



MAGAZINE

MARCH 2025

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Stopping Trump

Supporting Palestine

Reflections On Gender In
Yugoslavia



*“They torture truth and
eviscerate education
so the next generation
knows only bullying or
being bullied.”*

-Michael Albert



www.znetwork.org

Title image by: Jon Tyson

MARCH 2025

Negate the Nazi Then Free the Future by Michael Albert	3
Woke, Identitarianism and the Extreme-Right by Marcela Uchôa	6
You Can't Keep Imposing Austerity and Expect the Corporate Party to Last Forever by Pete Dolack	8
Is This The Beginning Or The End Of A New Cold War? by Medea Benjamin, Nicolas J.S. Davies	12
The U.S. and Israel: An Alliance of Blood, Politics and Money by M. Reza Behnam	15
International Law at a Crossroads: Can Gaza Spark a Global Reckoning? by Ramzy Baroud	18
From Charity to Liberation: Decolonizing Solidarity with Palestine by Mustafa Jayyousi	20
Reproductive Work From The Time Of The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia Until Today's Slovenia by Urška Breznik interviewing Sonja Lokar	22

Negate the Nazi Then Free the Future

Michael Albert

Is today's moment that different from all prior moments? Haven't we endured extreme subterfuge forever? "Defense Department"? "Serve the people"? "Health and human services"? "Workers rights"? "High technology"? "Home of the free"? "Beacon of Hope?" Even "destroyed the city to save it." Is today just more of yesterday? Is Trump just another turd on top? Just more odious? Does something make this crisis different from all other crises?

Truth be told a whole lot is certainly familiar. Look back at Nixon, Reagan, and McCarthyism. At George Wallace. When didn't we have lots of gilded gain for the already rich and powerful and a tiny trickle down for us, plus fire hoses and bayonets, of course? But what about Trump's totalizing payload of vicious vengeance? What about Project 2025's ramrod realignment of government to serve only those above?

What about Trump's Federal Bureau of Prosecution? What about the Joint Chiefs of Trump? We have certainly seen stomping "enemies within" and greed deemed good before. But have we seen compassion deemed bad? The apex predators vacuum up what we produce. We should praise them? We should cheer their gilded gorging? We should sing while we slave? Have we seen un-friendly fascism before?

Trump wants no dissent. Musk wants no fight back. Vance wants to keep his job. Can anyone reading this not see that their ultimate agenda is to have us on our knees? What's happening? What's their goal? What's their method? Most important, what's our solution?

What's happening? Trump, Musk, Vance and their buddies are dismantling the already tenuous tools meant to limit executive rampaging. They elevate macho hate and self-centered I/me/mine-

ness as the essence of accomplishment. They embrace exclusion and repression to hammer those who don't succumb to the carrot of simple celebratory "my team uber allies" obedience. They torture truth and eviscerate education so the next generation knows only bullying or being bullied. They do it one agency at a time. One vulgar speech at a time. One weaponization at a time. One child at a time. All at once. Blitzkrieg.

What's their goal? Ski in Greenland? Sunbathe in Panama? Wave the Stars and Stripes over Canada? Get real. Their goal is to be kings of the social hill. Their goal is to have merit reflect only wallet size and command presence. Their goal is for the many below to eagerly obey the few above. They want absolute hierarchy from the top of the Stratosphere to the bottom of the Mariana Trench. Obey upward. Stomp downward. Damn the Judiciary, Trump alone judges. Dismiss Congress, Trump alone legislates.

Do I exaggerate or does Trumpism seek absolute hierarchy such as we have never seen before other than in feudal kingdoms, the Third Reich, and every perverted apocalyptic dystopian Hollywood offering in which violence stars and masses die? The FBI and military turned into Trump-troopers. Do we really need more evidence that they seek fascism forever?

What's their method? Trump has told us loud and clear. Lie, deny, denigrate. Create so much noise and confusion that only his voice rises above the cacophony. Create enough chaos and fear to shock and awe us to sleepy silence. Crush vaccines to make America healthy again. Crush schools to make America smart again. Crush immigrants to make America welcoming again. Crush science to make America wise again. Crush public goods to make America equitable again. Impose tariffs to make America



Photo: Kyle Cleveland

affordable again. Crush unions to make children work. Crush sexual diversity to liberate love. End Medicare to extend life spans. Fire everything that's independent to ensure diversity. Eliminate accountability to enforce efficiency. Expand imperialism to enforce peace. Celebrate, advocate, and become Nazi to inspire the world.

Yes Trumpism is similar to things we have known, sort of like concentration camps resemble house arrest, Ebola mimics a headache, and a fleet of tornadoes with a blanket of firestorms mirrors an unexpected rain on an otherwise

pleasant Little League game. I don't mean to deny the horrors we have known. They have been more than horrible enough to deserve revolution. But what Trump now trumpets is not just more of the same. Am I alarmist? Am I exaggerating? You think so? Get your eyes out of your pocket. Pick your ears up off the ground. A new fascism really is unfurling its flag.

What's our solution? That is what we who write, we who organize, and we who demonstrate have to figure out. Black robed judges who yesterday sipped mint julep on Plantation porches can

actually help if we sufficiently prod them. Cowardly politicians who yesterday camped in front of mirrors to groom for meetings with big donors can actually help if we sufficiently compel them. But from where arises the prodding and compelling?

From her/him/they, us, our. And the good news is our resistance picks up momentum. Teachers say “not in my school and not with my students you don’t.” Farmers say “not to my product and not to my benefits you don’t.” Old men say “not to my Medicare you don’t.” Young women say “not to my body you don’t.” Workers say “not to my hours, my salary, and my job you don’t.” Consumers say “not to my protections you don’t.” Canada, Panama, Greenland, and more say, “not to our country you don’t.”

Private introspections scream danger. Collective educationals reveal truths. Public polls show Trump, Musk and Vance seriously slipping. Here and there a black robed judge wields an anti-fascist gavel. Two, three, many Governors say keep out of our state or face our wraith. Other countries roar in unison. Good news. And yes, I know that many judges cow tow, many governors genuflect, and many countries cower. But conformity has widening cracks. That’s the news to expand.

First one dissenter stands. Then another. Then ten. Momentum grows. First over there, then across the dinner table, next door, across town, across country. Thousands then millions. That is how resistance grows. We don’t cede an inch. When they say jump, we reply, who the hell are you? You are nobody. You jump. When they say you are fired, we reply not by you. We disobey. We stay. We fire you. When Trump tells the courts, you say I am breaking your law. Big deal. Let’s see you stop me. We tell Trump, you say we are fired. Big deal. Let’s see you remove us. And hey head of the Joint Chiefs and fellow cowering Generals. Show some backbone.

I know resistance can contract just as quickly as it expands. To prevent that I know our activ-

ism that welcomes doubt into dissent and that propels dissent into resistance has to steadily escalate from a demo a month to a demo a week. From saying no to one command to refusing all commands. From mobilizing those already on our side to strategically organizing with our words, examples, and deeds those not yet on our side. From vague to clear. From doing only in the moment to doing while constantly eyeing future consequences. From saying I don’t have time to saying we must together make time. No act is too small to count. No act is too large to rule out.

Grow commitment while we expand outreach. Enlarge militance while we provide space for new arrivals to partake as they prefer. Welcome every kind of dissent. Mutually support not just every seasoned activist but every first time cautious questioner. Forget blame and guilt. Call in those who disagree.

Smile when a judge gavel against Trump. Clap when a Governor backs down MAGA. But realize that such steps are just our popular resistance having pushed officials to resist. Don’t snatch self-denying defeat from the jaws of movement-affirming victory by thinking the system saved itself. Realize we and ours drive change. When Democrats rise and Trump/Musk/Vance are driven from attacking the public to defending themselves, having warded off calamity, don’t go home. Fight on to win another world.

What are some positive first steps beyond resisting reaction that can facilitate fighting on? How about to seek a big wealth tax and health care for all and to nationalize pharmaceuticals and end the Electoral College and Citizens United? How about to win a \$20 an hour minimum wage, plus community control of police, plus an end to fossil fuels? How about to universalize free higher education, massively build low cost high quality housing, and undertake a massive media makeover? How about to general strike into existence a thirty hour work week and then to seize our turn to remake everything?

Woke, Identitarianism and the Extreme-Right

Marcela Uchôa

In the year marking the eightieth anniversary of the end of World War II, we are witnessing a new surge of hate speech, both in the domestic politics of nation-states and in international policies. Liberal democracies, in a state of collapse, are shaped by identities (race, nation, gender) that feel threatened in times of crisis, alongside a simultaneous push for a strong state imposing order and censorship. This dynamic unites movements traditionally seen as opposites—conservatives and progressives—under the same logic of reinforcing a reactionary politics.

The term woke gained popularity in the United States as a synonym for liberal policies advocating legitimate causes such as racial and social equality, feminism, LGBTQIA+ rights, environmental activism, and more. As these causes become targets of far-right criticism, accused of fostering “cancel culture” and control, many of the same mechanisms have been repurposed to strengthen a sectarian and moralistic identity politics.

In her latest book, *Left is Not Woke*, philosopher Susan Neiman argues that wokeism also contributes to this reactionary shift, as it conflicts with fundamental principles that have guided the left for centuries: a commitment to universalism, an objective distinction between justice and power, and a belief in the possibility of progress. Without these ideas, Neiman warns, woke activists will continue to undermine their own path and, even unintentionally, drift toward the right—risking becoming what they despise.

