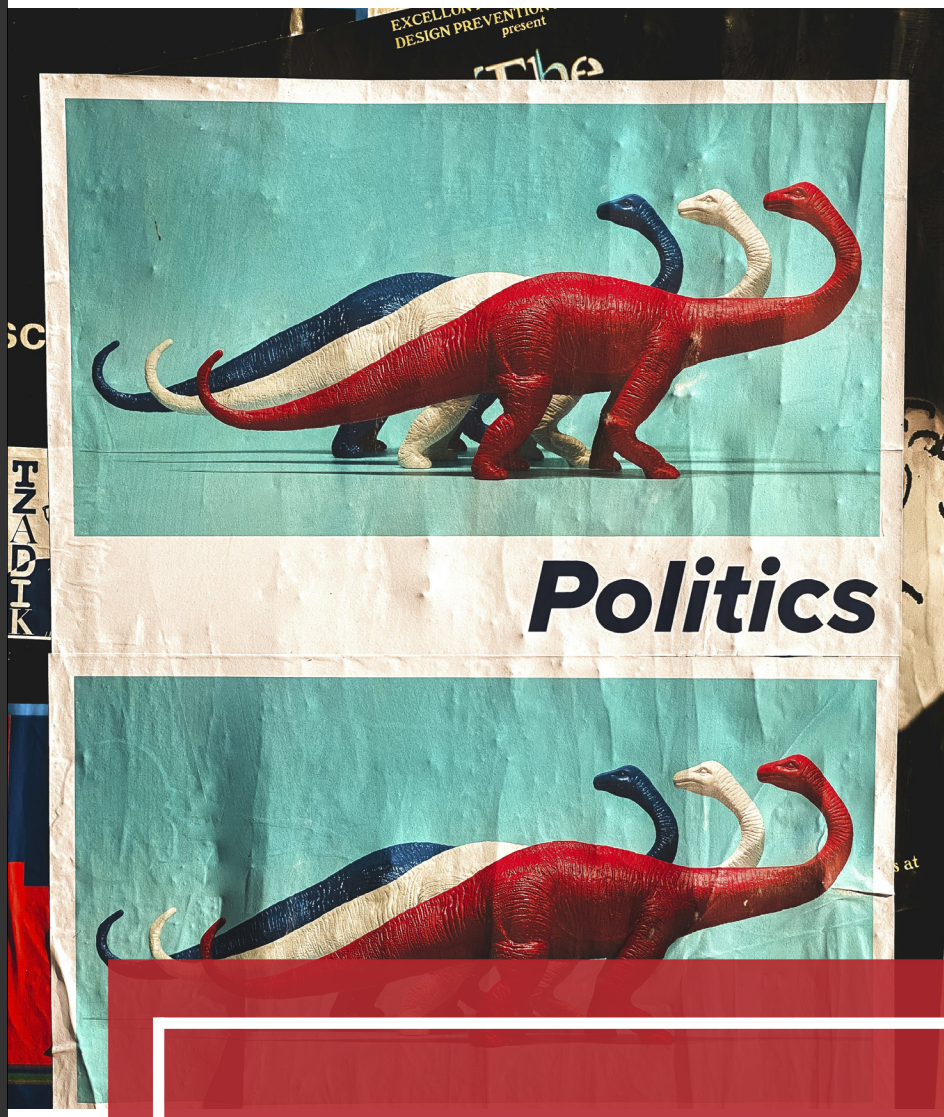
Z MAGAZINE

AUGUST 2024



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"People have been trained for generations that they should vote every 2, 4, 6 years, and then to get back on their respective couches and go back to sleep."

-Kim Scipes

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AIPAC Hijacks Rep. Cori Bush's Race–and Our Elections

Medea Benjamin

Representative Cori Bush, a progressive black woman from St. Louis, MO who is a member of the "Squad" and has been a powerful voice in Congress for poor people, women's rights, healthcare, housing–and Palestine, just lost her primary because pro-Israel lobby groups flooded the race with outside funding. Her loss is a tremendous blow to progressives and to the U.S. electoral process itself.

This is the pro-Israel lobby's second "win" of the season. The first was the June defeat of progressive, black congressman from Westchester County, N.Y., Jamaal Bowman, who was a forceful critic of Israel's attacks on Gaza. AIPAC and its mis-named super PAC, the United Democracy Project, barged into Westchester County to anoint an opponent—white, pro-Israel Westchester County Executive George Latimer—and then shower him with cash.

The ads against Bowman were not about Israel. Instead, AIPAC smeared the congressman's character and criticized him as a "hot head" who was not a reliable member of the Democratic team. In the words of President of the Arab American Institute Jim Zogby, the race became "the angry, frightening young black man versus the calm, thoughtful older white guy."

By throwing $17 million into the race, pro-Israel groups turned Bowman's primary into the most expensive one in U.S. history. When Bowman was defeated, AIPAC declared the outcome showed that the pro-Israel position is "both good policy and good politics." On the contrary. It showed that pro-Israel groups can buy elections and it sent a frightening message to all elected officials that if they criticize Israel, even during a genocide, they may well pay with their careers.

Buoyed by its success, AIPAC then took on Cori Bush, marching into St. Louis, MO determined to defeat a black woman who was one of the most unique voices in all of congress. Once a unhoused single mother of two, and a survivor of gun violence, domestic violence and sexual assault, Bush became a nurse and a pastor, and in the wake of the killing of the unarmed black man Michael Brown in Ferguson in 2014, she became an activist on the frontlines of the movement to save black lives. After protesting in the streets for 400 days, she jumped into the political arena. In 2020 made a successful run for Congress, becoming the first black representative from Missouri.

In Bush's two terms in Congress, she demonstrated leadership on many fronts, including reproductive justice and abortion rights. At a House of Representatives committee hearing in 2021, Bush was one of three congresswomen to share her abortion story publicly. And after the Dobbs decision that overturned Roe v. Wade, she introduced a host of bills, including the Reproductive Health Care Accessibility Act, the Protecting Access to Medication Abortion Act, the Reproductive Health Travel Fund Act, and the Protect Sexual and Reproductive Health Act.

She also championed housing rights. When the COVID moratorium on evictions was about to expire, she grabbed her sleeping bag and lawn chair, and organized a "sleep in" on the steps of the U.S. Capitol that resulted in an extension of the moratorium on evictions.

Foreign policy was not her focus, but in the wake of the Hamas attack on October 9, 2023 and Israel's subsequent bombing of civilians in Gaza, Bush felt compelled to speak out. Just nine days after the October 7 Hamas attack, she had the courage to introduce a ceasefire resolution in the House. She was one of only nine House members who opposed a resolution supporting Israel. She boycotted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech before Congress, calling him a "war criminal."

As a result of defending Palestinians, she found herself in AIPAC's crosshairs. "Cori Bush has been one of the most hostile critics of Israel since she came to Congress in 2021 and has actively worked to undermine mainstream Democratic support for the U.S.-Israel relationship, " AIPAC claimed.

AIPAC's super PAC spent nearly $9 million, much of it coming from Republican mega-donors, to buy ads smearing Bush and shoring up contender Wesley Bell, a St. Louis County Prosecutor. The attacks were vicious, including ads that darkened Bush's skin and manipulated her racial features. They also distorted her domestic voting record, condemning her for not supporting Biden's Infrastructure Bill instead of explaining that her vote was part of a strategy to gain leverage for key social programs in the Build Back Better Act.

Curiously, in the cases of both Bowman and Bush, the attack ads did not even mention Israel. But if Israel is AIPAC's singular focus, why did the ads avoid the issue? That's because most Americans, especially in those liberal Democrat districts, agree with their positions. Most Americans want a ceasefire and disapprove of Israel's military actions in Gaza. As Jewish Voice for Peace Executive Director Stephanie Fox said during a call to rally support for the Congresswoman Bush, "She has been a life raft for our values and principles in Congress and she has been under attack because far right extremist groups like AIPAC are scared.

Jim Zogby of the Arab American Institute agrees. "Pro-Israel groups are running scared," he said. "They are losing the public debate over policy—especially among Democrats. Most Democrats are deeply opposed to Israeli policies in Gaza and the Occupied Palestinian lands. Majorities want a ceasefire and an end to settlements. And they want to stop further arms shipments to Israel." So AIPAC hides the Israel issue and then claims the "win" is a victory for Israel.

If we are going to stop U.S. support for Israel's genocide, prevent the Middle East from erupting in flames and reclaim our elections here at home, we have to stop AIPAC.

What Does Arming Israel Cost Us?

Sonali Kolhatkar

What will it take to end Israel's genocide in Gaza? That's the question confounding people of conscience all over the world since last October. After Israeli citizens, tax-paying residents of the United States have the most leverage over the perpetrators of genocide given that the U.S. is Israel's biggest weapons supplier. What if our taxes were spent on the things we need rather than on the deadly weapons Israel is thirsting for?

For months, a majority of the U.S. public has disapproved of Israel's relentless mass killings. College students organized dramatic encampments to demand divestment from Israel. Protesters confronted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during his recent visit.

Yet, President Joe Biden has done little beyond paying lip service to address the public rage over Israel's murderous assault. Now, his proxy, Vice President Kamala Harris, faces a similar calculus in running for the presidency: pull back U.S. weapons from fueling genocide, as United Nations experts have urged, or risk losing voters in a critical election.

Unfortunately for Palestinians and their allies, Harris appears to be taking a similar approach to Biden's: using strong terms to uplift Palestinian suffering, while affirming "her longstanding and unwavering commitment to the security of the State of Israel and the people of Israel."

When Biden was the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, he resolutely refused to budge on funding Israel, even if it meant he might lose the election. Harris may truly believe Palestinian suffering needs to end, but between now and November, she faces a critical choice: to pledge allegiance to Israel or to adhere to basic standards of morality that value human life.

But, given the stranglehold that Israel and its powerful lobby have on the U.S. political system, Harris and her party may feel they risk more by alienating Israel than curbing its genocide.

And, given that Harris's main election opponent will be no better (or possibly worse) than Biden on Gaza, is there any significant leverage left to end Palestinian suffering?

Can the roughly 700,000 "uncommitted" Democratic voters who have threatened to withhold their ballots over Gaza be loud and strong enough to sway Harris to do the right thing? Perhaps. But she might call their bluff, weighing the aforementioned political risks and touting the dangers of a Donald Trump presidency on the domestic front.

The sad truth is that while Democrats and Republicans have had distinct domestic platforms, they have tended to be relatively united on foreign policy for decades. Democrats have often backed the same wars as their Republican opponents in the Middle East and antiwar organizers have struggled to stop wars even where U.S. soldiers were directly involved in killing civilians, let alone proxy wars such as Israel's Gaza genocide.

In 2007, then-Senator Barack Obama distinguished himself in the 2008 election as an "antiwar candidate" with respect to U.S. involvement in Iraq. But he remained a pro-war candidate over the war in Afghanistan begun in 2001.

Still, Obama's talking points on Iraq offer a tantalizing way forward on Gaza in 2024. In combating his opponent Senator John McCain, Obama said, "For a fraction of what we're spending each year in Iraq, we could be giving our teachers more pay and more support, rebuilding our

crumbling schools, and offering a tax credit to put a college degree within reach for anyone who wants one."

McCain's response was to call Obama "irresponsible," saying his ideas would jeopardize the U.S.'s national security. It didn't work. In 2008 Americans were tired of the two major wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and if they couldn't put an end to both, they would pick the candidate promising to end at least one and chose Obama. It wasn't until 2021 that the U.S. war in Afghanistan finally ended when Biden pulled all troops out.

There is a direct line between the issue Americans care most about in this election and the Palestinian right to exist: the U.S. economy. One of the most compelling arguments that could move the average American voter—who might be struggling far too much in their day-to-day life to care about Palestinians being massacred on the other side of the planet—is to remind ourselves of the cost of backing Israel's devastating pogroms.

Americans spend billions each year to arm Israel. Since its founding, Israel has received more than $300 billion in aid from U.S. taxpayers.

The U.S. spent more tax dollars on Israel in the past year—$12.5 billion—than it did to fund a critically important federal agency such as the Environmental Protection Agency, whose $9.2 billion budget for fiscal 2024 was cut by nearly $1 billion from the year before.

Last year alone, taxpayers spent more on arming Israeli genocide than the annual funding shortfall for Pell Grants.

The federal government spent many times more money on Israel than the budget cuts facing the Department of Education.

Every year, Republicans use budgetary concerns to extract domestic spending cuts from the federal government on social programs that help Americans. Democrats could counter those demands by cutting Israel funding to pay for the things we are told we can't afford.

Palestinian suffering cannot be allowed to continue. If making cold, hard calculations comparing the cost of carrying out their annihilation versus the cost of funding American needs will help to move the needle away from Israel's genocide, then so be it.

Think tanks such as the National Priorities Project have, for years, made direct links between war spending and domestic social programs, saying "Funding for Militarism Compromises Our Welfare."

Senator Bernie Sanders has often questioned the size of military budgets compared to social spending, saying in April 2024 that $95 billion in supplemental military spending was "a lot of money—especially at a time when many Americans are unable to afford their rent or pay their mortgages, pay their bills, afford healthcare, [and] are struggling with student debt or many other needs."

U.S. politicians have been able to undercut such logic by touting vague notions of "national security" in response. But that excuse won't work with respect to Israel. Let Israel worry about its "national security" while Americans focus on funding our needs.

Not only could antiwar and pro-Palestinian activists center the financial costs of gifting weapons to Israel as an election issue, but Harris could use it as political cover for doing the morally right thing.

Such an approach could have more resonance in an election year than hoping enough American voters will care about the fate of Palestinians to withhold votes from a liberal Democrat—especially when faced with the prospect of a fascist authoritarian.

When 'Prophets' Become Memes: Rise and Fall of Benjamin Netanyahu

Ramzy Baroud

Great orators in history would not have been recognized as such if their words carried no value. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is neither a great orator, nor did his speech before a joint Congressional session on July 24 have actual worth. It was an expression of his desperation, if not defeat, on all fronts.

This is not new. For years, Netanyahu has served the role of a social media meme. During his United Nations General Assembly speech in September 2012, the Israeli leader displayed a bomb diagram to fan the flames for another Middle East war.

His equally bizarre map of the 'New Middle East', which he also carried during another UNGA speech on September 22, 2023, also invited mockery.

But on both occasions, as on others, Netanyahu's strategy was never intended for humor. His spectacles were carried out with the knowledge that global media would not miss the opportunity to highlight his performance with much interest. His rhetoric would often go unchallenged.

Moreover, until October 7, Netanyahu's possible risk factors, resulting from what may seem to us as outrageous behavior and outlandish speeches, were quite minimal. To the contrary, for his Israeli constituency, appearing on the world stage with such media fanfare was always a reason for yet greater approval.

To his followers, Netanyahu served the role of the 'modern-day prophet'.

