



MAGAZINE

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“There are deadly links between war, the plunder of resources, and climate breakdown. Blood red stains follow their concurrence across the map from Iraq, to Amazonia, to DRC, to Gaza.”

-Alexandria Shaner



www.znetwork.org

Title photo: Nonviolent demonstration at Beni to recall the persistence of the massacres in Beni-Ituri, to denounce the ineffectiveness of the Tshisekedi administration to stem them, and to call out the international community for its silence and complicity. | Photo: LuchaRDC

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Radical New Stage in Ruling Class Modalities of Control

William I. Robinson interviewed by Arti Gerçek

The Israeli genocide in Gaza is a response to the crisis of global capitalism where extermination becomes an option for the system. Lighting the fuse of mass disaffection with the status quo, our protests are a direct threat to the transnational capitalist class.

Arti Gerçek: As you know, the genocide perpetrated by Israel in the war after October 7 has caused intense reactions all over the world. While states have mostly sided with Israel, social movements have sided with Palestine. What do you think about the contrast?

Robinson: I don't think most states around the world have sided with Israel. The majority of governments represented in the United Nations General Assembly have voted in favor of resolutions since October 2023 calling for Palestine to have full membership in the UN, for a ceasefire in Gaza, and urging states to prevent the forcible transfer of Palestinians. Many governments around the world have condemned the genocide and at last count there were several dozen governments that have joined the South African lawsuit at the International Court of Justice charging Israel with genocide. Even Egypt, which normalized relations with Israel in 1980 and is no friend of the Palestinian freedom struggle has declared its intention to back the South African suit. But governments around the world could and must do much more. Only a few states have cut their diplomatic relations with Israel. China is not supporting the genocide but neither is it doing very much to challenge Israel and help the Palestinians. India of course supports the genocide because its government is also based on proto-fascist repression and the persecution of the Muslim minority, so for it the Israeli model is attractive.

What is entirely true is that the Western states, led by the United States, along with Germany and the UK,

have provided steadfast support for Israel. They are complicit in the genocide. Really, we have to consider this an Israeli-US genocide. This is not surprising. The United States is the principal sponsor of the Israeli regime. For decades it has provided a ceaseless flood of military and economic aid to the Zionist regime along with steadfast political and diplomatic backing. The Zionist project is fully dependent on this US sponsorship.

The larger story here is that Israel was created by Western capitalism, literally. The UK colonized Palestine from 1916-1920 as the Ottoman empire crumbled and then in 1948 turned it over to the Zionists. It did this as a strategy for establishing a platform and outpost for world capitalist penetration and control over the Middle East at a time when the region was experiencing decolonization and Arab nationalism and socialism were on the rise. One part of Western strategy for the post-WWII Middle East was backing Israel and the other part was propping up conservative Arab regimes that would have a stake in, and defend, international capitalist economic and geopolitical interests in the region and maintain tight control over the Arab masses.

The Israeli genocide has shocked and outraged the world community. It has touched a raw nerve. There is a global intifada of solidarity with Palestine. This is an historic turning point. The world now sees the Zionist project for what it is, a project that can only culminate in fascism and genocide if it is not defeated. But the outrage worldwide among social movements and publics points to something bigger, an acceleration of the contradictions of a global capitalism sinking into deeper crisis. We see our own plight in the plight of the Palestinians, our own fate bound up with that of the Palestinians. Mass disaffection with the status quo around the world has been simmering and

is now reaching a boiling point. The Israeli genocide lit the fuse.

In the larger picture the genocide is a response to the crisis of global capitalism. The ruling groups fear mass uprisings. They have been preparing for them. The criminalization of Palestine solidarity in the Western countries is a dress rehearsal for mass repression. Here in the United States some 300 laws have been taken up by local and state governments throughout the country that would make such protest actions as damaging property, blocking streets or occupying public lands an act of terrorism. This is an extreme level of criminalizing peaceful dissent and it is in direct response to the outpouring of solidarity with Palestine and also to mounting popular protest against a wide range of social and economic injustices and other capitalist pathologies, such as the climate emergency, racism, and the persecution of immigrants.

On October 7, the footage recorded during Operation Aqsa Flood against Israeli settlements, organized by Palestinian groups (in particular Hamas) caused controversy. While some were horrified by the violence, others saw the Palestinian action against Israel's apartheid walls as a legitimate act of violence by an oppressed nation. What do you say about this topic?

In the first place, there needs to be an impartial international investigation into the events of October 7. We may never know all of the details. But what we do know is that the Israeli government launched a well-planned propaganda campaign – backed systematically by the United States and the other Western backers of Israel – almost immediately after the Hamas attack in which it put forward a torrent of lies and of claims that have not been corroborated, including the lie that 40 babies had been beheaded by Hamas. It was really disgusting to see President Biden declare before the world on October 7 that he had personally seen photos of babies with their heads chopped off. The US president lied before the cameras of the world because there were no such photos. Israel's claim that there had been mass rapes of women has now been debunked. Israel presented the attack as an act of anti-Semitism but the attack was not carried out

because the people who were the victims were Jewish but because Israel is the colonial occupation power that has imprisoned the people of Gaza in a massive open-air concentration camp.

We can condemn the fact that civilians were targeted in the Al Aqsa Flood operation. That is a war crime in accordance with international law on the conduct of warfare. We can condemn a specific war crime and the atrocities it involved and still recognize the right of Palestinians to defend themselves, including the right to armed defense. Israel and the United States have a propaganda slogan, which is "Israel has the right to defend itself." But this is false for two reasons. First, Israel is an illegal racist apartheid state. We would not have said that the South African apartheid state had a right to defend itself. Israel, by "defending itself," is defending apartheid, colonialism, occupation, oppression, ethnic cleansing and massive, permanent violations of the human rights of Palestinians. Israel is an outlaw state. An outlaw state cannot claim the right to defend itself. But more importantly, international law acknowledges the right of states to defend themselves from external aggression. Yet the Palestinians are not external aggressors. They are in their own homeland! This is not a case of aggression by one state against another and so international law on the right of states to defend themselves does not apply.

As a result of the US support for Israel, the protests that started at Columbia University spread to almost all colleges, where many protesters were detained. In your article published on Truthout, you mentioned that as an American academic you have been persecuted by Israel in the past. In the aftermath of October 7, how has the pro-Israel pressure, especially in the US and Europe, affected the right to protest and freedom of expression?

The wave of repression against Palestine solidarity in the US and Europe is simply unprecedented, and it is a direct response to the unprecedented wave of solidarity with Palestine. The hegemony of Zionism – which, we must be very clear, is a racist, colonial, and proto-fascist political project – is beginning to crack. At this time one-third of Jewish Americans oppose the genocide and do not identify with Zionism and that

percentage is growing, especially among young Jews.

Israel controls the military battlefield. It is impossible for the Palestinians to achieve an armed victory over Israel. However, Israel has already lost the global battle for political legitimacy. This is why the repression has been so fierce. Here in the US we have seen the suspension of the US constitution on our university campuses and in the larger society. We have a constitutional right to free speech and the right to peacefully assemble but those rights have been ripped up by repression. Peaceful student protesters have been met with savage state political and military repression.

But there is a larger story here. Why is the repression on and off our campuses so intense? Because our protests are a direct threat to the interests of the transnational capitalist class, to the military-industrial-security-intelligence complex, and to US foreign policy. We are seeing the rise of the capitalist university-industrial complex. Our universities are increasingly extensions of the capitalist state. The US government and military have an ever-greater presence at research universities. The universities now serve as a brain trust for transnational corporate capital. Corporations outsource their research and development to the universities. Pharmaceutical corporations finance chemistry and biology departments to do the research that is then used to produce and market drugs. The giant technology corporations do the same for computer engineering and physics departments.

The military-industrial-security-intelligence complex is tied to all of it. Many universities have simply been absorbed by agencies of the state, including the military, security, and intelligence agencies. There is a three-way fusion involving the capitalist state, the corporations, and the universities. My own campus, the University of California at Santa Barbara, receives multimillion dollar funding from Northrup Grumman, Raytheon, General Dynamics, Caterpillar, and so on. These are the same corporations that work with US policy in sponsoring the genocide. They invest heavily in Israel and supply the Israeli army.

Over the past few decades of neoliberalism our public universities have been defunded. Instead of public

funding the universities are funded by the tuition that students pay, which has skyrocketed and throws these students into a debt trap that lasts for decades after they graduate. But perhaps more importantly, the universities are funded by corporate and individual donors. It has now been shown that many of the multimillionaire and billionaire donors are Zionists and sympathizers of Israel. They threaten to withdraw their donations if university administrators do not crack down on the protests. So the administrators are doing the bidding of the corporations and the capitalist state.

We face the authoritarian university. We are experiencing the corporate colonization of our universities. It is no longer an autonomous space. It is now a space of capital and of the capitalist state. The student and faculty protests are demanding that our universities divest from the corporations that do business with Israel. We are calling for Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (known as the BDS movement). This demand is a direct threat to the interests of the transnational capitalist state and the US military, security and foreign policy apparatus. That is why the repression is so fierce.

To give you one example, Palantir is a multi-billion-dollar high technology corporation based in Silicon Valley, in California. In January it signed an agreement with the Israeli Ministry of Defense to supply the IDF with artificial intelligence and other digital technologies. As we know, the genocide is being waged through this technology. This company is making multimillion dollar profits off of the genocide. Its CEO, Alex Karp, explained early in May in an interview: "College campus protests are not a side show. They are the show. If we lose the intellectual battle, we will not be able to deploy any army in the West, ever." When we understand these connections, we begin to understand why our universities are calling in the militarized police to carry out mass repression.

There are comments that the genocide in Gaza signals a new process in terms of global politics. Do you think we have entered an era of genocide? What kind of future do you envision for the global capitalist system?

The past half century of capitalist globalization has involved a very profound and ongoing restructuring and transformation of world capitalism. The ranks of surplus humanity, of those expelled, marginalized, and made redundant, have swelled and now number some two billion people. Capital has no use for this mass of humanity. Moreover, those among the global working classes that have employment are increasingly facing precariousness, new forms of unstable and precarious work at the same time that they face neoliberal austerity. The level of inequality worldwide is simply unprecedented. One percent of humanity now controls 52 percent of the world's wealth and 20 percent of humanity controls 95 percent of that wealth. This means that 80 percent of humanity has to make do with just five percent of the world's wealth.

Surplus humanity and even those who are able to find employment face a crisis of survival, of social disintegration. Whole regions and even whole countries are collapsing and people are on the move. This scares the ruling classes. They fear the actual and potential rebellion of surplus humanity. The ruling classes faces the urgent need to develop and extend new systems of mass social control and repression. The Palestinian population is surplus humanity, especially the Gaza population. Even putting aside the Zionist project of ethnic cleansing to "resolve" the problem of Palestinians that they want to get rid of, Palestinian surplus humanity is of no use to transnational capital. The Gazans stand in the way of transnational capitalist access to the natural gas and oil wealth in Gaza and the Mediterranean shoreline. Gaza is prime beach-front real estate for transnational investors. The "Gaza option" of outright genocide is a nightmarish experiment in how the ruling groups may choose to resolve the problem of surplus humanity.

We are seeing a radical new stage in ruling class modalities of control. Worldwide we are seeing the creation of what we can call super-max prison geographies. Gaza is the model. It is a giant open-air concentration camp locking up the surplus and disposable Palestinian proletariat. However, this is taking place around the world. Last year, El Salvador opened a super-max prison that holds 40,000 prisoners, virtually all of them young unemployed and impoverished

surplus people. After that prison was opened, Brazil, China, Thailand and other countries announced similar plans. The one in Thailand will allegedly house 60,000 people. So we are seeing new forms of spatial control and super-max imprisonment over the mass of dispossessed humanity and the rise of authorities, dictatorial, and even fascist systems to legitimate and develop this global police state. As the crisis of global capitalism deepens, extermination becomes an option for the system. This is what is at stake in Palestine.

But there is something else I must point out. Global capitalism faces a structural crisis of overaccumulation. The transnational capitalist class has accumulated obscene amounts of wealth and are running out of outlets to profitably reinvest their capital. They increasingly rely on what I have termed militarized accumulation and accumulation by repression. Transnational systems of mass social control, repression, and warfare becomes very profitable outlets for investing the surplus and making huge profits. The global police state is very lucrative. The Russia-Ukraine war is a tragedy for the people of Ukraine. It is a tragedy for the people of Russia. It is a tragedy for the world's people. However, for the transnational capitalist class it is a godsend, a wonderful bonanza. This is why one consultant for the principle military corporations in the US declared after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022 that "happy days are here again," and why after Israel launched its genocide against Gaza that one executive of Goldman Sachs, a global financial conglomerate that invests heavily in Israel, declared that "this is great for our portfolio."

As a Middle Eastern country, Turkey is one of the countries directly affected by the post-October 7 situation. President Erdoğan has criticized Israel at the highest level, on the other hand, it has been revealed that trade between Turkey and Israel has actually continued uninterruptedly (via greatjournalistic work). How do you evaluate these contradictory positions of Turkey, which is ruled by people from the Islamist tradition?

These contradictory positions of Turkey are also present through the other countries in the Middle East. The Turkish capitalist class and the ruling political elite share common class interests with the Israeli

rulers and with the ruling classes of the Gulf and the other capitalist states. As Turkey and the Middle East globalized starting in the 1990s there was a very significant integration of capitals across the region, including between Israeli and Arab capital, and with extra-regional transnational capital. The political and the economic are out of sync here. The economic interests of the Turkish rulers, the Israeli rulers, the Gulf rulers are the same. They have common class interests that trump any political differences over Palestine. The Israeli oppression of the Palestinians is simply an embarrassment to them.

Remember, that Israel and Saudi Arabia were supposed to normalize relations this past fall. They would have done so except that the Hamas attack and now the genocide got in the way of these plans. The Israeli-Saudi normalization was supposed to have been the clincher that opened up the wider Middle Eastern region to a massive new round of investment and transnational capital accumulation – in finance and banking, tourism, energy, construction, industry, high technology, luxury consumption and so on.

The problem that the Arab regimes face is that the masses of Arab workers and poor people are also restless and see themselves in the Palestinian struggle. These states have to sustain legitimacy among their own populations so they have to pretend that they care about the Palestinians. In the particular case of Turkey, the legitimating discourse of the Erdogan regime has been a turn to Islamism. Erdogan must walk a tight-rope between the economic and class interests that are met by expanding trade and cross-investment with Israel, and his political legitimacy at home among the masses of people. And remember, in the last elections Erdogan lost significant political capital and influence. His regime faces an erosion of its legitimacy and its grip on power. So criticizing Israel is a political necessity to retain legitimacy. This is the same with Egypt. Both those states fear that if they do not criticize Israel, the mass popular solidarity with Palestine will also contribute to a mass movement against those regimes.

Your books, *The Global Police State and Global Capitalism and the Crisis of Humanity*, have recent-

ly been translated into Turkish. Especially in the last 10 years, the Turkish state has been dominating all areas of socio-political struggle, especially the Kurdish movement, by force. What message would you like to give to your Turkish readers and those who oppose the government?

I don't want to get you in trouble because I know you face censorship and repression. But in Türkiye and also many other countries around the world mechanisms of consensual domination are breaking down. We are moving more and more towards coercive systems of social control, whether authoritarianism, dictatorship, and even outright fascism, although we are talking about 21st century fascism, which is different than 20th century fascism. The extension of the Turkish state into civil society and the escalation of repression, which includes also new forms of political and cultural legitimization that manipulate mass insecurity and anxiety, reflects the larger situation worldwide, as I have been discussing. The global police state is becoming consolidated in Türkiye.

But there is also the particular Turkish characteristics, including the curious contradictions between an economic program that seeks to deepen neoliberalism and the liberation of capital from restraints, including the transnationalization of Turkish-based capital, which requires the assistance of the Turkish state and its foreign policy – along with a mystifying and conservative Islamicist political and ideological program. There is also the important matter of geopolitics that I cannot get into here.

With regard to the Kurdish movement, we know that the Kurds, together with many of the Syrian and other refugees that have poured into Türkiye in recent years, occupy the lowest and most marginalized rungs of the Turkish political economy. The Kurdish struggle – objectively speaking, if not necessarily subjectively – is really a struggle of all the Turkish proletariat and popular classes. The democratization of Turkey passes through the liberation of the Kurds from the oppression that they have historically faced. Abdullah Öcalan must be freed. His ideas and his political leadership are important for all of Turkish poor and working people not just for the Kurds.