The elections in Germany illustrate how representation without political and class consciousness can serve dubious political ends. The far-right leader Alice Weidel, for example, is married to a foreign woman yet claims to defend LGBTQIA+ and wom-

en's rights against immigrants. Similarly, Israel's LGBTQ+ colonialism presents another example of this paradox.

Although these phenomena may seem contradictory at first glance, history shows that identity and nationalistic claims have often been the foundation of reactionary politics, even in different contexts. While these progressive movements have played a crucial role in various emancipatory struggles, in times of crisis, they also hold the potential to become reactionary.

When the self-proclaimed Identitarian Movement gained traction in France in the 1970s, it was, in reality, a revival of 1930s fascism. From the outset, intellectual leaders of the new right incorporated environmental and indigenous issues—for instance, Alain de Benoist's letters to Native American leaders, in which he saw them as identitarian allies against American liberal hegemony.

Nonetheless, this post-war revanchist new right differs from traditional fascism in its emphasis on defending identities—particularly the nation—as being in decline. Historian Eric Hobsbawm contrasts this with the original nationalist movements, which emerged as progressive struggles for national emancipation following the dismantling of empires. Those movements were based on linguistic emancipation, popular sovereignty, democracy, and the public sphere—they were driven by an ascending national bourgeoisie. But as this bourgeoisie declined, nationalism reemerged in a paranoid form, clinging to the repressive institutions of the state and moralism.

This is reflected in discourses like: “We must defend our borders, teach moral and civic education,



prevent immigrants from invading us with their crimes.” The nation-state, in this sense, becomes the last refuge of what is mine: “This is my country, my language, my customs.” But it is also my misery, my suffocation.

According to Brazilian philosopher Vladimir Safatle, in his book *Circuito dos Afetos*, fascism is always based on the displacement of popular power in favor of an outlaw leadership. It is the colonization of anti-institutional desire by the order itself. The alienation of progressive politics and their reduction to identity-based struggles—lacking universalism and effectiveness—have enabled fascism to appropriate the legitimate critique of institutional failures and transform it into a call for strongman rule. This is embodied in leaders who appear above the law, who speak without accountability, who openly express their worst sentiments without concern for consequences.

Ironically, a similar critique is emerging towards movements that, until recently, were part of emancipatory struggles. Some of their leaders, while questioning the legitimacy and efficacy of institu-

tions, simultaneously cling to the state apparatus, censorship, security policies, and criminalization—promoting public, social media, and real-world lynchings. The populist right, which fights against “political correctness,” is therefore a mirror of what some still consider “the left.”

It is crucial to emphasize that the failure of certain strands of woke “progressivism” cannot be countered by adopting right-wing rhetoric on ethical and identity issues, as seen with Sahra Wagenknecht’s BSW party in Germany. The only way to challenge this discourse is to call it what it is: identity-based politics have the potential to become conservative and reactionary. There is an urgent need to present an emancipatory, materialist, and universalist political alternative.

As a racialized woman from a precarious working-class immigrant background, feminism and anti-racism were natural paths for survival. But these struggles only make sense within the broader defense of socialism. For a world, as Rosa Luxemburg envisioned, where we are socially equal, humanly different, and totally free.

You Can't Keep Imposing Austerity and Expect the Corporate Party to Last Forever

Pete Dolack

The failures of the neoliberal brand of capitalism — and capitalism as a system itself — were once again on display in the February 23 German elections. In a political vacuum, with mainstream parties unable to offer anything other than the austerity that has been imposed for decades, the extreme right gains adherents. The 21 percent vote total and second-place finish of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) is another unmistakable klaxon.

Although the political “firewall” against the fascist-tinged AfD appears that it will hold, with yet another “Grand Coalition” of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats almost certainly to be the outcome of negotiations, the doubling of the AfD vote stands out. That was by far the biggest improvement of any party’s increase, dwarfing the four percent increases enjoyed by the Christian Democrats and the Left Party (Die Linke).

A glance at the German electoral map is sobering: Districts in the five states of the former East Germany almost uniformly put the AfD first, with only Berlin and a couple of other constituencies excepted; the eastern part of Berlin put the Left Party first. By contrast, the states of the former West Germany are nearly uniformly black for the Christian Democrats, with one exception being the Social Democratic vote in urban centers including Hamburg and Bremen. The Christian Democrats and the AfD earned nearly half the vote between them, and add in the vote for the business party, the Free Democrats, and the right won a majority. Celebrations of the late surge of the Left, gaining nine percent, a strong increase from the previous election, don’t seem that much to celebrate given the surge for the right. And the new Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance, combining Left economics with conservative calls to halt immigration, fell flat; the BSW failed to reach the five

percent needed to enter the Bundestag, the German parliament.

The disastrous result of the Social Democrats (SPD), finishing with their worst result since the revival of German formal democracy after World War II, is the culmination of years of imposing austerity and not merely a referendum on the outgoing administration of Chancellor Olaf Scholz, a point to which we will return below.

Of interest is the pattern of voting when broken down by age, education and sex. German women voted noticeably to the left of German men, those with higher education voted to the left of those with less education, and the Left Party received the most votes from those ages 18 to 24 and placed second for those ages 25 to 34. These results, particularly the women/men breakdown and the education split, mirror what has become routine in the United States over recent national elections. The German results also mirror the voting patterns of the 2024 British election, although the female/male split there was not as pronounced.

So what conclusions might we draw from all this? Given that the Labour landslide in Britain was more a reaction to the disastrous years of Conservative rule, a rout magnified by the single-seat, winner-take-all format of its Parliamentary elections, and not a mandate for Keir Starmer’s Conservative-lite (and barely “lite”) policies, the pattern seen across the advanced capitalist countries is clear. With a wholesale abandonment of anything progressive or pro-working people by mainstream “center-left” parties and austerity enforced no matter who is in office, the siren songs of the far right are reaching more ears. Even the incoming Chancellor, Friedrich Merz, sounded this alarm. “This is really the last warning to the



political parties of the democratic centre in Germany to come to common solutions,” he said the night of the Christian Democratic victory.

That is not simply a coded message to the SPD to join in a coalition — given the results, that coalition seems a foregone conclusion — but a warning that the AfD can’t be held off indefinitely. And although Chancellor Merz is coming from a perspective of political survival, it is a warning with content even if somewhat hypocritical given his party’s increasing adaptation of AfD talking points. The disastrous showing of the SPD, should it wish to heed it, certainly is a ringing alarm. That same alarm is ringing for the Democratic Party in the U.S., the Liberal Party in Canada and other “center-left” parties.

Leave voters behind and they’ll eventually look elsewhere

The continual moves to the right, tailing the “center-right” parties that move rightward them-

selves, go beyond the personal failings of this or that political leader. When Bill Clinton, Barack Obama, Joe Biden, Jean Chrétien, Justin Trudeau, Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, Keir Starmer, François Hollande, Gerhard Schröder, Olaf Scholz, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and Romano Prodi all fall to their knees in front of industrialists and financiers, when each speedily implements neoliberal austerity policies despite leading the supposed “center-left” opposition to the conservative parties that openly stand for corporate domination, there is something other than personal weakness at work. That something is structural — a political system wholly captured by the most powerful possessors of economic power in a system of massive inequality.

When voting for traditional parties doesn’t change conditions, some people will begin to look at something different. With the collapse of Left alternatives, the “something different” on offer comes from the far right — the AfD in Germany, the neofascists in Italy, Trump in the U.S. and the

anti-democratic governments that have held, or still hold, office in Poland, Hungary, Argentina and elsewhere. Germany serves as an exemplar here.

The strong German economy of the first two decades of the 21st century (strong in terms of exports, gross domestic product (GDP) and corporate revenue) was built on the backs of German workers. The “secret” to Germany’s economic dominance within the European Union was cuts to German wages. Germany undercut other countries that use the euro as their currency by suppressing wages, a process that took form under a Social Democratic government. In 2012, at the height of German economic performance, German wage increases to that point from 2001 averaged half of one percent per year, consistently below the German inflation rate, according to the International Labour Office. To put it another way, the ILO calculated that German productivity had remained virtually unchanged in relation to the productivity of all countries that use the euro, while German wages declined by more than ten percent relative to the composite wages of all other euro-zone countries.

The prosperity of German manufacturers had come at the price of a decade of wage cuts (adjusted for inflation) suffered by German workers. Sound familiar? Reduced income leads to reduced consumption, so exports accounted for a steadily rising portion of German GDP. In relative terms, it became more difficult for other European Union countries to compete with German products, particularly in other countries using the euro, because German manufacturers increasingly could undercut them. Manufacturing capacity elsewhere is shuttered, reinforcing German dominance and increasing unemployment in the countries on the receiving end of the exports.

A 2011 paper written by a British economist, Engelbert Stockhammer, described this phenomenon bluntly: “Germany has pursued a policy of aggressive wage restraint resulting in large current account surpluses. German gains in competitive-

ness (since the introduction of the Euro) have not been founded on superior technological performance, but on more effective wage suppression. ... Simply put, German wage suppression rather than fiscal profligacy is at root of the crisis of the Euro system. ... Europe needs a set of economic institutions and policy rules that addresses such imbalances and their underlying mechanisms.”