"There are very few leaders left in Israel or around the world with the capacity to fully grasp and articulate the historical and prophetic relevance of what is happening in Israel, the Middle East and around the world today," David Lazarus wrote on October 9, 2020 – almost exactly three years before the Hamas operation in southern Israel, and the most destructive Israeli war which followed.

But the supposed visionary has failed to read all the signs, not only in the lead-up to the war, but to the disastrous impact of the genocide, which will haunt his country for many years to come. Since then, the majority of Israelis have abandoned their prophet, numerous Israeli opinion polls continue to tell us.

Yet, Netanyahu appears unperturbed. He spoke at the Congress with near total lack of awareness of the new reality emanating from his failed policies and botched reading of history.

For those who may not know, Netanyahu also sells himself to Israelis as an intellectual. His intellect involves "exposing the deception", of the centrality of the Palestinian cause to the Middle East, or the so-called "theory of Palestinian centrality".

To counter that "big lie", Netanyahu dedicated to the notion of the 'reversal of causality', as in challenging the notion that Israel – namely the Israeli occupation of Palestine and other Arab lands – is the main cause of problems in the Middle East.

Until recently, the man's theories have garnered much traction, enough, in fact, to temporarily marginalize the Palestinian cause, and to invest in new ways of shaping a 'new Middle East', where Palestine simply is not on a map.

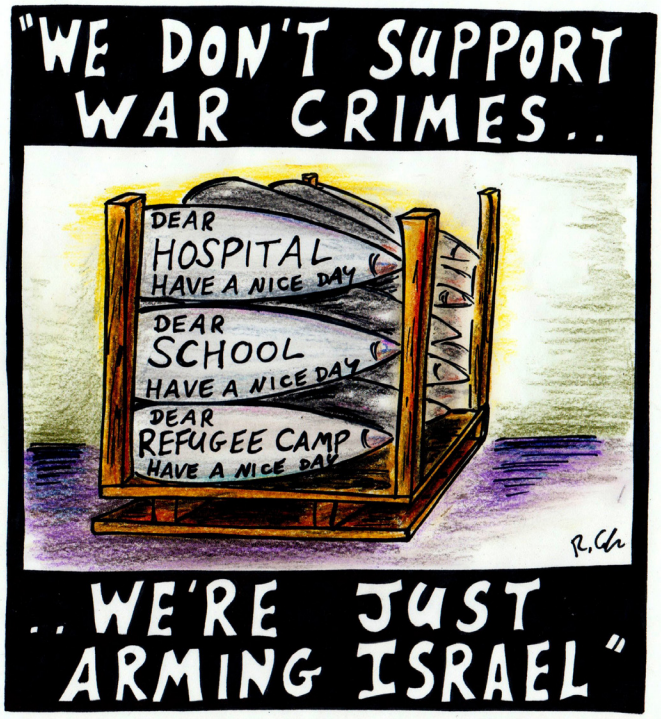
These illusions, however, have and continue to crumble. Instead of pushing a reset button that would shape the Middle East according to Israeli priorities and interest, the Palestinians pushed it.

This time around, Netanyahu has no theories, no actual solutions, no prophetic visions, not even a ridiculous map to save his life or career. Isolated by much of the world, he rushed to the only place where he would feel safe, where people would clap for him unconditionally, even before he spoke: The US Congress.

And, indeed, they did – 39 times, including 23 standing ovations, and a total of 10 minutes and 55 seconds to be exact. But even the jolly bunch of US representatives who agreed to be part of that tragic charade will not save Netanyahu.

Here, a quick pause is needed, in appreciation for those who refused to attend Netanyahu's speech of lies, and admiration for US-Palestinian Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib, who held a sign throughout the whole event, reminding us, and the world, that Netanyahu is a "war criminal" and "guilty of genocide".

Netanyahu is not a pathological liar, as he is often accused by his enemies and detractors, in Israel and elsewhere. He lies, because, at times, not telling the truth



is convenient, especially when there is no accountability for lying, time and again.

In his Congress speech, however, Netanyahu did more than simply lie. He had the audacity of calling millions of Americans who protested the war "Iran's useful idiots", while perpetuating the right-wing language on the "clash between barbarism against civilization".

Still, a few were truly impressed. Even his closest allies are abandoning him. Former US Speaker, Nancy Pelosi described his speech as "by far the worst presentation of any foreign dignitary invited and honored with the privilege of addressing the Congress of the United States". Many others found him insincere, including his own people.

When Netanyahu mattered, his speeches often led to wars, or major regional instability. But Netanyahu no longer matters, except for a few US politicians vying for re-election.

The Israeli leader had hoped to press the reset button and return to his silly theories about the irrelevance of Palestine to the Middle East, and the world. He was proven wrong, again, making him a false prophet or, at best, a failed leader.

There Is No "Eco-Friendly" Capitalism

Davor Džalto

The Balkans have faced numerous crises over the past decades. The most recent one, with potentially long-term devastating effects, is unfolding in Serbia. According to media reports, the current crisis involves the intention to exploit lithium reserves in western Serbia. Why is this a problem?

The problem lies in the potentially devastating ecological effects of such exploitation. As a group of authors claimed in their article published in Nature (https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-024-68072-9): "it would be one of the world's very first lithium mines in a populated and agricultural area." Research drilling "has already produced environmental damage, with mine water containing high levels of boron leaking from exploratory wells and causing crops to dry out." Moreover, "our investigations reveal substantially elevated downstream concentrations of boron, arsenic, and lithium in nearby rivers as compared to upstream regions." The authors show that "soil samples exhibit repeated breaches of remediation limit values with environmental consequences on both surface and underground waters." "With the opening of the mine," the authors conclude, "problems will be multiplied by the tailings pond, mine wastewater, noise, air pollution, and light pollution, endangering the lives of numerous local communities and destroying their freshwater sources, agricultural land, livestock, and assets."

Since the exploitation of lithium from ore rocks "has severe environmental consequences," mining of this mineral "is usually conducted in deserts and uninhabited areas of Australia, Chile, China, Argentina, Canada, Zimbabwe, and the United States" (ibid.). Now, why would anyone allow a potential disaster of such a scale on fertile, populated land rich with grass fields, forests, animal life, and drinking water?

The need for lithium is growing as it is a vital substance for the batteries essential for "green technology," which is perceived as indispensable in combating climate change. If the negative effects of exploitation are contained within uninhabited areas, without a significant presence of living organisms, one could perhaps make a meaningful argument in favor of such exploitation. However, if the scientific conclusions are right, the risk in inhabited areas seems too high, and the anticipated negative effects on people and the natural environment do not seem to be a reasonable cost for the hoped-for positive effects on the natural environment produced by lithium-based batteries. In the capitalist system, however, profits ultimately come ahead of concern for the environment, societies or individual human beings. For capitalist logic, it makes perfect sense to destroy the natural environment, if necessary, in order to fight climate change caused by the destruction of the natural environment.

The Brussels leadership is extremely enthusiastic. "The EU has hailed a pact with Serbia on lithium mining as a 'historic day for Serbia, as well as for Europe,'" reports the BBC. It is anticipated that the Serbian deposits will cover "90% of Europe's current lithium needs" (ibid.). The Serbian President, known for his autocratic style of government, is also passionately "selling" to Serbian people the story about the necessity of this exploitation, and the blessings that will befall Serbian citizens once this becomes a reality.

Many activists and regular citizens are concerned and angry. They do not trust the promises coming both from the company and from the government that the project will be "subject to stringent environmental requirements". They would hate to see the fruitful fields and forests of their fathers, grandfathers and neighbors turned into a desert. Well, welcome to the desert of the capitalist real (to paraphrase Slavoj Žižek).

Yes, capitalism destroys nature and societies. It has been doing so since its inception as a particular system and ideology. To survive, it needs to expand. Everything can be sacrificed if there's another million or billion to be made. Nature, human beings, and the entire planet are only "resources" to be exploited for profit-making purposes. That is why capitalism is not only inherently anti-democratic, it is also anti-ecological.

A sad part in this saga is played by intellectuals and the media who have religiously promoted neo-liberal agendas in the region, advocating, for decades, deregulation and corporatization of the Serbian economy and society. Many of them now react against this project. They are skeptical that the exploitation will be conducted according to the "highest ecological standards." They are also surprised to learn that big corporations can be ruthless and that the leadership of the "democratic world" (in this case, the EU) can make close alliances with autocrats, promoting socially, economically, and ecologically destructive policies. Well, too little, too late.

One cannot advocate for capitalism and, at the same time, for the values of social bonds, undisturbed nature, and democracy, without ending up in a contradiction. Yes, capitalism kills. The more unrestrained it becomes, the greater the damage it will produce. In a hyper-capitalist world in which we live, capitalism is given a free hand to destroy whatever stands in its way. Its agents – big corporations and governments – ensure that all "troublemakers" are neutralized, nice and clean, so that the production of waste by capitalist exploitation is secured, without hindrance.

Capitalism is not eco-friendly. If we want to do something about the natural environment, prevent its further destruction, and reverse some of the negative tendencies, we need to dismantle it, as a system and ideology. Without that, we will only be making cosmetic changes until there is no longer a face to put makeup on.

Can Humanity Repair Its Relationship With Nature?

Damon Orion

Disconnection from nature is a catalyst for the present environmental crisis and several physical, mental, and emotional illnesses. With mental health challenges on the rise in the U.S. and climate change on the brink of becoming irreversible, there is an urgent need for educators who can help restore our sense of connection with nature.

That's the mission of Weaving Earth Center for Relational Education, a nonprofit group that helps participants remember "that we are a part of this earth, not apart from it." Located in the unincorporated town of Graton, California, Weaving Earth (WE) believes that various problems, such as climate change, bigotry, misogyny, colonialism, and religious persecution, stem from supremacy culture: "cultural systems that value separation and domination." The organization's leaders feel that nature immersion can help break that mindset.

David Hage, who co-founded Weaving Earth with his wife Lauren and their longtime friend Will Scott in 2013, says their organization is dedicated to "disrupting and helping unlearn inherited structures of belief and philosophies that are causing ecological, social, and personal harm." Its primary means of achieving this is "Relational Education": nature-based learning driven by curiosity and experience.

Woods, meadows, and creeks in Northern California's Sonoma County are the "classrooms" for children, teens, and adults partaking in WE's nature immersion programs. Participants in summer camps, teen backpacking trips, one-week events, and one-year intensive programs learn skills such as ecosystem restoration, fire tending, animal tracking, gardening, and sustainable plant harvesting.

Hage explains WE's Relational Education approach by describing how students learn to build fires. The first step is "knowing the plants and the type of soil and ecosystem they grow in. Which plants are better suited to make fire, and what kind of fire do they make? How do they like to be tended? What do they need to thrive? When is it best to harvest them for fire-making? Then that leads to: How do we tend the fire? What does that look like on a small scale, [for instance,] a campfire, and what does that look like on a broad scale, [for instance,] a prescribed burn?"

He adds that the safe and successful execution of a prescribed burn requires interactions "with our human family, ideally including the First Nations, but also [needs] policies, certifications, governmental institutions, etc. So you can see how a deep relationship with fire, and truly with anything, [extends to] our relationship with all life."

Relational Education fosters what WE calls "Earth Intimacy." Hage describes this as a "feeling of knowing [nature] like you would know a loved one."

Hage, a Wilderness First Responder, explains that one aspect of Earth Intimacy is a heightened awareness of qualities specific to individual animals and plants. "We can make broad generalizations about humans: We eat food; we breathe air… but then my mom loves tacos," he notes. These kinds of "subtleties of relationship that exist between us and [other] humans" can also exist "between me and a bird—not just a species of bird, but a bird."

Fields of Study

WE instills an appreciation for nature in young people through programs like Wild Tenders, a nine-month "learning journey" for adventurers between the ages of four and 14. Participants absorb the organization's core teachings through activities such as storytelling, food preparation, arts and crafts, and natural dyeing.

"We believe our future depends on understanding and embodying our interdependent place in the ecological web," the group's website states. "The younger we cultivate that embodied understanding, the more likely it will influence values and actions throughout one's lifetime."

In programs such as Teen Backpacking, adolescents and young adults aged 15-18 engage in hiking, mapping, journaling, aidless navigation, and other activities that help them connect with nature. A curriculum designed for teens who are about to graduate from high school includes an option to spend 24 hours alone. To help these adventurers honor what Hage describes as "the crossing of the threshold from high school senior into adulthood," facilitators encourage participants to ask themselves if they're leaving any loose ends as they part ways with relatives and friends. "So many of them are taking that time to do the healing work that's needed between them and a friend, write that letter to mom or dad about how thankful they are, or maybe [do] some repair work that was needed," Hage notes.

WE's primary program for adults, the Weaving Earth Immersion, offers options to spend one, two, or three years learning about ecosystem regeneration, somatic awareness, bird language, and other experiential and nature-based fields of study. According to the organization's website, this program attracts "activists, educators, entrepreneurs, naturalists, systems thinkers, and changemakers" aged 18 and above.

Ripples of Change

In addition to pursuing careers in sustainable agriculture and the healing arts, graduates of WE's programs have founded bird language and tracking clubs, nature-based education programs for adults, consulting services for other educational institutes, youth programs, and forest schools such as Nature Connect Alabama, Flying Deer Nature Center, and Sonoma Earth School.

Weaving Earth is a fiscal sponsor for Walking Water, an organization striving to help repair humanity's relationship with water. This group leads walks and holds gatherings to raise awareness about water-related issues.

WE also runs the youth leadership program at the annual Bioneers Conference, a forum seeking solutions to environmental issues. One of Hage's functions at Bioneers is to hold small youth circles with presenters at the event.

"It's a chance for young folks to get more access to these leaders and sit with them in more of a conversational style versus just sitting in a didactic lecture," he notes. "We're always looking for ways we can interrupt and disrupt the 'expert' model and instead create opportunities to be in a circle. We find more often than not that the experts leave the room having received as much from the young folks in the room as [the youth] did in return."

As a social justice-focused group, WE strives to cultivate awareness and understanding of crises such as climate change, war, racism, and the wealth gap. "That takes time, patience, and relationship," Hage says. "Some of these gaps are so wide. Defensiveness, anger, shame, and [other] blocks to compassion and empathy can come up. So we have to have tools and systems in place to be ready for that, get ahead of it, and even make it okay. That's part of the process: feeling the pain, moving through that together, and staying together. That's hard work. We do not claim to have that figured out. What we do have is a committed team of loving, caring, and deeply invested leaders who are willing to stay with it."

