



MAGAZINE

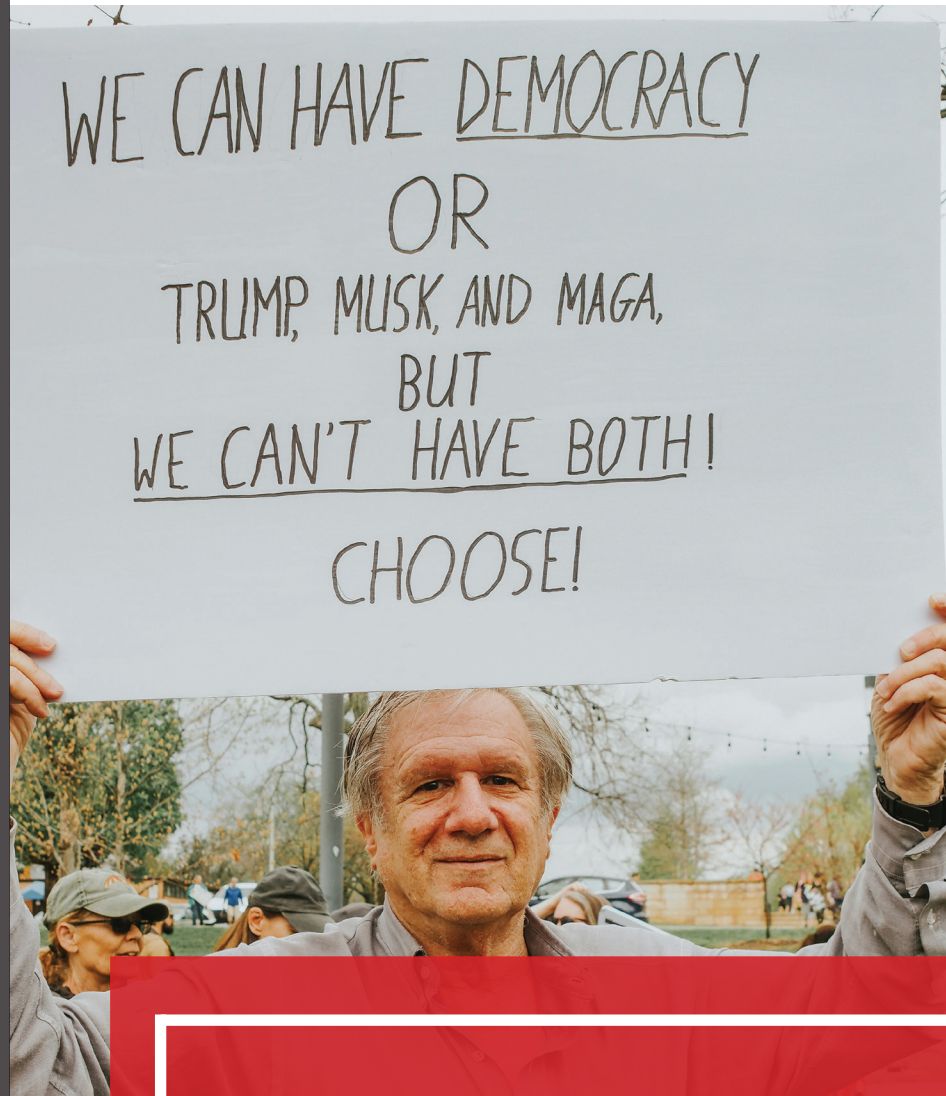
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*Resist. However we
can, resist today.
Resist this Saturday.
Resist until Trump,
Trumpism, and
fascism are driven
into history's dustbin.*

- Micahel Albert



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Gaza's Graveyard of Illusions: How Israel's Narrative Collides with Military Failure

Ramzy Baroud

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is a skilled salesperson, though the product he peddles is deeply flawed. His current challenge is to convince himself, his people, the region, and the world that, despite significant setbacks, he is winning the strategic war against his adversaries.

Former Israeli national security officials, while employing different terminology, essentially convey the same conclusion. They describe Netanyahu as a “master tactician” but “not a master strategist,” as reported by CNN. In an article detailing one of Netanyahu’s grandiose, yet hollow, pronouncements of aspiring to control the Middle East, CNN’s headline declared that “The Endgame is unclear as ever.”

Netanyahu and his extremist allies are acting in defiance of reality. They either believe, or wish to believe, that the endgame is perfectly clear.

According to Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, Israel is operating under a grand military strategy, one that will culminate in “Syria being dismantled, Hezbollah being severely defeated, Iran being stripped of its nuclear threat, Gaza being cleansed of Hamas, and hundreds of thousands of Gazans being displaced to other countries.”

Smotrich’s extensive list, communicated at the end of April, concluded with Israel emerging “stronger and more prosperous.” This wish list aligns closely with a similar list presented by Netanyahu last March.

However, Netanyahu, desperate for immediate political capital, chose to boast about purported achievements rather than future goals. He claimed to have already brought his enemies to their knees and “destroyed the remnants of the Syrian army.”

This latter claim refers to Israel’s unilateral actions

against Syria last December, a nation embroiled in internal strife and not actively engaged in war with Israel. In essence, Israel fabricated a major war front in the absence of actual conflict and declared itself the decisive victor.

Rarely do Israeli leaders publicly articulate their nation’s true intentions with such stark language. They often frame war, colonial expansion, and even genocide using terminology palatable to Western mainstream media and public: Israeli aggressions are portrayed as self-defense, and the construction of illegal settlements as self-preservation.

However, the political discourse emanating from Israel lately strikes a different tone. One might argue that Israel, ostracized by much of the world and led by individuals facing criminal charges, no longer feels compelled to conceal its genuine aims. This is incorrect, however, as Israel is now more than ever desperate to provide any rationale, however feeble, to justify its extermination of the Palestinian people in Gaza.

Indeed, were Israel not concerned about accountability, it would not dedicate significant time and resources to defending itself in the world’s highest legal and criminal courts, nor would it issue travel warnings to its soldiers or conceal their identities for fear of prosecution.

Israel’s inflated political rhetoric and its pronouncements of imaginary achievements are a form of hype aimed at preserving its image as a powerful regional player capable of not only influencing political outcomes but fundamentally shaping the entire Middle East.

The irony of this hype is that Israel has been attempting, and failing at an unprecedented cost, to conquer Gaza, a devastated, tiny territory with a starving



Photo: Lua Eva Blue

population still reeling from the impact of the ongoing Israeli genocide. Even venturing a few hundred meters into Rafah or Khan Yunis continues to result in deaths and injuries within the Israeli army, which is struggling to amass the necessary numbers for large-scale offensives within the Strip.

One must, however, distinguish between Israel's intentions and its failure to realize them. Indeed, dominating the Middle East has been the formula driving Israel's actions for decades. In fact, there is an official document that details Israel's regional ambitions: "A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm."

This document was prepared in 1996 by Richard Perle, a prominent neoconservative intellectual and a close associate of Netanyahu, for the so-called Study Group on a New Israeli Strategy Toward 2000. It aimed to guide Israel toward a more assertive policy that rejects the "comprehensive peace" notion, advocating for destabilizing the region and "rolling back" threats, specifically those emanating from Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran, among others.

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 presented a golden opportunity for some of these goals to be achieved, though the ultimate outcome fell short of the overall

objectives.

Humiliated by the failures of his army and intelligence throughout the Gaza war, and facing immense pressure from a deeply discontented public, Netanyahu knows that his legacy, which he had hoped would be remembered as the greatest among all Israeli leaders, will instead be marred by controversy and disgrace.

Thus, Netanyahu is re-engaging in Perle's old strategy, though under entirely different circumstances. To "secure the realm" would imply that Israel is indeed in control, possesses incomparable military strength, and that its adversaries are willing to accept their diminished role in this Netanyahu-crafted Middle East.

But even a skilled salesman, or "great tactician," cannot market genocide as a victory, nor can a disreputable and dysfunctional army secure a strategic triumph.