It was none other than the SPD that brought about this wage suppression. In 2003, Schröder, then the Social Democratic chancellor, pushed through his “Agenda 2010” legislation. Schröder said at the time, “We must not get trapped in defending our past achievements, but instead must work to our future.” Since those “past achievements” included old-fashioned concepts such as good wages and pensions, Schröder said, “The core challenges before us are accepting the reality of globalization, the ‘digitalization’ of our economy and an aging society.” Classic Right-wing code words. “Accepting” this “reality,” Agenda 2010 cut business taxes while reducing unemployment pay and pensions.

The structures of corporate domination

The European Union, for all that some Germans might gain from it, is nonetheless a purveyor of austerity itself; it is designed to benefit large capital, in particular finance capital, and suppress conditions for working people. European capital can’t compete with U.S. capital without a similarly large political economic unit behind it; the EU serves as a vehicle to elevate European competitiveness in global capitalism at the same time EU governments keep themselves subordinate to the United States.

The EU is a supra-national institution to impose corporate domination on a reluctant population. National governments are not insulated from popular opinion, but a supra-national structure can impose dictates on those governments, which can then tell citizens that it has “no choice” but to adhere to them so that the country can remain “part of Europe.” European capitalists’ need for the combined clout of a united continent under-

lies the anti-democratic push to steadily tighten the EU, including mandatory national budget benchmarks that require cutting social safety nets and policies that are designed to break down solidarity among wage earners across borders by imposing harsher competition through imposed austerity. The EU, in its current capitalist form, is a logical step for business leaders who desire greater commercial power on a global basis: It creates a “free trade” zone complete with suppression of social accountability while giving muscle to one of two currencies that has any potential (albeit small) of challenging the U.S. dollar as the world’s pre-eminent currency.

Having become dependent on exports, what happens when demand in other countries declines? Trouble, as Germany is currently undergoing. Throw in higher energy costs because the cost of U.S. liquified natural gas is higher than the natural gas previously piped in from Russia, and it is no surprise that many Germans are struggling, and looking for anyone who addresses their struggles. And, it could be added, the costs of housing are skyrocketing, further cutting into German living standards. The shortage of affordable housing units is calculated to be in the millions. Neither renters or homeowners can afford to stay where they are.

It is only natural that more people seek different solutions, and the siren songs of the far right, even those with fascist elements, such as the AfD, and those who aspire to install themselves as a fascist dictator, such as Trump, begin to sound appealing to the politically naïve because their problems appear to be addressed where others fail to do so. But the “solutions” the far right puts forth are the usual scapegoating — immigrants are taking your jobs, elites look down on you, diversity and inclusion are poisons to a pure national people, etc., as they play on people’s emotions. Anything to deflect attention from the socioeconomic system and its inherent inequality and harshness that is the actual root cause. When U.S. Democrats, Canadian Liberals, German Social Democrats, French “Socialists,”

British Labourites and other European center-left parties join their center-right rivals in imposing austerity, then there isn’t much reason to vote for them other than to keep Republicans, Conservatives and their equivalents out of office. Voting becomes a sterile exercise in voting for the lesser evil to keep something even worse out of office, and after enough rounds of this, more voters will decide to just sit it out, as just happened with millions of liberals in the U.S. election.

Interestingly, Germany bucked this pattern, with the turnout of 84 percent the highest since reunification. Perhaps fear of the AfD had something to do with that turnout; perhaps more so those who previously felt they had nobody to vote for decided they had something at stake this time. The AfD gained 2 million votes from those who didn’t vote in the previous federal election, by far the highest of any party, and picked up another 1 million from those who had voted for the Christian Democrats.

However you wish to parse the numbers, the rise of parties flirting with fascism is an ominous development, one now years in the making across the Global North. The Europe of the 1930s and the Latin America of the 1970s gives us grim history lessons in what happens when fascists are able to gain and exploit power. Germany’s formal democratic structures are holding but that cannot be said to the case everywhere, especially given the dangerous stress the Trump gang is placing on U.S. institutions at the moment, compounded by the willingness of many heads of government to pander to the Orange One-Man Crime Wave and illustrated by the willingness of Trump’s de facto co-president, Elon Musk, to blatantly interfere in the German election and other government matters.

If we want a better world to be our future, there is an enormous amount of work to be done. The fascist takeovers of the past, while by no means destined to be repeated, nonetheless give a warning of the shape of the future if we don’t fight back.

Is This The Beginning Or The End Of A New Cold War?

Medea Benjamin, Nicolas J.S. Davies

When European Union leaders met in Brussels on February 6th to discuss the war in Ukraine, French President Emmanuel Macron called this time “a turning point in history.” Western leaders agree that this is an historic moment when decisive action is needed, but what kind of action depends on their interpretation of the nature of this moment.

Is this the beginning of a new Cold War between the U.S., NATO and Russia or the end of one? Will Russia and the West remain implacable enemies for the foreseeable future, with a new iron curtain between them through what was once the heart of Ukraine? Or can the United States and Russia resolve the disputes and hostility that led to this war in the first place, so as to leave Ukraine with a stable and lasting peace?

Some European leaders see this moment as the beginning of a long struggle with Russia, akin to the beginning of the Cold War in 1946, when Winston Churchill warned that “an iron curtain has descended” across Europe.

On March 2nd, echoing Churchill, European Council President Ursula von der Leyen declared that Europe must turn Ukraine into a “steel porcupine.” President Zelenskyy has said he wants up to 200,000 European troops on the eventual ceasefire line between Russia and Ukraine to “guarantee” any peace agreement, and insists that the United States must provide a “back-stop,” meaning a commitment to send U.S. forces to fight in Ukraine if war breaks out again.

Russia has repeatedly said it won’t agree to NATO forces being based in Ukraine under any guise. “We explained today that the appearance of armed forces from the same NATO countries, but under a false flag, under the flag of the European Union or under national flags, does not change anything in this regard,” Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on February 18.

“Of course this is unacceptable to us.”

But the U.K. is persisting in a campaign to recruit a “coalition of the willing,” the same term the U.S. and U.K. coined for the list of countries they persuaded to support the illegal invasion of Iraq in 2003. In that case, only Australia, Denmark and Poland took small parts in the invasion, Costa Rica publicly insisted on being removed from the list, and the term was widely lampooned as the “coalition of the billing” because the U.S. recruited so many countries to join it by promising them lucrative foreign aid deals.

Far from the start of a new Cold War, President Trump and other leaders see this moment as more akin to the end of the original Cold War, when U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev met in Reykjavik in Iceland in 1986 and began to bridge the divisions caused by 40 years of Cold War hostility.

Like Trump and Putin today, Reagan and Gorbachev were unlikely peacemakers. Gorbachev had risen through the ranks of the Soviet Communist Party to become its General Secretary and Soviet Premier in March 1985, in the midst of the Soviet war in Afghanistan, and he didn’t begin to withdraw Soviet forces from Afghanistan until 1988. Reagan oversaw an unprecedented Cold War arms build-up, a U.S.-backed genocide in Guatemala and covert and proxy wars throughout Central America. And yet Gorbachev and Reagan are now widely remembered as peacemakers.

While Democrats deride Trump as a Putin stooge, in his first term in office Trump was actually responsible for escalating the Cold War with Russia. After the Pentagon had milked its absurd, self-fulfilling “War on Terror” for trillions of dollars, it was Trump and his psychopathic Defense Secretary, General “Mad Dog” Mattis, who declared the shift back to strategic com-



petition with Russia and China as the Pentagon's new gravity train in their 2018 National Defense Strategy. It was also Trump who lifted President Obama's restrictions on sending offensive weapons to Ukraine.

Trump's head-spinning about-turn in U.S. policy has left its European allies with whiplash and reversed the roles they each have played for generations. France and Germany have traditionally been the diplomats and peacemakers in the Western alliance, while the U.S. and U.K. have been infected with a chronic case of war fever that has proven resistant to a long string of military defeats and catastrophic impacts on every country that has fallen prey to their warmongering.

In 2003, France's Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin led the opposition to the invasion of Iraq in the UN Security Council. France, Germany and Russia issued a joint statement to say that they would "not let a proposed resolution pass that would authorize the use of force. Russia and France, as permanent members of the Security Council, will assume all their responsibilities on this point."

At a press conference in Paris with German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, French President Jacques Chirac said, "Everything must be done to avoid war... As far as we're concerned, war always means failure."

As recently as 2022, after Russia invaded Ukraine, it was once again the U.S. and U.K. that rejected and blocked peace negotiations in favor of a long war, while France, Germany and Italy continued to call for new negotiations, even as they gradually fell in line with the U.S. long war policy.

Former German Chancellor Schröder took part in the peace negotiations in Turkey in March and April 2022, and flew to Moscow at Ukraine's request to meet with Putin. In an interview with Berliner Zeitung in 2023, Schröder confirmed that the peace talks only failed "because everything was decided in Washington."

With Biden still blocking new negotiations in 2023, one of the interviewers asked Schröder "Do you think you can resume your peace plan?"

Schröder replied, “Yes, and the only ones who can initiate this are France and Germany... Macron and Scholz are the only ones who can talk to Putin. Chirac and I did the same in the Iraq war. Why can’t support for Ukraine be combined with an offer of talks to Russia? The arms deliveries are not a solution for eternity. But no one wants to talk. Everyone sits in trenches. How many more people have to die?”