A New Ireland: Socialist, Internationalist and Free

Fearghal Mac Bhloscaidh

On Saturday 3 August 2024, I attended an anti-racist rally outside Belfast City Hall. Across the police line, howling fascist yahoos flew Union Jacks, Israel flags and the Irish Tricolour. This organised mob then went on to attack mostly Muslim-owned businesses across the city. In the aftermath, the media made a great deal of the images showing British and Irish flags flying side-by-side. Many commented that this represented a contradiction in terms, that you can't be an Irish nationalist and simultaneously cosy up to loyalists, or indeed espouse fascism. There was certainly a degree of novelty to the mob's constituent elements, but the notion that you cannot be Irish and racist represents a fallacy. Indeed, some media reports even called the fascist protesters from Dublin 'republicans.' The Sunday World reported Shankill sectarian killer, Glen Kane, giving Nazi salutes, while he 'stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Irish flag-waving republicans.' In fact, across the last century, many far-right Irish nationalists have claimed the tricolour, none more prominent than Eoin O'Duffy, the founder of the Blueshirts and first president of Fine Gael, the current party of government in Dublin. Indeed, lamentably, in the late 1930s right-wingers within Sinn Féin, such as the party chair, J.J. O'Kelly (Sceilg), preached anti-Semitism and sought a rapprochement with O'Duffy and, while not fascist in their politics, militarists within the IRA such as Seán Russell sought Nazi cooperation during the Second World War(Hanley, 2005).

The perversity of this position rested on the established historical fact that, in the early 1930s, the republican movement had a history of anti-fascism and radical left-wing politics, fighting O'Duffy's acolytes on the streets and condemning Nazi racism and anti-Semitism in print. The IRA position echoes to this day in Moss Twomey's famous remark that if it was communism to undo the conquest, destroy landlordism, restore the heritage of the dispossessed, end robbery and exploitation by a privileged minority, then the IRA is a Communist organisation (Hanley, 2001:53). Therefore, the fascist scum who waved the tricolour beside the Butcher's apron can plausibly claim to be Irish nationalists. Their alleged republicanism holds a less secure basis in historical fact, however. The novelty of their espousal of fascism, however, is that perhaps for the first time, they have chosen to ally themselves with the British far-right as opposed to a continental and typically Catholic variety be it Mussolini, Franco or Hitler – apparently, the lingering whiff of incense has been overcome by the waft of gammon nonsense.

Those who point to a coming together of the two communities in this hate march exhibit a level of historical ignorance partially created by a half-century of mainstream misrepresentation of the northern conflict. The loyalist and Ireland First mob are united in their national chauvinism and white supremacism. Despite the contradictions outlined earlier, Irish republicanism (particularly socialist republicanism) is the only mainstream anti-sectarian tradition in Irish political history. It also represents the principal anti-imperialist and alsoanti-racist tradition, despite laudable exceptions on the liberal side in highly problematic figures like Daniel O'Connell. To understand this and to map out the Ireland we seek in the future, it is necessary to move from the specific to the general and to view history as a process. For instance, the heirs to the proto-fascist Sinn Féin of the late 1930s were not the Provisionals but rather what became the Official movement, which by the late 1960s espoused an overtly Marxist position before performing a

Free Derry Corner (Photo: Ardfern)

profound ideological somersault over the course of the Troubles, eventually adopting a partitionist and pro-British outlook.

Similarly, after 1970, the Provisional movement emerged as a working-class insurgency which promoted the concept of an all-Ireland socialist republic and expressed solidarity for anti-colonial movements across the global South (McKearney, 2011:106). The current Provisional movement has triangulated its way to an acceptance of US imperial hegemony, positioning itself as an establishment proxy for neo-liberal continuity. Its long-term participation in the sectarian carve-up at Stormont, recent positions on Gaza and lamentable attempts to appease the lumpen far-right on the issue of immigration suggest that, as an organisation, it has made considerable progress down the well-worn historical path taken by those who move from a revolutionary republican position to a reformist and assimilationist constitutional nationalist one. In a recent documentary, the veteran socialist republican, Tommy McKearney, outlined his decision to break with the Provisional movement in the late 1980s: 'The commitment into having lived a life as I did… it was a huge emotional decision to break with the IRA, but my loyalty wasn't to an organisation, it was to the cause.' But what is that cause and can those who adhere to it chart a different more democratic and socially just path for our island?

Tone, the McCrackens and Russell stand as founders of an anti-sectarian and egalitarian tradition which applied the universalism of the radical Enlightenment or humanism to a colonial society. The constitutional tradition, which regularly condemns republican violence, emerged from the liberal Enlightenment and accepts the colonial conquest and, in utilitarian fashion,

operates on an acceptance of the sectarian paradigm on which inequality and social reproduction within a colonial situation was based. Those who seek to establish a genuine democratic republic must leave nationalism to the nationalists and adopt an internationalist perspective grounded in Ireland's revolutionary anti-colonial tradition. These are not reified polarities but represent a spectrum or dialectic and Irish nationalism clearly could encompass aspects of reactionary politics as well – Seán South may have been a violent nationalist intent on driving out the Brits, but he was no Fenian, nor was Eoin O'Duffy, Ernest Blythe or the other filthy reactionaries who rode in on the back of the southern counter revolution.

The current discourse around nationalism, therefore, occludes the real and qualitative distinction between constitutional nationalism and republicanism. Daniel O'Connell is a nationalist hero. Yet, from a republican perspective, he amounted to little more than a utilitarian opportunist and hypocrite, whose laudable anti-slavery and religious tolerance aside, cut his clothe to suit with the British establishment's worldview, thus carving out a niche for propertied Irish Catholics and their brahmin class in the Roman Catholic Church. Irish republicans have more in common with the English Quaker radical, Tom Paine. Indeed, Paine wrote Common Sense the year after O'Connell's birth, while his Rights of Man (1791) became the key text of nascent popular Irish republicanism. During the 1798 Rebellion, O'Connell, a supposed opponent of physical force, joined the pro-British yeomanry, later arguing that 'the popular party was so completely crushed that the only chance of doing any good for the people was by affecting ultra loyalty' (Woods, 2006:138).After reading Paine's Age of Reason in London, O'Connell rejected religion and adopted a Deist outlook, which he quickly publicly abandoned on his return to politics in Ireland out of political expediency. When Paine died a pauper in 1809 New York, his bones famously returned to England before being lost. When O'Connell died on a lavish pilgrimage to Rome during Black '47, while the nation of beggars he led, starved and fled, his heart was interned in a gold box in Rome while his body returned for a mass funeral in Dublin. Like their hero O'Connell, many of the Irish liberals who mock the far right for their lies might remove the plank from their own eye before they attend to the fascist splinter.

Colonialism, therefore, is a process not an event and loyalism, unionism and conservatism are reactionary and anti-humanist tendencies that reject the universalism of the radical enlightenment completely. In short, sectarianism is a manifestation of racism in the colonial context of Ireland. To claim that the northern conflict was a religious one is to occlude or deliberately ignore sectarianism's centrality to social reproduction and inequality in a colonial context. In Ireland, sectarianism functioned as racism did for the diaspora across the Anglosphere. Ireland had the misfortune to be conquered and colonised in the early stages of modern capitalist formation. When asked to write this piece, the brief stated that the argument would have to be short and accessible. With Einstein's imperative that 'if you can't explain it to a six-year-old, you don't understand it yourself' in my mind, I will now briefly explain capitalism and its relevance to Ireland's future in several hundred words. Capital is defined as a process, which is in continuous expansion, dedicated to endless accumulation. Yet, the market is meant to rest on an exchange of equivalents, price equilibriums, money in exchange for commodity etc. Marx explained capitalism's growth through the theory of surplus-value, which focuses on production, not circulation in the market (Harvey, 2023:89). This growth, the basis of capitalism, rests on class exploitation.

Therefore, capitalism can be characterised 'as a self-expanding circle, a spiral' (Marx, 1993:746). This spiral form of endless cumulative growth is based on exploitation, often facilitated by mass violence in its early stages, which ultimately threatens human survival either through war or environmental catastrophe. Colonisation became an imperative as this 'organic system' subor-

dinated 'all elements of society to itself, or in creating out of it the organs which it still lacks. This is historically how it becomes a totality… This society then seizes hold of a new territory, as e.g. the colonies …" (Marx, 1993:278). As David Harvey rightly outlines, the contradictions within capitalism are manifest within long-term cycles of boom and bust. Capitalism (or the incessant drive for growth through profits) necessitated geographical expansion or 'spatial fixes,' but 'the world market is approaching saturation', with perhaps only the African continent left as an army of reserve labour for capital to feed upon(2023:478) This Marxist or materialist conception of history insists that we 'identify where we are at now and where we might go in the context of capital's penchant for endless accumulation, exponential growth (the dreaded spiral), uneven geographical development and intense competition between states or power blocs for economic and political hegemony' (Harvey, 2023:494). The rise of the contemporary extreme right must be understood in the context of a near two-decade long crisis in capitalism and the gradual decline of the US and its 'western' and 'developed' satellites, orbiting the EU and NATO. Racism is as old as capitalism itself, indeed, the modern notion of racism emerged as an ideological product of capital's early global expansion.

Furthermore, racism 'is inextricable from, articulated by, and articulates class.' Ireland acted as the laboratory of English racism in the period of conquest and colonisation. Similarly, in the Victorian period, Marx and Engels identified how 'the English working class will never accomplish anything before it has got rid of Ireland.' The next year, Marx wrote that racism against the Irish meant the 'ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor … In relation to the Irish worker, he regards himself as a member of the ruling nation, and consequently he becomes a tool of the English aristocrats and capitalists against Ireland, thus strengthening this domination over himself' (Miéville, 2022: 143-4). This anti-Irish racism formed the material bedrock of the Orange state after partition. Those who attempt to appease or as Connolly put it 'truckle' to loyalism to expose its progressive kernel are pissing into the wind. The most pernicious aspect of the Belfast fascist alliance represented the loyalist welcoming of Irish chauvinists into their white supremacist citadel. The novelty of our current position on the historical spiral is that Ireland is now ensconced in the 'developed' and 'liberal' camp and No Blacks, No Dogs and No Irish has been replaced by a novel lexicon of the hated 'other', encompassing BAME, particularly Muslims, refugees and asylum seekers, LGBT+ and other vulnerable minorities. Yet the ideological mechanics of the elite's manipulation of race remain recognisable from previous cycles.

As I stood in the line facing the fascists that Saturday, I noted the courageous presence of Paul Doherty, a local SDLP councillor who has consistently stood on the front line against bigotry. I also saw the local Sinn Fein minister, Deirdre Hargey, who later took a stand that day with residents of the Lower Ormeau, facing down the mob. This then is not some reductionist diatribe which condemns anyone not of a similar mind as a social fascist or any similar nonsense. Rather it is a corrective to those 'nice' people who think that you can reason with fascism or that the 'nice' liberal establishment will protect minorities. Bertrand Russell, perhaps one of the few genuine liberal philosophers, hit the nail on the head when he argued that 'to be a nice person it is necessary to be protected from crude contact with reality, and those who do the protecting cannot be expected to share the niceness that they preserve.' As such, 'nice people leave the policing of the world to hirelings because they feel the work to be not such as a person who is quite nice would wish to undertake' (Russell, 1967: 103).

Nice liberal Joe Biden has bankrolled and excused genocide in Gaza, while nice liberal Keir Starmer has done much the same while Sinn Fein fawned over the former in the White House and the SDLP took their seats on the government's green benches with the latter. Without a materialist conception of history and class-based posi-

tion, we become blind to the symbiotic relationship between the liberal establishment and the extreme right. From Liberal Democrats in the US to the 'philanthropic' billionaires who fund them, nice people are responsible for the terrible state of the modern world. When push comes to shove, they will deploy fascism and hatred to protect their interests because no matter what Bill Gates or Bono will tell you about their good intentions, at the fundamental level, the drive for accumulation will trump any other tendency, including human survival. One need only recognise how the imperative of capital accumulation drives the engine of war yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Those who struggle towards a human future for Ireland and the world must cut through the miasma of liberal niceness and respectability. Issues of race and gender are vital in this process, but they cannot be allowed to facilitate the elision of class power and the refusal to call for the end of capitalism as a social system. Asad Haider argues that a logical extension of the liberal position of 'political correctness' suggests that 'society would be fair if 1% of the population controlled 90% of the resources so long as the dominant 1% were 13% Black, 17% Latino, 50% female, 4% or whatever LGBTQ, etc', leaving 'the very fact that there is a dominant 1% of the population … unquestioned' (quoted in Miéville, 2022: 173). Naked class power has always paraded in the vestments of respectability and progress, but liberals are fair weather friends in the fight against fascism. The liberal establishment in Ireland, Britain, Europe and the US will practice colonial fascism abroad while they clutch their pearls about political violence at home. The same commentators who condemned the attack on Donald Trump will prevaricate on Israel's genocide in Gazaand, when the time comes, they will embrace indigenous fascism for their own exigencies – a process unfolding before our eyes. Any new Ireland cannot to be controlled by a comprador Shoneen establishment whose social policies have provided the seed bed for the emergence of the Irish far-right and whose kid-glove approach to the same fascists has allowed well-funded foreign infiltrators to astro-turf large swathes of working-class communities, sowing misinformation and hate.

This Shoneen constitutional tradition found perfect historical expression in John Redmond – who represented O'Connell's fabricated tradition of 'moral' over 'physical' force nationalism by imploring thousands of Irishmen to die in the industrial slaughter of the imperialist First Word War while he condemned the Easter Rising. Redmondism genuflects before royalty, connives with imperialism and seeks a space at the master's table – Fenians seeks to turn the tables! James Stephens established the Fenian movement by grafting French revolutionary socialism onto an inherent anti-colonial tradition of social resistance. In 1837, French socialists led by Auguste Blanqui swore an oath: 'In the name of the Republic, I swear eternal hatred to all kings, aristocrats and all oppressors of humanity' (Miéville, 2022: 187). The historical conditions have changed – the message hasn't.

Any new Ireland must confront and defeat fascism, but this can only be achieved by identifying and remedying the root causes of its attraction for growing numbers of Irish people. This will requite a revolutionary overhaul of Irish society north and south based on mass democratic mobilisation. The historical material to inform this constitutional demand is abundant from the United Irishmen, like John Kelly the Boy from Killane, who famously died 'for the cause of long down-trodden man', to the radical Fenian proclamation of 1867 through to the 1916 Proclamation and 1919 Democratic Programme. The cause of Ireland is the cause of Labour. The cause of Irish freedom is the cause of humanity and you cannot triangulate your way to smashing fascism and ending its ultimate root cause, the relentless accumulation of capital based on class exploitation, ever the herald of conquest, war, famine and death.

Funding the War in Sudan: Restrain the UAE and End U.S. Complicity

Mohamed Suliman

In April 2023, a war broke out in Sudan between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese National Army. Its impact has been devastating, millions were displaced and thousands died, in addition to the large destruction of buildings and infrastructure, but this war has been also fueled and sustained by external actors that are investing in it – namely the UAE, the main backer for the RSF militia. Given the urgency of the issue, Congress members who started to take note of this intervention should put more pressure to address the main cause of the war.

The RSF was extablished by President Omar Al Bashir, primarily in 2013, from the restructuring of the notorious Janjaweed militia. Its main task was to support the central government's counterinsurgency operations in Darfur and South Kordofan. Its ideology has been the ethnic cleansing of Africans and NonArabs in Darfur and dispossessing them of their, livestock, lands and pastures. In 2017, the Sudanese parliament passed a law that officially recognized the militia and organized its activities. The militia has reportedly committed countless crimes and atrocities during the ongoing war, including the destruction of villages, the killing of protesters, sexual violations and rape, mass killings, unlawful detentions, the targeting of hospitals and churches, and attacks on journalists and media institutions, in addition to ethnic-based killings and recruiting children as soldiers during the ongoing war.