Khan's Decision: A Turning Point in International Justice

Jorge González Arocha

International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor Karim Khan's request for arrest warrants against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and senior Hamas leaders marks a pivotal moment in international justice. The move, unprecedented in its scope and implications, is an essential step in de-escalating the situation in the Middle East, and sends a clear message against those who claim to be above the law or any kind of collective regulation. This last point is crucial in the current global war regime.

According to Michael Hardt and Sandro Mezzadra, we have entered a period of war without end, extending across the globe and unsettling even the central nodes of the world system. One of the many characteristics mentioned by Hardt and Mezzadra is that currently, "...the increasing imbrication of 'geopolitics' and 'geo-economics,' amid a constant making and remaking of spaces of valorization and accumulation," intersects "with the contested distribution of political power across the planet."

We can see then why many have criticized Khan's investigation. It turns out that he has struck directly at the heart of the current war regime.

Khan's Call for Accountability: War Crimes Charges Against Israel and Hamas

Khan, appointed ICC Prosecutor in 2021, has a notable background in international law, having worked on high-profile cases involving ISIS, the former Yugoslavia, and Rwanda. His tenure has been marked by a commitment to holding perpetrators of war crimes accountable, irrespective of their political stature or the international political ramifications. His approach to justice is informed by his belief that international humanitarian law must be upheld universally.

It is precisely because of all those elements that he has remained firm: "We are not going to be swayed by the different types of threats, some of which are public and some of which may be not," the prosecutor told CNN in a recent interview. "This is not a witch hunt. This is not some kind of emotional reaction to noise. It's a forensic process that is expected of us as international prosecutors, as an independent court, to build evidence that is solid that will not dissolve in the courtroom."

Khan's request for arrest warrants is based on substantial evidence suggesting that both Israeli and Hamas officials bear "criminal responsibility" for severe violations of international humanitarian law.

According to the statement published on May 20, the Head of the Islamic Resistance Movement, Yahya Sinwar; Commander-in-Chief of the Al-Qasam Brigades, Mohammed Diab Ibrahim Al-Masri; and the Head of Hamas Political Bureau, Ismail Haniyeh, should be charged in connection with the October 7 attacks on Israel. In addition, the Hamas leaders should face charges of extermination, murder, hostage-taking, rape and other acts of sexual violence, torture and cruel treatment.

On the other side, Netanyahu and Minister of Defense of Israel, Yoav Gallant bear responsibility for several international crimes since Israel began its military operation against Hamas, including the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, willfully causing great suffering, willful killing, intentional attacks against a civilian population, extermination and/or murder and persecution. In this case, the prosecutor claimed that these crimes "... were part of a widespread and systematic attack against the Palestinian civilian population as state policy."



Karim Khan (centre) announces ICC arrest warrant against Benjamin Netanyahu. (Photo: Screengrab / ICC)

Challenges and Criticisms After Applications for Arrest Warrants

However, while significant, the ICC's decision already faces numerous challenges and criticisms. The court's jurisdictional limitations and non-recognition by key states such as Israel and the US complicate the execution of possible arrest warrants. The effectiveness of these orders depends on the cooperation of states that have ratified the Rome Statute, which created the ICC.

Moreover, the decision has also provoked a polarized response from the international community. Israel's main Western allies, including the United States and the United Kingdom, have vehemently criticized the move. US President Joe Biden called the application "outrageous," arguing that there is no equivalence between Israel's actions and Hamas'. Similarly, Secretary of State Antony Blinken described the comparison as "shameful," and both stressed that the ICC lacks jurisdiction in this matter, as neither Israel nor the US recognizes the court's authority.

On the other hand, some European nations, notably Germany, France, and Switzerland, have voiced support for the ICC's independence and the necessity of combating impunity.

Meanwhile, Israel has firmly rejected the ICC's allegations, with Prime Minister Netanyahu denouncing the move as a "moral outrage of historic proportions." He argued that it undermines Israel's right to self-defense and unjustly equates a democratic state with a terrorist organization like Hamas. Defense Minister Gallant echoed this opinion, claiming that the Israeli military adheres to international law and takes unique humanitarian efforts unprecedented in armed conflicts.

During the already mentioned interview of Khan with CNN, he shared that "some elected leaders" had spoken to him and had been very direct: "This court is built for Africa and for thugs like Putin." In fact, days before Khan's announcement, a group of influential Republican senators sent a letter to the chief prosecutor of the ICC, warning him not to issue international arrest warrants against Netanyahu and other Israeli officials, threatening him with "severe sanctions" if he did so.

According to Zeteo, which first revealed the letter, the one-page document was signed by 12 Republican Party senators, including Tom Cotton of Arkansas, Marco Rubio of Florida, and Ted Cruz of Texas. The document even informs Khan that any attempt by the ICC to hold Netanyahu and his

colleagues accountable for their actions in Gaza will be interpreted “not only as a threat to Israel’s sovereignty, but to the sovereignty of the United States.”

They even went into directly threatening Khan, the ICC, and the values that inspired its creation by saying, “Target Israel and we will target you. If you move forward with the measures indicated in the report, we will move to end all American support for the ICC, sanction your employees and associates, and bar you and your families from the United States. You have been warned.”

Logically, no argument can support that view. On the one hand, more than enough evidence has accumulated during the last eight months of the war. As of today, the death toll in Gaza surpasses 35,000, of which 69% are children and women. There have been credible reports of attacks on public institutions, the press, and non-profit organizations working on the ground to provide food and health aid. Furthermore, the scope of the Israeli attack also targets the entire Palestinian community, morally and culturally, in both Gaza and the West Bank. There have been attacks against the Palestinian people, describing them as animals and using derogatory language. Not to mention Israel’s efforts to force a famine, applying not only strict controls over its borders but over every piece of material that enters and leaves that area.

The GOP letter cannot be justified on moral or political grounds. Why, for example, can ICC standards be applied in Africa and Russia but not in the United States or Israel? On what basis can anyone defend the right to be superior to other people? We all know enough history to understand the consequences of that kind of moral superiority. Ironically, this very mindset contributed to the origins of the Holocaust against the Jews.

The future disaster of an effective attack on the ICC would create a massive backlash against the organization. Then, what else will be left of the international justice order erected after the defeat of Nazism in the 20th century? Nothing, nothing will remain in place. That is why the applications

for arrest warrants and the capture and prosecution of Netanyahu, Gallant, and the Hamas leaders are so important. The current order is far from perfect, but with the weakening of these structures, we are inevitably heading towards an increasingly violent and authoritarian future governed by the rules of confrontation and in a regime of constant war.

International Justice at a Crossroads

David Harvey recently stated in an interview that today, “we’re seeing the emergence of an ethno-nationalist protectionism-autarky, which is a different model.” Besides, “We could be headed into something which is much less pleasant than neoliberalism, the division of the world into warring and protectionist factions who are fighting each other over trade and everything else.”

That’s why the ICC’s recent decision against Israeli and Hamas leaders represents a critical juncture in the pursuit of international justice. Whether these efforts will lead to tangible justice or exacerbate international tensions remains to be seen. What is clear is that the ICC’s statement has already made a profound impact on the discourse surrounding international justice.

Ultimately, the point is to defend what prosecutor Karim Khan said at the end of his application on May 20:

“Let us today be clear on one core issue: if we do not demonstrate our willingness to apply the law equally, if it is seen as being applied selectively, we will be creating the conditions for its collapse. In doing so, we will be loosening the remaining bonds that hold us together, the stabilizing connections between all communities and individuals, the safety net to which all victims look in times of suffering. This is the true risk we face in this moment.”

This is undoubtedly a key step towards achieving the solidarity-based peace we need to recreate a global system of greater social justice.

The Arsenal of Genocide: The U.S. Weapons That Are Destroying Gaza

Medea Benjamin, Nicolas J.S. Davies

On May 8, 2024, as Israel escalated its brutal assault on Rafah, President Biden announced that he had “paused” a delivery of 1,700 500-pound and 1,800 2,000-pound bombs, and threatened to withhold more shipments if Israel went ahead with its full-scale invasion of Rafah.

The move elicited an outcry from Israeli officials (National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir tweeted “ Hamas loves Biden”), as well as Republicans, staunch anti-Palestinian Democrats and pro-Israel donors. Republicans immediately prepared a bill entitled the Israel Security Assistance Support Act to prohibit the administration from withholding military aid to Israel.

Many people have been asking the U.S. to halt weapons to Israel for seven months, and of course Biden’s move comes too late for 35,000 Palestinians who have been killed in Gaza, mainly by American weapons.

Lest one think the administration is truly changing its position, two days after announcing the pause, the State Department released a convoluted report saying that, although it is reasonable to “assess” that U.S. weapons have been used by Israeli forces in Gaza in ways that are “inconsistent” with international humanitarian law, and although Israel has indeed delayed or had a negative effect on the delivery of aid to Gaza (which is illegal under U.S. law), Israel’s assurances regarding humanitarian aid and compliance with international humanitarian law are “credible and reliable.”

By this absurd conclusion, the Biden administration has given itself a green light to keep sending weapons and Israel a flashing one to keep committing war crimes with them.

In any event, as Colonel Joe Bicino, a retired U.S. artillery officer, told the BBC, Israel can “level” Rafah with the weapons it already has. The paused shipment is “somewhat inconsequential,” Bicino said, “a little bit of a political play for people in the United States who are... concerned about this.” A U.S. official confirmed to the Washington Post that Israel has enough weapons already supplied by the U.S. and other allies to go ahead with the Rafah operation if it chooses to ignore U.S. qualms.

The paused shipment really has to be seen in the context of the arsenal with which the U.S. has equipped its Middle Eastern proxy over many decades.

A Deluge of American Bombs

During the Second World War, the United States proudly called itself the “Arsenal of Democracy,” as its munitions factories and shipyards produced an endless supply of weapons to fight the genocidal government of Germany. Today, the United States is instead, shamefully, the Arsenal of Genocide, providing 70% of the imported weapons Israel is using to obliterate Gaza and massacre its people.

As Israel assaults Rafah, home to 1.4 million displaced people, including at least 600,000 children, most of the warplanes dropping bombs on them are F-16s, originally designed and manufactured by General Dynamics, but now produced by Lockheed Martin in Greenville, South Carolina. Israel’s 224 F-16s have long been its weapon of choice for bombing militants and civilians in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria.

Israel also has 86 Boeing F-15s, which can drop heavier bombs, and 39 of the latest, most wastefully expensive fighter-bombers ever, Lockheed Martin’s



Photo: Steve Eason

nuclear-capable F-35s, with another 36 on order. The F-35 is built in Fort Worth, Texas, but components are manufactured all over the U.S. and in allied countries, including Israel. Israel was the first country to attack other countries with F-35s, in violation of U.S. arms export control laws, reportedly using them to bomb Syria, Egypt and Sudan.

As these fleets of U.S.-made warplanes began bombing Gaza in October 2023, their fifth major assault since 2008, the U.S. began rushing in new weapons. By December 1, 2023, it had delivered 15,000 bombs and 57,000 artillery shells.

The U.S. supplies Israel with all sizes and types of bombs, including 285-pound GBU-39 small diameter glide bombs, 500-pound Mk 82s, 2,000-pound Mk 84s and BLU-109 “bunker busters,” and even massive 5,000-pound GBU-28 bunker-busters, which Israel reportedly used in Gaza in 2009.

General Dynamics is the largest U.S. bomb manufacturer, making all these models of bombs. Most of them can be used as “precision” guided bombs by attaching Raytheon and Lockheed Martin’s Paveway laser guidance system or Boeing’s JDAM

(Joint Direct Attack Munitions) GPS-based targeting system.

Little more than half of the bombs Israel has dropped on Gaza have been “precision” ones, because, as targeting officers explained to +972 magazine, their Lavender AI system generates thousands of targets who are just suspected rank-and-file militants, not senior commanders. Israel does not consider it worth “wasting” expensive precision munitions to kill these people, so it uses only “dumb” bombs to kill them in their homes—obliterating their families and neighbors in the process.

In order to threaten and bomb its more distant neighbors, such as Iran, Israel depends on its seven Lockheed Martin KC-130H and seven Boeing 707 in-air refueling tankers, with four new, state-of-the-art Boeing KC46A tankers to be delivered in late 2025 for over \$220 million each.

Ground force weapons

Another weapon of choice for killing Palestinians are Israel’s 48 Boeing Apache AH64 attack helicop-

ters, armed with Lockheed Martin's infamous Hell-fire missiles, General Dynamics' Hydra 70 rockets and Northrop Grumman's 30 mm machine guns. Israel also used its Apaches to kill and incinerate a still unknown number of Israelis on October 7, 2023—a tragic day that Israel and the U.S. continue to exploit as a false pretext for their own violations of international humanitarian law and of the Genocide Convention.

Israel's main artillery weapons are its 600 Paladin M109A5 155 mm self-propelled howitzers, which are manufactured by BAE Systems in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. To the layman, a self-propelled howitzer looks like a tank, but it has a bigger, 155 mm gun to fire at longer range.

Israel assembles its 155 mm artillery shells from U.S.-made components. One of the first two U.S. arms shipments that the administration notified Congress about after October 7 was to resupply Israel with artillery shell components valued at \$147.5 million.

Israel also has 48 M270 multiple rocket launchers. They are a tracked version of the HIMARS rocket launchers the U.S. has sent to Ukraine, and they fire the same rockets, made by Lockheed Martin. U.S. Marines used the same rockets in coordination with U.S. airstrikes to devastate Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq, in 2017. M270 launchers are no longer in production, but BEA Systems still has the facilities to produce them.

Israel makes its own Merkava tanks, which fire U.S.-made tank shells, and the State Department announced on December 9, 2023, that it had notified Congress of an “emergency” shipment of 14,000 120 mm tank shells worth \$106 million to Israel.

U.S. shipments of artillery and tank shells, and dozens of smaller shipments that it did not report to Congress (because each shipment was carefully calibrated to fall below the statutory reporting limit of \$100 million), were paid for out of the \$3.8 billion in military aid that the United States gives Israel each year.

In April, Congress passed a new war-funding bill that includes about \$14 billion for additional weapons. Israel could afford to pay for these weapons itself, but then it could shop around for them, which might erode the U.S. monopoly on supplying so much of its war machine. That lucrative monopoly for U.S. merchants of death is clearly more important to Members of Congress than fully funding Head Start or other domestic anti-poverty programs, which they routinely underfund to pay for weapons and wars.

Israel has 500 FMC-built M113 armored personnel carriers and over 2,000 Humvees, manufactured by AM General in Mishawaka, Indiana. Its ground forces are armed with several different types of U.S. grenade launchers, Browning machine-guns, AR-15 assault rifles, and SR-25 and M24 SWS sniper rifles, all made in the USA, as is the ammunition for them.

For many years, Israel's three Sa'ar 5 corvettes were its largest warships, about the size of frigates. They were built in the 1990s by Ingalls Shipbuilding in Pascagoula, Mississippi, but Israel has recently taken delivery of four larger, more heavily-armed, German-built Sa'ar 6 corvettes, with 76 mm main guns and new surface-to-surface missiles.

Gaza Encampments Take On the Merchants of Death

The United States has a long and horrific record of providing weapons to repressive regimes that use them to kill their own people or attack their neighbors. Martin Luther King called the U.S. government “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world,” and that has not changed since he said it in 1967, a year to the day before his assassination.

Many of the huge U.S. factories that produce all these weapons are the largest employers in their regions or even their states. As President Eisenhower warned the public in his farewell address in 1960, “This conjunction of an immense military



establishment and a large arms industry” has led to “the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex.”

So, in addition to demanding a ceasefire, an end to U.S. military aid and weapons sales to Israel, and a restoration of humanitarian aid to Gaza, the students occupying college campuses across our country are right to call on their institutions to divest from these merchants of death, as well as from Israeli companies.

The corporate media has adopted the line that divestment would be too complicated and costly for the universities to do. But when students set up an encampment at Trinity College in Dublin, in Ireland, and called on it to divest from Israeli companies, the college quickly agreed to their demands. Problem solved, without police violence or trying to muzzle free speech. Students have also won commitments to consider divestment from U.S. institutions, including Brown, Northwestern, Evergreen State, Rutgers and the Universities of Minnesota and Wisconsin.

While decades of even deadlier U.S. war-mak-

ing in the greater Middle East failed to provoke a sustained mass protest movement, the genocide in Gaza has opened the eyes of many thousands of young people to the need to rise up against the U.S. war machine.

The gradual expulsion and emigration of Palestinians from their homeland has created a huge diaspora of young Palestinians who have played a leading role in organizing solidarity campaigns on college campuses through groups like Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP). Their close links with extended families in Palestine have given them a visceral grasp of the U.S. role in this genocide and an authentic voice that is persuasive and inspiring to other young Americans.