Since 2022, President Macron and a Thatcherite team of iron ladies – European Council President von der Leyen; former German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock; and Estonia’s former prime minister Kaja Kallas, now the EU’s foreign policy chief – have promoted a new militarization of Europe, egged on from behind the scenes by European and U.S. arms manufacturers.

Has the passage of time, the passing of the World War II generation and the distortion of history washed away the historical memory of two world wars from a continent that was destroyed by war only 80 years ago? Where is the next generation of French and German diplomats in the tradition of de Villepin and Schröder today? How can sending German tanks to fight in Ukraine, and now in Russia itself, fail to remind Russians of previous German invasions and solidify support for the war? And won’t the call for Europe to confront Russia by moving from a “welfare state to a warfare state” only feed the rise of the European hard right?

So are the new European militarists reading the historical moment correctly? Or are they jumping on the bandwagon of a disastrous Cold War that could, as Biden and Trump have warned, lead to World War III?

When Trump’s foreign policy team met with their Russian counterparts in Saudi Arabia on February 18, ending the war in Ukraine was the second part of the three-part plan they agreed on. The first was to restore full diplomatic relations between the United States and Russia, and the third was to work on a series of other problems in U.S.-Russian relations.

The order of these three stages is interesting, because, as Secretary of State Marco Rubio noted, it means that

the negotiations over Ukraine will be the first test of restored relations between the U.S. and Russia.

If the negotiations for peace in Ukraine are successful, they can lead to further negotiations over restoring arms control treaties, nuclear disarmament and cooperation on other global problems that have been impossible to resolve in a world stuck in a zombie-like Cold War that powerful interests would not allow to die.

It was a welcome change to hear Secretary Rubio say that the post-Cold War unipolar world was an anomaly and that now we have to adjust to the reality of a multipolar world. But if Trump and his hawkish advisers are just trying to restore U.S. relations with Russia as part of a “reverse Kissinger” scheme to isolate China, as some analysts have suggested, that would perpetuate America’s debilitating geopolitical crisis instead of solving it.

The United States and our friends in Europe have a new chance to make a clean break from the three-way geopolitical power struggle between the United States, Russia and China that has hamstrung the world since the 1970s, and to find new roles and priorities for our countries in the emerging multipolar world of the 21st Century.

We hope that Trump and European leaders can recognize the crossroads at which they are standing, and the chance history is giving them to choose the path of peace. France and Germany in particular should remember the wisdom of Dominique de Villepin, Jacques Chirac and Gerhard Schröder in the face of U.S. and British plans for aggression against Iraq in 2003.

This could be the beginning of the end of the permanent state of war and Cold War that has held the world in its grip for more than a century. Ending it would allow us to finally prioritize the progress and cooperation we so desperately need to solve the other critical problems the whole world is facing in the 21st Century. As General Milley said back in November 2022 when he called for negotiations between Ukraine and Russia, we must “seize the moment.”

The U.S. and Israel: An Alliance of Blood, Politics and Money

M. Reza Behnam

To begin to correct the injustices that generations of Palestinians have faced, and to become “a society that can live with its conscience,” the story of Palestine and its people must be told.

After the Second World War, the United States made the decision to tie its destiny to the ethno-nationalist settler-colonial state of Israel. And since then, the Palestinian people have stood alone in their struggle.

The establishment of Israel was a violent process that has never ended. Beginning in 1947, Zionist paramilitary forces launched large-scale attacks on Palestinian towns and villages, leading ultimately to the Nakba (the catastrophe)—the culminating stage of the Zionist ethnic cleansing project.

During the Nakba, 531 Palestinian towns and villages were destroyed, 15,000 Palestinians were murdered, 800,000 were forcibly driven from their homeland to the West Bank, Gaza Strip and to neighboring Arab countries, and 70 massacres were committed.

Before Israel’s declaration of statehood on 14 May 1948, Zionist militias had committed numerous massacres, whose histories have largely been suppressed:

- Baldat al-Sheikh, 31 December 1947: 70 Palestinians massacred.
- Sa’sa, 14 February 1948: 16 houses and their 6 inhabitants blown up.
- Deir Yasin, 9 April 1948: 107 killed, including scores of children, women and elders. Some victims were found maimed, raped and then killed. Masses of men were put on

trucks and paraded across Jerusalem before being taken to a quarry to be executed. These atrocities were committed by Irgun and Stern Gangs led by Menachim Begin and Yitzhak Shamir, respectively, who would later become prime ministers of Israel.

- Abu Shusha, 13 May 1948: Despite efforts of the residents to protect their homes, the village fell to occupation; 60 Palestinians massacred.

During the 1948 war, Zionist and Israeli forces committed more than 30 documented massacres in Palestine. Israeli military historian, Uri Milstein, has suggested that there were more than 100. In ensuing years, Israel continued its campaigns of forced displacement and massacres.

Notably, it was the Qibya massacre of 14 October 1953 that gave birth to what would become the most powerful pro-Israel lobby in the United States. Born in the blood of the natives of Palestine, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) has spared no efforts to insure that Israel’s ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians be kept hidden from the American people.

It is important to know the origins of the Israeli lobby to realize the significant sway it has had on American politics and politicians. For that, we have to go back in time to post-World War II history:

Harry S. Truman is president of the United States and running for reelection with few prospects and little support; until the Israeli lobby literally enters the campaign in the person of Abraham Feinberg, a hosiery/manufacturing magnate. And the rest, as they say, is history—Israeli history.



The man who made Truman's 1948 election victory possible explained how it was done in an interview conducted in 1973 for the Harry S. Truman Library—"Oral History Interview with Abraham Feinberg." He stated in the interview that "without Truman, Israel would have had very difficult days and times trying to even come into existence."

Israel's American enforcers faced challenges during the Eisenhower years (1953-1961) from an administration inclined toward a more nuanced policy. During the president's first year in office, news of the massacre in the Palestinian village of Qibya sparked widespread disapproval.

Time magazine, for example, carried the story describing how Israeli soldiers "shot every man, woman and child they could find, then turned their fire on the cattle;" reporting also that soldiers were seen "slouching in the door-

ways of Palestinian homes, smoking and joking." Sixty-six people were killed that night, 45 were blown up in their homes that had been dynamited by soldiers. The New York Times ran excerpts from the United Nations Mixed Armistice Commission—in charge of the 1949 truce—deploring the act as "coldblooded murder" and refuting Israeli lies about the assault.

Israel's defenders quickly gathered for damage control. Isaiah L. Kenen, founder of the American Zionist Committee for Public Affairs (AZCPA), the forerunner of AIPAC, wrote of the ill effect it would have on what he called "our propaganda."

To manage the Qibya fallout and to prepare for future cover-ups, Kenen created AZCPA in 1954. Under his leadership, the group grew stronger and richer when it joined with the new Conference of Presidents of the Major American Jew-

ish Organizations, an association of top Jewish leaders who promoted Israel's interests with U.S. politicians, that included presidents and secretaries of state.

Influencers like Abraham Feinberg and Kenen were instrumental in selling Israel to Americans and influencing policies favoring Israel. By the time Kenen died in 1988, AIPAC had gained an outsized role in shaping U.S. policy in the Middle East.

Over the years, AIPAC has demonstrated that nothing will diminish its vested interest in Israel, including genocide. Since 7 October 2023, the death and destruction Israel's defenders have been willing to accept are woefully incomprehensible. For example, 26 days into its bombardment of Gaza, the Israeli military had dropped 25,000 tons of bombs (American made), on 12,000 targets—50 bombs dropped every hour. By that date, Gaza had been bombarded with the equivalent of two nuclear bombs over an area smaller than Hiroshima in 1945. Israel has also used banned cluster and white phosphorous munitions, that can cause permanent environmental damage.

The pain of that destruction was explicit in the words of 61-year-old Gazan farmer, Sami Abu Amir, trying to revive a patch of his once productive ground: "It is as if they wanted to kill the land before they killed us."

After dropping more than 85,000 tons of toxic bombs on the small enclave for 15 months, it is obvious that Israel intended to poison the soil, to make Gaza uninhabitable for survivors.

A November 2024 report published by the Environmental Quality Authority—an independent agency established in the 1990s by the Palestinian Authority—concluded that as a result of the bombing, the soil of Gaza has become so polluted with toxic chemicals that it will "hinder agriculture for decades."

Unable to defeat the Palestinian resistance with bombs and lethal ground forces, the Tel Aviv re-

gime has reimposed a total blockade once again on Gaza, returning to its October 2023 weapon of war—starvation and deprivation. In addition to halting humanitarian aid, Israel threatened the resistance with additional consequences if they refused to extend phase one of the January ceasefire agreement and accept its new proposal.

It is clear that Israel has no intention of putting an end to this human catastrophe that has been in the making for over 80 years. There will be no resolution until Palestinians recapture their land.

Against this history and backdrop, Arab "leaders" met in Cairo on 4 March 2025 to find a "day after" plan for the quagmire Israel and the United States have weighted the region with in Gaza. Essentially, Israel destroys and the Arab world, not Tel Aviv, is expected to pick up the tab of reconstruction.