They then joined the Sudanese Army units as soldiers recruited by Saudi Arabia to fight in Yemen. There the UAE found in the RSF its trusted ally. The UAE decided to adopt the militia by supporting it with money, hosting its social media team, and arranging for the militia leader's diplomatic travels. In addition, the UAE has been providing military support to the militia, In just one week, and a clear violation of the UN arms embargo, open-source investigators identified three air shipments from the UAE to an airport it established east of Chad. Moreover, A UN report mentioned that UAE flights coincided with a surge of highly sophisticated weapons and arms used by the RSF such as drones and anti-aircraft missiles. The main reason behind this ceaseless support is that the UAE believes once the militia takes power in Sudan, it can advance its economic and political interests in the country, such as controlling more seaports and agricultural land, preventing the Islamists from returning to power and recruiting more Sudanese to fight in Libya alongside General Haftar, the UAE's main ally in Libya who is coordinating with Wagner (various reports suggest that the UAE is co-financing Wagner in Libya). Most recently, a UAE cargo plane was identified by a humanitarian providing military aid to the RSF militia in the region.

The UAE's support of the RSF has been a subject of criticism by many observers and rights groups, for instance, In April 2024, the Refugee International president issued a statement calling upon the UAE to restrain from funding the miltia citing the atrocities and war crimes committed by the militia in Darfur and requested the UN security council to intervene in this issue.

In response to the global outcry, the UAE launched a disinformation campaign denying that it backs the RSF and rejecting credible and independent reports that show in detail its ongoing support to the militia, falsely claiming it takes no side in the war. In addition, the UAE has

been working to impede any independent investigation into this issue.

Thus far, The U.S. government has been modestly reacting to the UAE's involvement in Sudan, for instance, the U.S. envoy to the UN appealed to the UAE to stop supporting warring parties in Sudan. The U.S. representative to Sudan condemned the violence and massacres committed by the RSF but appears to be hesitant about naming its main backer. Most recently, the treasury department decided to block several UAE based companies with links to the war in Sudan.

Recently, US Congress members started to address the UAE's negative intervention in Sudan and where the U.S. government should act. In January 2024, the representative Ilhan Omar introduced a joint resolution that aimed at blocking arms deals that part of it contained $85 million to the UAE, one of the cited reasons is that the UAE has been violating the UN arms embargo in Darfur and supporting the RSF militia that the state department found it committed war crimes and crimes against humanity. This effort, if successful, will put considerable pressure on the UAE and encourage it to stop arming the militia.

Another congressional effort has been started by Senator Sara Jacobs, Ranking Member of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa who, along with a coalition of ten other senators, issued a statement that urges the UAE to stop backing the RSF militia for committing mass atrocities and ethnic cleansing. Sara Jacobs is constantly meeting with Sudan experts and activists to discuss strategies to pressure the UAE to stop arming RSF, most recently, Senator Jacobs also introduced a resolution that would ban selling U.S. arms to the UAE until it stops aiding the RSF.

Further, The U.S. Congress also introduced an Act that declared the continuous violation by the rapid support forces in Darfur against non-arab tribes in Darfur as genocide, the press release mentioned that they want the world to know we stand together in our outrage at these genocidal actions by the militia and its enabler, indirectly referring to the UAE.

Urgently, The Congress should also address the smuggling of sudanese gold by Wagner in coordination with the RSF which, eventually, according to reports by the UN and watchdog groups, reaches Russia through the facilitation of the UAE. In August 2023, an investigative report exposed that the then Wagner leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, met with RSF leaders just days before his death, and offered them supply arms in exchange for providing him with gold.

Blocking the UAE will have a significant impact on ending the war and the future of the Sudan, the immediate result will be in stopping the ongoing violence in Darfur that taking the lives of thousands, currently, in just one year, the RSF committed two genocides against non-arab tribes in Ardamata and El Geneina . Stopping the UAE support will weaken the RSF militia, a first step in dismantling the militia and building a unified sudanese army. Not long ago, The RSF leader rejected the integration of his troops into the national army several times and even threatened to send the whole country into chaos if requested to do so, Indeed, the RSF leader launched this war when he sensed the calls for integration were rising, eliminating the RSF funding sources will also be hugely beneficial to the global peace and order, for instance, Dagalo visited Russia and openly advocated of its unjust invasion to Ukraine, he also threatened to Europe with an influx of immigrants if it does not back his 2019 military coup.

The U.S. government, hitherto, is prioritizing its commercial and military relations with the UAE over the interest of the Sudanese people. Congress should not follow this path and push to stop the UAE from funding the destruction of Sudan and the hope of its people for a democratic, stable and peaceful country.

Dearest Donald — Bibi, Joe, and Kamala Too — But Mostly, Donald

Michael Albert

Dearest Donald, you got shot. Sorry. Yesterday's papers. Does anyone remember how many people of all shades and persuasions wished you a speedy return to health? Various factors propelled their words. Differentiating their reasons matters.

First, there was a humane and sincere propensity to not wish ill on others. That's something you, Donald, would not understand. Closely related there was an affirmative desire to avoid the swamp of hate which once you step in ensnares with ties that bind. You, Donald, are already long since swamp-bound. Also, there was a less benign desire to not appear uncaring, despite, well, not caring. You, Donald, get that. Then there was a desire to be or at least to appear to be civil and mature. Again, Donald, that's beyond your ken. And alas, there was also a defensive desire to avoid criticism. That, Donald, you routinely exploit. And finally, there was an understandable fear of what a bulleted Trump might unleash. Only you, Donald, know for sure. And beyond all those sentiments, who knows? Maybe there was even a paper-thin layer of sincere caring concern for your actual self. You think so, Donald? I doubt it.

I have been screeding of late. I'd apologize except that it seems appropriate. it is hard to refrain. And so, why refrain? And so, just one last time, what do I feel about you Donald? It's a little complicated. I see you as a creature lodged many levels beneath contemptible. You appear to me, that is, as a rampaging beast. You just do what comes naturally. You spew hate, but without an iota of choice involved. You are a living reflex. You are a 100% product of your own inner drives. A walking, talking, hating reflex. You growl and claw outside any realm of morality. I can't hate a spider for poisoning, a boa constrictor for squeezing, a lion for ripping, nor even a tiny little super virus speck for reproducing. They are what they are. You are what you are. So why hate you? I should forget about it. You are Donald just being Donald. And hate isn't healthy.

But, no. I'd rather dwell a bit on it. Because the overriding fact is that you are not just another beast. You are a person. You make choices. You are not a speck unto yourself. You have had and you even retain real power, and you seek massively more power. You cavort with others of your ilk although thankfully not everyone who cavorts with you, or who likes you, or even everyone who adores you is remotely like you. So what is the attraction?

The power brokers who sing your praises. They strike me as utterly horrible self centered greed machines. But as to their being like you, I suspect they are mostly pretenders to that level of beastliness. They are certainly seriously dangerous, yes, but not beastly. Not like you, and not like your late, great Hannibal Lector.

But what about those who matter more, your voters? To my eyes, multiple factors push and pull them into your orbit. For most of them, I suspect their attachment to you is highly mutable. Their escape might even be relatively quick and painless. In fact, I think we may be seeing that starting to happen even as I write this. Trump voters escaping Trump.

Sadly, others who vote Trump are so deeply

embedded in your orbit, so tightly tied to your beastly self, that their escape will require a stupendously hard climb. To provide them ladders is a worthy act. To withhold ladders from them is cruel and also self defeating. But to wish you well so you can ensnare them more tightly—that is unworthy.

So, back to you Donald, and of course, everything anywhere around you always returns to you. You are not just a beast, but also a beast rider, a beast provoker, the Beast in Chief, and unlike lots of your critics, I have to admit that you are scarily good at beastliness. It is your undeniable bit of genius. You are a sure fire-first round unanimous inductee into the Beast Hall of Fame. Congratulations.

You are at once as stupid as a turnip yet as effective as an idiot savant. You may yet make the best of having sickened yourself and having sickened even those guarding you, even those praising you, and of course so many millions of others by your anti-science, self-seeking, power-grabbing, endlessly lying, deaf, dumb, and blind wizardry. You may even get to strut and sputter on the biggest stage again, though I very much doubt that will happen. Surging sanity is forming up in your way.

You gleefully scream your mantra: "Thank me, praise me, follow me" even at the corpses of your victims. Last time you had the helm, you told us to skip the masks, skip the social distancing, and go back to business as usual. Body bags burst forth. Next time? Full on fascism! So, Donald, there cannot be a next time. Humanity's first big step toward many many more steps to follow: You must be defeated.

And yet, love Biden? Love Harris? Distaste for them will not interfere with stopping you. We know without any doubt that a lesser evil is still evil. We know that sometimes a lesser evil is a lot lesser evil. And we know this is one of those times.

Remember the Sixties, Donald? You were alive yet somehow you missed it, didn't you? Part of those days was love and kindness. Part of those days was dignity and respect. But Donald, back then there was also a commitment to seek justice that even a half century later remains vastly more timely than today's votes for you. Also, truth be told, that commitment remains vastly more appropriate even than most of today's too timid votes against you.

Coming from then, I can understand, acknowledge, admit the justification for, and respect the pain, alienation, desires for dignity, and desire to hit upward that fuels a great many of your voters—indeed, that I think fuels most of them. I can even understand the greed and deep-rooted misogyny and racism that fuels some of the rest of your voters. Not to mention the fear that hogties many of your opponents. You reward greed, nurture misogyny and racism, and instill fear right up there with history's most vile classist, sexist, racist fear-mongers. Fear monger medals for you, for sure.

And you know what Donald, I think your voters whose pain, alienation, desire for dignity, and desire to hit upward fuels their votes for you may soon defect from you. For them to see through you and to shake off their support for you may soon become admirable to their friends and their families who will in turn follow suit. Many million MAGA hats recycled. Many million Trump lawn signs X-ed out. Your wild shenanigans felt fun and friendly for awhile for those voters, but real fascism, Project 2025, that is a step way too far.

So here's to you Dearest Donald, you who are the foremost master of mayhem against all of humanity. Has anyone ever so gleefully welcomed doom as you welcome it? You are a big, bad, dumb, welcomer of death. It is probably only my idiosyncratic wish but I hope someone turns on a stereo near your head and plays the young Bobby Dylan singing his song to you, his song that so aptly applies to you. I hope it plays

for you, over and over, just out of your reach, until you finally actually hear it. Until you cry. Can you do that?

And then I might weep for your soul, but you don't have one. I might bemoan the loss of your human intelligence, but you don't have any of that either. You only have beast intelligence and of that you have a massive over supply. I would lament the loss of your sly and slippery talent for self preservation, but the end of that would be the end of you, and the end of you would be a blessing without disguise.

And while I am at it, these wishes extend as well to everyone who feasts like you on futility and violence. So it is for you, too, Bibi. Of course it is for you too. And Joe, yes, I gotta add that despite some relatively nice moves, it's for you as well. To bank roll genocide qualifies. And surprise, it is likely even for Kamala, despite that she may wind up a Fascism slayer. She may even redeem herself. We will see. But in any event, still more so, way more so, it is for the institutions behind all of you.

My message is really pretty simple. Business as usual in the United States of domination is now and has been incredibly vile. Those who run that business tend to reflect its true colors. But there are gradations. Even rare exceptions. And on the road forward, the gradations sometimes matter. So I want Kamala to win and even to win very big. But once that is done, and it better get done—then unless by some miracle Kamala becomes Rosa's sister, Noam's daughter, and from deep within herself a patient and proud purveyor of revolution—she too will become someone to dissent from and not dissent's daughter.

So, here's to you dearest Donald. And here's to all who abet genocide in all its capitalist, racist, sexist, and authoritarian forms. Here's to those who are worst and those who are less worst. And not only in the U.S. but wherever you may reside. Until injustice's end and humanity's re-birth.

Donald and Bibi and the rest too, trailing well behind but nonetheless Masters of War and not of peace—here's to you a bit of an exit song from Bobby. Heard it before? Good. Hear it again:

Like Judas of old
You lie and deceive
You've thrown the worst fear
That can ever be hurled
Fear to bring children
Into the world
For my baby
Unborn and unnamed
You ain't worth the blood
That runs in your veins
Let me ask you one question
Is your money that good?
Will it buy you forgiveness?
Do you think that it could?
I think you will find
When your death takes its toll
All the money you made
Will never buy back your soul
And I hope that you die
And your death will come soon
I'll follow your casket
On a pale afternoon
And I'll watch while you're lowered
Down to your deathbed
And I'll stand over your grave
'Til I'm sure that you're dead

Step one, Donald loses because Kamala wins.

Step two, talk with Trumpers. Welcome Trumpers.

Step three, new vision, new strategy.

Step four, organize, organize, and yes, fight, fight—but for peace and justice. For a new world.

These times feel for so many like the worst of times.

But these times can become for so many the best of times.

These times are changing. If not now, when?

J.D. Vance, MAGA Friendly Leftists and Fraudulent Populism

Chris Green

Last month, when Donald Trump picked Ohio US Senator J.D. Vance as his vice-presidential running mate, corporate media labeled Vance as an authentic economic populist. The Economist described Vance as a crusader against Big Tech and wrote that he was "staunchly anti-establishment, attacking what he saw as business elites benefitting from moving factories abroad and paying low wages at home." The New York Times noted that, in his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention (RNC), Vance "cast Wall Street's titans as villains." Vance thundered that the Republican Party was "done catering to Wall Street." Major Republican donors like the hedge fund mogul Ken Griffith were reportedly upset by the nomination of Vance, a populist demagogue "openly hostile to Wall Street" in the words of the Times.

Among those excited by Vance's nomination were multiple writers and activists that have sometimes been called "post-left." Many of these brethren are notable for holding conventional anti-corporate and anti-war left wing views; at the same time, they align with MAGA on issues like immigration, Covid vaccine mandates and "woke" identity politics (especially trans issues). Many of them are notable for arguing that there are many positive aspects to MAGA populism that align with the anti-corporate progressivism of Bernie Sanders.

One notable "post left" thinker is Glenn Greenwald. Greenwald is known for his former position as an investigative journalist at the radical left publication The Intercept and for his involvement in landmark whistleblower cases involving Julian Assange, Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden. In more recent years, he has been known for his numerous friendly appearances on Tucker Carlson's Fox News program, his defense of Alex Jones and his breathtakingly bizarre efforts to prove that MAGA aligns with traditional left wing anti-war and anti-corporate values. In 2021, he told the Daily Caller podcast that he considered Carlson and Steve Bannon to be socialists–and that Trump ran as a socialist for president in 2016. Yes he actually said that Trump ran as a socialist in 2016.