Israel has clearly failed to secure any genuine or lasting victory, and the obvious solution is for Israel to be reined in and held accountable for its crimes in Gaza and throughout Palestine. The Middle East would then be poised for true stability, peace, and even prosperity, free from Israeli scheming and the relentless pursuit of more war fronts and illusory victories.

International Law and Israel's Reign of Terror in Gaza

M. Reza Behnam

As the world watches, one of history's greatest crimes has taken form. Inaction, complicity and silence in the face of genocide have caused profound suffering to the Palestinian people. No final reckoning or redress would be equivalent to the scale and magnitude of Israel's depraved criminality.

Inevitably there will be a final accounting for those who advanced an environment in which a member of the Israeli parliament felt emboldened enough to boast: "Everyone got used to the idea that you can kill 100 Gazans in one night ... And nobody in the world cares."

The time is past due to state unequivocally that Israel has, since it declared statehood in 1948, been terrorizing the Palestinian people and that the U.S. and its Western allies have, because of their overwhelming support for Israel, been active participants in that terror.

Israeli violence clearly fits America's own definition of "domestic terrorism."

Washington's leading law enforcement agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, defines it as: "Violent, criminal acts committed by individuals and/or groups [regimes] to further ideological goals stemming from domestic influences such as political, religious, social, racial, or environmental nature."

Palestinians have suffered incomprehensible horrors because U.S. politicians, political influencers, public and corporate media have failed to provide the historical context that gave rise to the insurrection of 7 October 2023. Absent that history and discussion of Palestinian resistance grounded in international law, they have made Israel's indefensible response appear warranted.

The failure to inform has essentially given Israel license to commit genocide and all manner of atrocities in Gaza and has enabled U.S. authorities to suppress opposition to the war on American college campuses.

The media, for example, has accepted without question, the government's illegitimate designation of Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation as "terrorism" and national liberation groups like Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) as terrorist organizations.

In so doing, by equating Palestinian resistance with terrorism, they have eased the way for authorities to use the "support for terrorism" accusation to crush dissent and to arrest pro-Palestinian demonstrators.

Scholars and activists, like Columbia student Mahmoud Khalil, held without due process for over two months in a Louisiana detention center, have been arrested on grounds that they pose a threat to U.S. foreign policy and security. In reality, Khalil's "crime" was standing up for truth and Palestine.

With some basic fact-finding, the media would have learned that resistance to occupation is legally reinforced under international law. And that the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention and Additional Protocol I explicitly affirm the legitimate right of the occupied to resist occupation as part of the right to self-determination. Resistance includes armed struggle in situations of colonial domination, foreign occupation and against racial regimes. The 1977 Additional Protocols to the Convention also gave legal legitimacy to the "resort to arms by national liberation movements."



Charitable organizations distribute hot meals to Palestinians in the Jabalia refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip, Gaza on May 14, 2025.
Photo: Mahmoud Issa

In addition, they would have discovered that the U.N. General Assembly has passed numerous resolutions recognizing the legitimacy of armed resistance as a means of oppressed peoples to achieve self-determination and independence.

Israel is a colonial foreign and racial regime that has brutally dominated Palestinian lives for eight decades and according to international law, resistance to it is justified.

The Palestinian rebellion could also have been understood differently if the media had presented comparable cases, like the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943—an historical act of Jewish resistance against their Nazi occupiers during World War II. We would be hard pressed today to find anyone who would question the righteousness or legitimacy of that rebellion, as they have regarding the uprising of 7 October.

During the Nazi occupation of Poland in 1939, for instance, German authorities began to concentrate Poland's Jews, estimated at three million, into a number of crowded ghettos located in cities throughout the country. The sealed-up Warsaw ghetto warehoused approximately 350,000 people in a densely packed two-mile area of the city.

Jews who had not died of disease, starvation or deportation to extermination camps fought back against Nazi Germany's final effort to transport them to death camps. Although they recognized that victory and survival were unlikely, they refused to surrender. After 29 days of fighting, 13,000 Warsaw Jews and 17 German soldiers were killed. After the Nazi occupiers destroyed the entire ghetto, their final act was to blow up the historical 1878 Warsaw Synagogue.

The Jewish fighters knew full well the outcome of their defiance. They chose, however, to determine how they would die—Treblinka or resistance.

After years of degradation, Palestinian resistance forces also made a choice to break out of the dehumanizing ghetto in which they had been held hostage for 58 years. Although they, too, knew they were up against a powerful brutal army, they chose a “Gaza Ghetto Uprising” over unending oppressive confinement.

As Israel moves closer each day to completing its long-cherished goal of killing as many Palestinians as the “civilized world” will permit, it is critical to magnify the fact that according to international law, people under colonial or foreign occupation have a legitimate right to armed struggle to obtain their freedom and sovereignty.

Had the October insurrection been placed within the context of international law, perceptions may have been different and the violence of the last 19 months might not have happened. Most importantly, 68,000 Palestinians would not have been massacred and ancient Gaza would not now be an environmentally devastated wasteland.

It is essential to recognize that Palestine is one of the few countries in the world remaining under direct military occupation and colonial rule. Using the auspices of the newly established United Nations, the British officially handed off their colonial mandate in Palestine to the Tel Aviv regime in 1948. Since then, Israel’s plan to seize and control all of historic Palestine and forcibly remove the indigenous population, has never ceased.

In addition, attention should be focused on the 19 July 2024 International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion ruling that Israel is unlawfully occupying and is not entitled to sovereignty over any of the the Palestinian territories (West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza). The Court also mandated that Israel end its occupation, desist from creating new settlements, evacuate existing ones and provide full reparations to Palestinian victims; and once

again affirmed the Palestinians’ right to self-determination.

Israel has, however, only intensified its violence since the ICJ ruled and after the U.N. General Assembly overwhelmingly voted in favor of a resolution that gave effect to the Court’s Advisory Opinion.

In Resolution ES-10/24, the General Assembly demanded that within 12 months from the adoption (18 September 2024) of the resolution that Israel end without delay its unlawful presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and meet its obligations under international law.

The United States and its European allies have joined Israel in giving the ICJ and the U.N. General Assembly the “digitus impudicus,” as they ignore the Court’s mandate that all states must recognize the unlawfulness of the occupation and refrain from aiding Tel Aviv in maintaining the occupation.

International law is unmistakably on the side of Palestine. Until now, it has been primarily textual representation, not action. Legalities have not stopped Israel from murdering Palestinian resistance leaders, dropping thousand-pound bombs on non-combatants to kill one man.

Resistance is a right of the oppressed. Mahmoud Kahlil, in a letter to his newborn son, has eloquently given voice to that right and to the Palestinians who were, who are and who will be:

“The struggle for Palestinian liberation is not a burden; it is a duty and an honor we carry with pride. So at every turning point in my life, you will find me choosing Palestine. Palestine over ease. Palestine over comfort. Palestine over self. This struggle is sweeter than a life without dignity. The tyrants want us to submit, to obey, to be perfect victims. But we are free, and we will remain free.”

Is There a Crack in Western Support for Genocide?

Medea Benjamin, Nicolas J. S. Davies

After twenty months of horror in Gaza, political rhetoric in Western countries is finally starting to shift—but will words translate into action? And what exactly can other countries do when the United States still shields Israel from efforts to enforce international law, as it did at the UN Security Council on June 5th?

On May 30th, Tom Fletcher, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, accused Israel of committing a war crime by using starvation as a weapon against the people of Gaza. In a searing interview with the BBC, Fletcher explained how Israel's policy of forced starvation fits into its larger strategy of ethnic cleansing.

“We’re seeing food set on the borders and not being allowed in, when there is a population on the other side of the border that is starving,” Fletcher said. “And we’re hearing Israeli ministers say that is to put pressure on the population of Gaza.”