American politicians and Israel's influencers lack an understanding of Palestinians' connection to and determination to remain steadfast on their land. It is the force that has enabled them to withstand unimaginable hardships. The inseparability and steadfastness were expressed by those who survived the genocide, returning to what was left of their homes, determined to rebuild.

Amir Karaja, for example, told CNN that he would "rather eat the rubble" than be forced to leave his homeland; and Khan Younis survivor, Ahmed Safi, stressed that "We prefer Gaza's hell than the paradise of any other country...if we are given all the money in the world, we won't leave this land."

When discussing the Palestinian experience and identity, the words of Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008), remind us that "The metaphor for Palestine is stronger than the Palestine of reality." To the detriment of Palestinians and the entire region, Israel and its defenders are determined the metaphor never becomes a political reality.

International Law at a Crossroads: Can Gaza Spark a Global Reckoning?

Ramzy Baroud

International law is fighting for relevance. The outcome of this fight is likely to change the entire global political dynamics, which were shaped by World War II and sustained through the selective interpretation of the law by dominant countries.

In principle, international law should have always been relevant, if not paramount, in governing the relationships between all countries, large and small, to resolve conflicts before they turn into outright wars. It should also have worked to prevent a return to an era of exploitation that allowed Western colonialism to practically enslave the global south for hundreds of years.

Unfortunately, international law, which was in theory supposed to reflect global consensus, was hardly dedicated to peace or genuinely invested in the decolonization of the South.

From the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan to the war on Libya and numerous other examples, past and present, the UN was often used as a platform for the strong to impose their will on the weak. And whenever smaller countries collectively fought back, as the UN General Assembly often does, those with veto power, military, and economic leverage used their advantage to coerce the rest based on the maxim, “might makes right.”

It should therefore hardly be a surprise to see many intellectuals and politicians in the global south arguing that, aside from paying lip service to peace, human rights, and justice, international law has always been irrelevant.

This irrelevance was put on full display through 15 months of a relentless Israeli genocidal war on Gaza that killed and wounded over 160,000 people, a number that, according to several credible medical journals and studies, is expected to dramatically rise. Yet, when the International Court of Justice (ICJ)

opened an investigation of plausible genocide in Gaza on January 26, followed by a decisive ruling on July 19 regarding the illegality of the Israeli occupation of Palestine, the international system began showing a pulse, however faint. The International Criminal Court's (ICC) arrest warrants were another proof that West-centered legal institutions are capable of change.

The angry American response to all of this was predictable. Washington has been fighting against international accountability for many years. The US Congress under the George W. Bush administration, as early as 2002, passed a law that shielded US soldiers “against criminal prosecution” by the ICC to which the US is not a party.

The so-called Hague Invasion Act authorized the use of military force to rescue American citizens or military personnel detained by the ICC.

Naturally, many of Washington's measures to pressure, threaten, or punish international institutions have been linked to shielding Israel under various guises.

The global outcry and demands for accountability following Israel's genocide in Gaza, however, have once again put Western governments on the defensive. For the first time, Israel was facing the kind of scrutiny that rendered it, in many respects, a pariah state.

Instead of reconsidering their approach to Israel, and refraining from feeding the war machine, many Western governments lashed out at civil society, for merely advocating the enforcement of international law. Those targeted included UN-affiliated human rights defenders.

On February 18, German police descended on the Junge Welt venue in Berlin as if they were about to



Reporters Without Borders (RSF) stage a demonstration at Plaza Mayor in Madrid, where they filed their fourth complaint with the International Criminal Court (ICC) against Israel, condemning the killing of over 130 journalists in Palestine in the past year. RSF members also stated that the largest massacre against the press in the shortest time took place in Palestine, during demonstrations held in 10 cities across Europe on September 26, 2024.

apprehend a notorious criminal. They surrounded the building in full gear, sparking a bizarre drama that should have never taken place in a country that perceives itself as democratic.

The reason behind the security mobilization was none other than Francesca Albanese, an Italian lawyer, an outspoken critic of the Israeli genocide in Gaza, and the current United Nations Special Rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories.

If it were not for the UN's intervention, Albanese could have been arrested simply for demanding that Israel must be held accountable for its crimes against Palestinians.

Germany, however, is not the exception. Other Western powers, lead amongst them the US, are actively taking part in this moral crisis. Washington has taken serious and troubling steps, not just to protect Israel, and itself, from accountability to international law, but to punish the very international institutions, its judges, and officials for daring to question Israel's behavior.

Indeed, on February 13, the US sanctioned the ICC's chief prosecutor due to his stance on Israel.

After some hesitance, Karim Khan has done what no other ICC prosecutor had done before: issuing, on November 21, arrest warrants for two Israeli leaders, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and then-Defense Minister Yoav Gallant. They are currently wanted for "crimes against humanity and war crimes".

The moral crisis deepens when the judges become the accused, as Khan found himself at the receiving end of endless Western media attacks and abuse, in addition to US sanctions.

As disturbing as all of this is, there is a silver lining, specifically an opportunity for the international legal and political system to be fixed based on new standards, justice that applies to all, and accountability that is expected from all.

Those who continue to support Israel have practically disowned international law altogether. The consequences of their decisions are dire. But for the rest of humanity, the Gaza war can be that very opportunity to reconstruct a more equitable world, one that is not molded by the militarily powerful, but by the need to stop senseless killings of innocent children.

From Charity to Liberation: Decolonizing Solidarity with Palestine

Mustafa Jayyousi

As Israel's war on Gaza escalates and the occupation of Palestine deepens, international solidarity has surged. Mass protests, boycott campaigns, and public statements of support have multiplied. However, as the global movement grows, a critical question emerges: Is our solidarity truly advancing Palestinian liberation, or does it sometimes reinforce the very power structures we seek to dismantle?

True solidarity must be more than symbolic gestures or humanitarian aid. It must be rooted in a decolonial framework—one that recognizes Palestine as part of a broader struggle against colonialism, imperialism, and racial capitalism. This entails moving beyond charity, resisting efforts to depoliticize Palestinian resistance, and directly challenging the systems that uphold Israeli apartheid.

When Solidarity Reinforces Colonialism

Despite good intentions, many international solidarity efforts reflect paternalistic and colonial dynamics. Instead of amplifying Palestinian agency, they often reproduce power imbalances that center Western voices and institutions.

1. Saviorism

Activists often approach Palestine as a humanitarian crisis rather than a liberation struggle, leading to Western figures dominating the conversation. Palestinians are treated as passive victims rather than political agents leading their own resistance. While humanitarian aid efforts are necessary in emergencies, they only provide temporary relief without addressing the root causes of oppression.

2. NGOization of Solidarity

Many Western-funded organizations working in or for Palestine prioritize neutrality, dialogue, and institutional reforms over direct action. These efforts often depoliticize Palestinian resistance and society and avoid confronting the reality that Zionism is a settler-colonial project. By focusing on coexistence rather than decolonization, these initiatives can reinforce the status quo rather than dismantling it.

3. Selective Solidarity

Support for Palestine is often conditional. Some activists and organizations hesitate to use terms like “apartheid” or “settler colonialism” for fear of political repercussions. Others distance themselves from Palestinian resistance movements to maintain mainstream acceptability. However, solidarity that only supports Palestinians when it is politically convenient is not solidarity—it is self-preservation.

What Does Decolonized Solidarity Look Like?

To be truly effective, international solidarity must reject colonial frameworks and embrace a politics of shared struggle. This means challenging power, centering Palestinian leadership, and understanding Palestine within the larger fight against global oppression.

1. Center Palestinian Voices

Solidarity is not about speaking for Palestinians but amplifying their demands. Listen to Palestinian organizers, support movements like the

Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign, and ensure that advocacy efforts reflect Palestinian leadership, not Western gatekeeping.

2. Move Beyond Charity and Crisis Narratives

While emergency aid is crucial, a decolonial approach focuses on structural change rather than short-term relief. Instead of framing Palestinians as victims in need of Western assistance, emergency aid needs to follow the needs of Palestinians on the ground and not serve for more Western conditioning or furthering the restrictions of Palestinian agency. Solidarity efforts should primarily target the systems that enable Israeli apartheid—military funding, diplomatic cover and economic complicity.

3. Name Zionism as Settler Colonialism

Many solidarity campaigns frame Palestine as a territorial conflict rather than a colonial occupation. Recognizing Zionism as a settler-colonial project rooted in ethnic cleansing and land theft is crucial. Decolonized solidarity names the system for what it is and demands its dismantling.

4. Link Palestine to Global Struggles

Palestine is deeply connected to Indigenous land struggles, Black liberation movements, and anti-imperialist resistance worldwide. From U.S. police forces training with Israeli security to shared surveillance technologies, systems of oppression are globally interconnected. True solidarity builds alliances across these struggles and works to dismantle the structures that sustain them.

How to Practice Decolonized Solidarity

- Amplify Palestinian Voices: Follow Palestinian journalists, scholars, and organizers. Avoid Western-centered narratives that erase Palestinian agency. Western individuals can

continue to support decolonial solidarity by amplifying Palestinian voices, prioritizing their leadership, and advocating for justice without speaking on their behalf or overshadowing their lived experiences.