It is no surprise that Greenwald has been deeply impressed by the populist figure presented by J.D. Vance. He was pleased when no less an authority than Teamsters president Sean O'Brien spoke to the RNC last month and attested that Vance was a true friend of the working class. In a tweet on X, Greenwald noted excitedly that O'Brien praised Vance–and his fellow senate Republican populist Josh Hawley–for engaging in what Greenwald called "relentless pro-labor acts.".Regarding Vance, Greenwald described O'Brien as "gushing over how much he's done for workers." Indeed, O'Brien told the RNC delegates that Vance "has been right there" in supporting organized labor's point of view "on all our issues." .

Like Greenwald, Lee Fang and Zaid Jilani are former investigative journalists at The Intercept. While not embracing MAGA in the extreme manner of Greenwald, both share some of his MAGA friendly "post left" views. Last month, Fang–in an article on his Substack page–and Jilani–in an article for Compact magazine and in an appearance on Democracy Now!–echoed Greenwald's celebration of Vance for what Fang called the Ohio senator's "populist, anti-corporate record." Both cited a nearly identical list of Vance's progressive accomplishments. The relatively short list featured a number of legislative bills Vance introduced or cosponsored with Democratic colleagues, all of which have stalled in the senate. The list includes bills to: reduce swipe fees imposed on merchants by credit card companies; to cap out of pocket insulin expenses under private health insurance at $35; to tighten regulations on freight

rail carriers carrying toxic chemicals after a February 2023 train derailment heavily contaminated the community of East Palestine, Ohio; and to increase capital gains taxes on shares acquired in large corporate mergers.

Jiliani was somewhat nuanced and cautious in his praise of Vance, compared to the mindless cheerleading on the latter's behalf by Fang and Greenwald. In his Democracy Now! appearance, Jilani noted that Vance would never support Medicare for All; he conceded that Vance opposes the proposed legislation known as the PRO Act, which is designed to make it easier for workers to organize unions. Vance, after all, said Jilani, is a conservative populist, not a democratic socialist. But Jiliani insisted that Vance represented a sincerely populist faction within the Republican Party. This faction represents the view that the promotion of conservative family values requires good paying jobs; the creation of those jobs requires modest governmental intervention in some areas of the economy to regulate the excesses of unfettered capitalism. Jilani noted that Vance's populist stance is a small minority within a Republican Party which still largely hews to an orthodox big business agenda of tax cuts and deregulation.

Meanwhile Fang laid particular emphasis on Vance's praise of Lina Khan, Biden's chair of the Federal Trade Commission, as proof of his populist bonafides. Vance has supported Khan's vigorous fight for antitrust measures, particularly against Big Tech. Fang noted that Vance quietly filed an amicus brief in a recent Ohio court case in which he argued that Google should be regulated as a common carrier.

Vance's Record: The Reality

Some have questioned the sincerity of Vance's populist stance. After all, it wasn't that long ago when he was an orthodox pro-business Republican who professed disdain for Trump and his voters. Critics have speculated, not implausibly, that once Vance observed Trump's success, he decided to reverse himself and follow the political winds, becoming a fierce MAGA partisan. Also, as the independent journalist Ken Silverstein observed, there is the fact that while Vance poses as the champion of ordinary people against Wall Street and Big Tech, his top campaign contributors are….Wall Street elites and Silicon Valley billionaires. Vance himself made millions as a venture capitalist. There is plenty of evidence belying Vance's claim to be a fighter on behalf of ordinary people.

Whether or not he sincerely believes in the above mentioned progressive legislative bills cited by Fang and Jilani, he has shown a vulnerability to backtrack in his support of them under the influence of corporate lobbyists. For example, credit card industry lobbyists recently reported that Vance had backed off on his support of proposed legislation to cap fees for merchants on credit card swipes.

Vance has also worked to dilute the railroad safety legislation he introduced with Ohio's other US Senator, Democrat Sherrod Brown, in the wake of the 2023 East Palestine, Ohio train derailment. This disaster occurred in Vance's home state, an extreme act of corporate malfeasance occurring in broad daylight. Even here, as Lever News reported in June 2023, Vance quietly agreed with railroad lobbyist requests to amend his legislation to move back the required date that the rail industry must adopt safer tank cars carrying hazardous materials from 2025 to 2029.

It was profoundly false of Sean O'Brien to say in his RNC speech that Vance was aligned with organized labor on "all" its issues . (Why O'Brien made this statement or spoke at the RNC in the first place is a subject beyond the scope of this article). It is true that Vance opposes Right to Work laws and made a 2023 photo op appearance on a United Auto Workers picket line. However, Vance, as noted above, opposes the PRO Act. One reason he has given for objecting to it is because he wants to institute European style "sectoral" collective bargaining in the US; he falsely claimed that the PRO Act would prevent this. He also criticized it because, as he told Politico, it would "hand over a lot of power to a union leadership that is aggressively anti-Republican."

As he objected to the PRO Act, he also cosponsored the Team for Employees and Managers Act of 2024 (TEAM). Like previous versions introduced by congressional Republicans in 2022 and 1995, this proposed legislation would reinstitute company unions, which were banned nationwide by the National Labor Relations Act of 1935. Company unions, of course, are not genuine collective bargaining institutions: they are workplace organizations entirely funded by the employer (which can dissolve the organizations at their own will at any time). Republicans have marketed the TEAM Act as populist in the sense that it supposedly would enhance "worker voice" at companies. The TEAM Act is apparently the brainchild of Oren Cass's think tank American Compass, an institution which has had considerable influence on Vance's policy proposals. Like Vance, Cass has evolved from an orthodox business friendly Republican–he was Domestic Policy Director of Mitt Romney's 2012 presidential campaign–into a so-called right wing populist. Cass's mission has been to come up with "populist" ideas to give a pro-worker sheen to the generally anti-worker Republican Party. Besides such drivel as the Team Act, Cass has advised Republicans to drop their support for Right to Work laws and to scapegoat immigrants as a cause for depressed wages among native born Americans.

Speaking to the Claremont Institute in December 2023, Vance outlined a distinction between "good unions" and "bad unions." His example of a "good union" was the Fraternal Order of Police. An example of a "bad" one was the Starbucks baristas union. He denounced the latter for attacking Israel. He said "if your politics lead you to defend the baristas union as they defend Hamas, then you should have a different politics." The baristas, of course, were not actually defending Hamas but objecting to genocidal Israeli war crimes in the Gaza Strip–crimes which Vance has wholeheartedly supported.

There are other cases belying the claims of Sean O'Brien that Vance has been "right there" with labor on issues affecting working people. For example, Vance voted against legislation codifying into law the joint-employer rule of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). The rule–before

it was rejected by a federal court–established that companies must participate in unfair labor practice complaints filed with the NLRB against companies they employ as contractors. The rule was supposed to help hold companies accountable for participation in labor abuses by preventing them from shielding themselves behind contracting companies. Meanwhile, using talking points used by steel industry lobbyists, in late 2023 Vance successfully lobbied the Environmental Protection Agency to substantially weaken one of its rules limiting carcinogenic emissions from the manufacture of coke, a component of the steelmaking process. Such emissions have had serious negative public health consequences for steelworker communities.

Politico noted that Vance, in opposing the PRO Act, was "in the awkward spot of trying to position himself as [a] 'pro-worker conservative' while simultaneously seeking to contain the political power of organized labor, the only entities in American society that reflect–however imperfectly–the actual will of workers."

Vance's Actual Constituency

Vance's pose as the champion of ordinary people should not be taken seriously. Underneath his populist veneer, Vance, like Donald Trump, is devoted to enhancing the ability of economic elites to exploit ordinary people. His "populist" rhetoric inciting racism against Latino immigrants, Islamophobia and transphobia only serves to divide the US working class and strengthen ruling elites.

Vance's primary constituency is clearly not ordinary people. An informative Washington Post report of July 28th described his real constituency: a network of Silicon Valley venture capitalists centering around Peter Thiel–the latter helped Vance himself get started as a venture capitalist in the early 2010s. These oligarchs provided the financial backing for Vance's meteoric political rise. Thiel and David Sacks (another prominent Silicon Valley venture capitalist) both reportedly personally lobbied Trump to choose Vance as his running mate. Elon Musk is also known as a strong supporter of Vance.

Specific objections of members of the Thiel network to Biden administration policy–amplified by their messenger boy Vance–were outlined by progressive populist Matt Stoller (research director at the American Economic Liberties Project think tank) in an article on his Substack page last month. In the article and in other writings, Stoller has seemed to take too much at face value Vance's pretense of being an authentic populist. This is not surprising as Stoller has been noted for problematically collaborating with Oren Cass in trying to find common ground between right wing populists and progressives on economic issues. Nonetheless his Substack analysis of Vance's financial backers is intelligent, well informed and worth reading.

Stoller noted that Peter Thiel, a billionaire, views himself as an underdog, representing "little tech" fighting against Big Tech monopolies. Thiel invests in startups in industries often dominated by a few companies. Stoller wrote that Vance experienced similar conditions as a venture capitalist: in the mid-2010s, he observed multiple digital advertising startups. These were quality companies, Vance believed, but they would die quickly because they could not compete with Google's dominance in the online advertising industry. This is the root of Vance's support for the antitrust actions against companies like Google and Facebook by Lina Khan, Biden's FTC chair. It is an example of the true nature of Vance's populist pose which has so impressed the likes of Lee Fang and Zaid Jiliani: he is for the "little guy" i.e. billionaires funding startups who are battling against other billionaires controlling more established companies.

Stoller wrote of a particularly interesting case: the prominent Silicon Valley venture capitalist partners Marc Andreessen and Ben Horowitz. After Vance became Trump's running mate, the billionaire duo pivoted to supporting the Trump/Vance ticket after primarily funding Democratic candidates for years. Last month, Andreessen and Horowitz filmed a podcast episode where the two discussed their objections to Biden administration policy. Their objections, as laid out by Stoller, are interesting because they are

illustrative of the nature of the particular elements of the capitalist class that Vance represents.

First the two objected to Biden's proposed "unrealized gains" tax on investments, which they claimed would destroy the venture capital industry. Second, they denounced the tight regulation of cryptocurrency and the blockchain in general(in which they are significant investors) by Biden's Securities and Exchange Commission. Third, Biden's FTC prevented the sale of one of the duo's companies (Maze Therapeutics)–which possessed an experimental treatment for a condition called Pompe disease-to the pharmaceutical company Sanofi. Horowitz claimed that the FTC's blocking of the sale had effectively strangled all venture capital investments in US biotechnology.

Stoller observed that the duo had left out some important details in their complaining about Democratic policy. For example, Stoller noted that "at no point in their praise of the blockchain do they bring up that large swaths of crypto, if not the entire apparatus, turned out to be a giant scam." The fraudulent nature of so much cryptocurrency is why the FTC has been regulating it and blockchain networks. As far as the blocked sale of Maze Therapeutics, Stoller noted that the pair left out a few important facts:

"The FTC stopped Sanofi from buying Maze Therapeutics not for no reason, but because Sanofi was engaged in an illegal scheme of trying to kill a rival treatment for Pompe disease so it could preserve its ability to charge $750,000 for an annual course. And Maze Therapeutics quickly found a different company to buy their treatment, for the exact same price."

Stoller observed that–echoing Andreessen and Horowitz–Vance also denounced the Biden SEC's regulation of blockchain, claiming that SEC chairman Gary Gensler was a "candidate for worst person" in the Biden administration. Vance said he worried whether "a lot of the crypto stuff is fundamentally fake" but argued that it needed to be deregulated in order to fight Big Tech monopolies. Stoller observed that "that's exactly how Andreessen and Horowitz pitch crypto, its 'little tech' challenging the big guys"

The Bottom Line

The truth is that politicians–ranging from a highly dubious reactionary opportunist like J.D. Vance to a much more serious populist like Bernie Sanders–are limited in their ability to pursue progressive economic reform. When powerful economic interests dislike a particular legislative proposal they are able to utilize enormous resources to defeat it: campaign contributions to politicians, enormous armies of corporate lobbyists, legal challenges in the courts, paid advertising on corporate media (where many commentators share a point of view with business). There are innumerable examples of this dynamic at work. For example, Kamala Harris–when she first ran for president in 2019–backtracked on her initial support for Medicare for All after a campaign funded by wealthy financial interests was launched against it (primarily targeting Bernie Sanders). After much flailing around and incoherence, she settled on a reform proposal that left private health insurance in the driver's seat of US health care.

If business–particularly the financial industry–is upset by governmental policies they can always engage in capital flight: a mass sell-off of assets and withdrawal of investment capital from a country. Liz Truss (who has adopted a right wing populist pose not dissimilar to that of Donald Trump) faced this when she became British Prime Minister in 2022. British financial markets strongly objected to Truss's proposed fiscal policy of combining tax cuts with energy subsidies for British consumers. The financial markets crashed the British economy and Truss was forced to resign after a month and a half in favor of Rishi Sunak, a more conventional business friendly conservative.

Short of overthrowing the capitalist system, the only hope for serious redistribution of power in favor of ordinary people in the United States is mass social movements that exert overwhelming pressure on ruling class politicians in favor of progressive reform. In the meantime, some of us really need to stop being so credulous about ruling class politicians who adopt populist poses.

It's Time to Organize or Die

Kim Scipes

I saw a message from a veteran friend of mine recently: he had just received a picture of a dog eating a dead baby in Gaza.

Revulsion, anger, sadness, rage: of course, at the Israelis for their genocide in Gaza and everything they have done in Gaza and on the West Bank against Palestinians, and for the Biden Administration for encouraging and enabling such atrocities.

But, also, revulsion, anger, sadness, and rage against the left, particularly in the United States, but also around the world: we could not stop this shit, nor the US Government from supplying the weapons and political support to allow it to happen.

And revulsion, anger, sadness, and rage against the left, again particularly in the United States, but also around the world for being unable to stop the impending climate catastrophe already happening.

Etc., etc., etc. And, unfortunately, in my mind, this is all connected.

Let me regress. I am a strong leftist and especially anti-imperialist/anti-capitalist. I've been a political activist since "turning around" while in the US Marine Corps over 50 years ago and joining the anti-Vietnam war movement inside the US military. I'm a socialist of sorts but belong to no established organization because my approach differs: I am a leftist despite the left, not because of it. I have researched, written, and published around the world. Although I've lived most of my life in the United States, I don't see the world through an "American" lens; I see the world through a global lens.

And what I see—and this will probably piss off many in the left, however defined—is failure: we have failed to build organizations that can force social change while radically altering power relations. Yes, we have forced changes, but they have been short-term at best: we have failed to build long-standing, POWERFUL organizations that can force social change. And most of us don't even realize this.