He was referring to statements like the one from Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who openly admitted that the starvation policy is meant to leave Palestinians “totally despairing, understanding that there’s no hope and nothing to look for,” so that they will submit to ethnic cleansing from Gaza and a “new life in other places.”

Fletcher called on Prime Minister Netanyahu to stop this campaign of forced displacement, and insisted, “we would expect governments all over the world to stand for international humanitarian law. The international community is very, very clear on that.”

Palestinians might wish that were true. If the so-called international community were really “very,

very clear on that,” the United States and Israel would not be able to wage a campaign of genocide for more than 600 days while the world looks on in horror.

Some Western governments have finally started using stronger language to condemn Israel’s actions. But the question is: Will they act? Or is this just more political theater to appease public outrage while the machinery of destruction grinds on?

This moment should force a reckoning: How is it possible that the U.S. and Israel can perpetrate such crimes with impunity? What would it take for U.S. allies to ignore pressure from Washington and enforce international law?

If impoverished, war-ravaged Yemen can single-handedly deny Israel access to the Suez Canal and the Red Sea, and drive the Israeli port of Eilat into bankruptcy, more powerful countries can surely isolate Israel diplomatically and economically, protect the Palestinians and end the genocide. But they haven’t even tried.

Some are now making tentative moves. On May 19th, the U.K., France, and Canada jointly condemned Israel’s actions as “intolerable,” “unacceptable,” “abhorrent,” “wholly disproportionate” and “egregious.” The U.K. suspended trade talks with Israel, and they promised “further concrete actions,” including targeted sanctions, if Israel does not end its offensive in Gaza and lift its restrictions on humanitarian aid.

The three countries publicly committed to the Arab Plan for the reconstruction of Gaza, and to building an international consensus for it at the UN’s High-Level Two-State Solution Conference in New



York on June 17th-20th, which is to be co-chaired by France and Saudi Arabia.

They also committed to recognizing Palestinian statehood. Of the UN's 193 member states, 147 already recognize Palestine as a sovereign nation, including ten more since Israel launched its genocide in Gaza. President Macron, under pressure from the leftist La France Insoumise party, says France may officially recognize Palestine at the UN conference in June.

Canada's new prime minister, Mark Carney, claimed during his election campaign that Canada already had an arms embargo against Israel, but was swiftly challenged on that. Canada has suspended a small number of export licenses, but it's still supplying parts for Israel's 39 F-35s, and for 36 more that Israel has ordered from Lockheed Martin.

A General Dynamics factory in Quebec is the sole supplier of artillery propellant for deadly 155 mm artillery shells used in Gaza, and it took an emergency campaign by human rights groups in August 2024 to force Canada to scrap a new contract for that same factory to supply Israel with 50,000 high-explosive mortar shells.

The U.K. is just as compromised. The new Labour government elected in July 2024 quickly restored funding to UNRWA, as Canada has. In September, it suspended 30 out of 350 arms export licenses to Israel, mostly for parts used in warplanes, helicopters, drones and targeting. But, like Canada, the U.K. still supplies many other parts that end up in Israeli F-35s bombing Gaza.

Declassified UK published a report on the F-35 program that revealed how it compromises the sovereignty of partner countries. While the U.K. produces 15% of the parts that go into every F-35, the U.S. military takes immediate ownership of the British-made parts, stores them on British air force bases, and then orders the U.K. to ship them to Texas for use in new planes or to Israel and other countries as spare parts for planes already in use.

Shipping these planes and parts to Israel is in clear violation of U.S., U.K. and other countries' arms export laws. British campaigners argue that if the U.K. is serious about halting genocide, it must stop all shipments of F-35 parts sent to Israel—directly or indirectly. With huge marches in London drawing hundreds of thousands of people, and protests on June 17th at three factories that make F-35 parts, activists will keep applying more pressure until they

result in the “concrete actions” the British government has promised.

Denmark is facing a similar conflict. Amnesty International, Oxfam, Action Aid and Al-Haq are in court suing the Danish government and largest weapons company, Terma, to stop them sending Israel critical bomb release mechanisms and other F-35 parts.

These disputes over Canadian artillery propellant, Danish bomb-release mechanisms and the multinational nature of the F-35 program highlight how any country that provides even small but critical parts or materials for deadly weapons systems must ensure they are not used to commit war crimes.

So all steps to cut off Israel’s weapons supplies can help to save Palestinian lives, and the full arms embargo that the UN General Assembly voted for in September 2024 can be instrumental in ending the genocide if more countries will join it. As Sam Perlo-Freeman of Campaign Against the Arms Trade said of the U.K.’s legal obligation to stop shipping F-35 parts,

“These spare parts are essential to keep Israel’s F-35s flying, and therefore stopping them will reduce the number of bombings and killings of civilians Israel can commit. It is as simple as that.”

Germany was responsible for 30% of Israel’s arms imports between 2019 and 2023, largely through two large warship deals. Four German-built Saar 6 corvettes, Israel’s largest warships, are already bombarding Gaza, while ThyssenKrupp is building three new submarines for Israel in Kiel.

But no country has provided a greater share of the tools of genocide in Gaza than the United States, including nearly all the warplanes, helicopters, bombs and air-to-ground missiles that are destroying Gaza and killing Palestinians. The U.S. government has a legal responsibility to stop sending all these weapons, which Israel uses mainly to commit industrial-scale war crimes, up to and including genocide,

against the people of Palestine, as well as to attack its other neighbors.

Trump’s military and political support for Israel’s genocide stands in stark contradiction to the image he promotes of himself as a peacemaker—and which his most loyal followers believe in.

Yet there are signs that Trump is beginning to assert some independence from Netanyahu and from the war hawks in his own party and inner circle. He refused to visit Israel on his recent Middle East tour, he’s negotiating with Iran despite Israeli opposition, and he removed Mike Waltz as National Security Advisor for engaging in unauthorized warmongering against Iran with Netanyahu. His decisions to end the Yemen bombing campaign and lift sanctions on Syria suggest an unpredictable but real departure from the neocon playbook, as do his negotiations with Russia and Iran.

Has Netanyahu finally overplayed his hand? His campaign of ethnic cleansing, territorial expansion in pursuit of a biblical “Greater Israel,” the deliberate starvation of Gaza, and his efforts to entangle the U.S. in a war with Iran have pushed Israel’s longtime allies to the edge. The emerging rift between Trump and Netanyahu could mark the beginning of the end of the decades-long blanket of impunity the U.S. has wrapped around Israel. It could also give other governments the political space to respond to Israeli war crimes without fear of U.S. retaliation.

The huge and consistent protests throughout Europe are putting pressure on Western governments to take action. A new survey conducted in Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy and Spain shows that very few Europeans—between 6% and 16% in each country—find Israel’s assault on Gaza proportionate or justified.

For now, however, the Western governments remain deeply complicit in Israel’s atrocities and violations of international law. The rhetoric is shifting—but history will judge this moment not by what governments say, but by what they do.

How to Fight Trump Without Caving to Corporatists

Norman Solomon interviewed by Richard Eskow

In a recent column you asked, “What’s preventing a united front against the Trump regime?” You say, “America desperately needs a united front to restrain the wrecking ball of the Trump regime.” I get the “wrecking ball,” but why do we need a united front? What’s wrong with a multi-pronged approach from various groups and actors?

There’s a serious lack of coordination at the political level. The Democratic Party is a constellation of 50-plus state and other local parties, and there are many organizations which are—or should be—independent of the party.

To the extent there is any governing body, it’s the Democratic National Committee. The DNC should provide leadership at times like these. But there’s still no leadership, several months into a second Trump regime that’s much worse than the first. There’s energy to oppose, but it’s uncoordinated.

Rethinking the Left and the Party

Here’s a challenge. For too long, the American left looked to the Democratic Party for leadership and guidance instead of considering it an instrument that’s available to movements. I think a lot of people assume that “a united front” against Trump means making the left fall in line yet again behind the institutional party’s corporate, so-called “centrist” politicians.