Now it is up to Americans of all ages to follow our young leaders and demand not just an end to the genocide in Palestine, but also a path out of our country’s military madness and the clutches of its deeply entrenched MICIMATT (military-industrial-congressional-intelligence-media-academia-think-tank) complex, which has inflicted so much death, pain and desolation on so many of our neighbors for so long, from Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan to Vietnam and Latin America.

Why Recognizing The State of Palestine is Important

Ramzy Baroud

In politics, context is crucial.

To truly appreciate the recent decision by Ireland, Spain and Norway to recognize the state of Palestine, the subject has to be placed in proper context.

On November 15, 1988, Yasser Arafat, then Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, declared Palestine as an independent state.

The proclamation took place within important and unique contexts:

One, the Palestinian uprising of December 1987 which ignited international support and sympathy with the Palestinian people.

Two, growing expectations that the Palestinian leadership needed to match the popular Intifada in the Occupied Territories with a political program so as not to squander the global attention obtained by the uprising.

There were other issues that are also worth a pause, including the growing marginalization of the PLO as the main political front of the Palestinian struggle.

This irrelevance was the natural political outcome of the forced exile of the PLO leadership from Lebanon to Algeria in 1982, which largely severed the connection between this leadership and an influential Palestinian constituency.

Though Arafat's announcement was made in Algiers, Palestinians in occupied Palestine and across the world rejoiced. They felt that their leadership was, once more, directly involved in their struggle, and that their Intifada, which, by then, had cost



them hundreds of precious lives, had finally acquired some kind of political horizon.

The countries that almost immediately recognized the state of Palestine reflected the geopolitical formation at the time: Arab and Muslim countries, which fully and unconditionally recognized the nascent state. Additionally, there were countries in the Global South which expressed their historic solidarity with the Palestinian people.

A third category, which also mattered greatly, was represented by countries in Asia and eastern Europe – including Russia itself – which revolved within the Soviet sphere, posing a direct challenge to American hegemony and Western militarism and expansionism.

Soon after the Algiers Declaration, the geopolitics of the world received its greatest shock since World War II, namely the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the subsequent fragmentation of pro-Soviet states, thus the isolation of the Global South amid growing Western hegemony.

That, too, had a direct impact on Palestine. Though Arafat and his PLO made their fair share of mistakes and political miscalculations – leading to the Oslo Accords, the formation of the Palestinian Authority and the fragmentation of the Palestinian front itself – the Palestinian leadership's options, from a strict geopolitical analysis, were quite limited.

Back then, the PLO had one out of two options: either to continue with the struggle for freedom and independence based on the national liberation model or to adopt a purely political approach based on negotiations and supposed 'painful compromises'. They opted for the latter, which proved to be a fatal mistake.

Political negotiations can be rewarding when the negotiating parties have leverage. While Israel had the leverage of being the occupying power and receiving unconditional support from the US and its Western allies, the Palestinians had very little.

Therefore, the outcome was as obvious as it was predictable. The PLO was sidelined in favor of a new political entity, the PA, which redefined the concept of political leverage altogether, to essentially mean direct financial benefits to an Israeli-sanctioned ruling class.

Since 1988, more countries recognized the state of Palestine, though that recognition remained largely confined within the geopolitical formations at each phase of history. For example, between 2008 and 2011, more South American countries recognized Palestine, a direct outcome of new and assertive political independence achieved in that part of the world.

In 2012, Palestine was voted by the United Nations General Assembly as a non-member observer state, allowing it to officially use the name 'State of Palestine' for all political purposes.

All Palestinian efforts since then have failed to overcome the power paradigm that continues to exist at the UN, separating the UNGA from those with veto power at the Security Council.

The events of October 7, and the genocidal war that followed, have certainly ushered in a massive global movement that challenged the pre-existing geopolitical paradigm regarding Palestine.

If the war, however, had taken place, say ten years ago, the global response to the Palestinian plea for solidarity may have been different. But this is not the case, since the world is itself experiencing a major state of flux. New rising global powers have been boldly challenging, and changing, the world's status quo geopolitics for years. This includes Russia's direct confrontation with NATO in Ukraine, China's rise to global power status, the growing influence of BRICS and the more assertive African and South American political agendas.

For its part, the Gaza war has also challenged the concept of military power as a guarantor of permanent dominance. This is now obvious in the Middle East and also globally.

The latter realization has finally allowed for new, significant margins to appear, allowing Western European countries to finally accept the reality that Palestine deserves to be a state, that the Palestinian aspirations must be honored and that international law must be respected.

Now, the challenge for Palestinians is whether they will be able to utilize this historic moment to the fullest degree. Hopefully, the precious blood spilled in Gaza would prove more sacred than the limited financial gains by a small group of politicians.

Ireland Is Full... Of Berts

Bridget Meehan

What is a bert?

I have no clue. But recently I saw it written on a wall in Derry City where I live. To be exact, this is what was on the wall:

IRELAND IS FULL
OF BERTS!

It was obvious that this graffiti was actually in two separate pieces because the writing in the top line was different from the lower line. “Ireland is Full” had been written first. Afterwards, someone else had come along and added “of berts”. I returned to the wall a week later, intending to take a photo, but another someone been and gone and had erased the “Ireland is Full” part – which on porous red brick was no mean feat.

The whole thing seems like harmless urban graffiti until you realise that “Ireland is Full” has a very

disturbing meaning. “Ireland is Full”, it turns out, is both a slogan and an anti-immigrant protest group.

I was shocked to discover that such a group existed in Ireland. How could this be? On an island that endured English and then British colonial rule for 800 years? On an island that was their first colony, that suffered the worst of their savagery, that they used as a lab to test out the tools of empire? And how could “Ireland is Full” have support in Derry, of all places, birthplace of the Irish civil rights movement and which to this day remains under British occupation [1].

The origins of anti-refugee sentiment

“Ireland is Full” has its origins in a series of rallies that took place in the south of Ireland in late 2022, a year when the number of refugees to the country totalled 65,000. Rally locations mapped to places



Photo of the wall in Derry with “Ireland is Full” removed – very faint markings still remain

where the Irish government had set up temporary shelters for refugees arriving from places such as Ukraine, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Nigeria. Many of these locations were rural towns and villages and refugees began arriving, unannounced, in large numbers.

Not surprisingly, locals were incensed. Out of the blue, here they had crowds of strangers coming to their locality without any prior notice or consultation. This approach to managing the influx of refugees was entirely wrong. Blame lies solely with the Irish government who seemed to have no refugee strategy, and who excluded residents from the process and made unilateral decisions that would have significant implications for the communities in question. How did they ever think this was going to work? As an aside, the Irish government continues to remain clueless in this regard. Today, not only are refugees packed into inadequate shelters around the country, they're also being made to live in tents – yes that's right, tents – along the streets of Dublin while they wait to be granted refugee status. It's hard to imagine how the situation can get any worse.

Prior to 2022, anti-immigrant sentiment had been on the rise in Ireland. From 2018, greater numbers of refugees began coming into the country and refugee shelters were becoming more widespread. Many of these shelters were hotels used to warehouse refugees in large numbers, enforcing strict living and eating arrangements and providing little or no amenities such as play areas for children. Back then, a few demonstrations were held and two of the shelters were firebombed before anybody could move in. The protests and violence against refugees escalated in 2022, and November 2023 saw riots break out in Dublin. The city centre was left in disarray following arson attacks, vandalism and looting. The Gardaí (Irish police) were violently attacked too. In the days subsequent to the riots, the Gardaí were condemned by political and civic spokespeople for being ill-prepared and ill-trained, while the protestors criticised them for taking the side of the refugees.

In response to the anti-immigrant violence and hostility, a solidarity rally, Ireland for All, was held in Dublin in February 2024 and attended by 50,000 supporters. The rally was organised by a new island-wide collective called Le Chéile (roughly meaning 'togetherness' in Irish), made up of 50 organisations from more progressive political parties, trade unions, and community and voluntary groups.

The problem is wider than refugees

But it's worth taking a step or two back to look at the bigger picture because the underlying problem started long before refugees became a concern and is much wider and more complex than the refugee issue alone.

Driving the anti-immigrant sentiment is profound resentment and betrayal at the economic situation in the country. While Ireland tries hard to portray an image of a thriving, modern economy with a high standard of living and benefiting from that great white saviour, foreign direct investment, the reality is not so shiny.

Five percent of children living in Ireland are in poverty and 13% are at risk of poverty. More generally, 14% of the overall population is at risk of poverty. Rates of pay are relatively higher than in many other European countries but so is the cost of living; the cost of essential goods and services is 40% higher than the EU average, and Ireland is officially the most expensive country in the EU. Ireland also ranks 32 out of 34 among OECD members for income inequality before taxes and transfers, and after taxes and transfers it ranks 15 out of 34, making it one of the worst places in the EU for income inequality. Wealth inequality is also high: the richest 10% own about 40% of the country's wealth.

At the same time, Ireland is suffering the deepest housing crisis in its history. Social and affordable housing are practically non-existent and house prices are eight times the average annual wage; in Dublin they can be ten times the average wage. Private renting is as unattainable as owning a home

and 90% of earners find rent unaffordable. Rents in Dublin hover around €2,000 per month (the average monthly wage is €3,683) and in 2021, Dublin ranked the sixth most expensive capital city in the world to rent in. Homeless is rife and even people in relatively well-paid jobs are evicted by landlords and finding themselves and their families homeless. This crisis is a decade or more in the making and was created by deliberate government policy which has left housing in the hands of the free market, such that tax breaks and incentives have been given to private developers and investors while social housing has been outsourced to the private sector, and social housing stock sold off to tenants without being proportionately replenished.

Feelings of frustration and acrimony are commonplace among ordinary people. These feelings are understandable and legitimate. But instead of going after the culprits – the private profiteers and the government with its neoliberal policies – to demand radical change, people are instead targeting the most vulnerable and most blameless in all of this: refugees and migrants.

As you might imagine, anti-immigrant propaganda proliferates and grows in the telling. ‘Foreigners’, we’re told, are coming to our country in their hundreds of thousands. They’re taking Irish jobs; they’re being set up in social housing while locals remain homeless; they’re getting €100 a-day living expenses, in addition to free accommodation and food; they’re using up all our public services; they’re taking over the country. Bus loads of dangerous military-age men are arriving in our towns and villages, but without women folk or children. That can only mean one thing: these men are rapists, paedophiles, and thieves, here to take advantage of the easy life on offer. They’re raping Irish women, attacking and threatening Irish men, and hanging out near play parks because they want to sexually abuse Irish children.

One story I heard came from a person I’ve known and loved all my life, who is decent and kind but who is hearing the nonsense and believing it. She heard (from a friend of a friend) that the council

allocated a social house to a local family but when they tried to move in they found the house was occupied by ‘foreigners’. The council gave the ‘foreigners’ the house over the heads of the local family. This of course is rubbish, it’s simply not true. But even if it were, at worst it’s an administrative error and not an alien takeover. Was I able to convince my loved one of this? No. I was told that I just didn’t understand the suffering and pain of the Irish people. Another story I heard, again from someone close to me, who again heard it from a friend of a friend, that a ‘foreigner’ was in the GP surgery and making demands about when she wanted an appointment; the nerve! This is another improbable tale but these anecdotes abound, serving to justify racism and xenophobia.

Cutting through the lies, the truth is that the socio-economic polycrisis unfolding in Ireland has nothing whatsoever to do with refugees or migrants. However, the anger of the people is fertile ground for those who would exploit it to advance their own agendas. The forces of the far right are stepping up as the voice of the people, echoing and fuelling their fears, giving them the answers and solutions they looking for. This pattern is a familiar one and has played out in many countries with Trump in the US, Milei in Argentina, UKIP and the Tories in Britain, to name a few.

Growth of the far right

In Ireland, several new far right political parties have emerged from the shadows, including the National Party, the Irish Freedom Party, Ireland First, The Irish People and Independent Ireland. All are sketchy on substance. Equally, all are big on rhetoric. They share similar values and principles. Rather than discuss each of them in detail, I’ll highlight just two here to give a flavour. Neither will be anything you haven’t tasted before.

The National Party is essentially a carbon copy of other European national front parties and its favourite drum to beat is anti-immigration. It uses archaic and emotive language that wouldn’t be out of place in 1930s Germany e.g. knaves, deceivers,

mother-country, rebirth of destiny, sacred soil. They see diversity, inclusion and international rights as subversive threats being used to dissolve the bonds of Irish nationality. They don't have policies as such but they have a hodgepodge of 'principles': anti-abortion, extreme localism, anti-immigration and pro-remigration, Euro-scepticism, and a tough approach to crime, including bringing back capital punishment (ye Gads). And as you'd suspect, their leaders are white and male – their candidates in the upcoming local and EU elections are all white males, apart from one white female. Their website shows photos of some fine specimens of Irish macho men standing on mountain tops overlooking picturesque valleys.

As for the Irish Freedom Party, it has policies of a sort that reflect the real problems people are experiencing but that offer largely regressive solutions. So, they support Irexit, an Irish exit from the EU which plays to disillusionment about the EU; although further complicated by the Irish unity debate where they want a united Ireland separated from Britain and Europe and under Irish-only control. They reject carbon taxes and the climate agenda which they put down to climate alarmism and they promise to leave climate action up to the people themselves. They want to lower taxes for middle and higher earners and will fund that by cutting funding to unnecessary NGOs. They blame low pay on immigration and promise to put an end to that by shaking up the immigration system. They want tougher prison sentences and better use of the army to back up the Gardaí. They want to solve the housing and homelessness problem by relaxing building standards and pushing through planning permission, prioritising Irish nationals on the social housing list over non-nationals, and introducing intergenerational mortgages. They promote freedom of speech and oppose 'hate crime' legislation which categorises speaking your mind as a hate crime against minorities.

You can see how, on the surface, much of what these parties are saying speaks to where people are at. It's only when the rhetoric is peeled back and studied a little more carefully that it's possible to see what they're really doing and how their solutions

will not improve the socio-economic fortunes of the people.

Nationalism and private property

Throughout my life, the Irish flag has represented the fight against colonialism and oppression. I felt proud to be from a place that didn't lie down under the jackboot. Now, when I see my national flag, I'm reminded of the ugly racist movement that has emerged. I no longer see a symbol of the under-dog fighting the tyrant. I see a symbol of fascism. Historically, Ireland was a nation of beleaguered emigrants who scattered to the four corners of the world as a consequence of colonialism, exile, famine, and poverty. How short our memories are that we've forgotten our painful past and what was done to us. How tragic it is that we can't hold that memory as a reminder to stand in solidarity with other oppressed people today.

Nationalism had a very different meaning not so long ago. In Irish history, nationalism was a noble aspiration that Irish men and women sacrificed their lives to attain. The struggle to become a nation state meant fighting the coloniser and gaining self-determination, freedom, equality, and solidarity. The nationalism of Ireland today couldn't be further from those original ideals.

But maybe nationalism has always had the potential to turn sour. Nationalism is really an extension of capitalism's principle of private property but on a grand scale where instead of owning property or the means of production, ownership is applied to whole expanses of land. Nationalism allows the citizens of a nation to say this island or this territory or this continent is ours; we have exclusive control over what happens here; we get to decide who is allowed to live here, who is allowed to belong here, who is allowed to work here, who is allowed to exercise rights and freedoms. Nations give citizens license to separate themselves from others, us and them, better and worse, good and bad. Nationalism is the opposite of internationalism and of solidarity, both of which the human race is desperately going to need if we're to survive the climate crisis and create a sustainable and fair society.

There's hope

Is it time to move away from the archaic idea of nation states and towards the idea of a unified global community governed by cooperation and mutual aid?

Is it time to find a way to speak to people as effectively as the far right is doing and to send the message loud and clear that instead of a zero-sum game a better way is possible?

Is it time to set out a vision and strategy for that better way?

Is it time to take housing out of the hands of private developers and put it into the hands of local authorities and housing co-operatives who will build social and affordable housing for all?

Is it time to implement a universal basic income so that everyone has financial security?

Is it time to have a universal health system, free at the point of use, so that no one has to worry if they'll be able to afford healthcare when they need it?

Is it time to end the hierarchical dictatorial workplace and have in its place the worker-owned and self-managing workplace, with fair wages and decent conditions?

Is it time to implement a global progressive taxation regime that clamps down on tax breaks and loopholes for the wealthy and that is fairer to low and middle earners and small businesses?

Is it time to mutualise banking to ensure wealth is retained in the productive economy rather than being used to make the rich richer and to fund extractive industries and reckless financial trading?

Is it time to reject authoritarianism and fascism and embrace a participatory society and democracy?