One of the most profound understandings by the late Jane McAlevey, developed in her book , No Shortcuts, is that she delineated between advocacy, mobilization, and organization. Advocacy was speaking up for someone else, such as lawyers for clients in a case. Mobilization was motivating people to stand up to fight a civil injustice, such as the murder of George Floyd, but it generally depended on relying on the same good foot soldiers, again and again until they burn out. And then, there was organization: building on-going organizations that would engage people on an on-going basis and educating them and reaching out to those still unengaged so as to build power. In other words, the idea of organizing was to BUILD POWER by developing, maintaining, and expanding our organizations, and seeking engagement by more and more people in our respective areas and training them to become leaders.

But, within this, there needs to be the understanding that leadership exists within groups; it doesn't emerge only with the presence of outsiders. In fact, as McAlevey recognizes, we need to build on, develop, and help refine the leadership that always exists among groups of people; we must work with and build upon existing leadership, not ignoring or replacing it: this is key to facilitating organizational development.

We—in general—have failed to adopt McAlevey's understanding of the need to organize, and that is immobilizing us. And this failure has been keeping us incapacitated and helpless. And ineffectual.

Yes, we can analyze things on a sophisticated basis. Yes, we can recompose history with dedicated archival work. Yes, we can snivel about "injustices" anywhere in the world. But we cannot do a damn thing about them because we refuse to organize to build power from the bottom of society upward.

PARC's one-year anniversary, as shown by the Herald Dispatch (Smith, 2018)

I live in Michigan City, Indiana, on Lake Michigan. This is a city of about 30,000 people, in the rust belt, and with the majority of people (53%) living month-to-month. It's a city that's generally about two-thirds white, one-third African American, although race relations seem pretty relaxed; not perfect, but generally people at least tolerate each other, especially at the same economic status level. Our recently elected mayor is an African American woman, the first to win the position.

Now, Indiana is not a progressive powerhouse, to say to least: it is controlled by Republicans at the state level (governor), and Republicans control a two-thirds majority in both the House and Senate.

We live in what's considered "Northwest Indiana," which is an area dominated by the steel industry and its (conservative) union; other than in Indianapolis, we're the only area that votes consistently Democratic. Nonetheless, it's a conservative Democratic area.

Yet we are living in an area that has been under economic and political assault for somewhere around 40 years. In this period, a number of steel mills have been closed, many union locals busted, and a lot of ancillary jobs destroyed. In turn, this has decimated many of smaller companies that serviced the mills and their workers. We live in a state where today's minimum wage, like the Federal minimum wage, is $7.25 an hour; trying raising a family on that! And tipped minimum wage is $2.13 an hour! And where fast food is a major industry!

What can progressives do in such an area? It's a long-standing question that I think needs to be addressed across the country; I think lessons from our work might be helpful for folks living in many areas of the country, whether in a "blue" or "red" state. I think recounting some of our experiences might provide some ideas…. (And I hope others will share their experiences as well!)

Although retired now, for 18 ½ years and after getting my PhD at age 51, I taught at a local four year university called Purdue University North Central (PNC), later changed to Purdue University Northwest (PNW) ; a part of the Purdue University system. (Purdue is the land grant university in Indiana.) This is a four-year university located in a rural area, 4 ½ miles out of the two stoplight town of Westville.

My primary teaching responsibility as a sociologist was to teach a course on "Race and Ethnic Diversity," and over the years, I eventually taught 57 sections of this course at a university roughly 87% white and generally conservative. What frustrated me was that we had no established social organizations or networks for students to plug into once they got a taste of what was really going on in the world and wanted to stay engaged after graduation.

Fortunately, that changed. A student named Vince Emanuele came to campus. Emanuele was a Marine veteran of the Iraq War, and he was trying to recover from the war, a difficult journey, I assure you: he had survived some vicious combat. We hit it off: I was a Marine veteran of the Vietnam War, although I had lucked out and had stayed in the States for all four years of my enlistment. Nonetheless, we bonded. And over time, we talked about and thought through many of the problems of our area, and he decided he wanted to do something about this.

Emanuele, after participating in a number of social movements—Occupy Wall Street, Obama, Bernie, environmental, antiwar—was also dissatisfied with the "left." He knew the state of our region, knew the state of the left, and wanted to do something about it.

Somewhere around 2015-16, Sergio Kochergin came to town; Kochergin had been a platoon-mate of Emanuele's in Iraq; they were inseparable, both helping the other recover from their wartime experiences. They, along with a couple of other people from this area, journeyed to Standing Rock to support efforts there.

The idea that emerged from hours of conversations along the trip, following multiple conversations beforehand between Emanuele and me, was that they decided to establish a community cultural center in town. Michigan City really has no place for people to relax and enjoy themselves together without having to pay money, and they wanted to set up a site where people could socialize that didn't require money but where people could meet freely and get to know each other. At the same time, Emanuele and Kochergin also wanted a space to explore political ideas and community-based organizing in an area such as Michigan City. Eventually, they found a storefront that they rented, and they established PARC, which stands for Politics, Art, Roots, and Culture, in 2017.

PARC was an amazing place. Both Emanuele and Kochergin made folks feel welcome; they painted the place, gathered couches and chairs, established a large lending library, established a performance space, and always had a pot of coffee on. Other than when alcohol was served at evening events, when you had to be 21 or older to enter, there were no limits on who could join activities on site.

They welcomed everyone in the community. Interestingly, in a city largely self-segregated, they invited African Americans to come and share their spoken word poetry and to produce other events directed to African American audiences; some nights, the audience was 95% African American, which is very unusual for a "white" space. Yet, they also had heavy metal bands perform, as well as folk singers.

Eventually, different community-based groups used PARC as a meeting place. This included the West Side Little League, the NAACP, as well as some progressive pastors in the city. I think there were one or two weddings at PARC.

PARC also had family-focused events: most important was "Friendsgiving Day," instead of Thanksgiving; we all brought food and shared, while the kids ran around and drew pictures on paper on the floor. They also held family game nights, sponsored art installations, welcomed hip hop events, initiated electoral candidate roundtables, etc.

Along with this, PARC showed political movies and provided political speakers: along with my colleague, Lee Artz, I spoke on the then-current situation in Venezuela (which is still being attacked by the US Government today). They had other guest speakers, in person and via Zoom.

But PARC also featured sporting events—both Emanuele and Kochergin were fans of boxing and mixed martial arts, and some of us were pro football fans.

They got a big screen TV for engagees. Everybody was welcome at PARC!

Ultimately, PARC was trying to find ways to mix cultures and races, seeking to unify across established social barriers instead of just merely "tolerating" the existence of others.

Over time, and what we hoped for, was that a few people came around and wanted to do something to improve their city. Some of them had joined together previously and had been active. They created OUR MC, which stood for Organized and United Residents of Michigan City, and we worked together to create a social justice group that would fight for the betterment of the city. (Accordingly, there was an overlap between the people of PARC and OUR MC.)

OUR MC got involved in a number of campaigns. We fought lead poisoning in the city—a very big problem in the formerly industrialized rust belt cities, as industry did not clean up the environment they had poisoned during their operations after they abandoned the area. We fought an effort to establish a development along the last remaining sand dune along Lake Michigan in the area. We fought the gratuitous development of a downtown plaza with taxpayer money, although it was intended to be used by those visiting only during the summer. And we mobilized over around a thousand city residents for a couple mile protest march down a main street in town, protesting the killing of George Floyd and declaring that "black lives matter!"

Yet, we were more than just an "action group." We wanted to develop the consciousness and understanding of OUR MC members, of which many did not have a more complete understanding. We knew that key to the survival and expansion of OUR MC over time was leadership development; we wanted to develop every person willing to take our proposed courses, as ultimately, it was expected that Emanuele and Kochergin would bow out. We asked people what they wanted to learn.

We initiated classes at PARC that anyone was free to join. Most important, I believe, were our classes on SWOT, which stood for "strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats." SWOT analyses help illustrate our strengths and show where we could have the greatest social impact in the local political/economic scene, and where our greatest threats might come from. We were also seeking to develop a structure that would facilitate our political program.

So, we combined a social movement approach toward issues based on broad mobilization (as mentioned above) with electoral work; rejecting a sole focus on electoral politics, what appears to be a common approach with many left groups.

The local mayoral race in 2019 was one of the places we intervened. After interviewing a number of progressive candidates, we backed an elderly African American female candidate, and really went to work for her. Michigan City has about 30,000 homes, and in one day, we talked with residents or left literature about our candidate's campaign on doors of over 10,000 of them! There was no other candidate with this kind of support. Unfortunately, we found out that our chosen candidate had escalating mental health problems, and we decided we could not continue to support her; we felt it unethical to tell the community that she could handle the job when, clearly, she could not. Still, she lost by only 200 or so votes.

So, OUR MC—and PARC—were seen as a growing power base for the people by the "powers that be." There was pressure put on our landlord to no longer rent to PARC. That probably could have been overcome, but we had some internal problems that were not handled well.

This, too, might have been overcome, especially over time. But the COVID-19 pandemic hit this area in the Spring of 2020, and that had a terrible effect on the region and on relations between people in it. (The demise of Bernie's second presidential campaign probably contributed as well, but I don't remember that folks were that enthusiastic about his second run.) We simply did not have the organization consolidated sufficiently to survive the social turmoil.
Nonetheless, there needs to be some analysis of PARC/OUR MC, and their strengths and weaknesses.

Understand that these are my personal comments, and probably would be disputed by at least some of the participants. Yet, as an older, more experienced activist than others—so I should not be considered a "regular member"—these are things that I think need to be drawn out for continued discussion.

There was a gruesome set of internal conflicts that were ugly, that occurred with both organizations, and which I do not want to repeat. The long and short of it—and what needs to be learned from—is that we never provided for handling internal conflict that might emerge throughout the course of the organizational history, and this was, in my opinion, a MAJOR failure; it led to the destruction of an incredibly innovative and successful community organization project.

There are two main lessons. First of all, EVERY organization—no matter how well intended, no matter how well initiated—needs to be prepared to handle internal conflict, and to be able to do so in a way that does not destroy the organization nor force people away. We had run into a thing where this approach—deemed "touchy-feely"—was denigrated from the beginning: it basically prevented us from addressing emotional issues among members. However, the greater the diversity of those involved—and we want the greatest diversity possible—the greater the chance of emotional issues emerging among members; and cross-class memberships seem particularly vulnerable to this. (The violence that many working class people are subjected to—at work, in their neighborhoods, and in their daily lives—differs qualitatively from that experienced by more upper middle class folks, and resulting tensions can be explosive. But other issues such as gender, race, sexual orientation, etc., as well as experience levels are all potential flashpoints.) This must be expected and prepared for! We did not, and when the crisis happened in 2021, PARC/OUR MC exploded and burned out. An amazing project—especially in a "red" state such as Indiana—fell apart and disintegrated.

But tied to that must be another understanding: internal conflict, while not desirable, is almost unavoidable over time. Sometimes, it even energizes organizations, at least at first, forcing them to find new ways to be creative, to reach new people, etc. As stated above, its likelihood increases as the organization gets more internally diverse. But in any case, it is all but inevitable over time. (Unfortunately, I speak with a lot of experience with this.)

Key to resolving this, I believe, is to think clearly about what is going on in advance of the conflict. Absolutely the central question: is this conflict internal, among members, or is it external, such as an attack from competing or outside organizations? This is an important detail for every organization, which should be prepared to handle both should either raise its ugly head. The key thing to understand, however, is that we should treat internal conflict among members differently than conflict with external organizations.

We have to develop processes that treat members with respect, and try to work these problems out amicably, if at all possible. The goal is to overcome the conflict and restore the health of the organization so good political/cultural work can be continued!

(There may be situations where this cannot be done and the individual or individuals must be expelled; but the goal should be to intervene before it gets to this level, and this should be avoided if at all possible; yet expulsion of some members is ultimately more important than allowing the organization to be destroyed. The expulsion process should be developed early on, with due process procedures included for all concerned from the beginning: you want to be clear and transparent, as other people and organizations will be watching, and you want to assure these outsiders that you've handled this as carefully and as humanely as possible; you don't want to be denigrated for mishandling internal conflict by others. And this problem intensifies as the problem continues over time; "friends" get involved, and often make things much worse, which argues for a clear, expeditious, and clean handling of internal conflict as quickly as possible.)

External conflict is another thing. You want to train your members, so everyone understands what the

organization is seeking to accomplish, and to be able to identify "friends" and "foes." This is why ongoing organizational educational efforts are important because with greater and more solid organization, you are better able to defend and maintain your organization.

The goal over time is to build an organization that can develop and carry out a program that is strategically based on clear analysis and understanding of the social-political-cultural fields your organization is operating within. You want to build a stronger, better educated group of people who will work together in solidarity to better your respective community. You want to develop and achieve goals that have been commonly agreed on by the largest collection of people possible. You want to expand your membership numbers. And, along with all of these organizational goals, you want to develop leadership within your organization, helping each person desiring such training to advance and get as much development as possible, and then using them to further develop the organization. (And should they leave, for whatever reason, you want them to have the skills -and confidence to develop solid organizations wherever they land!)

You also want to develop processes by which you can decide—assuming there are compatible groups in the area—who you want to work with, and who you do not. Ideally, organizations join in coalition with others seeking the same results, building community-based power and expanding further outward.

Also, there is one more thing I learned that needs to be remarked upon. Just because you build a wonderful community cultural center that brings people together, you cannot assume these people want to become activists or will self-organize. The reason, as we discovered in our work in Michigan City, is that people are not just waiting to be asked to join. In fact, most have been trained over decades by social and political leaders to be passive, to not want to get involved.

What is the message generally shared: let the politicians handle it! (Oftentimes, a recipe for disaster!) No, people have been trained for generations that they should vote every 2, 4, 6 years, and then to get back on their respective couches and go back to sleep until the next election. (It's why we need to engage people between elections….) The individualism produced by contemporary culture has been reinforced by self-serving politicians, and we've got to recreate cultures of solidarity.

We have always to remember that progressives, however defined or however they have defined themselves, have been subjected to this same immobilizing message as everyone else. This cannot be ignored and must be directly confronted. Besides talking about it and trying to understand how it has affected each person in the organization, exercises such as public speaker training, door-to-door canvassing, and general assertiveness training can all help challenge those previous messages, and even better is engaging in on-going social movement campaigns.

In other words, organizations do not simply emerge: they must be constructed with care, consciousness, and concern for the well-being of everyone. We may not get it right every time, but we damn sure should learn from the past, so we don't make the same mistakes over again.

Now, admittedly, there's no certainty that without the Pandemic that PARC/OUR MC would have survived, either partially or together. No organization is guaranteed success. The larger social/political/economic environment that has affected the left overall—the past 40 years of neo-liberal economics, the demise of Occupy, failure of Bernie's campaigns, killings of African Americans, attacks on the Black Lives Matter movement, the lack of trust of traditional politicians, the rise of the Tea Party and then the MAGA movements—affected us as well. But having been a member of a number of activist organizations over the years in different parts of the country, I believe PARC/OUR MC came further than most.

After all, our goal is not to analyze the world, it is to change it. This can only be done through building organization: I can see no alternative. We need to get to it! And now!