It’s dubious, and not very auspicious, to follow “leadership” that isn’t leading. I think your word “instrument” is an excellent one. The left should consider the Democratic Party a tool that not only can be used but, under this electoral system, must be used to stop the right and advance progressive causes. No

other party can win federal elections and stop what has become a neo-fascist Republican Party.

Most of the people who serve as administrative or elected Democrats consider social movements subordinate to their electoral work. They see progressives—the grassroots activists, the ones with deep concerns, who do research, who communicate, who organize in local communities, who provide hope—as fuel for them to win elections.

That’s backward. Campaigns and candidates should be subordinated to progressive social movements, not the other way around. That’s how we win. Change doesn’t come from the top. The great advances—Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, anti-war, gay rights, civil rights, women’s rights, reproductive freedom—came from people who weren’t held into check by the party apparatus. They came from the grassroots, the social movements.

Big Money, Big Problems

Progressives inside the party have told me how complicated it is to work within the party. Each state party has its own rules and its own representatives to the DNC, and there are also other appointed members and other centers of power. They’re up against complex machinery whenever they try to change anything.

Worse, the party allows dark money in its primaries and is heavily reliant on it in general elections. Party operatives—thousands of them, in think tanks and consulting firms and so on—depend on that money for their livelihood.

Kamala Harris raised more money than perhaps any candidate in history. I think that money ac-



tually hurt her. It dissuaded her from saying the things she needed to say to win, whether she meant them or not.

How can a popular front incorporate and influence a party that's dominated by big donors? Isn't that the elephant in the room?

Well, certainly the money is huge, but we want to be realistic without being defeatists. With the state supreme court election in Wisconsin a few weeks ago, Elon Musk literally tried to buy the election and failed. That was a victory against the tide of big money. But yes, money typically correlates with victory.

I attended the DNC's so-called Unity Reform Commission meetings in 2017, when the power of the Bernie Sanders forces was at high ebb. The party's centrists, corporatists, and militarists felt it necessary to give the left some seats on that commission. But they kept a voting majority, which they used to kill some important reforms for transparency and financial accountability.

Jennifer O'Malley Dillon, who was then the Clinton-aligned chair, helped defeat those proposals. And what happened to her? She became deputy chief of staff in the Biden White House, then effectively ran Biden's reelection campaign. And, after Biden belatedly pulled out and left chaos behind, suddenly Jen O'Malley Dillon was running the Harris campaign.

As you said, a lot of money was sloshing around. It's hard to spend a billion dollars-plus in a few months and not have a lot of pockets being lined. Lots of it goes to consultants who broker deals, hire other consultants, and arrange TV advertising. They love advertising because it's easy and you don't have to relate to people. (Note: Many consultants are also paid a percentage of each ad buy.)

Meanwhile, we heard afterwards that African - American organizers in places like Philadelphia had been asking Where's our help? Where are our resources?—while TV stations in their states were filled with Harris ads.

That's not to villainize Jen O'Malley Dillon. She's just an example. Certain people will always win. They'll always make tons of money, no matter what happens on Election Day.

Would the Party Rather Lose Than Change?

Let me underscore that point about insiders. I think they would all prefer winning to losing. I don't know anyone who'd rather lose. But their incentives are misaligned. There are times when, consciously or not, they feel there are worse things than losing. Take Bernie Sanders, whose policies and fundraising model threatened the Democratic ecosystem that feeds them. In a choice between winning with Bernie or losing—even to Trump—they'd rather lose. Their incentives make losing preferable to turning the party over to unruly Sanders types like—well, like you.

I think that's a fair point. Remember, when Bernie was at high ebb in primaries, a lot of traditional Democrats on Wall Street and elsewhere were quoted as saying if Sanders is the nominee they might go with Trump.

Imagining a “Popular Front”

Let's try to envision a popular— well, I call it a “popular front.” I don't think others use that term, but I think of the wartime alliance under FDR that included everyone on the left—including Communists, socialists, mainstream labor, radical labor, moderate Democrats—everyone. From the radical left to the center, people made common cause against fascism. I think there is common cause again. You can see it in the threats to the judicial system, to media independence, educational independence, and other pillars of civil democracy. Those pillars were already tattered, and many are already broken, but what remains is endangered.

How can the left build that alliance without either surrendering leadership on its ideas or being subsumed by the “Vote Blue, no matter who”

rhetoric that always gives us the same failed party leadership?

It's a challenge. To use a word that might seem jargony, we should take a dialectical approach. We should look at these contrary, sometimes seemingly contradictory realities and see them all. Fred Hampton was a great young leader of the Black Panther Party, murdered with the collusion of the FBI and Chicago police. There's video of him saying that nothing is as important as stopping fascism because fascism is gonna stop us all. Malcolm X said that if somebody is holding a gun on you, your first job is to knock the gun out of the hand.

The right is holding a gun on you. There are neoliberals and there are outright fascists. Neoliberalism is a poison. It's a political economy that makes the rich ever richer and immiserates everybody else, while destroying the environment and creating more and more militarism. But the fascists are holding a gun to our head.

We have an opportunity to creatively acknowledge that two truths exist simultaneously in 2025. We have a responsibility and imperative to join with others to defeat this fascistic group, which means forming a de facto united front with militarists and corporatists. And, at the same time, we need to fight militarists and corporatists.

So, there we are.

A Time for Left-Populism

This may be blue-sky thinking, but it occurs to me that the progressive movement can display leadership and vision in forming that front, at a time when those qualities seem to be lacking elsewhere. It could build a broad alliance while simultaneously attracting people to the left's ideas and leadership. We wouldn't try to subordinate people to our will in this alliance, as has been done to us in the past. Instead, in this admittedly optimistic scenario, some people will be attracted by the left's vision and leadership.

Absolutely. One of the recent dramatic examples is AOC and Bernie going to state after state, often in deep red districts, and getting huge turnouts. In 2016's primary, Bernie went to the red state of West Virginia and carried every county against Hillary Clinton.

These examples undermine the mainstream media clichés about left and right because they're about populism. It's about whether people who are upset and angry—and a lot of people in this country are—are encouraged to kick down or kick up.

The right wing—the fascists, the militarists, the super pseudo masculinists—they love to kick down. That's virtually their whole program: attacking immigrants, people of color, women, people who have been historically shafted. Progressives should kick up against the gazillionaires and the wealthy power brokers who hate democracy.

That kind of populism resonates. Expanding Social Security resonates. Healthcare for everyone resonates. It resonates among self-described conservatives, Republicans, whatever, as well as liberals and progressives. We could be saying to people, "They're distracting you. It's not trans kids who are ripping you off and making your life so miserable. It's those guys over there."

It's been striking to see how passive the party was in the face of this year's onslaught, and how passive so much of it continues to be. The right got off to a running (or crawling) start on demolishing what remains of democracy. And yet, we were flooded with Democratic operatives like James Carville, who openly use the phrase "playing possum" when describing how the party should respond. Hakeem Jeffries, Minority Leader of the House, said we can't do anything because we don't have the votes. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer helped pass Trump's budget.

It felt like the party leadership had wiped its hands and walked away from the catastrophe it helped create. People who want to fight Trump will also have to fight this inertia—even though many of the party's presumptive presidential candidates are distinguishing saying, no, no, I'm going to come out swinging. I'm going to be the candidate who comes out swinging against the right.

I always tell people that if they're going to work in Democratic Party politics, they should heed the biblical injunction about the world: be in it, but not of it. And I think that activists should go where their inclinations and their talents lead them. They should follow the path that calls out to them.



Working Inside the Party

But if people are called to do Democratic Party activism, what exactly does that look like, given what they're up against? What's the mechanism of activist involvement?

I think the right wing has in the last decades been much more attentive and attuned to the reality that everybody in Congress is elected from somewhere else, not DC. You wouldn't know that when you talk with a lot of the Democrats and Democratic-aligned groups there. Some people in that bubble think that's where the action is, where power is wielded. But, as you say—to the extent we have democracy and there are still some democratic structures as of now—the action is in the grassroots, in communities.

