border. Are Iran and Saudi Arabia in the same bloc when they wish for the destruction of each other. Was Brazil part of the bloc under Bolsonaro, or only under Lula. Do we support states as part of an anti-US bloc when they violently oppress mass movements, as in Belarus, Myanmar, or Iran. So yes, there are some forms of unity among Global South countries on individual issues, but there is no real consistency. That's because the

TCC are competitive capitalists with financial cross-border relationships that have nothing to do with blocs. The biggest problem with seeing the entire world through the lens of US imperialism is that it blinds people to the aggression of regional imperialism. The primary example being non-support for the independence of Ukraine under invasion by Russia, and all sorts of excuses put forth for "understanding" why the need for Russian security includes seizing foreign territory. That is right out of the Realists play book that calls for recognition of great powers, their territorial guarantees, and their zones of interest. State conflicts certainly exist and are important. And it's important to support states when they are threatened or oppressed by other states, as with Ukraine or defending Cuba or Venezuela from US interference. But what is primary in our worldview, international class solidarity based in the unity of the Western working class and oppressed people of the Global South, or supporting one or another supposed bloc lead by various TCC factions.

US Labor Today and the Way Forward

Kim Scipes

The labor movement in the United States used to be respected and looked to for leadership; people cared about what positions labor took, watched when they mobilized, noticed the causes they supported. This was especially true among the left. Today, for most of the country, crickets. Including much of the left. And yet, labor is a source of potential power unrivaled by any other bottom-up social grouping in the country.

As one who has written extensively about labor around the world and in the United States I have been thinking over a number of years about the future direction of the US labor movement. But this thinking is not just based on writing or just academic research; I've done that and also have years of experience as a labor activist and as one who has worked in blue, white, and pink collar jobs over the past 40+ years and in multiple locations across the country.

I argue that we haven't had a labor movement in the US since 1949, when the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) expelled 11 so-called "left-led" unions with somewhere between 750,000 and a million members; we've had only a trade union movement. What's the difference? A labor movement looks out for the well-being of all working people in the country, while a trade union movement only looks out for members of its member unions.

And, especially since 1981, when the trade union movement failed to defend the striking air traffic controllers in the PATCO (Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization) strike when attacked by President Ronald Reagan, the trade union movement leaders have done little but watch its ranks shrink, its prestige fall, and its power decline. Millions of jobs have been shipped overseas while the manufacturing economy has been decimated, and most of the service sector jobs since created have remained ununionized, underpaid, and with many fewer protections for workers. Yes, acting together, the trade union movement has worked to elect Democrats such as

Bill Clinton and Barack Obama to office, but between signing NAFTA (North American Free Trade Act) in 1994, and the failure to pass a bill to enhance labor organizing, I'd say neither could be considered blazing successes. Individual unions have succeeded here and there, but only episodically and not consistently, and usually only because of some tactical feature that gave it a winning advantage in a particular struggle.

The only consistent trade union success since the early 1980s has been in sucking up US government money—often between \$30-75 million annually—which has allowed AFL-CIO foreign policy leaders to act behind the backs of most of the organization's leaders and all of its affiliated union members, in our name, in efforts generally intended to undercut foreign workers' struggles against multinational corporations and US government foreign policy projects.

Worse, even while nonetheless being helpful to foreign workers in a few cases, the AFL-CIO has acted to legitimize the imperialist National Endowment for Democracy (NED) by serving as one of its four "core institutes," along with the international wing of the Democratic Party, the international wing of the Republican Party, and the international wing of its domestic archenemy, the US Chamber of Commerce, in NED's on-going project of supporting and advancing the US Empire.

Thus, the trade unions' leadership has generally done little to advance the interests and well-being of US workers, while acting in differential manners—usually bad—with foreign workers. I don't think this was what Karl Marx and Frederick Engels were expecting when they echoed the French feminist, Flora Tristan, urging "Workers of the World, Unite!" Yet, despite the general failure of the trade union movement leadership, especially since 1981, the reality is that unions are one set of institutions that, at their best, are of the workers, by the workers, and for the workers. You see workers fighting to make their



unions “real”—trying to make them part of a labor movement that serves the interests of all workers if not the entire society—over the years. We see workers creating reform movements over the years trying to transform their unions for the benefit of the entire membership if not all workers.