- Challenge Zionism and Western Complicity: Confront pro-Israel narratives in your community, media, and political spaces.
- Support Economic Resistance: Join the BDS movement and campaign against companies that profit from Israeli apartheid. Remove Israeli products from the European markets.
- Reject Co-optation by Governments and NGOs: Be wary of efforts to sanitize or depoliticize Palestinian resistance in the name of neutrality.
- Push for Policy Change: Advocate for an end to U.S. and European military aid to Israel and demand accountability from political leaders. Stop economical, political and cultural cooperation with Israel, which normalizes the occupation.

The Urgency of True Solidarity

Decolonizing solidarity with Palestine means more than performative gestures. It requires a fundamental shift in how international activists engage with the struggle—centering Palestinian leadership, challenging settler colonialism, and linking movements for collective liberation.

Palestinians are not asking for charity. They are demanding justice, dignity, and freedom. The question is not whether we stand in solidarity, but whether our solidarity is truly radical, decolonial, and committed to dismantling the systems that sustain oppression. Anything less is not solidarity—it is complicity.

Reproductive Work From The Time Of The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia Until Today's Slovenia

Urška Breznik

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has been well known for its socialist feminism – the politics that helped to create a state with a highly developed health-care system, with excellent child-care and all-day primary school, extended paid maternity and parental leave, public food canteens in the workplace, kindergartens, schools, companies and other state institutions, homes for the elderly in every municipality, an enshrined right to freedom of childbirth in the 1974 Constitution, and a whole system of support for the implementation of women's reproductive and sexual rights and health. We spoke about this legacy and the current situation in reproductive work and reproductive rights in Slovenia (and other ex-Yugoslav countries) with a **renowned** Slovenian sociologist, international gender expert, feminist, activist, former politician and the president of The Women's Lobby of Slovenia, **Sonja Lokar**.

What was the situation of women in the region of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) before SFRY was established, so before 1945?

The first Yugoslavia, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes¹, was very diverse. Half of the country had a history of the Turkish Empire rule (today's Serbia without Vojvodina, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro), the other half had a history of the Austro-Hungarian Empire rule (Vojvodina, Croatia, Slovenia). Bosnia and Herzegovina was under Turkish rule, then annexed to the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1908. The formerly Turkish part of the country, with exemption for the large cities, was characterized by a very high illiteracy rate among men and especially among women (over 70% even by 1945), while in the formerly Austro-Hungarian

parts there were no illiterate women. In Slovenia, already before World War II, women made 30% of the working class. The majority of the population in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia were peasants and day-labourers, the working class was small in number, but as industry developed, the working class became stronger and more and more unionized and, under the influence of the Soviet revolution, attempted to organize itself also along party lines. But in the Kingdom the Communist Party of Yugoslavia was soon banned and driven underground, where it remained until the beginning of World War II.

The first Yugoslavia was essentially an autocratic constitutional monarchy with an extremely progressive constitution modelled on the German Weimar constitution but, unfortunately, not implemented. Women were not equal before the law, as was then the case almost everywhere in the world except in the Soviet Union. The law made them subordinated to the male members of the family before marriage (father, brother) and after marriage to the husband. This constitution stated that they had the right to vote, but no law was ever passed to give them the right to vote. It was an underdeveloped, peripheral, capitalist, unitary state that sought to erase inherited specificities, above all denying national differences and imposing Greater Serbian nationalism. It recognized religious differences and regulated the private status of women (marriage, inheritance, child allocation, the status of illegitimate mothers and children, divorce - which was not possible because it was contracted under religious law). In Christian religions, only separation from the table and bed was possible, but not total divorce. In Islam, a man could divorce at will, but a woman could not. Schools provided religious education according to three denominations: Ortho-

¹ Established on December 1st 1918



Sonja Lokar speaking at the anniversary of the Antifascist Women's Front in February 2025

dox, Catholic and Muslim, which had the status of state religions.

The society of Slovenia was realistically described by writers, playwrights, and poets of that time: Oton Župančič in his poem *Duma*, Ivan Cankar in *Idealist* and *Hlapci* (*Idealist*, *Serfs*), Prežihov Voranc in *Samorastniki* (*The Self-Sown*), Ivan Potrč, Ciril Kosmač in *Tantadruj* and Srečko Kosovel. The women were mostly maids, hired daily farm workers and factory workers, as well as teachers, midwives and low-level clerks. Women teachers were not allowed to marry if they wanted to keep their jobs, and many professions were inaccessible to women. Married bourgeois women were housewives. Patriarchy, in the manner of a capitalist, underdeveloped society controlled by religious morals, was thus legitimised in economic, public, and private life.

During World War II, many women were among the Yugoslav partisans, not only as auxiliary personnel, but also as medics, doctors, intelligence gatherers and fighters. Did this emancipatory moment have an impact on the later position of women in the SFRY²?

² Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was established on November

Not only did it have an impact, but it was also crucial. All our basic women's rights are built on the blood and sacrifice of partisan women, nurses, doctors, couriers, informers, bourgeois women who collected food, shoes, clothes and sanitary supplies and sent them to partisans, peasant women who, in their homes, under the threat of the death of entire families and the burning of their homes, took the partisans under their roofs and fed them, bandaged their wounds and frostbite. What was particularly crucial was that among the partisans there were many dedicated communist women who really knew what had to be done to improve the situation of working women significantly. Vida Tomšič³ presented a motion at the 5th National Conference of Yugoslav Communists in Dubrava near Zagreb in 1940 on the necessity of communists' work among

29th in 1945 and then named Socialist People's Republic of Yugoslavia (it was renamed in 1963). It was composed of six socialist republics (Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro) and two autonomous regions (Vojvodina, Kosovo).

³ Vida Tomšič (1913-1998) was a Slovenian Partisan fighter during World War II, prominent communist politician, women's activist, she was the president of the Antifascist front of Women of Yugoslavia between 1948 and 1953 and a professor of family law at the Faculty of Law at the University of Ljubljana. She was given the Order of the People's Hero in postwar Yugoslavia. She was appointed minister for social policy in 1945 and later held important posts in the government of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia. She represented Yugoslavia in international relations, especially in the framework of the Non-Aligned Movement.

women, in which she developed to the last detail the program which the Communist Party had already started during the war, and which it had implemented step by step after the war. By 1990, women communists succeeded in implementing this programme almost fully.

Why was the Anti-Fascist Women's Front founded and what was its importance in the struggle for women's equality?

It was initiated by the leadership of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. The basic idea was that women, under the ideological leadership of communist women, should organise themselves en masse as the most important support for the armed partisan struggle and, through their participation in the national liberation movement, train themselves in every possible way for a completely different social role, on an equal footing with men in the post-war period. The motto of the founding meeting of the Anti-Fascist Women's Front (AFWF) in Dobrnič in October 1943 was "All for the partisans until the final victory." After the end of the war, AFWF played a remarkable role, today we would say the role of a mass civil society organization, replacing the state social policy and its institutions, since a systemic and universal social policy was almost non-existent under capitalism, and could not be established overnight by the communist authorities. In the south of Yugoslavia, the AFWF eliminated female illiteracy within two years by holding seminars of its activists in every village. In Slovenia, for example, the AFWF eliminated the trachoma that caused mass blindness in Prekmurje region, took care of war orphans, of the disabled, who were very numerous after the war, of the health education of uneducated women who knew little or nothing about their bodies and not enough about the care of newborn babies, and made women aware of their equal rights at home, at work, in politics. In 1953, however, the AFWF was abolished by the communist authorities.

Vida Tomšič was the President of the AFWF at the time, and she strongly defended this decision. Her argument was that confining women only to the AFWF was harmful because the really important development and political decisions are taken in the party and the organs of national and local governments, without women, who are too concerned



Vida Tomšič, 1961

only with specific social issues, but who, alone and marginalized, cannot actually solve them successfully. Today, we would say that she has opted for gender mainstreaming - bringing a gender perspective into all policies where they are actually decided. Subsequent insights by women researchers into this abolition of AFWF have also provided different explanations as to why this happened. Some concluded that because the AFWF was in daily contact with the needs of women workers and peasants, it remained revolutionary, while the leadership of the Yugoslav Communist Party slowed down and began to warm up to the idea that women should be more concerned with the home, children and family rather than with social problems, while others noted, that the AFWF was in fact becoming too strong a political force and that AFWF women were too determined and too demanding, fighting uncompromisingly for their priorities, putting them before the Party, which in those days had other priorities and "bigger concerns" than gender equality. In my view, the truth is actually a mixture of all these insights. What is important, however, is that our so-

cial development later confirmed that the socialist women's movement, after the initial organizational shock, had successfully regained momentum and showed that communist women politicians were able to learn from their mistakes.

What were the characteristics of socialist feminism and how was it implemented in the SFRJ?

Typically, it was framed within the ideological scheme of the Marxist theory of the liberation of labor. The leading party feminists firmly rejected and publicly denounced any deviation from this theory as a delusion of petty-bourgeois feminism and a defense of the interests of the privileged women, those who are the better-off, better educated and better-connected to the centers of real economic and political power. By attacking the patriarchy as a timeless social machine for male discrimination against women, these better off women are turning the class struggle into a meaningless, and therefore, ineffective struggle of women against men. The basic idea of our communist feminism, based on the theory of the liberation of labour, was that gender inequality could only be eliminated simultaneously and concomitantly with the abolition of capitalist exploitation of workers and the abolition of private ownership of economic resources, the means of production. In the class struggle, and in the building of a socialist society, female and male workers have a common interest and there must be alliance, comradeship and solidarity between them, because only together can they achieve the fundamental goal: the abolition of the capitalist order in the society and its transformation into a society of equality and freedom for all, not only for those who appropriate political power on the basis of their economic superiority. That is why Vida Tomšič and her female comrades were resolutely opposed to any independent, autonomous self-organization of women in politics, in the Communist League, in the trade unions, in the Union of Socialist Youth. The only exception was the Socialist Union of the Working People, an organization where different social groups that shared a consensus regarding the legitimacy of the socialist constitutional order could meet, freely express their differences, and find out how to work together for the greater common good.