There are well over 1,000 different congressional offices. Members of the House have district offices. They are, in a nonviolent way, sitting ducks to be confronted. Voters are facing questions of life and death, whether it's healthcare or the genocidal war on Gaza that the U.S. continues to arm, or so many other concerns. We could be confronting these people in Congress when they don't do what they should be doing.

Those folks are not gods. They should be confronted. And there's often a dynamic on the left where, if Congressperson X does some things that we appreciate and a couple of things that we think are terrible, there's a tendency to say, "Well, I appreciate the good things. I don't want to be mean just because I differ on one or two things."

The right wing rarely takes that tack. They go to the mat. They fight for exactly what they believe. That's been successful for them—very successful.

We have the chance to really make an impact right now. But we're often told, "Cool your jets. You don't want to be divisive." Bernie got a lot of that. AOC gets a lot of that. We're told, "You don't want to be like the Tea Party from the last decade." And the astute response is, "Oh, yeah, what a disaster. The Tea

Party took over the Republican Party. That must have been just a terrible tactical measure."

It's a way of being told to sit down and do what you're told. The right doesn't do that—maybe because, ironically, they have less respect for authority figures. We don't need deference to leaders who don't provide leadership.

Can We All Just Get Along?

On the right, the nastiness is directed against what was the institutional party establishment. But a lot of centrist Democrats, leaders and supporters alike, seem to get angriest at the left for bringing up certain ideas. It's like we're just like spitting in the punch bowl, that it's wrong and rude and who the hell do you think you are? The left has the ideas, but I also think we have to deal with a kind of professional/managerial class culture that can be quite hostile.

It feels like we have to say, "No, we're actually your friends, because a) we can help you and b) in your hearts, you want these things too. Don't be annoyed. We're not 'indulging ourselves' by speaking up. We're helping."

I struggle with that all the time. And I wonder what your thoughts are.

That's the corrosive culture of thinking the people in charge know best. That culture includes a substantial proportion of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. And it also happens because the financial and party pressures on elected officials are intense.

A few minutes ago I mentioned my admiration for Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and their anti-oligarchy tour. They've been great. But we should not erase the historical memory that, even after Joe Biden's disastrous debate last summer and up until the day he withdrew from the race, Bernie Sanders was publicly adamant that Biden should stay in the race. AOC was adamant that Joe Biden should stay in the race.

That made no sense whatsoever. And as someone on the RootsAction team, that isn't just hindsight. RootsAction launched the Don't Run Joe campaign at the end of 2022. You didn't have to be a rocket scientist or a political scientist to know that Joe Biden was incapable of running an effective campaign for reelection.

We also saw the Congressional Progressive Caucus leadership endorse Biden a year before the election, if I recall correctly.

Oh, absolutely. The chair at the time, Pramila Jayapal, endorsed him two years ahead of the 2024 election day.

ESKOW: It's also striking what wasn't said during those two years. We heard virtually nothing about Medicare for All, which went off the political radar. We didn't hear much about expanding Social Security. Joe Biden promised to expand it in the campaign and never said another word about it.

"Inside/Outside"

We could go on. But to me, and speaking of embracing contradictions, this speaks to the ongoing need for activists. Because here's the ultimate irony for me about the phenomenon we've just described. Capitol Hill progressives, many of whom I respect, essentially replicated what party insiders did to them in 2015 and 2016 when they were told not to challenge Hillary Clinton.

Good point.

It says to me we'll always need outside activists pounding on the door, however annoying they may find us to be from time to time. It's an "inside/outside" game.

Jim Hightower said it's the agitator that gets the dirt out in the washing machine.

He also said there's nothing in the middle of the road except yellow lines and dead armadillos.

Call for an Emergency DNC Meeting

Let's close with this. RootsAction has been calling for an emergency meeting of the DNC to address the crisis of fascism, or what I would join you in calling neo-fascism. What's the thinking there and what's the status of that?

I think of a quote from James Baldwin. He said that not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed unless it's faced. We're in an emergency, and we're getting very little from what amounts to the party's governing body, the Democratic National Committee—even acknowledging that it is an emergency. There's pretty much a business-as-usual ambience, although the rhetoric is ramped up.

The DNC, which has 448 members, normally meets twice a year. If, in the midst of emergency year 2025, you remain committed to meeting only twice a year, you're conveying something very profound. You're communicating that you're not operating in the real world of an emergency.

That's where we are right now. So, in partnership with Progressive Democrats of America, RootsAction has launched a petition (which people can find at RootsAction.org) urging the DNC to hold an emergency meeting. People can still sign it. And we know that the chair of the DNC, who has the power to call such a meeting, knows full well about this petition.

But right now it's still business as usual. So, I think we need to ramp up these demands.

And meanwhile the party is at historic levels of unpopularity. You'd think that's one emergency they would recognize.

One would think so. The latest polling showed only 27 percent of voters had a favorable view of the Democratic Party. You would think that one or two alarm bells would go off. Maybe the "same old, same old" isn't going to do it anymore.

A Brief History of U.S. Military Interventions Within the United States

Zoltan Grossman

Although the National Guard has often been used against civil rebellion, deploying federal military forces within the U.S. is a drastic and historically rare move. I've studied the history and geography of U.S. military interventions from the "Indian Wars" to the Middle East, and have documented only a handful of times that Army, Marines, or federalized National Guard forces have been used against U.S. citizens over the past century. For Trump to take such a profound leap is an admission that a conflict at home is being equated to an overseas war. Sending in soldiers trained for combat will only make a bad situation worse, by launching a war at home against domestic dissent.

The Insurrection Act of 1807 governs the President's ability to deploy the active-duty military within the U.S. to put down rebellion. The Posse Comitatus Act of 1878 limited the federal government's power to use the military to enforce civilian laws, constricting the military to a role supporting state and local police authorities. Ironically, the limitation was put in place partly due to the white supremacist rollback of Reconstruction, as President Rutherford B. Hayes withdrew federal troops occupying the former Confederacy since the Civil War. The Act still allows the President to deploy forces in the U.S. under congressional authority (derived from the Insurrection Act), if a state cannot maintain so-called "public order."

Wars against Indigenous and Mexican resistance

U.S. military forces fought the so-called "Indian Wars" as foreign interventions on the soil of Indigenous nations, using military bases (forts), to forcibly incorporate the nations into (or keep them within) the United States. These included the 1862 war against the Mdewakanton Dakota (Santee Sioux) in Minnesota, which ended in the execution of 38 Dakota men.

The Army's last major Indian War was against the Lakota Nation, culminating in the 1890 Wounded Knee massacre of about 300 civilians, for which the soldiers were awarded Medals of Honor. Later interventions were directed against the Leech Lake Ojibwe in 1898 (using soldiers just returned from the Philippines), and the Muskogee (Creek) in Indian Territory (later Oklahoma) in 1901. U.S. naval forces also backed the 1893 settler overthrow of the U.S.-recognized Kingdom of Hawai'i.

During the Mexican Revolution, U.S. Army troops were involved in fighting Mexican rebels who crossed the border, in the 1915 Plan of San Diego raids into Texas, and Pancho Villa's 1916 raid into Columbus, New Mexico in 1916 (triggering the Pershing Expedition deep into Mexico). Although these were interventions on U.S. soil, they were not directed primarily against U.S. citizens.

The "Indian Wars" were rekindled in 1973, when FBI and other federal agents besieged Lakota community activists joined by the American Indian Movement (AIM) at the Wounded Knee massacre site, where two Native resisters were killed in firefights. Phantom jets from nearby Ellsworth Air Force Base conducted surveillance overflights. The 82nd Airborne was put on alert, but an FBI request for 2,000 Army troops was turned down by Colonel Volney Warner, and the 72-day siege ended without a second massacre.