Is it time to say no to all forms of racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia and to start treating each other like we truly are equals?

Is it time for governments to embrace the global Green New Deal as a first step in taking the climate crisis seriously?

Is it time to throw open territorial borders and allow the free flow of people to protect migrants, refugees and future climate refugees and to attract those who can take on the enormous programmes of work that will be required to tackle the climate crisis, especially in countries with aging populations?

And let's go for broke, is it time to rid ourselves of the scourge of capitalism once and for all, and replace it with a participatory economy where people and the ecology are treated like they actually matter?

I would like to believe, in fact I do believe, that the majority of people who are caught up in the "Ireland is Full" movement are not evil people who hate refugees. I believe that they're decent human beings just trying to survive, as we all are, in the terrifying mess that is our modern world. I believe their anger is justified but also misplaced. And I believe with my whole heart that if they were shown another way, if they were shown a vision and strategy full of hope and opportunities and solutions, they would embrace it and never let go.

Ireland is not full... of berts or anything else. The Irish have the resources to welcome hundreds of thousands more to our shores. And we have the decency and humanity to do so too.

END NOTES

[1] *Ireland was an English/British colony for 800 years before it won partial independence in 1921, at which time it was partitioned into two jurisdictions: 1) the North or "Northern Ireland", made up of 6 counties that remained under British rule (and remains so today); and 2) the South or "Republic of Ireland", made up of 26 counties that gained freedom from Britain.*

Union Strategies Against Germany's Far-Right

Thomas Klikauer

Germany's unions are afraid of being infiltrated by AfD members. A recent case from the city of Hanover is currently pre-occupying many in Germany's union movement.

In that case, a local AfD apparatchik who was elected to the local city council has also been running for the works council of a local waste disposal company [Abfallentsorger Aha].

In the works council election, the AfD man – Jens Keller – received the most votes from his staff. He is also an active member of Germany's public service union Ver.di.

Yet, the union wants nothing to do with the neo-fascist AfD. It prefers to expel the right garbage worker and AfD apparatchik from the union. But stripping the AfD operative of his union membership turns out to be rather complicated. Many German trade unions are currently struggling with similar cases.

Some workers have even elected colleagues who express the racism of the AfD. Unions fear that migrant employees might be insulted, and minorities are discriminated against once there are AfD-members elected to works councils.

Such an AfD-influenced workplace would be defined by setting “them” (non-Germans) against us (Germans). Such a workplace climate might well be characterized by right-wing populist slogans, hate speech, and far-right conspiracy fantasies like the great reset.

Meanwhile, German trade unions' works council representatives have set the limits of what can be said on factory premises, workplaces, and

warehouses. The strategy is to prevent workplace from shifting to the far right. Increasingly, people who suffer from racism and discrimination turn to trade unions asking for help and support.

Worse, right-wing ideologies are an ever-increasing problem in many German companies. It is no longer a marginal problem.

The public service union Ver.di has already hired a special assistant for the former East-German states of Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, and Thuringia to help. Many trade unions are also offering training courses on how best to deal with workplace racism.

The police union's Jochen Kopelke recently argued that his union empowers its members by giving them arguments against the far-right. Meanwhile, the IG Metall union, too, recognizes that right-wing ideas have become a problem in many companies and that unions have to counteract that.

In accordance with the progressive and human rights tradition, unions credibly warn against racism, intolerance and far-right ideologies.

Unions openly and directly attack the AfD as the party-political embodiment of a far-right state of mind. Other social institutions in Germany are also gearing up against the AfD.

Germany's churches, for example, have recently, and very publicly distanced themselves from the AfD calling on their members to leave the party. Even the powerful corporate lobbying institution “BDI” argues against the AfD outlining the AfD's suicidal plan to leave the EU and Euro.



Photo: Christian Jungeblodt

Virtually all of Germany's democratic society agree that strong worded declarations against the AfD are necessary. Germany's churches, for example, prefer to kick out believers of far-right ideologies as these contradict their Christian and humanitarian values. Germany's churches fight those who are AfD members and are spreading their neofascist ideologies.

Historically, it is nothing new. Fascist has often pretended to be on the side of workers. Hitler's Nazis of the 1930s even featured the word "socialism" in its party name while – once in power – killing thousands of socialists and trade unionists.

Today, the AfD, too, is celebrating itself as a new "workers' party." Interestingly, both – Germany's trade unions and the AfD – have rather similar "social markers". Both are dominated by male, middle-aged, skilled, and unskilled workers. Seemingly, this is where both groups overlap.

Yet, nobody really knows exactly how many AfD supporters trade unions have in their ranks. Unions tend not to conduct a "mindset test" among their millions of members. A second problem is that it would not be easy to force union members to disclose their political party affiliation.

The third problem is that while being deeply anti-democratic, the neofascist AfD is not yet officially banned. This makes it more difficult to exclude union members who support the AfD.

In the case of Germany's police union, for example, membership numbers have recently increased. The GdP is now Germany's fifth largest union. The union has received a lot of praise from its members, from the media and from society for its "clear line against the right".

Yet, it seems inevitable to find unionists – like those organized in the GdP – supporting the

AfD. Already in Germany's federal election (2021), 12.2% of the union members gave their vote to the AfD. Yet, the AfD only received 10.3% in overall support.

Among such support for the AfD, there is a marked gender gap. Among the female unionists, support for the AfD was 8.3% while for male unionists it was 14.6%.

In other words, a high proportion of workers can be found to support the AfD. These AfD supporters can be characterized by poorer working conditions, a lack of recognition, low trust in institutions and a relatively high degree of anxiety and stress compared to voters of democratic parties.

Many of these union members and AfD voters show a belief in xenophobic ideologies while also supporting the restriction of immigration. Both have become priorities for many of them.

Meanwhile on the institutional side, right-wing groups are still a rather marginal phenomenon in one of Germany's most important workplace institutions: works councils.

This can indeed be seen as a success for trade unions. Right-wing influence has – so far – been kept within limits.

Yet, companies can also be catalysts for right-wing mobilization. Workplaces can be a location where shady right-wing mobilization collides with democratic political activities often organized by trade unions. This is not restricted to workplaces.

In the realm of politics, the wave of anti-right and anti-AfD rallies that soared through Germany during early 2024 is undoubtedly an encouragement for trade unions.

Yet, the immediate impact of these mass rallies remains uncertain. The AfD seems to have been pushed back – from polling just above 20%

in voter support (2023) to a 16% to 18% range (mid-May 2024).

On this, trade unions think that this optimism needs to be stabilized – even if the results at the ballot box should not turn out as hoped. Elections are scheduled for June (EU parliament), and September (three states in the former East-Germany) and many expect – despite the mass rallies against the AfD – to make substantial gains.

In all of this, trade unions distinguish between short-term activities and long-term strategies against the AfD. Next to parliamentary elections, trade unions are also facing virtually the same task inside companies and in works council elections.

Much of this is about combating the slowly but steady spreading of right-wing ideologies even into companies and workplaces.

One of the most prominent examples is the so-called “Zentrum” (center) – a right-wing extremist association affiliated with the AfD. Deceptively called “Zentrum Automobil” and in operation since 2009, it has been competing in works council elections – nationwide but mainly in the automotive industry.

Although the Zentrum has been able to win seats at works councils in past elections, the Zentrum and adjacent right-wing associations are far from reflecting the AfD's election successes.

Currently, the Zentrum and its bedfellows are targeting other industries, and they are also trying to gain a foothold in the social and health sector.

To contain right-wing forces inside companies and to convince colleagues to stand up for anti-fascist and solidarity-based solutions, the IG Metall union also supports the “Association for the Preservation of Democracy”.

The VBD is tasked with analyzing and mobilization of workers inside companies and to develop approaches for trade unions for “right-wing de-mobilization”.

Unions agree that all this must begin at the causes of discrimination, individual devaluation, dehumanization, and racial insults. This means the empowerment of workers which will – almost by definition – collide with the incapacitation of employees based on asymmetrical and hierarchical power relations inside capitalist companies.

When corporate management structurally and deliberately disempowers workers in everyday working life – often through the use of authoritarian corporate structures, deceptive corporate communication and management control – the formation of pro-active attitudes and democratic behaviors needed to fight the radical right are blocked.

This works the other way around as well. In companies where participation and collective co-determination achieves success, self-esteem, a willingness to take care of others and commitment grow.

In short, the more positive and successful democracy and commitment are perceived in companies, the lower the tendency to devalue others and to turn to right-wing ideologies.

Such a commitment to active democracy – both inside and outside of companies – will work towards the demobilization of the far-right. Obviously, what happens inside companies cannot be separated from social and political developments in the public sphere.

No less urgent are measures against the electoral successes of the parliamentary arm of Germany’s far-right: the AfD. The clear and present danger to democracy and to workplaces is real and imminent.

Still, much of this is not too likely to affect the upcoming state elections in Thuringia, Brandenburg and Saxony.

The unions’ most minimum goal is that the AfD is not getting involved in any state government. Unions do not want state governments making themselves indebted to the ideological whims of the rather dubious and deceitful AfD.

If the AfD were to get into a state government, the AfD and its far-right as well as neo-Nazi supporters will take advantage of additional state resources. As Hitler’s propaganda minister – Joseph Goebbels – once said,

“We are entering the Reichstag, in order that we may arm ourselves with the weapons of democracy from its arsenal. We shall become Reichstag deputies in order that the Weimar ideology should itself help us to destroy it.”

To achieve this aim, the AfD and its far-right apparatchiks – once in government – will gain access to areas of influence and will also have the opportunity to shape official policies.

Worse, they will be able to fill public offices with right-wing extremists. They will also be able to block parliamentary proceedings and cut funding for projects that further democracy as well as slashing funding for Holocaust education and memorials.

Beyond such electoral goals, the aim of many trade union initiatives against the AfD is to prevent people whose worldviews are not yet firmly locked in right-wing thought patterns from electing the AfD. Of course, it would be preferable if undecided and potential voters of the AfD be convinced to vote for democratic parties.

The demobilization of the far-right camp, as far as possible, is the order of the day. Every vote that does not strengthen right-wing is a good vote – even if it ends up in the trash.

The task is to move from right-wing anger to courage. In the medium term, union policies are also about integrating social groups that have not yet been reached into the mobilization of social progress in companies and in society.

In other words, the battle Rosa Luxemburg was fighting (1914-1918) is still not won. This is the battle between “class” vs. “nationalism”. In 1914 Luxemburg lost that battle.

Nationalism won and millions were killed on the altar of ultra-nationalistic ideologies. In 1933, unions lost again and even more millions had to die on the altar of the worst form of nationalism the world has ever seen: Hitler’s Nazism.

In the long term, there is no way for Germany’s progressive and democratic forces – including trade unions – to avoid problematizing such ideologies as well as the structurally fragile relationship between corporate capitalism and democracy.

A neoliberal-economic development model such as capitalism inevitably and repeatedly produces economic losers. It also manufactures corporate-managerial minorities that can dominate society because of their – largely uncontrolled – access to the media and power.

Such a model will not be able to shake off the temptation of authoritarian strategies to deal with the frequent crisis of capitalism. It is not about human values, democracy and morality. As German philosopher Max Horkheimer said in 1939,

if you do not want to talk about capitalism you should also keep silent about fascism.

Beyond all that, a kind of “double strategy” of a “clear line” against the AfD and an “open door” policy to return people back into Germany’s democratic society could promise positive outcomes:

1. A Clear Position: a “strong union policy” for an aggressive and confrontation strategy against those who carry right-wing populist ideologies like the AfD inside companies and in society.
2. Open-Door Policy: this means an open door offering to participate in company-internal and societal counter-far-right movements for those who have been made to feel insecure and angry. This Union strategy seeks to reintegrate them back into the realm of solidarity, the common interest of all workers and progressive projects.

Such a union strategy is not about simply “picking up” those who are called “angry citizens” – the infamous Wutbürger – through seemingly “programmatic concessions”.

This has been done by conservatives and liberals – sometimes to the point of self-denial. Making concessions to Wutbürger may well be a failed strategy that might even have strengthened those on the far-right side of politics.

Instead of this, a potentially more successful union strategy is about an offer to participate in an inclusive, solidarity-based and participatory policy that promises democratic solutions to problems.

Still, ideological attachments and consent to right-wing worldviews do not just “run above one’s head” (read: being theoretical issue). Hence, union counterstrategies need to respond to this directly through support for an increase in minimum wage, strengthening collective bargaining, and workers’ democracy. This would mean bringing the democratic movement into the world of work in the form of workplace and industrial democracy and into people’s everyday lives in the form of participatory democracy. This uses democracy to fight the anti-democratic forces of the AfD.

Debrief with May Boeve

May Boeve interviewed by Alexandria Shaner

The coming years are often referred to as our last chance to get on track to co-existing with our planet — the “decisive decade” is a term used by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Many activists and scientists warn there is even less time remaining on the clock. Regardless of metrics in days or degrees, the conclusion is that the climate and ecological emergency is ever more urgent. Every day and every degree matters in direct proportion to suffering and survival.

Organizers looking ahead greatly benefit from pausing for a look back. The value of a good debrief surpasses the time it sacrifices. What can we each understand about the last 15 years that could inform the next — personally, as community and as a movement?

After 15 years of building 350.org, co-founder and executive director, May Boeve has decided it's the right time to move on and transition leadership, having grown 350 from a student-led university collective to a global organization of 144 staff in over 25 countries supporting a network of 500 local groups. Under May's leadership, 350 has grown the global divestment movement, created high-profile campaigns and mobilizations to stop fossil fuels, and supported thousands of activists and movements around the world.

350 has also recently entered a new phase in campaigning — taking what they've learned after 15 years of fighting the fossil fuel industry to champion the transition to renewable energy in communities around the world. They are demanding world leaders fund renewable energy projects instead of fossil fuels and showing that people want affordable, reliable and cleaner energy, now.

I spoke with May about organization building, strategy, mobilization, climate justice, and activism. She shares widely applicable insights that bear on

current and future organizing — from intergenerational solidarity and student uprisings to the nitty gritty of behind the scenes work, from the double edged sword of technology to stewarding healthy networks, and of course, strategy.

Alexandria: How and when did you get activated? What were some of your first activism experiences?

May: My most memorable early activism was when I was 12, and writing a letter to the editor in my hometown paper about a beloved pasture that was slated to be removed. One of the activists involved in saving the land called me up and asked if I wanted to get involved. Through that, I got to know local community organizers and the mayor. It was the first time I can remember learning the power of raising one's voice and finding community through that.

My journey was one of feeling very passionate from a young age about a range of injustices – but feeling alone and somewhat isolated as a result. The difference maker was in finding other people who felt similarly – not only for finding my own sense of belonging but also in having a greater impact. That idea is central to what we have built at 350.

Campuses across the world are erupting with activism right now through the Gaza Solidarity Encampments. Though this movement is undoubtedly student-led, there are also essential roles that faculty, parents, and community members must play. As someone who got their start as a student activist, could you share your thoughts on intergenerational solidarity and empowerment?

Look at any major social movement and you will see the powerful role that young people and students play in articulating the moral clarity of a given crisis and exercising inspiring courage. Historic,



May Boeve, 350.org Executive Director speaks at a rally in Washington DC, US about ExxonKnew (August 19, 2016) (Photo: Robert Meyers)

first-of-its-kind climate legislation in the US would never have happened but for the youth leadership of the Sunrise Movement. The question for everyone else becomes: what does this mean for the rest of us?

The students on campuses today are trying to agitate because they don't see nearly enough changes happening to stop the killing in Gaza – and they are wisely and strategically elevating this issue on campuses, where elite opinion is still not, by and large, on the side of Palestinian rights. It is a brave use of leverage of privilege. I love the video of the father of one of the student protestors at USC who says, "I am here to support my daughter." That is how the ripples of activism and mobilizing can move more people into action.

From my own experience of campus activism – very plush by comparison (no tear gas or rubber bullets were used to thwart our climate activism at Middlebury College) – we had our greatest victories

when we teamed up with university staff, faculty, alumni, and community members – just as we are seeing take place now. As students at Middlebury, had we not worked alongside Bill McKibben, there would be no 350.org.

Campuses CAN be a microcosm of their wider communities – but only if the work of the students is not seen as isolated, but becomes connected to a wider set of constituencies. We are seeing glimmers of that today and let's hope it has an impact on the choices the US government is making around enabling a ceasefire and enforcing our own laws around the provision of aid in Gaza.

Talk about taking 350 from a student collective to an international organization. Was this growth part of the strategy? And how are vision and values affected by scale?