Perhaps the most famous of late has been the reform organization UAWD (Unite All Workers for Democracy) inside the United Auto Workers. UAWD came together to fight for direct elections of UAW leadership instead of the convention elections, which had led to a one-party state since 1946 and the election of Walter Reuther. Over time, a number of top-level UAW leaders were charged with corruption, and in a consent agreement with the Federal government, the UAW had to shift to direct elections for top officers. UAWD put forth a partial slate headed by Shawn Fain, and then proceeded to win every leadership position they sought, ultimately gaining control of the international union’s executive board. In turn, Fain and his administration led the 2023 fight against the Big Three auto companies—General Motors, Ford, and Stellantis, the parent of Chrysler—which then won their strike

in the Fall. While the UAW did not win all of its demands in the strike, it clearly demonstrated the power of organized workers who have a leadership that will fight for and with them. And following that successful strike, Volkswagen workers at Chattanooga, Tennessee voted to join the UAW, with help from the German union, IG Metal, although in the face of governors from six southern states telling them to not do so.

It is important to understand that unions are important to many workers, that they make a difference in the workplace, and they usually mean higher wages, better benefits, seniority systems, and a recognizable “rule of law” in the workplace, the latter which places some limits on management authority and discipline; a big difference from the situation of most workplaces where workers give up most if not all of their rights when they enter company grounds.

So, where does this lead us?

I want to build off a study that I did originally for my PhD dissertation in 2003. It was a comparative-historical sociological study of unionization in the steel

and meatpacking industries in the greater Chicago area (including Northwest Indiana) between 1933-1955, examining how the unions addressed racial oppression in the workplace, union, and communities in which these workers operated. Long story short: despite drawing from the exact same labor pool—white ethnics from eastern and southern Europe, African Americans from the rural South, and some Mexicans—the steelworkers’ organizations ignored the issues of white supremacy and racism, while the packinghouse workers directly confronted it: in 1939, in racist, segregated Chicago, eight out of 14 packinghouse local unions were headed by African Americans!

From this study, and differing from much research on the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations), the labor organization both of these unions ultimately joined, I recognized there were two different conceptualizations of trade unions within the CIO; ultimately, I referred to that of the steelworkers as “business” unions and that of the packinghouse workers as “social justice” unions. And this was important because I found that how the members thought about their union determined subsequent organizational behavior.

And that brings things to where we are now: there are still two forms of unionism available to unions and their members. Business unions focus the power they are able to mobilize to fight for workers in the workplace, such as wages, working conditions, seniority, “rule of law,” etc. However, they generally ignore anything beyond the workplace, despite workers having lives outside of the workplace. Social justice unions focus that power in the workplace to not only address workplace issues, but they use the power in the workplace to also address things in workers’ lives beyond the workplace, including things such as racism, misogyny, and homophobia, as well as things like health care, education, the climate crisis, etc. Ideally, unions becoming or transforming themselves into social justice unions would consider the range of interests from the local to the global, ultimately seeking to join with unions and other people’s organizations around the world to make things better for all. Recognizing these two different possibilities and what

union members want to do in light of this understanding is important. It is important that these issues get discussed by the members of each union themselves; this is not limited to union leadership or even activists.

The reality is that the trade union movement today is so weak that unions rarely have a chance to win their battles without gaining public support. Unions have often recognized this and have appealed to community support to help them win their battles. Yet, what do the communities get back from the unions? Often nothing. This one way form of “solidarity” is simply not sustainable; you can only withdraw from the well so many times without giving back before it runs dry.

Transforming business unions into social justice unions offers a solution: they build on their foundation in the workplace but join with community members—however defined—to work together in ways to improve life for all concerned.

There are issues that simply cannot be solved on a local, regional, or even national basis; the climate crisis jumps immediately to mind, although there are other issues such as global sexual slavery and related issues, pandemics, war and empire that can only be approached from a global perspective. We have to understand issues such as these from a global perspective and begin educating and organizing our union sisters and brothers on this level. But our ideas about our unions must at least allow for this, if not actively encourage work on this level by all members. Key to this is implementing an educational program that confronts these issues and encourages workers to think about how their union could work to address issues key to workers in this larger sense. The old slogan, “Think globally, act locally,” encapsulates these ideas.

This, however, is not going to change by itself: activists in each union need to stimulate discussion within their organization about whether they should confine their unionism just to the workplace, or to use that power for the good of all.

I would suggest trying to find a group of union members that think having this debate within one’s union



to be crucial, and work to unify this core. Then they could create a campaign to spread this issue throughout the union, initially through one's workplace and/or local and then through the national or international union they are affiliated with. It should be run the same way as any organizing campaign; and that is to win.

When confronted by this question—how do we want our union to go forward, alone or with our neighbors (from the local area to the globe)?—this is a question that encourages workers to think about these issues and get involved in participating in strengthening the union. Once a union is seen as something everyone participates in, or at least as many as possible, instead of just something that “others” do, we strengthen our individual unions. When we come to common responses, then we can extend our conceptualization of the union to other unions, locally, regionally, and nationally.