During the 2016-17 confrontations at Standing Rock over the Dakota Access Pipeline, North Dakota National Guard troops were deployed, and Tiger-Swan private security contractors (who had worked with the military in Iraq and Afghanistan) spied on the water protectors. Although there was no obvious direct use of federal military forces, it is not always clear which agencies operated surveillance planes and drones.

Deployments against strikers and veterans

Army troops have also been sent in to crush strikes by U.S. workers. During the 1894 Pullman rail strike in Chicago, troops killed 34 strikers. In Idaho, troops intervened against striking silver miners in the Coeur d'Alene region in 1892, and occupied the area in 1899-1901. Troops were deployed against striking West Virginia coal miners in 1920-21 (including the first aerial bombing of U.S. citizens); the conflict inspired the film *Matewan*.

In 1932, during the Depression, Army soldiers were deployed against World War I veterans demonstrating in Washington for early payment of the government bonus for their service. General Douglas MacArthur led the light-tank assault on the "Bonus Army" veterans and their families; 55 veterans were injured and their shantytown burned to the ground.

African American civil rights and white backlash

By far the most common use of federal troops in the U.S. has been related to African American civil rights, and the white backlash against those rights. A series of racial confrontations and pogroms in the 20th century involved state National Guard troops, but it was not until World War II that federal troops were directly used. In June 1943, white rioters in Detroit protested a Black housing project and white workers went on strike against promotions of Black workers in local industries. The tension led to a cascading series of rumors, violent clashes, and shootings, resulting in the deaths of 34 people—25 African Americans (18 at the hands of police), and nine whites. Although most of the rioters were white, police arrested four times as many African Americans. President Roosevelt deployed Army tanks and 6,000 troops, who stayed in the city for weeks, as violence also erupted in New York and military bases in Britain.

Federal troops were deployed during the civil rights era to enforce desegregation orders, against intransigent Southern governors who refused to racially inte-

grate the schools. President Eisenhower famously sent Army troops to Little Rock, Arkansas, to escort Black children safely to school past white mobs. President Kennedy federalized the National Guard to enforce federal courts' orders to desegregate the University of Mississippi in 1962, and the University of Alabama and Alabama public schools in 1963. In 1965, President Johnson federalized the Alabama National Guard to protect civil rights marchers at Selma.

But in that same year, the Watts Uprising in Los Angeles signaled a wave of African American urban rebellions against economic inequality, judicial racism, and police brutality, causing repeated deployments of state National Guard troops. It was once again in Detroit, with its extreme segregation and nearly all-white police force, where federal troops were deployed. A July 1967 violent police raid on an African American club (whose patrons were celebrating the return of two soldiers from Vietnam) triggered a conflagration of violence that left 43 residents dead (33 African Americans and ten whites), and 1,189 injured. President Johnson sent in 4,700 paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne to back up the police and 4,000 National Guardsmen.

The assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in April 1968 immediately triggered a wave of urban rebellions around the country that lasted up to two weeks, and the largest deployments of federal troops on U.S. soil since the Civil War. At least 21,000 federal soldiers were sent to cities around the country, 13,600 of them to Washington D.C. and others to Baltimore, Chicago, and other cities. Troop transport planes landed at O'Hare in darkened, combat conditions, and local soldiers were enlisted to guide military units around the city. There were more armed government forces (police and military) used in Chicago alone than in the 1983 invasion of Grenada. At least 43 people were killed in what became known as the "Holy Week Uprisings."

Even Johnson acknowledged, "I don't know why we're so surprised. When you put your foot on a man's neck and hold him down for three hundred years, and then you let him up, what's he going to do? He's going to knock your block off."



California National Guard at the June 2025 Los Angeles protests

First Bush Administration

In September 1968, the U.S. Army published a classified plan known as Garden Plot projecting that “dissatisfaction with the environmental conditions contributing to racial unrest and civil disturbances” may require large-scale federal military interventions “to preserve life and property and maintain normal processes of governments,” laying the basis for a series of martial law-style plans for counterinsurgency at home.

These plans for local martial law were put into motion during the presidency of George H.W. Bush, first in the U.S. Virgin Islands, where in 1989 he sent 1,100 heavily armed Military Police to the island of St. Croix, which had been severely damaged by Hurricane Hugo. The storm damage exacerbated longstanding racial tensions, and the troops’ primary mission was not disaster relief, but suppressing looting (even if it was allowed by stores) and putting down a Black uprising. Although troops and military contractors have since been deployed to other hurricane-damaged regions, such as Florida in 1992 and Louisiana in 2005, they were sent in under state authority.

The largest deployment of federal forces after 1968 was during the Los Angeles Uprising, triggered by the April 1992 acquittal of police officers involved in the beating of Rodney King. Initial mass protests led to arson, looting, and racial violence over 32 square

miles. As 10,000 National Guard troops were overwhelmed, Governor Pete Wilson used the Insurrection Act to request federal troops. President Bush federalized the National Guard, activated reservists at California military bases, and deployed 4,000 Army and Marine troops to set up checkpoints and back up police raids around the city. In one incident, a police officer confronting a shooter requested “cover” from the Marines, meaning to aim their weapons at the house, but the Marines instead unleashed 200 rounds in “covering” fire. In all, 63 people were killed in Los Angeles (including at least seven by police), and 2,000 injured.

The road from 9/11 and Black Lives Matter

The 9/11 attacks in the George W. Bush Administration instantly demonstrated how, in its exclusive focus on overseas interventions, the Pentagon had never really prepared for the actual defense of the “homeland.” The PATRIOT Act and other laws intensified the militarization of law enforcement (equipping police with military weaponry and technology far beyond their needs), the use of private security contractors, military spying on antiwar groups, and the increasing use of some regular Army and Marine units along the U.S.-Mexico border. A 2006 revision of the Insurrection Act allowed the President to deploy troops as a police force during a natural disaster, epidemic, or terrorist attack, though it was reversed two years later.

The result of the so-called “Global War on Terror,” coupled with the continuing wars on drugs and undocumented immigrants, was a blurring of the distinction between wars abroad and the war at home. This trend became painfully evident by 2014 in the militarized, racist response to Black Lives Matter protests in Ferguson, Missouri, and many other cities. In 2020, as the George Floyd Uprising convulsed the country during a pandemic and Depression, Predator drones (from Customs and Border Protection) conduct surveillance flights over Minneapolis, “Lakota” and “Black Hawk” military helicopters fly low to disperse protesters in Washington, and President Trump designated anti-fascist groups as “terrorists.”

As the George Floyd Uprising intensified in 2020, President Trump asked Acting Defense Secretary Mark Esper for options to deploy federal troops to Minneapolis. He signaled to Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, “We have our military ready, willing and able if they ever want to call our military, and we can have troops on the ground every quickly.” Military Police soldiers were ordered to be ready to deploy for crowd and traffic control duties, if the state National Guards could not quell the unrest. Trump put Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman General Mark Milley “in charge,” lambasted state governors, and said he would soon order active-duty federal troops into U.S. cities to “quickly solve the problem for them.” He deployed thousands of National Guard troops from 11 states in the District of Columbia, where he had the direct authority to do so. Milley and Esper balked at deploying regular troops against the protests, causing Trump to name fierce loyalists to their positions in his second term. And of course, on January 6, 2021, Trump refused for hours to deploy troops to protect the U.S. Capitol from far-right insurrectionists evoking his name.

Military dissent

Ordering rank-and-file soldiers into U.S. cities, to repress people in neighborhoods just like theirs, may not be as easy as Trump may think. Military discipline was difficult enough to enforce in Vietnam and Iraq, and could be harder in an American city. Soldiers have the right to refuse illegal orders to harm civilians. The Uniform Code of Military Justice (Article 92) estab-

lishes a duty to obey lawful orders, but also a duty to disobey unlawful orders to that are clearly contrary to the Constitution.