One of our core beliefs has always been that we need a larger, more diverse, and therefore more

politically powerful mass movement to confront the climate crisis. That said, we had no idea when we started how large and lasting 350 would become. We were quite allergic to institutionalizing in our early days, so the aspects of organization-building (decision-making processes, personnel policies, governance, etc.) came at a much later stage in our evolution. Growing pains of that nature are tricky for any organization but we benefited from the fact that we took on organization building after we had built up a reputation, a budget, a staff, and a lot of support.

Scale affects everything, including vision and values. In our case, we have a very ambitious vision, of building and scaling the global climate movement, which can only be achieved with a certain scale – but not necessarily the size of our own organization per se. We made a decision a few years ago to concentrate growth in our network – the volunteers and community groups, over 500 in total, that we support and who operate independently. A highly complex network like ours, operating in almost every country, cannot possibly be held together by a shared structure, but it can be held together through strategy and values, which is the approach we are trying to take.

Some of the highlights of your work with 350 include a long-term campaign for fossil fuel divestment, fighting the Keystone XL pipeline, and helping to launch the Global Climate Strike. What is 350's theory of change and how did strategy and tactics develop through these struggles?

We believe in organizing and mobilizing with an ever-increasing number of people in order to build the political power necessary for bold climate action that science and justice demand. We do this through focusing on dismantling the pillars of support of the fossil fuel industry — right now our focus is on creating conditions for climate solutions to scale, so that the fossil fuel industry cannot continue to claim that they have a positive role to play in the energy transition.

This year is the hottest year on record, we're seeing the catastrophic effects of the climate emergency

across the world. In parallel the cost of living crisis means people and communities are struggling to even afford their basic necessities – meanwhile, fossil fuel companies post record profits. These crises are inextricably linked to our dependency on fossil fuels and 350 is pushing for a world powered by community-centered renewable energy solutions to the climate crisis – which would provide reliable, equitable and cheaper energy for all.

Over the years we have emphasized different elements – in the 2010s we were primarily focused on mobilizing and showcasing the diversity of the climate movement, and bringing that to bear on the social license of the fossil fuel industry, through pipeline fights and fossil fuel divestment. In 2019 there was a historic upsurge in climate action through the climate strikes, driven by young people, but that was followed by a big crash, largely brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, we have shifted our focus to organizing, and building more leadership within the movement, particularly in the Global South.

You've often been vocal about inequality and sexism, even within the environmentalist movement. Could you talk about the justice in climate justice?

One of the aspects of the climate fight that has changed the most since I got involved is the understanding of, advocacy for, and solutions when it comes to climate justice. It is now generally understood that climate change is an injustice, a symptom of a wider set of systemic injustices. By that I mean the causes of climate change, from fossil fuel extraction and burning, to the impacts, from pollution, extreme weather events, sea level rise, and more, can all be understood through a lens of justice. Policies that were inequitable that led to certain places and certain people – largely people of color, lower income people, women – bearing the brunt of all of this, in the past and to this day. This understanding and shift in worldview has enormous implications for what approaches are required to adapt to climate change and stop it from getting even worse.



During Rise for Climate, a global day of action, 250,000 people mobilised around the world. Photo: Brooke Anderson

The fact that this shift occurred within a movement that had its origins in protecting wild places from people – and in some ways saw people as a problem to be dealt with – is a monumental shift and something to celebrate. As someone who got involved in environmental activism by protecting a place I loved so that people couldn't live there – I have experienced a change in my own worldview precisely because it became so clear that climate change was deeply unjust. This happened because I met people who were losing their homes due to flooding, or fires, or coal mines, or an acidifying ocean.

Movements help shift ideas and the politics of what is possible. And the prominence of what we might call a climate justice worldview is thanks largely to the work of the climate justice and wider environmental justice movements, who have articulated a policies, culture, and a set of principles that have been widely influential in what we might call the 'mainstream' or 'white-led' environmental movement. You can see the impact very clearly in the Biden Administration's Justice 40 Initiative, and the existence of networks like the Climate Jus-

tice Alliance, the Solutions Project, and the NDN Collective, and their role in implementation of the Inflation Reduction Act, and ensuring it is accountable to principles of climate justice.

Our new vision towards community-centered renewable energy is built on the principle that climate solutions should be rooted in justice. Solutions should put the rights of people and communities front and center, protect and conserve the environment, and not replicate the extractive and neocolonial models of the past.

350 has been celebrated for its creative use of internet tools, with the website Critical Mass declaring a 2009 campaign "one of the strongest examples of social media optimization the world has ever seen." Foreign Policy magazine called it "the largest ever global coordinated rally of any kind." Talk about mass mobilization strategy and tools for social change then and now.

I feel very grateful that 350 got our start when digital tools were brand new and their long-term

implications had yet to be proven one way or another. It was a very exciting time in the 2000s and it contributed a lot of optimism to my generation and our experience of social movements.

To give an example, for our first day of action in 2009, the one you reference, we brought in hundreds of thousands of new Twitter followers and email subscribers because we were able to get Ashton Kucher, then the most followed person on Twitter, to retweet a post from Nick Kristof (whom Bill McKibben knew personally). That kind of rapid, explosive growth – for people obsessed with scale and a sense of urgency about climate change – made us feel like our big vision was possible.

It's therefore been soul-crushing to see what has become of social media in particular, now that we understand it better. How it is leading to increasing isolation and anxiety, especially among young people, at a time when we desperately need to come together to exercise our political voice. How disinformation and misinformation make democratic participation increasingly challenging. These aren't new challenges but the omnipresence of these tools makes political organizing even harder.

I'm committed to continuing to find the bright spots – groups like Aspiration Tech (they were our landlords at our very first 350 office) and stalwart digital organizing groups like OPEN who continue to work at the intersection of technology and movement building.

Fundraising occupies a huge amount of energy and time for most people who work for social change. Sometimes it even causes competition between organizations and people who are actually working towards the same goals. How can we overcome this dynamic? What was your experience in building and running a large nonprofit organization?

You are asking the right question: how do we overcome it?

Start with strategy and not with fundraising per se: working together on joint initiatives, building close

relationships with other organizations who are both quite similar and quite different. You learn equally valuable and different lessons that way to shape how you share and how you make decisions.

Larger orgs can play a role in incubation, seed funding, and some of the organizational set up issues. They can also make introductions and vouch for other organizations.

Institutional donors can give multi year grants that help organizations plan on a longer time horizon, which enables bigger bolder ideas; and unrestricted grants, which enable organizations to change their plans when political conditions change...which is about every 15 minutes.

We also should be focused on building membership – the sustaining year on year individual gifts that make an organization truly “people-powered.” I will never forget when I was on a call with Maurice Mitchell, director of the Working Families Party. We were checking in on our organizational partnership, and at the end of the call he asked me to increase my personal contribution to WFP. I was so impressed with that – we all need to believe in what we are doing so much that we are always asking for support.

As someone who has spent nearly 20 years organizing for climate justice, what are some of the crucial but behind the scenes work that should get more of a spotlight?

This is my favorite question.

- Paying attention to how people are feeling. Taking care of people.
- Keeping up relationships with allies, especially those not as closely connected to your day-to-day work.
- Learning about other movements and issues beyond your own
- Developing your own strategic judgment – knowing how to listen to your own insights.
- Administrative work. Finance, HR, legal support, scheduling.

- Healing conflicts
- Engaging in debriefing, learning, assessment of impact, and applying lessons learned

What are the biggest challenges ahead for 350, climate justice organizations generally, and the movement as a whole?

Between the COVID-19 pandemic and recent tragic wars, world leaders are devoting less attention to the collaborations required for multilateral climate action. Not only that but with rising authoritarianism, fewer world leaders are inclined to promote climate justice solutions and are choosing instead to focus on business as usual, which often serves fossil fuel interests. Contrast this with the political conditions in 2015 when the Paris Agreement was signed: numerous heads of state were aligned in advancing climate action.

How do movements manage to create conditions for a political breakthrough, if we assume the level of global conflicts does not diminish for some time? As we have written elsewhere, peace is a prerequisite for climate action at the scale required.

Under these conditions, 350 has shifted our strategy dramatically in order to focus on climate solutions: those that can be enacted locally, nationally, regionally – and simultaneously. Specifically: to advance the call for renewable energy all over the world. Finance is always a challenge when it comes to climate action and this year we're calling for finance to be redirected from fossil fuels to these fair and community-focused renewable energy projects – at the scale of trillions.

By empowering ourselves, quite literally, we hope to create meaningful agency and develop powerful new alliances. To bring this added political punch, we are focusing on a campaign with Brazilian communities to provide solar energy at scale in the Amazon. This is part of a broad-based effort to create political will in the leadup to the COP30 summit in Brazil in 2025, where

a breakthrough in the climate ambitions of the world's largest emitting countries is desperately needed.

What's next for you? Do you have advice for maintaining longevity as an activist?

My immediate plan after my last day is to campaign for Biden in Michigan, where the outcome will be quite close and where I have a lot of family. After that I plan to take a break before deciding what I want to do next.

That's what I would say about longevity – breaks matter. Getting perspective from our work, and also just putting it down for a while helps remind oneself that organizational leadership and movement building is a team sport.

It's also really important to create the kind of support you need. For me, that has always involved working with coaches, and having a network of peers with similar roles in similarly-sized organizations, who I can check in with regularly to get advice.

Would you like to platform someone or a smaller organization who could use more visibility?

First of all: my colleagues at 350.org, past and present, who have taught me so much, and who have built a beloved community of powerful impact that shines on. Most of what I'm describing in my answers to your questions came about with their help.

Second, are some other global network-based organizations that are doing terrific work with and for movements:

Namati – grassroots legal empowerment
The OPEN Network – digital campaigning
Clima/Global Greengrants Fund – grassroots grantmaking
Digital Democracy – digital access

Left or Not Left?

Michael Albert

Consider everybody in society. Some eat meat, others don't. Some live in Spain, others in Japan. Some are rural, others urban. Countless differences separate people into "we and they groups" for one purpose or another. So, what about for political purposes? What differences divide people into left and not left? What disagreements about social change are that important?

Suppose you think being left sometimes entails engaging in violence. Someone else thinks being left requires always rejecting violence. Is one left and one non-left due to that disagreement?

Suppose you think that to urge others to vote for Biden in a contested state is to shill for the Democrats. Someone else thinks to not stop Trump aids catastrophe. Is it legitimate for either to call the other not left? Both dismissals exist. Is either warranted? Is either constructive?

Suppose you believe that for winning social change a particular aspect of life is more fundamental to address than all other aspects. You say if someone disagrees with elevating my favored aspect, they are not left. If they agree with you, however, okay, they are left. For example, you feel that what's socially possible and desirable depends mainly on class. Others should understand racism, sexism, ecological decline, fascism, and war first and foremost in terms of relations to class. Someone else says that race is central or that gender, authority, ecology, or international relations is central. Should such differences divide left and not left?

Or suppose if you agree with me on something that I think now but that I didn't think last year, I say you are left. If not, I say you are not left. For example, I newly become vegan, advocate for trans rights, condemn some country's recent policies, or oppose a current war, and depending on which side of that line you're on, I deem you left or not left. Useful?

Perhaps I support writing letters to elected officials, giving talks to the rich and powerful, organizing strikes, or taking over buildings. Whichever it is, you don't agree. I decide you are not left. Or perhaps you think some tactic I favor is counterproductive. You deem me not left. Is one of us left, the other not left?

The above are not phony caricatures. These and other divisions often arise. I support a higher wage for custodians on my campus, affirmative action in hiring where I work, higher taxes on the rich everywhere, debt forgiveness, or abortion on demand. You say to support any reform ratifies and strengthens the system. To seek any reform vests all concern in one limited aim. Reform-seekers go home at the end of each campaign. Struggle ends. I say no, reforms improve people's lives. One should support them both out of solidarity and because the battle to win them can yield further radicalization and enlarge commitment. A campaign may end but struggle continues. They each say to the other, "my way or the highway."

Still another example would be if you are in my organization I consider you left, but if you're not in my organization, I consider you not left. Or, perhaps I feel you're not left if you don't function in light of a collective project and program. Warranted?

The point of all this is that people often highlight differences to demarcate borders where those on one side are left and those on the other side are not left. But which demarcations are sufficiently important? Put differently, how large an umbrella should the whole left assemble under? How quick should we be to push people out from under our umbrella? And why does any of this matter?

It matters because demarcation lines can destructively split the left. A particular campaign divides

in two. Each side deems the other not left. A particular organization divides in two or even just falls apart because a difference runs through it which people start to feel demarcates left from not left. Before long those on each side don't want to share anything with those on the other side. Each side increasingly views the other side as people to defeat.

Hostilities across demarcation lines tend to become a bit like what occurs in a dysfunctional family. Activists behave like relatives who too often don't even clearly acknowledge much less focus on trying to narrow their differences. They feel antagonism but avoid communication. Absent communication, the antagonism festers and hostility grows. Soon past hostility becomes the reason for future hostility. Each side feels the other ought to change. Neither side changes until finally no one expends any effort to hear across the growing divide. When a significant difference appears, can mutual aid instead cross the demarcation line?

Suppose to win a new world concerns us, or to win a better society, or to win a particular campaign, or to create a particular project. Our personal comfort should matter, but what ought to matter most is to amass sufficient people and shared insights to win whatever we seek. To build a left able to persist but also to change plans and even aims as circumstances change, can a structure facilitate people hearing and addressing one another across differences sufficiently to discover what can succeed?

How do you welcome differences but avoid splits? I've heard two ways. One is you create a coalition that includes, for example, an anti-war movement, a women's movement, an anti-racist movement and other diverse campaigns and organizations that each have different views so that the coalition fully agrees on only a particular narrow focus or what some call a least common denominator. You might create an anti-war coalition, a Green New Deal coalition, an abortion rights coalition, or a Cease-fire coalition where any such coalition includes many components that do not agree on everything or even on most things and that sometimes even significantly disagree on various things, but which

jointly pursues the anti-war, Green, abortion rights, or Ceasefire agenda even while and perhaps because their coalition largely ignores and has no shared program about everything else and doesn't even try to address differences about everything else. The coalition approach achieves effective collective unity about a narrowly-focussed agenda.

Another approach to build the overall left and not just one specific aspect of the whole is to not only welcome but also acknowledge views on both sides of many possible demarcation lines. Organizations, projects, and movements that take this approach still disagree about many things which each member finds important. But the many members openly acknowledge their differences and commit to hear, respect, and continue to explore disputed issues in hopes they will attain new agreements and insights. Perhaps one member proves to be more correct in what they were thinking about some disputed matter, or perhaps entirely new views emerge. In the interim, the whole forthrightly includes both sides of many disagreements. More, as a whole entity, it pursues the agendas of the main proponents of different focuses as the collective approach to that focus, be it race, gender, sexuality, class, ecology, or international relations. The whole has a widened not a narrowed focus. It has a greatest sum not a least common denominator approach. The participants conduct mutual aid, celebrate solidarity, and seek to sincerely explore and respectfully work through their differences toward greater unity. Regarding most of the potentially divisive issues mentioned earlier, this second approach seeks to include their sum rather than to eliminate or simply ignore contending views to avoid disagreement. Consider violence or not. Dave Dellinger, who a central figure in sixties and seventies radical work was a pacifist. He did not believe in the use of violence. On the other hand, he worked with groups like the Black Panthers who did believe in violent tactics. So they had a very strong disagreement but they were mutually respectful and heard each other and tried to learn from each other and even to operate in proximity to each other. Unlike many others at the time, they saw each other as part of

one left. Can that type mutual respect extend over the various demarcation lines I mentioned earlier? Can we see ways for disagreeing partisans to think and talk about their differences to try to narrow them instead of disagreeing partisans rushing to polarize and define each other as an opponent to defeat? Could those involved seek to stay under one umbrella to sincerely explore their differences and find what proves ultimately most useful?

Consider an example that now operates in and may even cause dissolution of one of the largest U.S. left organizations, DSA. Some members seek and celebrate reforms. Other members dismiss reforms and seek only revolution. Some of the former view the latter as mucking up their win-changes-now “brand” by callously ignoring the needs of current citizens. In reverse, some of the latter view the former as mucking up their win-everything-now “brand,” by losing track of or getting coopted out of recognizing the full extent of current oppressions and the need to seek fundamental rather than only ameliorative change.

Could a serious conversation rather than growing separation take place? Would it reveal that beyond the intensifying conflict, there exists an interesting unity? Leftists in DSA who focus intently on reforms nonetheless think it would be great to have fundamental change. Leftists in DSA who focus intently on revolution nonetheless think it would be excellent to have a ceasefire, a higher minimum wage, and abortion rights. To have those who emphasize reform and also those who emphasize revolution in the same organization without each seeing the other as non-left or even as an enemy, what if DSA members were to establish overall shared aims? Couldn't they then hear each other and work together because each would recognize that the other wants to win the shared worthy aims and disagrees only about how much emphasis to put here or there and what particular words to employ at particular moments, and so on?