What were the key gains for women in SFRY? What role did women politicians and activists

play in the realisation of economic, social and political rights of women?

I would like to stress a few key points first: full equality of men and women before the law, women's suffrage (already in the election of national liberation authorities in the time of World War II), the right to education and work in almost all professions, the separation of church and state including in public education and kindergartens, civil marriage, civil divorce, the equalization of the rights of legitimate and illegitimate children, special assistance for single mothers, an individualized pension and tax system, the division of marital property in half in the event of divorce, the allocation of the care of the children of divorced parents in accordance with the children's best interests.

The abolition of the AFWF therefore proved to be a wrong step because the communist women's movement had been significantly weakened for several years, as there were far too few active women in political decision-making positions, especially in the executive bodies of the Communist League and the elected state organs at different levels: the assemblies and governments. The Federation of Women's Associations, which was to replace the AFWF, was too dispersed for socially active women, who no longer had their own relatively independent united organization to be able to formulate common women's social priorities and then successfully mainstream them into political decision-making bodies. The movement really took off only after 1966, when the leadership of the Communist League decided to take a new step in the decentralization of the state and for a more market-oriented economy, for an economic reform that opened up Yugoslavia to international finance and foreign investments, opened up the borders for the free movement of people, and took a new step in the decentralization of the federation. It blossomed anew in the 1970s, when Yugoslavia effectively created a complex welfare state, operating on the basis of social property, integral self-management and a further decentralised federation. The women active at that time established excellent cooperation in the Council for Women's Social Activity of the Socialist Union of the Working People and achieved a real revolution by participating in delegate assemblies at the level of municipalities, republics and provinces and the federation, and above all in self-governing inter-

est communities for childcare, education, health, housing and social policy. They have become so successful because a social agreement for all social, economic and political delegate decision-making bodies has set a minimum quota of 30% for women and it has been respected. In those days, we were on a par with the Swedes in terms of the proportion of women in the assemblies, and Sweden was then the first country in the world in terms of the proportion of women in parliaments.

Thanks to the Yugoslav socialist feminists of those days, we developed excellent childcare, all-day primary school, public food canteens in the workplace (kindergartens, schools, companies and other state institutions), extended paid maternity and parental leave, built health centers and homes for the elderly in every municipality, enshrined the right to freedom of childbirth in the 1974 Constitution, and set up a whole system of support for women's reproductive and sexual rights and health. We have established a gynecologist and a pediatrician at the basic level of public health care. The social democrats in power in the most developed European countries at that time learned from us.

How important was political education in SFRY, also in the context of understanding the problematic nature of patriarchy and its connection to capitalism?

The public education system has undoubtedly given people a much better understanding of various societal processes than it does today. Perhaps that is why the process of Slovenia's independence⁴ was so brilliant and genuinely democratic. People, most of whom had at least a secondary school education, were able to grasp what was actually happening and to imagine and choose how society should be changed to make life freer and the economy more prosperous. Today, they come out of schools like idiots. This is not meant as an insult, idiot is a technical term for a person who is socially and politically illiterate. This is not the fault of the pupils and teachers, still less of the young people themselves, make no mistake, it is the fault of the concept of public education as we have developed it since independence.

As far as political literacy is concerned, especially for young people and for self-government activists, socialist Yugoslavia had a truly excellent system. The activists of the social-political organizations, that is, the members of the Union of Communists, the youth organization, the trade unions, the Socialist Union of the working People, the delegates, elected to the assemblies, had to be thoroughly educated about the values on which the economic and political system was based and how it worked. There were serious political schools. Sometimes some people speak derisively of the Kumrovec School⁵, where the cadres of the Communist League were trained. This only shows how they do not understand anything. Where do you think the generation that led the process of Slovenia's independence in government after 1990 was educated? Janša? Bavčar? Even Peterle! Whatever one thinks of them⁶, they were certainly not politically illiterate. And look at the members of their parties in the National Assembly today!⁷

We were also educated through practical action, the big political school being the youth work brigades⁸. The basic ideas of gender equality were always part of that training, although not exactly something that seemed to be the most important, it was more self-evident, because the basic value of the political system was equality between people living off their paid labor, so discrimination on the basis of gender was unacceptable, because the inequality of women would push half of society into inequality. But it has been much more difficult to integrate serious analyses of the realities of gender power relations into this education. Dr. Maca Jogan⁹ has just published an excellent scholarly article on this, entitled

4 Slovenia declared its independence from SFRY on June 25th 1991.

5 Josip Broz-Tito (1892-1980), communist revolutionary, the president of SFRY, was born in a small Croatian town of Kumrovec close to the Slovenian border.

6 Janez Janša, Igor Bavčar, Lojze Peterle, in 1991 at the forefront of Slovenian independence process, now right wing politicians and/ or businessmen. Janša and Bavčar both served jail time for corruption.

7 Janez Janša is the leader of Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), an extreme right wing party with members being known for their populist, vulgar statements.

8 The Youth Work Brigades were working groups, active especially in the post-war period in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. They were organised on a voluntary basis and carried out work of public interest. Young people helped to rebuild the war torn country and helped to set up communal and traffic infrastructures. The activity was also important from a political point of view, the participants were also educated in the fields of culture, sport, transport, defence, medicine and first aid, various forms of youth and elderly care, different cultures, and the strengthening of interpersonal relations.

9 Maca Jogan is Slovenian sociologist and feminist, professor emeritus of sociology at the Faculty of Social Sciences – University of Ljubljana.



Youth Work Brigade, 1961, Building the Brotherhood and Unity Highway in Prešovo SFRY

“From Man to Men”. She analyses how slowly and with how much resistance sociology, which has been developing as a science in this country since the beginning of the 1960s at the Faculty of Social Sciences, has incorporated gender aspects into its research, taking for granted the concept of man as the first, equating it with the genderless human being and making him the measure of all things. And if there is no critical sociological research that takes gender seriously, there can be no serious awareness of what the real challenges of gender inequalities in the society are. There can be no accurate way of addressing them successfully in the general public and especially among social and political decision-makers without discrimination and violence against women.

How did socialist feminism in SFRY deal with the problem of the burden of reproductive labor on women’s backs, and what is the state of reproductive labor today in Slovenia?

The partisans liberation movement’s feminists, not only Vida Tomšič, but also Mara Rupena and Majda Gaspari, for example, were very well aware of the burden and the consequences of this burden, which was still on women’s shoulders from the days of capitalism. They have tried very hard to turn as

much of this unpaid work of women as possible into paid work and to set up a systemic solution of public services (kindergartens, canteens, elderly people’s homes...).

But younger generations of socialist feminists have subsequently, since the mid-1960s, succeeded in proving that patriarchy is much more long-lived and flexible than the partisan Marxist feminists thought. They made visible that specific kinds of patriarchy have lived in all social formations since humans as a species outgrew the hunter-gatherer phase, i.e. since slave-owning Rome, to feudalism and capitalism, and that it happily lives its adapted life even in socialism. Namely, every time it achieves that the so-called reproductive work, i.e. the work of keeping people fed, clean, healthy, nurtured, provided for when they are old, sick, disabled, helpless, the work that is necessary to raise infants into adulthood and then to become socially functional human beings, is transferred to women’s shoulders. They have shown that, even under our socialism, we have not yet succeeded in getting women’s unpaid caring work to be actually fairly divided between the sexes, that even when it is paid, it remains less valued than male-dominated work. The socialist system has only succeeded in reducing this reproductive work by making it partially paid, professional work. From the mid-sixties, gradually, some

relief came also with the wide availability of the technology of washing machines, refrigerators, electric and gas cookers, central heating, vacuum cleaners, irons and other small household appliances. But even under self-managed socialism, parental leave was virtually always taken by women, women stayed on sick leave with sick children, women left the labor market prematurely to care for frail old parents, feminized professions were underpaid - textile workers, shop assistants, routine clerks, educators, nurses, even judges, and because of these, women suffered poverty in old age with shamefully low pensions, especially when their partners died.

The biggest problem of the current young generations in the context of reproductive work is that it does not become their problem at all because they cannot afford to have children. Most of them cannot afford to buy or even to rent a home, they do not have stable jobs or partnerships that are stable enough to dare to risk parenthood. Those who do have these conditions are increasingly divided into two groups: a group where men are increasingly, and consciously, taking a fair share of unpaid re-productive work, and a group, dominated by young men, but with young women increasingly present also, who are looking for a solution in the return of the women to the traditional feminine roles of wife, mother, housewife, even though this is a direct route to poverty and the restoration of the patriarchal domination of men over women. The second major challenge relates to the aging society with a growing proportion of elderly in need of long-term care. There is a clear trend here of transforming long-term care into a for-profit activity. The concessioners are claiming the right to the profits that flow to them from public funds. This is pushing the prices of services skywards and will, in the long term, divide society between the rich, who can afford these prices and the cost of the above-standard service out of their own pockets, and the very poor and lonely, who will end up in the hellholes, with the miserable services into which public nursing homes will be turned, and those who will fall on the shoulders of their daughters. These daughters will have to leave the labor market early to care for their parents or partners. Many of those will see their pensions substantially reduced by the loss of an important part of their income, since the status of the carer of a very frail family member gets an allowance of 1.2 the minimum wage.