Courage and Community at the Heart of Jackson's Fight for Clean Water

Rukia Lumumba interviewed by Bridget Meehan

A relentless campaign of public advocacy, legal challenges, and community mobilisation involving the People's Advocacy Institute, the Poor People's Campaign, the Center for Constitutional Rights, Forward Justice, and ACLU of Mississippi, recently won a victory in the courts for clean, safe and public drinking water in Jackson, Mississippi. A Federal court granted Mississippi Poor People's Campaign and the People's Advocacy Institute intervention in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) lawsuit that resulted in the de facto takeover of Jackson's water system. Being granted intervention means they are now an official party to the lawsuit and have a voice in the proceedings. The lawsuit, brought against the City of Jackson by the EPA for violations of the Federal Safe Drinking Water Act, dramatically shifted residents' access to information and say about the direction of their water system. The groups believe that this victory marks a crucial step toward the transparent, equitable, and community-centred management of Jackson's water system.

Z staffer Bridget Meehan interviews Rukia Lumumba of the People's Advocacy Institute about the history of the public water system in Jackson, her work in the campaign, and the indomitable spirit of the people of Jackson.

To start with, could you give me some background about the People's Advocacy Institute and the kind of work you do.

Thank you for your interest in talking about Jackson and the work we're doing. We're one of many community groups that are trying to create a water system and infrastructure, and just better conditions for our communities in Jackson and Mississippi overall. But, I am the founder of the People's Advocacy Institute [PAI] which is a not-for-profit, non-governmental entity that serves as what we consider an incubator for transformative justice in the US South. And so we work in three main areas to see community-led and community-driven solutions to common problems.

One, we create a space for co-governance so we engage in community-led policy, design, development and implementation. We do that through several tools including People's Assemblies.

We also have a body of work that we call Ending Mass Incarceration and Criminalisation that focuses primarily on development of coalitions and policies that decrease reliance on the carceral system and increase reliance on community members as problem solvers and people with the right and the responsibility over the resources that help to create safer communities.

And then our last body of work is what we call Investing In Communities. That's where we help to seed different initiatives and programs that are initiated by community members directly impacted by the harm that they're hoping to solve, for example, we operate the only bail fund in the State. We incubate those new projects with the hope that they'll eventually stand on their own and be an example for other projects to come to fruition as a result.

That focus on community, having communities lead rather than having things done to them, is really the way decisions impacting communities should be made. Regarding the lawsuit, could you give some background on the public water project, why it needed to

happen, who was involved, how long it's been going on?

In the lawsuit, the People's Advocacy Institute (PAI) served as plaintiffs; specifically our team member Brooke Floyd was a named plaintiff. Brooke is the Director of our community co-governance initiatives in her role she oversees our community-led governance initiatives like people's assemblies. Brooke is also a lifelong resident of Jackson, and is a mother who happened to be directly impacted and continues to be directly impacted from unsafe drinking water in Jackson and the lack of water at times. We decided as an organisation made up of residents who live and work in Jackson and surrounding areas, that it was important we not only engage in the rapid response efforts to provide people with clean drinkable water, and to provide people with filters, but also to ensure that we had a voice and created a space where community members could be engaged in that policy development broadly, for our city, for the policies that impact our lives. We felt it was critical that community members have a right to be at the table to ensure that our considerations as community members in general, not just the People's Advocacy Institute, had an opportunity to engage fully in the negotiations and the design and development of the rebuild of our water system.

Historically, as residents we've never had a seat at the table and so ensuring that we have the opportunity to intervene, to sit at the table, felt like a necessary step for community voices to be heard, incorporated and valued and have weight in the decision-making process around this water rebuild.

We worked with an amazing team of legal advocacy firms as well being co-plaintiffs with the Mississippi Poor People's Campaign which PAI is a member of. Danyelle Holmes served as the named plaintiff on behalf of the Mississippi Poor People's Campaign. Our legal team is made up of the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), Forward Justice, and the ACLU of Mississippi. We received research support from the National Resource Development Center (NRCD). Using local and national advocacy legal firms that have a social justice mission was really critical to our work as well, because we knew that they understood what we were fighting against and that they had a commitment to fully engage in this fight even though there were no financial benefits to them or us. It was really about having a seat at the table and understanding how critical it is, and how it begins to set the tone for future engagement not only in Jackson, but in Mississippi overall where water systems are failing across the board. And it sets the tone as well for communities at the table nationwide. What we're experiencing in Jackson has happened in so many other cities and is happening currently in neighbouring states like Alabama. We hope we've set precedent through this to see other communities be included in the development process as interveneers.

Can you tell me about the water system in Jackson, its history and why it's fallen into such disrepair?

The water system has historically been a public entity and I'll try to give some highlighted bullet points. About 108 years ago - that's a long time - the Fewell Plant was built. It was our initial water system and is still in operation today. In 1962, the Governor of Mississippi Ross Barnett, who was also opposing integration, constructed the Ross Barnett Reservoir, which is the largest source of drinking water for the city of Jackson. When the reservoir gets too high, water is discharged into the Pearl River, which flows through Jackson. Integration began in '62. Ross Barnett said we ain't having integration in Mississippi. The Federal Government had to force Mississippi to integrate, from 1968, 1969, and then real push in the 1970s. White flight began to happen after integration, and after that enforced integration, white flight really picked up with more than 11,000 white families fleeing Jackson to avoid school integration. In 1972, there was the passage of the Water Pollution Control Act which ushered in the infusion of EPA grants to fund municipal water projects across the country. This is important because you began to see right from 1972, as the city gets Blacker and then later the administration gets Blacker, the number of funds that make it through the State to Jackson for water infrastructure increases.

In the 1980s, specifically 1981, Jackson was ordered to build a metro wastewater treatment plant because we didn't have one. It included some neighbouring towns like Pearl, Flowood, Brandon, Pearl River Valley water supply district, the Jackson Municipal Airport, the State mental health facility, and a number of other places. Before that system was even complete, some of the municipalities surrounding Jackson (Pearl, Flowood, Brandon) were fighting to contribute as little financial resource as possible, including Rankin County which is the home of the current Governor Tate Reeves and is literally not even ten minutes outside of Jackson.

Many of these areas for the most part were receiving free sewer treatment off the backs of Jackson residents' tax dollars. Then in 1987, with the passage of the 1987 Water Quality Act, the funding of municipal water systems began to end and there was no more water investment money coming through most of the municipalities. At that time, Dale Danks Jr. was the Mayor of Jackson. Federal funding began to disappear from

places like Jackson, but specifically and including Jackson. There's a quote where Danks says the Feds [Federal government] lowered the financial assistance to deal with the metropolitan area as it relates to water and sewage; we have to find some source to fill the gap of reduction and participation by the Feds, he explains. And then Danks goes on to raise the water rates in the late 1980s precisely as the Federal Government expected municipalities like Jackson to do. Now, you have a combination of lack of funding for infrastructure where because there's no longer Federal investment and you have a smaller and growing lower income local tax base. A recipe for disaster, right, because white flight is taking off and the city population is decreasing, but the city's responsibility to fund the entire water infrastructure, for not only the city but many of the suburban developing areas, remains.

In 1993, what we know now as the OB Curtis Plant was developed and became the city's primary water plant, constructed near the Ross Barnett Reservoir. We have the Fewell Plant and the OB Curtis Plant, and both still exist today.

In 1997, the first Black Mayor, Harvey Johnson, was elected. Mayor Harvey Johnson began the trajectory to try to fix the water. Recognizing that the Fewell Plant is 100 and something years old, recognizing that OB Curtis Plant can't do all of it, he decides to increase investments into the Fewell plant in response to the EPA implementing the Consent Decree. 1997 saw Harvey Johnson's administration create a master plan for the water and sewer system. This was the first master plan of a water and sewer system in Jackson that anybody has actually seen or been able to produce. So, the first Black Mayor produced the first water and sewer system plan. In 2010, a major ice storm hit Jackson which for, I guess, the first time in more recent history highlighted the system's vulnerability to widespread service disruptions. In that 2010 storm, hundreds of water mains burst; all those service interruptions didn't last for a full month but they lasted for weeks. That was the first time.. In 2012, the city constructed an 8.6 million water main connecting OB Curtis and Fewel Plants to help keep water pressure up.

I'm sharing all of this because I want you to understand that under Black leadership there was an active effort to maintain a water system. It wasn't until Mayor Harvey Johnson came into office that you began to see actual attempts to correct a water system that was over a 100 years old.

So after years of neglect, here was the first time where anybody was trying to do anything to rectify this.

Right, and so then you just keep seeing that happen. You get to year after year after year from 2012 to 2019, where not only is the city government consistently trying to one, put a Band-Aid on the cracks with very little funding; but then, second, you see that they're also trying to give residents the ability to contribute towards the water costs by ensuring we have working water meters. The City contracted with Siemens, which ended up being the worst thing you could possibly do. We all know now how many cities and states Siemens has unfortunately ripped off providing faulty equipment to. Jackson was one of them, where they installed water meters - never worked; some were charging people higher rates; and some they never even placed in people's homes. There were thousands of homes that Siemens never even placed a water meter in, and most of those homes were in predominantly White communities. So, for years some White residents were never paying for water.

It's adding insult to injury, and with all the different elements there, it's far more complex than just the system being run down.

Right, and it resulted in a failed billing system where residents had the burden of trying to correct their bills. But even before that, residents took up the decision to contribute even more to our infrastructure issues. In 2013, under the Mayoral leadership of the late Chokwe Lumumba, residents decided to tax themselves an additional 1% to help

with our infrastructure issues; they decided by over 90% through a referendum that they wanted to contribute additional tax towards fixing our roads. Our roads were consistently in disrepair because pipes were constantly bursting due to weather and old pipes. All this is to say that it's been the residents of Jackson who have had the largest burden both financially, as well as healthwise, as a result of these water system failures.

2021 was the next time that we saw a major water break that further exacerbated the understanding and the reality of our vulnerable water system. The system had gotten to a place of complete dysfunction. In 2021, we had a winter storm where for six weeks many residents across the city were without any water, period. The Governor did not call for a state of emergency in the city of Jackson until three weeks after we had already been without water.

How do you even cope with water, it's so fundamental?

Between Covid and that 2021 situation, you understand the strength of our communities and the love of our neighbours. One of our biggest efforts was the establishment of the Mississippi Rapid Response Coalition where we were able to galvanise resources from across the nation to get people drinkable water. We mobilised, we were distributing water, hot meals, kerosene for heat, two days after the storm and before any government entity was able to respond. That's the power and beauty of community-led change. We served over 55,000 people during that time. So, I'm just really proud of the residents of Jackson. I really, really want to highlight that because they have really been at the forefront.

During the 2021 winter storm, we also had over 221 days of Boil-Water Notices. So in addition to six weeks of not being able to drink water we also were, for the majority of the year, unable to drink the water coming out of our faucets, we were encouraged not to brush our teeth, and those kinds of things.

In 2022, as soon as the weather began to get cold, we were faced with another severe water situation where we had a water crisis come to national attention as the result of our water system just completely breaking, failing. And that's what led us to the current point. It's currently in a place of repair but it's not out of crisis mode, and it is definitely not in a place where residents are able to safely drink their water, utilise their water, and/or have confidence that the problem will be fixed within a reasonable time, in our opinion. And that's why it's important that we're engaged in intervention.

This current city administration, as well as most city administrations post-Harvey Johnson, have worked to fix the water. It has not been something that people have just neglected, it has not been something that residents have just neglected. I think that's an important thing to understand because people will try to paint the narrative that we're just Black, uninformed, unequipped, and need a saviour to come and save us. What we have seen is that not only have we been the most equipped to maintain water flowing through our pipes at least to any extent, but that the same problems we told you we were experiencing because we did not have the finances to fix them, are the same exact problems that now this interim administrator that has been appointed by the EPA is having to this day. The difference is, he has the money to fix them, and he needs to listen now to the residents and the city administration that have been working on it so that he does what is necessary.

Could you talk a bit about the model that you want to see in place, now that there's an interim administrator and resources to do something? And do you think the administrator is going to listen to the community and actually do what needs to be done?

I think that all we can do is encourage them to listen, really pressure them to listen. But because the court supported our intervention, I am

hopeful that they will actually follow the court's orders and actually allow residents - not 'allow' because it's a right - so I'm gonna stop saying 'allow'. So, it's about them following through on the recommendations that we make as community members. The process is engaging community members in a number of ways. One: through surveying about what their water experiences are. The second part, because we need to fully understand what people's experiences have been both historically and currently, we're asking where they've seen some change. We also need to identify what residents feel is the immediate need. Some residents might say their immediate need is to repair the pipes leading to their home. Some residents might say their immediate need is a water filter. Some residents might say their immediate need is actually water coming through their pipes, not even clean water, just water. So, we have to assess residents' needs and in assessing them, we assess where across the city the issues are similar and different because it is a variety.

Adding to that list, we have to assess who is receiving accurate bills, who's receiving a bill and not receiving a bill, and how are residents being charged. We want affordable water and we want that water to stay public. That is critical because under a third-party administrator, the water is actually no longer in the city's control and is not really in the EPA's control. It's actually in its own little separate entity that has the authority to determine what Jackson's water system looks like without any requirement that they take the advice of the city or of the EPA. But as an intervener, according to the ruling of the court, the community at the very least should be involved in the judge's review of the third-party administrator's efforts.

So, how much contact do you have with this administrator and how much influence do you have in making sure the community, who have done so much to get it to this point, are not ignored? As you said, they have the solutions themselves, they don't need a saviour, but is there a chance they could end up getting ignored?

There's always a chance that we can be ignored and I think that's the responsibility of groups like the People's Advocacy Institute, the Mississippi Poor People's Campaign, and all of us collectively that engage in this work on a day-to-day basis. We cannot allow the voices of the people to be ignored. We have to be the pushers, the agitators, to ensure that community is having that voice. That's really the role we serve.

But you asked the question, can we be ignored? I mean we've seen throughout history, community voices being ignored regardless of court cases. We had back in the '60s and '70s law that required integration of our schools, and Mississippi ignored that. It took the Federal government to step in. You look at what's happening, Mississippi ignored Jackson's water needs and it took the Federal government to come in and say, well we're no longer sending money directly to the State to support the water infrastructure of places like Jackson, because we're seeing that you're not sending that money to Jackson. We're gonna bypass you and we're sending this money directly to Jackson.

Unfortunately, the money went to the third-party administrator and not to the city. But we've already seen the Federal government have to step in - that's one instance of them stepping in. We've seen the Federal government having to step in around our prisons in the State of Mississippi, the Federal government having to step in because of the inhumane conditions inside the prisons of Mississippi; after years of community groups and legal groups fighting with the State to close down these prisons, we've seen the Federal government having to step in and demand humane treatment and conditions inside of prisons. Mississippi has had a history where the Federal government has had to step in.

It doesn't say much for the State, as the Federal government isn't exactly the greatest champion; it only shows how bad it is when the government is better than what's going on in the State itself - the discrimination, the levels of

outright racism. You mentioned that the water system is public. Would your ideal situation be that it stays public but with the resources being put into it and with the community having a say in how it's managed?