There is a long history of resistance within the U.S. military. Some military enlistees and officers questioned the possibility of attacking protesters in 2020, and resisted the Iraq War a decade earlier, setting up several G.I. coffeehouses near military bases. The troops are about 43 percent people of color, so (like during the Vietnam War) some could refuse or frustrate orders to use their weapons at home. Military dissent during the Vietnam War and against deployments at home has been largely forgotten or glossed over in historical accounts of the era.

Carrying out mass deportations of refugees and up to 11 million undocumented immigrants is a logistical nightmare. If Trump claims the power to deploy the military against dissent, there will be nothing to stop him from also encouraging armed paramilitary militias, or promoting unrestrained mob violence in an “American Kristallnacht” pogrom.

It may be critical to proactively reach out to active-duty Army and National Guard soldiers, preferably via veterans and military families, to educate them about the injustices facing war refugees and undocumented workers. The soldiers could be educated about their own rights and power, not just about becoming individual public refusers, but about more covert collective disobedience (akin to “search-and-avoid” missions in both Vietnam and Iraq).

Veterans’ groups such as Veterans for Peace and About Face could play a pivotal role in reaching the hearts and minds of the troops deployed to crack down on dissent. If soldiers feel they are being given an unlawful order to harm or violate the rights of civilians, “I was just following orders” may not be an adequate legal defense. They can contact the G.I. Rights Hotline, or legally send an “Appeal for Redress” to their congressional representative that is protected under the Military Whistleblower Protection Act. Military personnel know quiet, creative ways to “work-to-rule,” and share vital information about unlawful actions, to help slow down the madness. And if in doubt, they can always kneel in solidarity or pray for guidance.

Listen Officer, Listen Citizen

Michael Albert

There is something happening here and what it is is all too clear.

Officer: Did you watch movies as a child? Did you wonder how Hitler could dominate Germany's thoughts, dreams, and beliefs to the point of nazifying so many minds and getting the rest to accept their lot? I did. I wondered how that was possible. Even as a youngster I had some silly theories. Was it their language? Their diet? Did they have different genes? I idly offered childish blather. But now it is truth time.

Officer: You aren't in a theatre watching a film from the forties. You aren't reading a book that describes the technology of gas chambers. No. You are in the midst of our own present. So no more idle wondering for you. Look in your mirror. Stare at yourself. It's easy to find some truth. Just ask yourself. Demand an answer. Are you going to gleefully Nazify yourself? If so, there's your answer. If not, okay, are you going to sullenly surrender to those who do gleefully goose-step? Will you march alongside others who have uniforms like you and who like you would rather be anywhere else? Are you going to march on that fascistic team? Wield its long guns? That is how Nazification happens. Why? Ask yourself. Orders given. Orders taken.

What would it mean to not gleefully or sullenly agree to help Trump repress liberty and incinerate empathy? The time has come for a hard, pivotal, decision. If you are in position to give repressive orders, don't do it. If you receive repressive orders, disobey them. Today it comes down to that. It's that simple. Active or passive obedience on Trump's side. Active resistance on our side. So, which side are you on?

National Guardian, what the hell are you guarding? Semper Fi Marine, what the hell are you being forever faithful too? It is time to thoughtfully and compassionately decide. Guard Trump to impose ignorance. Be faithful to Trump to destroy dignity. Officer, it has come to that. Marine, that's how it is. Crush freedom or disobey. Which will it be? Obey to corrode hope. Obedience serves Nazification. Is that your aim? Or disobey. Resist. It is rising all around. It is multi focus, multi tactic. That is the higher calling. You know it. And it has come to that.

Citizen: We saw the same movies as the officers didn't we? We wondered too didn't we? Well, now it is no longer movie time. Now it is crunch time. Skip the popcorn. Are you in high school, college, at work, or retired? It doesn't matter. Whatever. Misogyny, racism, power, and profit propel hate. Will you serve hate or serve your neighbors? Which side are you on?

You are not a Proud Thug. Good. Glad to hear it. You are not brandishing a Swastika. Good. Glad to hear it. You have good values. You care. Great. Glad to hear it. Me too. Your children or parents will be too. But there is still a decision to make. Will you look the other way and in doing so abet Trump? Or will you resist to block Trump? The choice is simple. For those who don't wear soldiers' clothes and who don't carry soldiers' tools, our teacher, our professor, our boss, our parent, child, or mate—has no gun. We can disobey. And time has come today—to decide. Will we place our heads in sand, put our eyes in pants pockets, and continue with life as usual—or will we hold our heads high, open our eyes wide, see Trump's disgusting path and resist? Resist. It is rising all around. It is multi focus, multi tactic. It is the higher calling. You know it. And it has come to that.

I could write word after word. I could tout fact after fact. I could present analysis after analysis. I could paint images of hate and images of love, images of regimentation and images of freedom. I could talk of history and of today, I could talk of today and of tomorrow, or I could talk of strategy and of tactics. You can too. And indeed, we need such talk. But really, even before all that, what we need now is simpler than all that. You know, I know, we all know what is happening here. The means are little muddy but the bottom line is crystal clear. Trump lies about everything except what he wants. About his wants Trump has been clear like no one ever before. He wants total control. He wants absolute power plus the corruption that goes with it. So which side are we on?

Resist. However we can, resist today. Resist this Saturday. Resist until Trump, Trumpism, and fascism are driven into history's dustbin. Don't weep over the pain they impose. Organize to make Trump less than zero. And then, after eliminating Trump, struggle on for the true revolution that we all really need. Struggle on until we win a worthy world. Deportations, profits, inequity, abortion, rape, racism, indignity, tariff war, shooting war, genocide, global heating—all of that and much more imposes one unified mutually entwined world of pain. Call it the totality of oppression. To transcend it we need a total struggle, all for one and one for all. Consequences in command. Wage it to win it. June 14th No Kings, and then beyond.



Georgia Air National Guard assist Atlanta Police Department SWAT team enforcing a curfew during demonstrations in Atlanta during Black Lives Matter protests, June 4, 2020.

The Fight For Housing Justice in Washington State

Chris Green

Washington state has a progressive reputation. On the surface, this image might seem plausible: after all Democrats have continuously controlled the state governorship since 1985 and currently control both houses of the state legislature by significant margins. Progressive activists in Seattle, the state's largest city, cemented their city's reputation as a bastion of left wing hellraisers during protests against the World Trade Organization in 1999 and against police brutality in 2020. From 2014 to 2024, Seattle even had a bellicose revolutionary socialist (Kshama Sawant) occupy one of its 9 city council seats, winning election multiple times until she decided not to run again. At \$20.76 per hour, Seattle has the highest minimum wage of any city in the nation. The minimum wage for Washington state itself—\$16.66 per hour—is the highest of the nation's 50 states.

However, beneath these pleasantly progressive features, the state is rife with all of the same social and economic inequities plaguing the rest of the United States. Perhaps nowhere is this more true than in the area of housing. The state's high minimum wage is more than offset by its extremely high cost of living. Recently, the New York Times, citing the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, reported that “between 2001 and 2023, median residential rents in Washington state rose by 43 percent, adjusted for inflation,” while state renter income grew by only 26 percent during the same period. Nowhere in the state is the cost of housing more crushing for many working and middle class persons—with the possible exception of Seattle's wealthy eastern suburbs—than in Seattle itself; in 2024, Seattle's median asking rent (the rent price listed in advertisements by landlords) sat at \$2,072, well above the national median asking rent of \$1,648.

In this article, I will concentrate mainly on the issue of affordable housing in Washington state—and solu-

tions left wing activists are putting forth to address it—and will avoid the related issue of homelessness, one of the leading issues discussed in Washington state politics. It is not that homelessness in the state is not hugely important; it is. According to a 2024 report by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Washington state ranks third among states in its number of homeless residents, behind only California and New York. The issue of homeless encampments in downtown Seattle and around the state has provided constant fodder for the state's right wing activists, podcasters and talk radio demagogues to fan the flames of reactionary backlash amongst the state's public. In the interests of space, I will devote space below to surveying the equally important issue of the political dynamic around the state's increasingly diminishing supply of affordable housing. I will focus especially on the strategies of left wing activists to gain victories for working people in the area of housing, where, like in any policy area, the potential for progressive policy is highly constrained by the influence of big business and the wealthy (especially real estate interests in the case of housing).