This can be extended globally when we find out what

is happening elsewhere: there are workers around the world seeking to join globally to fight for a better world for all. Yes, this is happening among workers in other imperial countries but, as we see in the case of SIGTUR (Southern Initiative on Globalization and Trade Union Rights), workers in Africa, Asia and Latin America are finding ways to unite across their geographical regions and the globe to organize for a better world for all. I think they would be delighted to have North Americans join in their project, and that can only happen when unions take that broader, social justice union approach.

In short: innovate or stagnate. The business unionism of the past 40 years (in particular) has been a failure. Either we think about unionism in new ways and establish new ways of thinking about and joining other movements, or most of our unions die a long, slow, painful death.

It's time we start rebuilding the labor movement: for the good of all!

Activist Diary: Go to the Meeting

Cynthia Peters

Back in the early 2000s, I was doing a lot of neighborhood based organizing against the war in Iraq. My partner and I brought our kids with us to meetings and protests, and our house was often full of people planning the next action.

One day, our 11-year old daughter got very frustrated with me. “Mom,” she said, “there’s a war going on and all you do is hold meetings.”

Out of the mouths of babes, right?

How often have we felt the helplessness and frustration of facing an array of atrocities, which can only be matched by an array of responses that feel in no way adequate. Like holding a meeting. Again and again and again.

Fast forward to 2024, and we are slip-sliding to climate catastrophe, witnessing a genocide in Palestine, and being gobsmacked by extreme, ever-increasing (and deadly) inequality. And what is there to do about any of this? Sometimes the best thing – the only thing – to do: attend another meeting.

I know they can be frustrating. They can be badly organized. The agenda is too rigid, or even worse there’s no agenda at all, and the tyranny of structurelessness allows the numbskulls to take over. We spin our wheels, dutifully note next steps, and spend half an hour trying to determine the next meeting time. We shake our heads sadly. There is an emoji for that, right? If so, we surreptitiously text it to a friend with a small cry of desperation that echoes my daughter’s incredulity. “What am I doing here?”

That has happened to me plenty of times. But I’ve also been at meetings that effectively organized campaigns, that gave “each one” a chance to “teach one,” that sparked new and creative

strategies, and that – perhaps most importantly – broke the isolation that so many people experience. These meetings I believe are more numerous than the duds, but even if they are not, it’s still on us to go to the meeting.

Why? Because a meeting is a chance for people to put their minds together, and there is literally no other way to develop a grassroots response to the empire’s exploits. Meetings can change lives and save lives by sharing the most mundane information (so... I have some rights as a tenant?) to the more momentous (so... this is what solidarity feels like?)

Some examples:

- Jewish Voice for Peace has been holding “power half-hours” (by Zoom) every day since the Israeli invasion of Gaza. With thousands of views on youtube and hundreds in attendance, these daily check-ins have given activists a way to feel grounded and connected with others across the country focused on raising the social cost of the U.S. supporting Israel’s crimes in Palestine.
- At a recent anti-eviction protest in Medford (organized by City Life/Vida Urbana), tenants talked about forming a union to fight their corporate landlord’s enormous rent increases. At first, people were scared to meet in public places. So a tenant opened his small one-bedroom apartment for the meetings to take place, and neighbors crowded in. “We continue meeting to keep up our campaign against the landlord,” he said, “but we also meet because we’re like family. We get together every week, so people remember they’re not alone. Now we know about each other and care about each other. We call each other just to say, ‘How are you feeling?’”



- At this same protest in Medford, one city councilor after another spoke against the landlord. They used strong, anti-corporate language that you don't usually hear from elected officials. "What's the deal with this overwhelmingly progressive city council in Medford?" I asked one of them. I wasn't expecting an actual answer, but she had one: "Talk to him," she said, pointing to a guy in the crowd. He's with Our Revolution. So I did, and I found out that a few years ago, a small group of people set out to change the political landscape in this town, and they've succeeded through relentless door-knocking and organizing – all launched at, you guessed it, meetings!

In *Lord of the Rings*, Gandalf tells Frodo we don't get to pick our historical moment, but we do get to decide what to do with the time given to us. In our historical moment, our work is to go to the meet-

ing. The meeting isn't effective? Work with others to improve it. The meeting isn't inclusive enough? Change it so it is. The meeting is boring, no fun, too sleep-inducing? Make a rule against endless droning (and enforce it!), share food with each other, sing a song. The meeting is irredeemable? Give up on it and find a better one.

The thought of another meeting may make you roll your eyes. But whether it's genocide occurring half-way across the world or your community getting eviscerated by greedy landlords, another meeting is exactly the appropriate response. Get together with others. Figure out what to do.

Cynthia Peters is a volunteer organizer with City Life/Vida Urbana in Boston. She has written for ZNet and other publications, and she is a longtime activist in the city. Her day job is editing an adult literacy magazine called The Change Agent.