What was the understanding of reproductive rights in SFRY, especially compared to Western countries?

Communist and social democratic feminists were already campaigning for the legalisation and accessibility of abortion on social grounds before the World War II, as women workers were dying from unsafe back street abortions because they could not afford to have an abortion at a doctor's office, which was forbidden but available for a large sum of money to wealthy women. Immediately after the war, the old Yugoslav law was in force, punishing both the woman who did it and the person who helped her to have an abortion. In SFRY the regime first abolished the punishment of the woman, then allowed abortion for medical and social indications recognized by a special commission, while at the same time taking great care of sex education and the availability of contraception as it was known at the time. Yugoslavia had already developed its own production of condoms and diaphragms in the 1950s, and the contraceptive pill, which American women got in 1960, was already being produced and dispensed on prescription by gynecologists to women in Yugoslavia as early as in 1964. As one of the prominent women leaders of non-aligned countries, Vida Tomšič was fighting in the United Nations for defining free choice in childbirth as a new human right in the 1960s. In doing so, she prevented the state demographic policy of forcing childbirth in developed countries with low birth rates and forcing the prevention of too many births at any cost in developing countries. Her solution was the concept of the desired child, which is a conscious choice made by the parents, because such a child has the best conditions for survival and healthy development. The state should only ensure that the parents are free to make an informed and free choice. In this case it is a woman's right to decide whether to give birth or to abort after an unwanted conception. In the human right of freedom in giving birth, the duty of the state is to help women to make the decision to abort safely. So the right to abortion has been explicitly included in the human right of the freedom of birth.

The developed Western countries, with the exception of Scandinavia, have always been inclined towards a policy of state-led birth promotion and hypocritical restrictions on the ability of poor women in particular to have an abortion in their own country, and at the same time towards a policy of state-led popula-

tion explosion control in the countries of the poor global South. The best example of such a policy is Germany, where there is no officially available information on contraceptives and the right to legal abortion, where abortion and contraception are paid for, where a woman has to go to counselling if she decides to have an abortion and then has to wait a week, if she does not change her mind, where the time in which a legal abortion can be performed is being cruelly reduced, where every major city has a baby box, a special box in which a mother who gives up her newborn baby can anonymously and safely deposit and abandon that newborn baby. At the same time, Germany, through its development aid policy, is fervently supporting the policy of state birth restriction, the so-called population policy, in developing countries.

In the 1974 Federal Assembly, Vida Tomšič convinced the delegates in the Constitutional Commission not to accept an amending proposal by Serbian feminists that the article in the new Federal Constitution on the human right to decide freely on the birth of children should be reduced to a woman's right to decide on her own about the termination of her pregnancy. I have never asked Vida Tomšič whether she really wanted above all to assert the right of both women and men to decide together and consciously freely on the birth of a child, or whether she was just tactically trying to get men to agree that a woman can decide for herself whether or not to keep a foetus. Without men's support, this article would not have made it into the Constitution. One thing I am sure of, however: the Communist feminists fought to ensure that desired children would be born, that all people would learn at an early age how they could prevent unwanted pregnancies, and that abortions would be kept to a minimum. For them, abortion was not a woman's right to decide about her own body, but a rational last resort to prevent even greater harm: the health of the woman being endangered or even killed by a smear abortion.

What has changed in the former republics and autonomous regions of SFRY, and more specifically in Slovenia, since the transition to capitalism (from 1991 onwards)?

Slovenia has done best in the area of gender equality, although it has also lost a lot. In particular, it kept the article on freedom to procreate in its new constitu-

tion¹⁰. Croatia, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Kosovo no longer have it. Slovenia has maintained the separation of church and public education, the network of public kindergartens, and even introduced some important innovations: constitutionally protected legal gender quotas, 100% paid maternity, parental and special non-transferable paternity leave, excellent preventive health care for pregnant women, screening programmes for breast and cervical cancer, a lower tax rate for menstrual hygiene products, a redefined definition of rape in the Criminal Code based on the principle of the absence of freely given consent. Women's access to education has not deteriorated, and women have penetrated the police and the army. The legal discrimination against same-sex couples has ended, and the Constitutional Court has just restored single women's right to artificial insemination, which they lost in the 2001 referendum.

The only things that can be considered improvements everywhere in the former socialist Yugoslavia are two things:

Firstly, the proportion of women in parliaments at all levels after 2020 has finally surpassed everywhere the best results we had under socialism in the 1980s. The bad news is that there are fewer and fewer women elected to parliament to fight for women's human rights. There are reasons for that: because many of them have no idea how much work we still have to do to achieve real equality, because they do not dare to fight, because they are afraid of losing support and the chance to be re-nominated and re-elected in their parties, where misogyny and machismo flourish, because of hate speech and threats against feminists, especially on social media, and even physical violence on the streets, that have made it dangerous to be a feminist, or simply because the powerful anti-feminist women politicians are in the front ranks and in the service of their radical right, nationalist, misogynist, homophobic and xenophobic political parties.

Secondly: Violence against women has lost its status as a private matter for the victims and has been given a prominent place in the policies of all the governments of the countries that emerged from SFRY, where truly progressive legislation has been adopted to prevent violence of all kinds against women and to protect the victims. As far as rape is concerned, the

¹⁰ "It is a human right to decide freely on the procreation of children", SFRY wrote the right to abortion in the Constitution in 1974.

best legal solutions have been adopted, you will not believe it, in Kosovo. The bad news is that nowhere is this legislation really being implemented successfully.

Both improvements were won by large national coalitions of conscious civil society activists, experts, journalists, MPs and ministers of different political colors, in the sweat of their brow and with the overwhelming support of international organizations such as, in particular, the Council of Europe, UN Women, the OSCE, the ODIHR, the EU and progressive international political foundations.

But women's economic and social rights have declined everywhere. The share of women in paid work has fallen sharply. The worst situation is in Kosovo and North Macedonia. The gap between average female and male wages is widening everywhere. Women's work has become heavily precarious, and with it the rights to paid maternity leave, to an 8-hour working day, to a free weekend, to paid holidays, which remained in the legislation, have in practice all flown out of the window. Health security has deteriorated severely, as privatization has invaded public health care everywhere, bringing with it endless queues and a decline in the quality of public health services. Without money, you cannot get good medicines. There has also been a small decline in access to, and above all in the quality of, education, with higher education becoming increasingly fee-paying. The proportion of women in higher education is declining. In schools, children in Bosnia and Herzegovina are even physically separated, depending on which religion they choose: Catholic, Orthodox, or Muslim. In all three cases, they are taught that God created women to obey and serve men.

What is that - comprehensive sex education? It is nowhere to be seen or heard of anymore!

In Montenegro, kindergartens have been privatized, and quality kindergartens are no longer accessible to children from poor families.

The poverty of older women is spreading and deepening everywhere.

The situation of sexual and reproductive rights varies from one country to another. Abortion is still legal everywhere, but it has to be paid for and is much less accessible. Religious propaganda and public rallies against this right are spreading. Women need to pay

for contraceptives everywhere, Slovenia is the only exception, but even here, gynecologists and pediatricians in primary health care are disappearing in practice.

Croatia is a good example: the right to freedom of procreation is no longer mentioned in the Constitution, but the legal framework regulating the right to an abortion has remained unchanged from the socialist times. In 70% of gynecological hospitals, where legal abortion can only be performed, there is not a single male or female doctor who does not claim conscientious objection. That is why women from Croatia are going to Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina to have abortions.

To conclude, I draw your attention to comparisons:

Despite the fact that Slovenia has long lacked any noteworthy state mechanisms to prepare and monitor the implementation of improvements in gender equality policies, and despite the fact that our legislation on equal opportunities for women and men is completely outdated, and the draft of a new one has been languishing in the government's drawers for several years now, Slovenia, in 2024, takes, according to the European Union Institute for Gender Equality, a 12th place among EU Member States. It scores 70.1 out of a possible 100 points, below the EU average for gender equality by 0.9 points. This is a very solid, good result.

Serbia has one of the best legal frameworks for gender equality in the world; even a gender-sensitive budget has been enacted, and the state's mechanisms for gender equality from municipalities upwards are well organized. But in June 2024, Serbia's Constitutional Court annulled their law on equal opportunities until further notice. The reason? The law is said to be unconstitutional because it uses the word gender, which does not exist in the Serbian dictionary and it is written in gender-sensitive language, which is unacceptable, since linguistic experts think that male gender in Serbian language is a generic gender, and when used for men and women, it denotes persons of both sexes. This decision blocks the work of all state mechanisms for gender equality, as well as the work of NGOs that provide, with the support of the state budgets, essential services for the women that need them, e.g. SOS phones, safe houses, even psychological counselling for victims of violence against women.



Partizanka / A partisan woman, Nikolaj Pirnat, 1944