Absolutely, and ideally what we would all like to see is something similar to cooperatives. In Mississippi, you have farming cooperatives, you also have the Mississippi Association of Cooperatives, which has been around for a hundred years, is Black-led, and has over 400 cooperatives. Mississippi has always been home to cooperatives. Fannie Lou Hamer in the Delta created some of the first cooperatives to just support and ensure that Black people were fed - farming cooperatives and pig banks - all of these to ensure that community could share resources. Really what we now call the Solidarity Economy is what our ancestral mentors like Fannie Lou Hamer were doing. We get the examples from the blueprints they provided us back in the day. We have electrical cooperatives in the state of Mississippi; many are in rural communities where organisations like One Voice, MS are fighting for Black community members to be part of those cooperative boards. They're not perfect entities but they're entities in which we're organising to ensure there are more black voices and more voices of poor working families on those boards, and to ensure that they are truly cooperative and representative.

When we think about our water system, it's not unimaginable that we have some form of participatory process by which residents of Jackson have a say in the decisions in the management and the oversight of our water and sewer treatment centres.

So that is a possibility as well, being able to take it to that cooperative point. I suppose you want to get it out of crisis first and then look at how the management structure could be changed to make it more participatory. I can see you're going in that direction and that you have the strength and the ability to make that happen. When I think about some of the European models, a lot of the water systems here are publicly owned as well, like in Jackson. But again, a lot of them suffer from that neglect; not for the same reasons as yourselves in Jackson but more because of decades of wealth extraction where public services have been squeezed. The systems here have slowly degraded because they haven't had the necessary investment, because the money is going elsewhere.

And in the part of Ireland where I live, we have a public water system that needs huge investment to be brought up to standard. The local administration tried to impose water charges, but that didn't happen because there was uproar and people said they just wouldn't pay. In the south of Ireland, the other jurisdiction in Ireland, they brought in water charges and there was absolute mayhem; many people simply refused to pay.

In England, they probably have the worst of all worlds because their system has been completely privatised; and although they pay water charges, the private water companies have just asset-stripped the infrastructure for decades. Their systems are in serious decay. There's actually a massive campaign going on about pollution in the rivers and sea because the private water companies have been pumping raw sewage into the rivers and sea. People are experiencing some of the things you're experiencing in Jackson where they might be without water, say if there's been a weather event like a flood or extreme cold. And there's only going to be more of that because of climate change anyway.

I think we could learn some lessons from the campaign that you've been involved in, in Jackson, looking to see how the public could take a bit more control and have more say in how the systems are run. It could start the process of bringing these systems back into public ownership.

It's such an inspiring example, what you've done. One of the things that really stood for me when you were talking was how determined people in Jackson were. They were saying,we just can't take any more of this, and they were determined to make that change happen and knew what they had to do. That level of community cohesiveness and solidarity makes a huge difference to campaigning. They were even willing to impose more taxes on themselves, that's unheard of.

Trust me, that was a big one. I will say that even the Mayor at the time wasn't trying to tax people more but the people were saying it was necessary. But, I appreciate you sharing what your communities have been experiencing, as it sounds so similar. We know for a fact that what we're experiencing in Jackson is happening in so many, many more rural communities throughout Mississippi where dollars for infrastructure have not been provided because the State doesn't value that particular area; or doesn't appreciate the significance of maintaining water infrastructure that allows for us to have access to clean water - just doesn't appreciate it, meaning just doesn't understand the importance of it. So, some of it is just ignorance.

And disregard as well. Everybody would grasp the impact of having no water or having water that's unsafe to drink. They could empathise but they're choosing not to. They've chosen to say I don't care.

You're right. And I do want to say that in Jackson, community came together and has always come together in times of crises. When we come together, our community is no more special than any community across the world. I think that what we've experienced in these times of crises, we have what we consider, and what one of our movement elders Mr Frank Figgers says, is a "fragile unity". It's unity that's only held together by a single little thread, that thread that is a common pain that we're struggling through and are willing to get to the other side of to get a little relief from.

I definitely think that the ways in which we engaged, the tools and techniques, the strategies that we have used, really can be used anywhere and we can probably see more people use them; and others will use additional ones that we will learn from.

And I suppose your next step is to see what happens after this court ruling and to continue with the campaign to make sure that what the court said actually happens. The real issue is to get something done with the system so that the water is safe and fit-for-purpose.

Yes, thank you. One last thing to mention is PFAS [per-and poly fluoroalkyl substances] chemicals and the presence of permanent chemicals in the water. One of our colleagues, Brooke Floyd, has written an article that discusses this in some detail. These chemicals have been found in the water systems all over the State of Mississippi. So, the issues people in Jackson have experienced are not just narrative, although if they were narrative they would still be valid. But the water has been tested and the tests show that there are health risks and the drinking water is currently not safe.

There's a lot of double-speak and refusal to actually engage on the question of whether the water is safe to drink or not. The main focus is around the financial arrangement of the water system which is essentially about how to get the indebted public utility into a place where it can be privatised. That's what the authorities are focused on but residents are focused on the fact that the water is not safe and they can't get straight answers about that.

After listening to you talk, and how passionate you are, as well as everybody involved in the campaign, I have no doubt that you'll succeed and that it will happen. Thank you for talking to Z Network and I wish you ever more success with your campaign.

Diaries From Systemic Crumble

Alberto Peruffo da Montecchio

The metabolic fault-line is open. Just bang the hammer. And capitalism will collapse.

I live in one of the most contaminated areas on the planet, caused by human arrogance. The western Veneto, the region of Venice. A high-income sacrifice zone (HISZ). Different from classic sacrifice zones.

Over the last 40 years, 4000 more people have died from a single risk factor alone, an increase of 7% compared to other areas in northern Italy with the same background noise. I am talking about pollution. Toxic air, toxic water, toxic food.

4000 civilian deaths from a single risk factor (PFAS) alone. It is like a war. In reality, it is and we are on the front line. All the other deaths are invisible and we cannot be aware (have an account) of them. But they are many, very many, covered by capitalist omerta.

The extraordinary civilization that has thrived for centuries in these lands, for various reasons, historical, anthropological, cultural, with the advent of the last capitalism, as if it were a self-imposed degenerative disease, the Cancer of the World, is killing itself with its own hands.

Indeed, I could say that capitalism is the death of civilization as we have understood it so far. A construction that does not stand because its foundations have been badly grounded and some simple existential requirements have been forgotten.

This is not the place to reconstruct history and events, historical, conceptual, cultural. I will only recount the collapse-crumble that we - my comrades and I - are not only experiencing firsthand, but are even nurturing. From the ashes of capitalism a new civilization will be born.

And if I may venture to announce the death of such a great creature of thought and action - the capitalist system - it is because here we have seen its downfall for the first time. The first piece of the crumble. The first rift (fracture) that became a fault-line. The failure of its very possibility of rebirth.

I will accompany you through the collapses of this system, reporting on the hot fronts of our struggle, which I list here as if they were the different front lines where we put our climate troops, FFF, XR, Climate Activists of various kinds, Social Centres, Rebel Trade Unions, Radical Mountaineers, Proletarian Hikers, Parents in Revolt.

There are five fractures on which we are working to widen the fault-line: the destruction of mountains as Milano-Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics; the chemical pollution of new forever chemicals as PFAS; the great useless works such as the high-speed train line Lisbon-Kiev (TAV); intensive luxury productions such as Prosecco wine and tannery skins; the merchants of death as NATO military bases. All are interconnected and adopt the same cynical hyper neoliberal logic of destroying the territories they cross, without knowing their geography and history.

I will begin with the first fracture-front. The Dolomite-Milanese front.

THE MILANO-CORTINA 2026 WINTER OLYMPICS

We had left each other at the Climate Camp in Venice and made an appointment for the big mo-

bilization in Carrara at the end of 2023, saying: «mountains don't grow back». We have to stop the immoral-foul works planned for the 2026 Winter Olympics.

Already the fact that the 'winter' Olympics will be held - even in name only - between Milan and Cortina, between a city without snow (120 m above sea level) and mountains where snow falls little, much less than it used to, mountains that are nonetheless beautiful, says a lot about the 'economistic choice' of these supposed winter games.

Milan is the capital of the Italian capitalistic economy and hyper-consumerist fashion. Cortina is the capital of the mountains seen as a luxury and exploitation of natural resources for the use and consumption of the rich, to circulate what is actually earned in Milan-style metropolises. Money must circulate, and the best place to circulate it is where the high-profit-profile tourist and real estate recycling takes place. In tourist havens (which I call Paradise Zones, as opposed to Sacrifice Zones).

It is no coincidence that the political governors of the two host regions, Lombardy and Veneto, are of the same political, identity-driven, neo-liberal, business-oriented persuasion: the Northern League. For years, the two regions, the richest in Italy in terms of money and infrastructure, but

the most critical in terms of sociality and righteousness, have created unprecedented business and corruption in Italy's history.

Veneto, my region, just to mention two world-famous case studies, was the protagonist of the biggest corruption scandal in public works in the history of Europe (the Mose in Venice, costing more than EUR 6 billion, of which only EUR 1 billion in bribes) and of the biggest chemical contamination of water for human use in the western world (the PFAS contamination created by Miteni - compositions of the multinationals Mitsubishi and Enichem, suppliers of the American DuPont).

Lombardy, the region next to Veneto, was one of the greatest examples of a 'system of favors and clienteles to divide up the proceeds of contracts' (see reports on Expo 2015) that ended with a myriad of trials and convictions, leaving part of the city to building and cultural speculators, with dozens of works of dubious public use for the common good of the city. It is also the Region that started the privatization of public health, with impressive scandals involving the President of the Region, subjected to continuous investigations and checks by the judiciary.

Seeing the presidents of these regions - Attilio Fontana and Luca Zaia - exult over the awarding of the Olympics, while all the other contenders withdrew aware of the waste and climate costs, knowing the history of the two regions, did not reassure the activists already sensitive on the various environmental and social fronts. Right from the start, the division of major works, both sport-specific and infrastructural, showed that the same 'spannometric' game of dividing up international funds and economicistic spin-offs was about to be repeated, only and always for the usual strong powers.

For the sake of simplicity, I will mention just two of the most striking cases on which our struggle is focusing. That of the Bobsleigh Sliding Center in Cortina and that of the speculation on the Olympic Village in Milan.

First of all, one must take into account that Milan is a long way from Cortina and also from Bormio, the other Alpine town where the races will be held. With this excuse of distances between cities hundreds of kilometers apart (I recall that in Italy you can find everything in a radius of less than 100 km: sea, lake, mountains, beautiful cities), fictitious connecting works have begun, new roads or remakes of old ones, which have little to do with the effectiveness of the connection and are just pretexts for building very expensive infrastructures in the hands of large construction companies. Not to mention the pollution from the traffic of goods (from construction and logistics) and people (athletes and spectators).

The Olympics have therefore become a huge and colossal affair for the few at the expense of the many, a great attractor of capitalist funds and interests, even before, often above, the very high Olympic values of sport that we all recognise. If sport were still sport, and not instead the exploitation of athletes' bodies, especially when subjected to the hyper-specialistic consumption of their own, due to the sporting regimes of recent years: consumed bodies that have become useful only to create easy imagery used to convey goods and products, designed by unscrupulous sponsors.

The Cortina Sliding Center

In Cortina, famous for the splendid Dolomites, the home and motherland of technical mountaineering, they have wanted to build a new bobsleigh track without consulting before the townspeople. They have passed the project off as the renovation of the old track, but this is not the case. The few native citizens - the city has been in the hands of the servants of luxury for decades - made it clear that a bobsleigh track could no longer be built where the old one was, which had fallen into disuse, because the climatic conditions had changed, because the first one was already wrong because of its south-east exposure, because very few athletes practice this sport, because it would no longer be used due to

the very costly maintenance, due to the abnormal cost of the project, which in the space of a couple of years has gone from 61 to 128 millions euro, subtracted from the coffers of the mountain villages, which live with great difficulty due to the absence of health and social services.

Not only was a centuries-old larch forest being cut down. But the rights of mountain communities were trampled underfoot. We did everything to prevent this, but the passivity of the locals, after years of domination and domestication due to easy money, prevented the work from being blocked for the time being. The forest has been violently cut down, causing hundreds of centuries-old larches to fall, with the complicity of the International Olympic Committee, which has not kept its word about blocking the work and moving the races to the nearby bobsleigh tracks in Austria, a few kilometers away. The forest has fallen under police control, proceeding in a de facto illegal manner, despite environmental impact laws and the legacy of the project. An infamy and an environmental crime of enormous magnitude that the whole world must know about. Especially since the IOC declared these Olympics sustainable. Only in their principles, not in their facts. An ignoble contradiction.

From a social and environmental point of view, the Olympics are becoming a serious danger for the future, like the UNESCO label for the Dolomites, which at the end of the day has also become nothing more than a flywheel to attract international funds and millions of superficial tourists: touristification and assault on nature, nothing more, nothing less. The tourists and the Olympics 'pass by' (like hordes of New Barbarians), leaving the territories devastated.

The Olympic Village in Milan

In Milan - where nature has already been wiped out by violent hyper-urbanization since the time of Berlusconi, the father of zero-cost Italian business - things are no better. Neighborhoods once neglected and used by the poor classes have been gentrified under the pretext of building the Olympic Village. Evictions, expropriations, downward bargaining, in order to build a village that after the Olympics is supposed to become a student residence only for rich students attending Milan's elite universities. The cost of a single room will be around 1,000 euros a month. More than twice the Italian average. Truly a colossal bargain since it will have 1700 places and will be the largest student residence in Italy.

In the face of this umpteenth capitalist barbarism that is killing itself, the people, the territories, the Civilisation, a united front has risen up, stretching from Venice to Milan, to Turin, and also creating connections with the Paris committees (already active for the 2030 edition in the French Alps). From the Climate Camp in Venice to the alternative CIO in Milan, young guys and less young, old and new subjectivities, such as XR, FFF or the Social Centres of the Northeast, Alpine Clubs, and popular sports groups, all of Northern Italy is uniting to oppose these Olympics derailed from their original values.

We have chosen to break the narration of hypocritical Olympic Pax, now more than ever given that war is being waged in the territories of Palestine and the disputed lands of the Black Sea, and the Paris Olympics are being attended by belligerent countries, fuelled by nations hypocritical in their supply of weapons to all sides. Two of them upon all, given where I am writing from and to, are the USA and Italy. We should be ashamed to talk about the Olympics and to belong to nations that supply instruments of death on a daily basis.

Our slogan is 'our life is not a game'. Strategic objective is first and foremost to counter the false narratives and to exonerate-overthrow the authorities (deprive of authority) who are building the Sliding Center, Olympic Village and other useless works. We can't tell you the next steps yet, but the first unitary appointment against the 'late-climatic' Olympics will be in Milan with the UTOPIADI on 24 /27 October.