There's a domain in which the above common sum approach to “membership” happens routinely. It's called science. Within science, there's

physics, chemistry, biology and much else, and in the whole of it people have a great many disagreements. Even within each separate component, which are a bit like an orientation or specific movement or organization inside the whole left, there are big differences. So physicists have very strong differences with each other, but they nonetheless respect each other. They don't say you're not under the same umbrella as me. They accept that serious differences exist, debate them, and yet continue to respect one another's efforts. They each and all want to move the whole forward as they explore, discuss, and debate their differences. Can leftists do that more often and never form “circular firing squads?”

I'm suggesting that instead of frequently seeking to find a line of demarcation that allows the finder to enjoy a more comfortable but smaller community, we should try to figure out ways to respect, listen to, learn from, and affect people on both sides of differences. It is better to not define our differences as demarcation lines between left and not left. It is better to not try to escape from or to destroy those with whom we differ. It is better to try to converse, debate, and explore with those with whom we differ. Rather than seek “better fewer but better,” we should seek “better more but better.” Fewer is not a goal. More is. And better members means members who seek to hear as well as to speak. Members who participate. That is what can win what is sought by all, and not just win nothing or win what is sought by few. This approach won't always work or even be an advisory that always applies. But often it will make sense and fit. And so often we should try the mutual aid, conversing, listening, and exploring rather than exiling approach. Trying to hunker down in a comfortable perfectly homogenized left is most often counterproductive. That doesn't mean that that there is never a line and on one side there's left and on the other side there's not left. Sometimes that is the case and it's important to realize when. But to rush to see every difference that discomforts us as grist to not converse, become hostile, and then split is a sure recipe for losing.

Book Bans Don't Protect Kids, They Harm Us

the 2nd Grade Fearless Bumblebees

Introduction from an anonymous teacher:

When I started teaching at our elementary school over two decades ago, racial and LGBTQ-phobic epithets led to intimidation, at worst physical assaults and drops in student academic performance. One Latine child had his journal pooped on and flushed down the toilet and himself was thrown by the bully into a recycling dumpster! These sorts of incidents are now unheard of, ever since our District adopted a curriculum to educate students about the cultures and genders that make up our population, mostly through award winning-literature.

This year, when our 2nd grade Fearless Bumblebees learned that some of their most beloved District-mandated literary works were banned, they demanded to know where. This led to them persuading me to allow them to scour the Pen America Index of School Book Bans (2022-23), after which they concluded that Florida had done the most banning of the books they recognized. I had a contact in Florida's Manatee County and my students were studying persuasive writing, so I tailored our class writing model for Manatee County School District that had banned our Bumblebees' beloved *I Am Jazz*.

After reviewing the components of a persuasive letter, I asked them to tell me what were the most important points they wanted to make and jotted these as bullet points. Next, while studying the structure of a persuasive letter, I asked students to suggest where each point should go. I was surprised how well their organization matched my ideas, except for perhaps one bullet point that needed more explanation. But they did need more help with the transitions. I also made suggestions for more examples and more descriptive language or similes, though students came up with all these themselves. Then I made them rewrite it about six

or seven times. One restructuring was prompted by a girl who announced, "I thought about this on the weekend and realized Florida thinks they are protecting children by banning books but really they are harming us!"

This is their final draft, though I did just add the title. Unfortunately, the original Florida paper they sent this to rejected it because of the timing and their dedicating all their space to the elections.

BOOK BANS DON'T PROTECT KIDS, THEY HARM US

By The 2nd grade Fearless Bumblebees

Dear Manatee Readers,

Did you know that your School District of Manatee County has banned 44 books, including *I am Jazz* by Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings, according to Pen America? We think this is a horrible choice. We don't think it's a mistake because we think they did it on purpose. We think they are scared that these books will brainwash kids into being LGBTQ. We will show you how this can't happen so that your children are protected and can still enjoy *I am Jazz* and the other banned books.

First of all, Manatee County School District says they want to protect kids, but it's the opposite. Banning books actually hurts kids and can lead to bullying. *I am Jazz* helps stop this bullying from happening by educating children about who transgender people really are. You see people are often bullied by those who feel uncomfortable or scared of folks they think are "weird" or different. Also, hurt people hurt people. Or bullies might be jealous because they can't be who they really want to be.



Artwork by Caitlin Z. Bellinger

The solution is to teach about people who are different so others can stop being uncomfortable and scared and stop bullying. I am Jazz does this by educating people about a transgender child so kids won't be scared by this when they grow up.

The story is about a child who was born with male body parts but likes dresses, mermaids and princesses and feels like a girl inside. Her family treats her like a boy until they take her to the doctor and learn the truth: that she is transgender. Finally, she gets to start wearing dresses, swim with a shimmering mermaid tail in the pool, her hair as long as kelp swirling around her in the water. Unfortunately, even though her friends and family accept her as a girl, she is still not allowed in the girl's bathroom and has to play soccer on the boys team at school. Yet, she says even though she is different she is proud to be who she is: Jazz.

I am Jazz teaches you that you can be whoever you want to be and your gender is up to you. We want Manatee County schools to stop banning this and other educational books. If Florida really wants to protect children, you should let them read books that help them be who they really are and to empathize with people who are different. LGBTQ books don't make kids transgender just like when you empathize with manatees who are being affected by global warming, it doesn't brainwash you into becoming a manatee.

All bans are dangerous. That's why you should not ban this or other books that are educational. You have to protect and love each child, including those of us who are LGBTQ. Please don't let us down, Manatee County!

Sincerely,
The Fearless Bumblebees
(Anonymous school and state)

How the Constitution Fails to Protect the Environment

Katrina Fischer Kuh, James R. May

The absence of clear and broad constitutional authority to protect the environment limits the scope of federal environmental law.

Even a healthy U.S. democracy would struggle to respond effectively to the “wicked” problem of climate change. As humans, we would have to overcome innate cognitive limitations to accept the connection between everyday actions like driving and attenuated effects on climate. As voters, we would have to appreciate the importance of addressing a problem with limited immediate salience primarily for the benefit of future generations. Politicians would need the courage to fight for policies that would yield no visible benefits for voters in their political lifetimes.

Change would have to occur over the tooth and nail opposition of the fossil fuel companies—among the most powerful corporate special interests in the history of our country. We would need to be open to transformative change and a rethinking of values and priorities to develop a shared vision for a future radically different from settled expectations, all while reckoning with the ways that historical injustices—most notably colonialism and racism—produced and remain embedded in the systems that brought us to this precipice.

But our democracy is decidedly not healthy. Corporations pour money into elections virtually unrestrained and face no consequences for flagrantly lying to the public—most notably for present purposes about whether climate change is real and dangerous and what causes it—to maximize their profits. The right to vote is now more theoretical than real, with federal protections dismantled and many state and local gov-

ernments adopting measures that make voting harder (especially for disfavored people, including communities of color).

The votes of those who make it into the voting booth are counted—our electoral system is sound. However, it is not perceived as such; ideological fantasies of voting fraud cause vast swaths of the public to reject legitimate electoral outcomes. And myriad pathologies in the information environment, from social media algorithms to purposeful disinformation efforts, have fractured our ability to talk to and reason with one another.

Nor is our climate system healthy or stable. We already limp from unprecedented crisis to unprecedented crisis—the Pacific Northwest heatwave in 2021, deadly fires in 2023, a hurricane that made landfall in Louisiana in 2021 and drowned 11 people in New York City basement apartments—with hardly a chance to catch our breath in between.

This rapidly changing physical reality adds further stress to our ailing democracy. We face the daunting task of attempting to transform our society, law, and economy to cease emissions and sequester carbon while also trying to adapt to ongoing and worsening dislocations from climate change.

In short, our democracy must somehow marshal focus, purpose, and resources to address climate change’s long-term challenges to life and justice while enduring increasingly frequent and extreme climate-related events that take lives, exacerbate injustices, and put unprecedented strain on democracy and governance.

How the Constitution Obstructs Climate Policy

How and why does the constitutional status quo fail to meet the climate crisis? It begins with constitutional design. The Constitution grants the Supreme Court and such lower courts, as Congress establishes, “judicial authority.” Federal courts were thought to be the “least dangerous branch” and less prestigious appointments than, say, supreme courts in Virginia or New York—among the reasons some of the first appointed Supreme Court justices, John Jay and John Rutledge, quit the bench.

But the import of judicial review was transformed in *Marbury v. Madison* when then-Chief Justice John Marshall famously declared that it is “emphatically the duty of the Judicial Department to say what the law is,” as it has done in more than 20,000 decisions since its inception in 1789.

Since its inception to June 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court has had 116 justices. Yet very few have acknowledged that catastrophic climate change is happening and has been caused by humans. Even those justices who acknowledge climate change believe that Congress, not the courts, should address it.

The U.S. Constitution’s 4,543 all but ignore environmental concerns. It was crafted to address separation of powers, federalism, and civil liberties. There is an extensive taxonomy of the sources and limits to federal and state authority to reach climate change. Virtually nothing is uncontested, giving rich context to former Chief Justice John Marshall’s maxim that “we must never forget that it is a constitution we are expounding.” But, forget it or not, the Constitution has failed the climate.

Constitutional Omission

The Constitution presumes the existence of an environment capable of supporting a flourish-

ing society but does not explicitly recognize or protect the environment. Indeed, it was historically uncertain whether the Constitution empowered the federal government to act to protect the environment at all. The textual silence of the Constitution with respect to the environment is mirrored by the judicial silence about how the environment supports other rights explicitly recognized in the Constitution.

Despite the obvious fact that life or liberty cannot exist without functioning ecosystems, courts in the United States do not recognize any federal constitutional environmental rights, even to the extent that an environmental right might be deemed appurtenant to explicitly enshrined constitutional rights.

The constitutions of many countries explicitly protect the environment, and in many others, the courts have interpreted nonenvironmental constitutional provisions to necessarily include environmental rights. That is not the case in the United States. The Constitution does not explicitly protect the environment, nor is the protection of the environment recognized as being required to protect other constitutional rights.

The absence of clear and broad constitutional authority to protect the environment—explicit in the Constitution’s text or understood by courts to reside within other enumerated powers—limits the scope of federal environmental law. One aspect of this limit is foundational. Finding constitutional authority on which to adopt our core federal environmental laws required judicial willingness and stretching of doctrine.

What might the laws coming out of our great public awakening to modern environmental problems in the 1970s—the National Environmental Policy Act, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Endangered Species Act—have looked like had they been adopted against a backdrop of clear and broad constitutional authority?



Photo: Joe Brusky

The dearth of constitutional authority limits not just the structure of our core federal environmental statutes but also how they are interpreted and applied. Internalized understandings of the limits of what is constitutionally possible constrain our policymaking imagination when it is imperative that we bring about systemic, transformational change to respond effectively to today's environmental challenges.

One side of the coin is the absence of clear and broad authority to protect the environment. In addition to failing to give the federal government clear power to protect the environment, the Constitution also fails to impose clear limits on the federal government's power to harm the environment, let alone impose a duty on the government to prevent ecological damage.

The Constitution's failure to identify limits on government harm to the environment compounds the lack of express power to act to protect the environment. The Constitution is (at least as a matter of express text) silent when it

comes to protecting individuals from government destruction of the ecological necessities for a healthful life. And, unlike in the case of constitutional power to legislate on environmental matters, courts have been largely unwilling to read such limits into the Constitution.

To appreciate how constitutional silence on the environment contributes to constitutional hostility to environmental protection, it is important to recall that the Constitution affords other values—private property, speech, and states' rights—explicit recognition and protection. The constitutional omission of the environment thus diminishes the importance of environmental interests when considered relative to other interests explicitly protected by the Constitution. One-sided constitutional protection for private property, for example, hobbles adaptation policy by dissuading governments from restricting new development in climate-vulnerable locations out of fear of triggering an obligation to compensate private landowners.

Judicial interpretation could overcome the textual constitutional omission of the environment. For example, during the Progressive Era, scientists, attorneys, and politicians succeeded in persuading courts to interpret the Commerce Clause to give the federal government significant constitutional environmental authority.

There are many powerful arguments that—despite the lack of explicit text and a historical, doctrinal focus on the Commerce Clause—the Constitution can and should be understood to afford broader environmental powers and impose environmental limits and duties on the government. To date, however, courts have largely abdicated their institutional role in the development of climate policy.

The constitutional structure of our representative democracy thus creates an obstacle to mitigation. While courts withdraw from engaging on climate change policy, reasoning that it would be counter-majoritarian for judges to weigh in, the reality is that the political process that produces climate change policy is not, by design or in practice, majoritarian. In the context of climate change, the Senate and Electoral College resolutely skew against climate change mitigation, allowing a public and political minority to obstruct the adoption and implementation of robust mitigation law.

Moreover, it is not simply that courts decline to exercise their constitutional authority to engage with climate policy out of a mistaken belief that it would be “undemocratic.” Courts affirmatively exacerbate the obstacle that our constitutional structure poses to adopting mitigation law through interpretations of the Constitution that limit voting rights (thereby decreasing majority voice) and elevate the rights of corporations (thereby increasing corporate voice).

Judicial interpretations of the Constitution help to produce, sustain, and afford veto power to the minority public and political block obstructing federal mitigation policy. Fossil fuel interests,

gifted a First Amendment right by the Supreme Court to make effectively unlimited donations to political campaigns in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, orchestrated a well-documented and effective campaign to convince a relevant swath of the American public and their representatives—the group with a smaller population but greater representation through the Electoral College and Senate—that climate change is not real, not human-caused, not dangerous, and or/not imminent.

In lawsuits brought by plaintiffs against fossil fuel companies seeking to hold them accountable for their lies, the companies, without shame, respond that they have a right to lie under the First Amendment, especially if they lie to influence public policy.

The constitutional status quo, defined by a series of judicial interpretations and decisions, fails on climate because it fails more broadly on democracy. It neglects to protect fundamental rights like the right to vote while enshrining new rights for corporate interests.

The Constitutional Status Quo Fails to Meet the Climate Moment

The Constitution, as presently worded, interpreted, and applied, is obstructing the development of a robust societal response to climate change, partly by failing to protect healthy democratic processes and advance real social justice.

We could, of course, amend the Constitution to explicitly support the protection of the environment, better protect democratic processes, and advance social justice. We could also encourage new understandings of existing constitutional texts that recognize the fundamental value of and right to a healthy environment, more effectively support healthy democratic processes, and go further to advance social justice. Any new approach will require an open-eyed reckoning with how and why the constitutional status quo is failing to meet the climate moment.

How Banks and Investors Are Fueling a Global Biodiversity Crisis

Laurel Sutherlin

In a global context where tropical rainforests play a critical role in biodiversity conservation and climate regulation, these ecosystems are severely threatened by expanding agribusiness and logging activities. This poses significant risks to the environment, wildlife, and communities dependent on rainforests.

Against the backdrop of escalating climate change impacts, urgent action is needed to prevent the collapse of these vital ecosystems and address the injustices faced by Indigenous and local communities and workers within the agricultural sector.

The ratification of the UN Global Biodiversity Framework in December 2022 marked a pivotal moment, signaling a collective commitment by 196 countries to reverse the decline in global biodiversity. However, financial institutions have historically failed to address their role in exacerbating the biodiversity crisis.

A 2023 report by Forests and Finance—a coalition of campaign, grassroots and research organizations that includes TuK Indonesia, Profundo, Amazon Watch, Repórter Brasil, BankTrack, Sahabat Alam Malaysia, Friends of the Earth U.S., and my organization, Rainforest Action Network—sheds light on the extensive financial support provided to sectors responsible for tropical deforestation, including beef, palm oil, pulp and paper, rubber, soy, and timber. “From January 2016 to September 2023, banks provided at least \$307 billion in credit to these operations,” states the report, while institutional investors held approximately \$38 billion in related shares and bonds.

Despite fluctuations in financial flows, there has been no discernible downward trend in financing

forest-risk commodity production. Alarming, the analysis of more than 100 financial institutions’ policies in 2023 revealed grossly inadequate safeguards against deforestation and its associated social and environmental impacts. The average policy score was just 17 percent, according to the report.

Entities like JBS, Cargill, Royal Golden Eagle, and Sinar Mas Group exemplify the egregious behaviors tolerated and enabled by banks and investors.

Demands to Correct a Systemic Issue

The report by Forests and Finance urged governments and financial institutions to adopt and enact five principles:

1. Halt and reverse biodiversity loss
2. Uphold and prioritize the rights of Indigenous peoples, women, and local communities
3. Facilitate a just transition
4. Safeguard ecosystem integrity
5. Harmonize institutional objectives across sectors, issues, and instruments

Immediate action is crucial to combat the climate and biodiversity crises. The report urges financial institutions to align their activities with sustainability goals, enact robust environmental and social policies, and ensure transparency and accountability. By holding the financial sector accountable for its role in enabling social and environmental harm, we can work toward preserving biodiversity and mitigating the impacts of climate change for current and future generations.

Notable Progress

The Forests and Finance report highlights the significant progress of tropical forest countries and key import and financial jurisdictions in promoting sustainable financial practices and combating deforestation. Brazil, Indonesia, Malaysia, the United States, and the European Union have all taken notable steps toward integrating environmental, social, and governance (ESG) considerations into their financial systems.

Brazil stands out for excluding industrial livestock activities from sustainable sovereign bonds and for being the first country to commit to integrating the International Sustainability Standards Board's IFRS Sustainability Disclosure Standards into its regulatory framework by 2026. Implementing these standards will help bolster Brazilian capital markets by amplifying transparency in sustainability-related risks and opportunities. This, in turn, will ensure that companies attract capital and foster global investments that are aligned to meeting the goals of nature protection and sustainable development.

Another initiative that supports sustainability is the implementation of green taxonomies. These taxonomies are meant to simplify guidelines regarding activities that support decarbonization objectives, including efforts to curtail deforestation and environmental degradation. This can bolster financiers' confidence in investing in projects that move the needle toward a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy.

Indonesia introduced its Green Taxonomy in January 2022 to expedite financing for sustainable sectors. "Indonesia's joint targets under the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) include capping power sector emissions to 290 MT by 2030 and reaching net zero by 2050," reported Luthfyana Kartika Larasati and Tiza Mafira of the Climate Policy Initiative, an independent nonprofit research group based in San Francisco, in October 2023.

"To achieve these [targets], phasing out coal-fired power plants while accelerating the deployment of

renewable energy sources is necessary. As financiers are now reluctant to finance coal, a transition taxonomy defines measurable parameters within which coal investment is allowed in order to facilitate early coal decommissioning," wrote Larasati and Mafira.

Malaysia implemented the Value-based Intermediation Financing and Investment Impact Assessment Framework (VBIAF) in November 2019 and issued the Climate Change and Principle-based Taxonomy in 2021 to guide Islamic financial institutions.

Meanwhile, a March 2024 Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) climate disclosure ruling seems to be a step in the right direction toward the U.S. managing its climate risk, even though the move remains inadequate to effectively protect the world's forests. On the procurement side, the new EU Deforestation Regulation, expected to take effect on December 30, 2024, provides a potentially powerful new tool for achieving supply chain traceability and transparency.

The European Union also approved new EU Taxonomy criteria in 2023 focusing on biodiversity protection and ecosystem restoration, despite criticism that it judged harmful sectors like forestry and bioenergy to be environmentally sustainable economic activities.

Forest-Risk Credit Trends

The report revealed that at least \$307 billion in credit had been directed to forest-risk sectors from 2016 to September 2023. The beef sector dominated South America, while palm oil led in Southeast Asia and rubber in Central and West Africa. Primary beneficiaries included agro-commodity traders and companies with significant environmental and social violations.

While progress has been made, heightened attention and enhanced due diligence procedures are needed to address associated ESG risks and promote sustainable financial practices to combat deforestation and environmental degradation.

Big corporations launched the Taskforce for Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) in June 2021 to guide businesses in reporting nature-related dependencies. However, civil society organizations have repeatedly raised concerns about the task force's development, composition, approach, and potential for greenwashing.

Regional Analysis of Credit Flows

The analysis of regional credit flow and investment trends in forest-risk commodity sectors across South America, Southeast Asia, and Central and West Africa revealed significant financial flows and investments contributing to deforestation and environmental degradation.

In South America, the beef sector dominated forest-risk credit flows, followed by soy, and pulp and paper, with Banco do Brasil emerging as a significant creditor. Infamous beneficiaries included companies like Suzano and Marfrig.

In Southeast Asia, palm oil was the dominant recipient of forest-risk credit, followed by pulp, paper, and rubber. Indonesian banks played a significant role as financiers, with recipients including tycoon-owned conglomerates Sinar Mas Group (SME) and Royal Golden Eagle (RGE). Concerns over governance risks and greenwashing practices persisted despite reductions in primary forest loss.

Central and West Africa saw the rubber sector attracting the majority of forest-risk credit, with Chinese companies emerging as primary financiers. The Chinese Sinochem Group was the largest recipient of the credit, followed by China Forestry Group and Wilmar.

Despite fluctuations in credit flows, challenges remain in corporate structures and accountability. For instance, companies like “SMG [and] RGE... have established complex corporate structures that mask ownership relations. This poses serious governance risks and facilitates leakage and greenwashing. They have all been linked to egregious social and environmental harms for decades,” states the report.

Forest-Risk Investments

Investments in activities likely to damage forests globally amounted to more than \$38 billion, with palm oil receiving the most significant share, followed by pulp and paper. Major institutional investors like BlackRock and Vanguard increased their stakes in forest-risk commodity companies, while others maintained or reduced their investments.

In South America, investments were predominantly allocated to the pulp and paper sector, with Suzano being the highest recipient. Southeast Asia saw the most investment in palm oil companies, with Sime Darby Plantations and IOI Group among the leading recipients.

In Central and West Africa, palm oil companies also received the majority of investments, with Sumitomo Forestry and Itochu being prominent recipients.

Forest-Risk Policy Assessments

Forests and Finance's assessment methodology evaluated financial institutions' adherence to 38 criteria to avoid contributing to deforestation and associated ESG issues.

These criteria are categorized into environmental, social, and governance requirements, covering commitments to zero deforestation, respect for land rights, anti-corruption measures, and more.

Forest-risk policy assessments of more than 100 financial institutions revealed a lack of robust policies, with an average score of only 17 percent. Despite incremental improvements since 2016, vague language, unclear timeframes, and loopholes persisted, leading to continued facilitation of human rights violations and deforestation.

The analysis underscores the urgent need for heightened attention, enhanced due diligence, and more stringent policies to address associated environmental, social, and governance risks. It also highlights the need to promote sustainable financial practices in

combating deforestation and ecological degradation in tropical forest regions.

Policies by Sector

Regarding sectoral policies, financial institutions exhibit the most robust policies for palm oil, followed closely by timber, and pulp and paper. However, the average scores for these sectors remain relatively low, indicating room for improvement despite sustained civil society campaigns and certification schemes' existence.

The assessment of forest-risk bank policies reveals that, on average, the largest 30 forest-risk banks have higher overall policy scores than the largest forest-risk investors. However, the scores across the board are still low, reflecting minimal policy coverage across ESG criteria.

While some banks like CIMB and BNP Paribas scored relatively higher, others like Banco do Brasil and ICBC had notably low scores, indicating inadequate policies to address harmful activities.

Four Corporations Leading Destruction

The report highlights four corporations—Cargill, JBS, Royal Golden Eagle, and Sinar Mas Group—that continue to receive significant credit and investment from financial institutions despite having egregious environmental and social track records. Cargill, in particular, has received substantial credit for its soy operations in tropical forest regions despite having a legacy of human rights abuses and environmental degradation.

Cargill

Cargill's expansion into the Brazilian Amazon and the Cerrado savanna has raised concerns due to decades of deforestation, violations of Indigenous peoples' rights, and failures to meet deforestation commitments. Civil society campaigns, such as Burning Legacy, have aimed to hold Cargill accountable for its practices, documenting evidence of human rights abuses and deforestation in its supply chain.

Despite making commitments to ensure zero deforestation by 2020, Cargill has failed to meet its goals and has faced allegations of land grabbing and violations of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) rights.

The report also discusses the implications of the financialization of land and the role of the financial sector in exacerbating soy-driven deforestation through land speculation. It evaluates the policies of banks financing Cargill, revealing low scores and loopholes that weaken their effectiveness in preventing harm in forest-risk sectors.

JBS

The report delves into the multifaceted issues surrounding JBS, the Brazilian meat giant, and its impact on the Amazon rainforest, climate change, and local communities. Financed by major banks from Brazil, the United States, Europe, and Japan, JBS has received substantial credit and investment despite its documented history of harmful business practices. Since 2019, banks have provided more than \$718 million in forest-risk beef credit to JBS, while investors held \$667 million in bonds and shares as of September 2023.

JBS's operations in the Brazilian Amazon have devastating consequences for forests, biodiversity, and Indigenous and traditional communities. The company's practices include bribery, corruption, price fixing, forced labor and labor abuses, forest destruction, land grabbing, and contribution to climate change. Despite JBS's high-profile pledge to achieve net-zero emissions by 2040, independent research suggests that the company lacks a credible decarbonization plan, leading to allegations of greenwashing.

The exploitation of people and forests in the Amazon is a systemic issue linked to JBS. Between 2008 and 2020, the company's involvement in deforestation extended to approximately 200,000 hectares in its direct supply chain and 1.5 million hectares indirectly. Despite agreements to clean up its supply chain, JBS has failed to ensure its products are free from deforestation and forced labor, as evidenced by ongoing violations.

The assessment of JBS policies reveals concerning scores, indicating inadequate measures to prevent environmental harm and protect human rights. While some banks like Barclays scored relatively higher, others like Bradesco and BTG Pactual had alarmingly low scores, raising questions about their commitment to addressing crucial issues like deforestation and climate change.

The communities affected by these actions are now holding financial institutions supporting companies like JBS responsible for the environmental damage. In April 2024, the Parakanã people met with the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES) to ask for reparation for the devastation of their territory, including by JBS suppliers. The Brazilian bank holds 20 percent of the shares of JBS and is therefore considered co-responsible for the impacts.

Royal Golden Eagle Group

The report also reveals mounting evidence that the multibillion-dollar Royal Golden Eagle Group (RGE), which says on its website “manages a group of world-class companies specializing in resource-based manufacturing,” operates numerous “shadow companies” and complex offshore ownership schemes to hide their destruction of forests across Indonesia. Banks have poured more than \$4.5 billion into forest-risk pulp and paper-attributable loans and underwriting services for RGE’s operations between 2019 and 2023.

However, none of the financial institutions assessed have adequate policies to mitigate the negative impacts. Scores for RGE’s top creditors range from 1 percent to 24 percent, indicating a lack of comprehensive policy coverage regarding forest-risk commodity sectors.

Sinar Mas Group

Sinar Mas Group (SMG), Indonesia’s largest conglomerate, has attracted substantial financing, receiving more than \$20.3 billion in credit since 2019. Its palm oil division alone obtained \$3.7 billion, primarily from Indonesian and Malaysian banks, between 2019 and September 2023. Despite this financial backing, SMG faces accusations of

human rights abuses, massive greenhouse gas emissions, and large-scale deforestation, mainly through its pulp and paper division, Asia Pulp and Paper (APP).

The destruction of the Rawa Singkil Wildlife Reserve by illegal palm oil plantations linked to SMG’s operations poses a significant concern, threatening biodiversity and local communities’ well-being within the Leuser Ecosystem. Despite documented evidence, SMG and its subsidiaries have failed to address these issues adequately, raising questions about their commitment to sustainability.

The report evaluates the policies of banks and investors financing SMG, revealing a spectrum of approaches. Malaysian banks CIMB and Maybank and Dutch bank Rabobank exhibit more robust policies, scoring highest for the palm oil sector. However, Indonesian banks such as Bank Panin, BRI, and Japanese bank MUFG have notably weaker policies, indicating insufficient measures to address environmental and social risks.

What Governments and Financial Institutions Can Do

The report underscores the urgent need for financial institutions to adopt robust policies and due diligence measures to address environmental and social risks associated with companies like JBS and RGE. Failure to do so perpetuates ecological destruction and human rights abuses and exposes banks and investors to significant financial and reputational risks.

Critically, the report also advocates for governments to step in and mandate financial sector regulation necessary to safeguard society and the ecosystems we depend on, consistent with international public policy goals. This is a problem that ultimately demands stronger, more systemic interventions. These could include, for example, prohibiting the allocation of capital to certain sectors or corporations driving ecosystem destruction and legislating for meaningful sanctions against financial institutions that fail to align their lending and investment accordingly.

Break the Silence, Free Congo

François Kamate interviewed by Alexandria Shaner

Rutshuru, Democratic Republic of Congo | There are deadly links between war, the plunder of resources, and climate breakdown. Blood red stains follow their concurrence across the map from Iraq, to Amazonia, to Gaza – no inhabited continent is unmarked. And nowhere are these links more devastatingly clear than in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where M23 militias financed by the Rwandan government, which is in turn funded by the EU, UK, USA, and others, are committing mass murder and ecological destruction.

The DRC receives little attention in mainstream media and is usually portrayed, if at all, as a poor nation with a “complicated”, conflict-riven backstory. But this framing omits the catalyst for the region’s violence since its colonization – resource robbery.

“The conflict, which has persisted in the east of the DRC for almost 30 years, and is the deadliest since the Second World War, is mainly economic,” explains Nobel Laureate Dr. Denis Mukwege. Since 1996, more than 10 million people have been killed, with countless more being displaced, raped, or forcibly recruited (even as children) into armed groups. “The link between exploitation and the illegal trade in minerals is recognized as a root cause.”

From this brutal context, activists in the DRC are calling for the international community to immediately stop funding Rwanda’s aggression and to hold all who are complicit accountable. Refusing to abandon their right to a future, they are urgently calling for a green transition that puts justice first, not profit, and that dismantles colonial exploitation once and for all.

One of these young activists, François Kamate, spoke with me from the heart of the crisis in Eastern DRC. Though he is tenacious in his vision for



François Kamate

a more just future, there is a hardening frustration and sorrow apparent in his words. Our interview explores François’ experiences and organizing, as well as the current security, humanitarian, and ecological crises in the DRC.

Please introduce yourself and describe how you became an activist.

My name is François Kamate and I am a young climate and human rights defender in the DRC. Currently, I’m not studying due to the recurrence of armed conflict in my province of North Kivu since the end of 2022. In this context of violence, I initiated a local chapter of Extinction Rebellion, XR Rutshuru, to organize and mobilize young volunteers through non-violent actions to demand participatory and responsible governance of protected areas in the DRC.

Through other associated movements such as Amani Institute ASBL, where I am a co-founding member, I try to help community members rebuild themselves psychologically despite the traumatic ordeals they undergo on a daily basis. Amani Institute ASBL is a socio-cultural movement of young volunteers working to promote a culture of peace and grassroots community development in Eastern DRC. We've been operational in the province of North Kivu since 2016, with over 500 young volunteers. The head office is in the rural commune of Rutshuru with sub-delegations throughout the region.

We organize psychodrama-style participatory forums (theaters) to dissuade young people from joining the armed groups that swarm the region. Especially, we try to empower women survivors of sexual violence and young mothers abandoned by their husbands. This is a common problem as many young men join militias or become destitute simply for lack of work. In response to increasing numbers of internally displaced people in the region, we also organize volunteers to help the displaced draw water and provide training on how to combat water-borne diseases.

My motivation for initiating both groups stemmed from our community's traumas – in particular, the unprecedented humanitarian tragedy coupled with the effects of global warming that are already being acutely felt. I challenged myself to dissuade young people from joining armed groups, and instead to work together to create positive change in the community.

The DRC is an extremely resource-rich nation yet has suffered a long history of colonialism, economic imperialism, and extractivism. As global finance gears up for “green growth”, the DRC’s resource wealth continues to attract violence, resource robbery, and ecological destruction. Could you talk more about some of the campaigns you’re involved in that fight for climate justice in this context?

Over the past several years, I've participated in campaigns like Fossil Free Virunga, Decolonize

Virunga, and Fossil Free DRC. We have had a dual approach of organizing outreach and dialogue inside communities, since the authorities and extractive corporations are never transparent with the people. Once communities have access to information about the effects of extractive projects and about who does and does not benefit from them, we then help empower them with skills and support in nonviolent resistance as they stand up for their rights. It's about communication and empowerment starting where we live and joining together.

I am currently involved in the #SaveVirunga campaign. We organize non-violent and peaceful activities to pressure the Congolese authorities, including President Félix Tshisekedi, to cancel tenders for the illegal sale of 27 oil blocks and 3 gas blocks located in vulnerable protected areas. This includes Virunga National Park, one of the oldest national parks in Africa whose conservation provides livelihoods for over 5 million people through fishing, livestock and agriculture. It should be noted that this sale is being pushed through by government authorities in violation of Congolese conservation laws.

But corruption and resource robbery is not limited to national borders. Extractivism is a trans-national project, so we must also organize internationally. Oil companies such as Total Énergie, Alfajiri, Sympion Red Power, as well as mining and tech firms have shown that they are fine with keeping the Congolese people in the climate chaos we are experiencing as long as they have access to cheap and plentiful resources.

In May, we held a joint rally with XR activists in Germany and DRC simultaneously to highlight how the Congolese people are being exploited by tech companies for natural resources. An Apple shop in Berlin was spray-painted, while more than 200 activists rallied outside under banners of #BreakTheSilence. At the same time, activists marched through Butembo in the DRC, calling for Virunga National Park to be protected from oil and gas extraction, and for the world to recognise that an ecological transition cannot be smeared with the blood of the Congolese people.



Describe the escalating security and humanitarian situation in the region and how that has affected you and your work?

This work is ever more challenging as it is ever more urgent. The security and humanitarian situation around our regional capital, Goma, has now gotten so bad that we are no longer able to organize

activities there. Fear is gaining ground among the population. Nobody knows what might happen. We manage to get together with fellow activists to follow what's going on.

The humanitarian situation is extremely alarming, with the fighting between the Congolese army (FARDC) and Rwanda-backed rebels (M23) caus-



Members of local communities, including women, men, young people, religious actors and local authorities as well as indigenous people, were brought together in Goma for critical reflection and discussion on gender roles, stereotypes, and their impact in order to promote gender equality and social inclusion in the community. | Photo: Amani Institute ASBL

ing the regional population to flee to Goma. It has further aggravated a chronic humanitarian crisis in the region, which has been plagued by recurrent armed violence for three decades. Some 7 million people have fled the fighting directly, and are living in makeshift sites on the outskirts of Goma in conditions of extreme poverty. These internally displaced people have no shelter, drinking water, food, sanitation, or clothing and have been largely abandoned by international humanitarian organizations.

Even after fleeing their homes, people are not finding safety. On May 3, after taking nearby Rubaya for its mineral reserves, M23 dropped bombs on IDP camps in Mugunga/Goma, killing displaced civilians. Armed bandits commit a number of atrocities in the outskirts and on the streets of Goma. Robberies, killings, murders and kidnappings of civilians are documented almost every week.

Unfortunately, the perpetrators are never arrested or identified by the security services. M23 militias now occupy and administer three of the six territories in North Kivu province (Rutshuru, Masisi, and Nyirongongo). Goma itself is suffocating as the villages that supply it with food are occupied by militias and traffic is not operational.

What is your view of domestic and regional politics in relation to the current crises and to ongoing extractivism?

With these few sentences, I'd like to say that the Congolese people are fed up. And to repeat that the ecological transition should not be made on the blood of the Congolese people. The DRC's resources have been profitably exploited by foreign corporations and co-opted local elites for decades, while local communities receive no benefit and are further destabilized. This is not development, this is looting.

Domestically, we need our national authorities to make a great effort to ensure security and peace for all Congolese people. While the international and regional community should stop being hypocritical by on one hand condemning M23 violence and lamenting poverty yet striking profitable deals with these same looters and their partners, or by engineering resource control under the guise of security. The blood of millions of Congolese people, innocently spilled, demands justice.

I deplore the national and regional policy on everything that is happening in the DRC. Nothing has been done to bring social and distributive justice

to all the Congolese people from independence to the present day. Already mowed down by repeated wars, rampant poverty, mass unemployment among young people, disease, lack of community infrastructure, etc, the Congolese people have been left to fend for themselves.

What is inadmissible is the fact that in the current crisis, only the average Congolese is suffering enormously, while regional and national leaders are enriching themselves on the backs of the people. This must stop. Justice means shared happiness between people without distinction.

Another component deserves mention here as well – this is about breaking the silence. Mainstream media has consistently failed to cover the crises we face, and certainly has failed to name the true causes of our decades long suffering: neo colonial structures of global finance and trade, neoliberal policy, and extractivism. Instead, racist and incomplete narratives occasionally grace the headlines, if at all. Yes, internally we suffer from corruption and intercommunal violence – but they are symptoms, even features, of these oppressive systems. We suffer all the benefits of capitalism, but will no longer be silenced.

You mentioned foreign intervention for security. What is public opinion about international and regional military interventions that have been active in the DRC in the name of peacekeeping, such as UN (MONUSCO), East African (EACRF), and Southern African (SADC) troops?

In fact, external military interventions in the DRC, mainly in the eastern part of the country, have already shown their limits to the point that everyone is wondering exactly why they are in the DRC in the first place. Since these forces have been in the Congo, the situation has remained the same. Populations are being massacred close to their military bases without the slightest intervention on their part, which puzzles everyone.

There's a black hand behind what's happening in the DRC, especially regarding illicit exploitation of raw materials (gold, uranium, cobalt, cassiterite, cobalt,

zinc, etc). There are people and corporations benefiting from resource robbery while external military intervention hasn't protected the people. There have been many examples where military troops have been deployed in the name of peacekeeping, yet function more like private security for mines and fossil fuel extraction rather than protecting civilians. The beneficiaries are foreign billionaires like Dan Gertler and the country's corrupt authorities. Capitalists continue to plunder Congolese resources using the Congolese people.

Do you have a message for fellow activists on pathways for solidarity in the current context and in terms of fighting for systemic change? What does being an activist mean for you personally?

My message to fellow activists is to ask for their urgent solidarity in relation to this crisis we are enduring as a result of the unjust aggression by Rwanda and its extractivist partners. Join our call for an end to this hypocrisy on the part of the international community. The blood of the Congolese people has long been shed freely, and this must stop.

Looking ahead, we must join together to pursue a more just world for all people within safe and healthy planetary bounds. What does doing this mean specifically? I can only suggest that you can start where I started. We all can look around our communities and challenge ourselves to work together to make positive changes. Then we need to continue to look around wider and understand how we are all connected, and see that our struggles are also connected. This is how we empower justice.

To be an activist for me means to enable others to achieve common goals. I'm proud to be an activist because I'm convinced that the fight we're waging is going to change history. What motivates me is indignation at everything we're going through. I tell myself that I have to work to make communities aware of the problems we face, so that together we can hold our leaders to account and give power to the people.

Solidarity, for me, means for others to try and do the same.

Activist Diary: Life as an Activist

Peter Bohmer

"If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the roar of its mighty waters."

- Frederick Douglass

I have been an activist for reform and revolutionary transformation since 1967. For me, being an activist has meant directly involving myself in activities groups, and organizations in order to change policies at a local and national level and to raise consciousness about the causes, consequences and solutions to poverty and the inequality of income and wealth, police brutality and repression, U.S. militarism and intervention in other countries, climate justice, for quality health care and housing for all, and for reproductive rights. This in addition to solidarity with liberation struggles and ending capitalism and ending capitalist alienation, exploitation, and oppression. Being anti-racist has also been central to my theory and practice since the 1960's, strongly influenced by the Civil Rights and Black Freedom Movement and in the 1970's, the Chicano and American Indian Movement (AIM).

Here are five key moments, examples from the 1960's in furthering my lifelong commitment to activism for a better world.

Vietnam Summer, 1967

This was my first organizing experience although I had attended a few anti-Vietnam war and civil rights demonstrations and SDS meetings before. We first educated ourselves at the Vietnam Summer office in Boston about the history of Vietnam and French and U.S. colonialism there. I remember then going door to door and asking people if they were willing to discuss the Vietnam War. In 1967, most people who answered the door supported the

war and thought opposing the US war against Vietnam as being disloyal to US troops (this changed substantially after the 1968 Tet offensive in Vietnam). If people were interested in talking with us and possibly opposing the US role, we asked them to invite their neighbors and we presented a slide show about the war followed by a discussion. We then asked the people if they opposed the Vietnam war to actively show their opposition in a way that they decided on. Common was a visit with the assembled group to their Congressperson's office to express their opposition to the US war against Vietnam. We stayed in touch with them.

I was shy at first and would only go door to door with a more experienced organizer, but I increasingly found my voice. It has never left. One of the key organizers, Mike Ferber, suggested I read two books, *The Political Economy of Growth* by Paul Baran and *Monopoly Capital* by Paul Sweezy and Paul Baran. These books changed my life as I was by this time although not earlier, ready to integrate their analysis into my very being. Both books showed the limits of reform, the irrationality of capitalism, and how much of the wealth in the U.S. and Western Europe came from extracting the surplus (wealth) from what we called the Third World and now call the Global South. Having a political economic analysis has been one reason for my continued activism. Anger at injustice and excitement are not enough. I also saw first-hand how people can change but we have to go out to meet them, not expect them to come to our events.

March on the Pentagon, 1967

In October 1967, there was a large, well over a hundred thousand people protesting the Vietnam War in a march from Washington DC to the Pentagon. Just before 5 PM when our permit ended, civil rights activist and comedian Dick Gregory asked if we were going to be just 9-5 protesters and what



Peter Bohmer at Exarchia, Athens, Greece

was more important the law or justice. I was very moved. Since then, I have always prioritized justice over what is legal. Everyone I had come with, we were from Boston, returned to DC then where we were staying. I decided to stay at the Pentagon as did 10,000 others. It was the demonstration where protesters, mainly women, put flowers on the bayonets of the military police (MP) guarding the Pentagon and tried to talk to the soldiers; almost all refused. I was inspired by the community that formed among us resisters: welcoming, sharing food and stories. Many had driven east from the recently completed, “Stop the Draft Week” in Oakland, CA. Many of us burned our draft cards.

At about 9 PM, the last camera left, the British BBC. After that the military police turned violent, beating people with their bayonets on the grass by the Pentagon. A few of us, a small minority fought back.

What also affected me was that James Reston, the major NY Times reporter and friend of the powerful and wealthy wrote, shortly thereafter on the front page of the NY Times that the demonstrators had turned violent. I had seen the opposite and when I found out that Reston had been in Denver the day of the march although his article implied, he was at the Pentagon. My belief in the objectivity of the New York Times was forever shattered. I continue to read the NEW York Times but since then always critically.

Noam Chomsky, 1968

In spring, 1968, I took a class at MIT where I was a graduate student in economics with Noam Chomsky and Louis Kampf, “Intellectuals and Social Change”. It furthered my transition to becoming a lifelong radical left activist. By radical I mean

going to the root of the problem, which I consider to be capitalism, and seeing fundamental change coming primarily from the bottom up. Noam Chomsky has been a big influence in my life. I have learned so much from Noam Chomsky, much more than in this paragraph. I learned that building strong and growing social movements and protests in the streets are more important in changing policy, such as ending the Vietnam war, than trying to convince politicians through arguments and lobbying, or electing liberal politicians. I also learned that claims of expertise and saying we should unquestionably accept the so-called experts are used to justify policies such as carrying out the Vietnam War in order to silence dissenting voices and to delegitimize grass roots movements. Similarly, the term, national interest, or the assertion, “this war serves the national interest” is usually used to disguise the interests of the capitalist class. The interests of working people diverge from those with economic power. Thank you, Noam!

Chicago 1968

Another formative event was the 1968 Democratic Party Convention in Chicago. I had planned to go but was working with a group, Mothers for Adequate Welfare, a branch of the National Welfare Rights Organization. We were demanding a guaranteed income of \$6500 for a family of four (about \$40,000 in today's prices). This was an early form of a Universal Basic Income (UBI). I hadn't finished writing my report to the Boston City Council at the time the buses were leaving from Boston to Chicago so I couldn't go. I remember watching the convention every night that August at a bar in Brattleboro, Vermont. I was enraged each night at the beatings of protesters by the Chicago Police under the orders of Mayor Richard Daley and of the nomination of Vice President Hubert Humphrey, a Democrat who had publicly supported the Vietnam war. This reinforced my perspective that ending the war was not going to come from within the Democratic Party even though the majority of the country now opposed it.

I realized that anger and rage at injustice are important and necessary fuel for long-term activism,

although hopefully our anger is primarily directed at structures of oppression and those with economic and political power—and not at someone who has cut us off driving. Continuing anger at injustice is an important factor in my continuing activism up to and including the present. Today my central focus is directed towards ending U.S. support for Israel, and in solidarity with the Palestinian struggle against the Israeli War and Israeli Occupation. As I write this on May 11, 2024, the growing and inspiring student movement in solidarity with Palestine and against U.S. and university complicity with Israel and U.S support for Israel, reminds me of 1968, e.g., the Columbia University uprising, and the upcoming Democratic Party Convention in Chicago that plans to nominate another pro war President, Biden. I expect massive protests at the 2024 Chicago Democratic Party Convention this August although hope that US support for Israel stops by then and that there is a permanent cease fire. The global movement in support of Palestine although not yet sufficient to change U.S. and especially, Israeli policy is so important.

Anti-Imperialist Coalition in Boston. 1969

I was active in the fall of 1969 in an anti-imperialist coalition in Boston, The November Action Coalition (NAC) Our focus was ending the direct support of MIT for the US military in Vietnam, i.e., developing weapons systems for them. We blocked the entrance to one of the main MIT weapons labs, The Instrumentation Lab, until the police forced us away from the entrance, their clubs swinging.

One of the member groups of NAC was the Boston Black Panther Party (BPP) which I respected and learned from. Impressive to me was their free breakfast program in Roxbury and their organizing of low-income Black youth. The murder of 21-year-old leader of the Chicago BPP, Fred Hampton on December 4, 1969, affected me more than any of the many assassinations in the 1960's. The willingness of the US government to kill revolutionaries especially Black leaders had become even more apparent. I remember being depressed and not being able to get out of bed for a few days after

Fred Hampton's brutal murder by the state and thinking because I was white, I was somewhat safer. I thought about the level of my commitment to transforming the U.S. Reflecting deeply on his assassination furthered my commitment to ending racial capitalism even if it meant serious risks.

It has made anti-racism and solidarity with people of color and movements, then called, Third World people, inside and outside of the United States, central to my theory and associated practice. So has solidarity with societies such as Cuba defending themselves from the U.S. war and blockade against them. **Fred Hampton Presente!**

Another group within the November Action Coalition (NAC), whose theory and practice have influenced me in a major way was Bread and Roses, a socialist women's liberation organization. Bread and Roses differentiated itself from left organizations who claimed a women's organization or women's caucus was unnecessary or divisive, and from other women's groups that claimed women could not work with men. Within NAC, Bread and Roses won their demands to be able to caucus at any time which would temporarily halt the meeting, and that all the leadership committees such as the steering, tactics, and media committees be at least one-half women. Bread and Roses challenged sexism within NAC and in the society. They were socialist and feminist, an anti-imperialist women's group both within NAC and beyond. Bread and Roses was autonomous rather than separatist. The concept of autonomy together with principled unity, e.g., working against all forms of oppression in a group with the goal of unity, are a central part of my perspective and organizing.

Conclusion

Our activism makes a difference; we usually win less than what we demand but nevertheless the gains matter. Those who concede will never admit that raising the social cost to them of continuing oppressive policies was the cause of their conceding, but this is often the case. By social cost, I mean that the cost, not mainly in dollars, but loss of legitimacy of the elites and the growth of an-

ti-capitalist movements, causes them to concede, at least partially. This is because the social cost of not conceding begins to threaten their rule. An example is the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa from 1976 to the early 1990's, where those in power in South Africa increasingly feared not only losing their political power but also their economic power if they didn't release ANC leaders including Nelson Mandela from prison and concede to elections where the Black population could vote, i.e., universal suffrage. I was active in the anti-apartheid movement in the late 1970's and early 1980's, and especially in Pittsburgh from 1984 to 1987 with a strong multi-racial group, Pittsburghers Against Apartheid. We contributed to the end of apartheid, an important victory led by the people and movements inside South Africa although structural racism continues there and whites still have most of the economic power in a very unequal capitalist economy.

I have continued to be active from 1967 to the present and will continue to be so. I advocate for a participatory socialist society. Check out the group Real Utopia, realutopia.org, that I am a member of. I am anti-capitalist but equally important for me and necessary and desirable is to be for a liberatory and ecological socialist alternative on a global level.

Although I have suffered some serious repression, it has not been a sacrifice to be an activist. Most of my closest friends are people I have been active in the struggle with. We have accomplished some real gains although they are never permanent as we can see in the current growth of authoritarian, racist, patriarchal, anti LGBT, anti-environmental and anti-immigrant movements, and political parties such as the Republican Party and similar authoritarian anti-immigrant parties globally. Being involved and active in the struggle for societal liberation has kept me young in spirit. I can look myself better in the mirror, and it has given my life more meaning.

Free Palestine!
Si se puede!