Wealth Redistribution

State activists seeking serious solutions to the state's housing crisis have zeroed in on redistributionist policies. In 2018, the Seattle city council passed by a 9-0 vote a “head tax” proposal which would have imposed a special payroll tax on the highest paid employees among the city's largest employers in order to fund the construction of affordable housing. The proposal's most prominent public advocate was the revolutionary socialist city council member Kshama Sawant—along with activists in the local chapter of Socialist Alternative of which she was then a leader—who saw it as a partial solution to address the problem of

extreme gentrification in the Central District, Seattle's historically black neighborhood. However the threat of capital flight quickly spurred the city council to repeal the legislation it had just unanimously passed. With only Sawant and her colleague Teresa Mosqueda dissenting, the council voted to repeal the head tax after major corporations with headquarters in Seattle like Amazon, Starbucks and Vulcan Real Estate issued public denunciations of the tax and began funding a signature gathering campaign to establish a city-wide voter referendum to repeal it.

However in 2020, the political climate in Seattle was different: massive protests around racial justice and demands for government economic assistance in the wake of the Covid pandemic spurred the Seattle city council to successfully implement a new version of the head tax, which like the old, was a tax on the salaries of the highest paid employees at the city's largest companies. A majority of the Jumpstart payroll tax—as it became known—would be used to fund affordable housing, but the rest would be used for economic assistance to small business and Green New Deal style infrastructure projects. Since its passage into law, Jumpstart revenues have brought in much greater revenues than forecast. Seattle mayor Bruce Harrell and the pro-business majority on the city council have tried to take credit for the modest yet tangible achievements of the Jumpstart tax while quietly working to limit its reach. They have worked successfully to divert Jumpstart revenue surpluses to plug existing deficits in the city's general budget (instead of applying the funds for expansion of affordable housing or similar worthy goals—or creating new taxes on the wealthy to reduce the budget deficit).

Meanwhile a grassroots coalition of community groups—including the Seattle chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)—formed in 2021, calling itself House Our Neighbors, to oppose a voter referendum pushed by a big business backed group called Compassion Seattle which—unsuccessfully in the end—sought to enshrine the city government's "sweeps" of homeless encampments in the city charter.

In 2023, House Our Neighbors successfully helped engineer Seattle voter approval of Initiative 135, which created the Seattle Social Housing Developer, a public

authority charged with overseeing the creation in Seattle of "social housing"—a concept which is different from traditional public or affordable housing programs in the United States. The most developed example of social housing in world history is possibly that from the Red Vienna period of interwar Austria: when a socialist city government of Vienna built public housing which was constructed to enhance the democratic solidarity of residents as well as facilitate their access to health care, education, cultural events and other vital needs. The Viennese success in social housing has continued to the present day.

It remains to be seen whether Seattle's version of social housing will resemble that of Red Vienna. There is still a long way to go in terms of the development of community involvement and the political process which will ultimately shape its specific details. For now, it appears that resulting from Prop 1A's passage, Seattle social housing will revolve around the following broad principles: that it be publicly owned; that no renter will pay more than 30 percent of their income for rent; that it consist of renters whose income from employment is anywhere from 0 to 120 percent of the Seattle area's median income; that higher income renters subsidize the rents of lower income renters; and that social housing residents have democratic control over the social housing.

House Our Neighbors secured a major step toward the realization of its goals when Seattle voters approved Proposition 1A in February of this year to generate revenue for the Social Housing Developer, implementing a 5 percent tax on the incomes of persons employed within Seattle city limits making more than \$1 million per year—the new payroll tax is expected to raise \$50 million per year for social housing in Seattle. Seattle voters simultaneously decisively rejected Proposition 1B, an effort by the Seattle city council and the Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce to co-opt the idea of social housing while substantially diluting its impact. Prop 1B would have utilized a mere \$10 million annually for five years for social housing, appropriating it entirely from Seattle's existing Jumpstart tax revenue for affordable housing while subjecting the Social Housing Developer to strict oversight by the pro-business Seattle city council.

Solutions: Renter Legal Protections

In 2021, community activists mobilized by Sawant—including members of the local Socialist Alternative chapter and Seattle union members—played a major role in the Seattle city council’s enactment of multiple pieces of legislation to protect renters in the city. The laws require landlords to give six months notice of future rent increases; to pay relocation expenses equivalent to three months rent if the rent increase is more than 10 percent and the tenant makes less than 80 percent of the area median income; a moratorium on eviction of tenants during winter months and families of schoolchildren during the school year; subsidies for legal defense for low income tenants threatened with eviction; an appeals process for tenants served with 3 day eviction notices for allegedly engaging in criminal or dangerous behavior; and to cap late fees on rent payments at \$10.

The Seattle renter protection laws have come under sustained criticism from local real estate landlords and nonprofit public housing developers. Responding to their concerns, Seattle city council member Cathy Moore is currently preparing legislation to repeal at least some of these protections, including the above listed eviction moratoriums. Given the strong pro-business orientation of the current council and of mayor Bruce Harrel, it is probable that any legislation Moore introduces will pass.

A remarkably similar housing controversy exists 35 miles southeast of Seattle down Interstate 5 in the city of Tacoma, whose population is roughly 223,000. In November 2023, Tacoma voters narrowly approved Initiative 1, which led to the institution of the Landlord Fairness Code, whose components are similar (although not identical) to the above listed Seattle rental protections.

Initiative 1 was launched by Tacoma For All, a grassroots organization created by the Tacoma Democratic Socialists of America and United Food and Commercial Workers Local 367. Tacoma For All operates with democratic voting on organizational direction being taken by paid members at regular meetings. It has made regular efforts to canvas apartment buildings in Tacoma, to explain the new legal rights to ordinary renters

and to convince such renters to become members of Tacoma For All. The organization has tried to popularize the title “Tenant Bill of Rights” for the officially titled Landlord Fairness Code.

As is similarly the case in Seattle, local real estate interests have coalesced around the notion that Tacoma’s Landlord Fairness Code’s moratoriums against evictions during winter months and of families with children during the school year has allowed tenants to avoid paying rent even though, these critics say, they have more than enough money to pay it. They have put forth stories of freeloading renters using the moratoriums and other legal protections to stay in properties without paying rent and putting mom and pop middle class landlords through the most mentally anguishing and financially draining ordeals before finally being able to evict the scoundrels. One of the leading spokespersons for the effort to roll back Initiative 1, former Executive Director of the Tacoma Housing Authority, Michael Mirra, repeated the claim to the Tacoma News Tribune (TNT) in January, implying that the Landlord Fairness Code’s eviction moratoriums enabled renters perfectly capable of paying rent to shaft landlords.

The problem with Mirra’s claim is that there is no evidence that any significant number of renters with the ability to pay rent are exploiting the moratoriums to withhold rent. There are certainly other plausible explanations for people missing their rent payments. One is that worker wages are not keeping up with the exploding growth in housing costs (which the Tacoma Landlord Fairness Code does not address except, very modestly, in its requirement that landlords provide relocation assistance to tenants equivalent to two months rent if they raise rents by more than 5 percent and the tenant does not accept the rent increase). The TNT reported that 77 percent of jobs located within the city of Tacoma “don’t pay enough for a single worker to be able to comfortably afford housing on their own.” It also noted that according to official figures for Pierce County (of which Tacoma is the county seat), “37% of all households are cost-burdened or extremely cost-burdened, meaning residents spend more than 30% of their income on housing.”

Even Sean Flynn, Executive Director of the Rental Housing Association of Washington and a fierce opponent of Initiative 1, told the TNT that as far as he could tell, for the most part, renters were missing rent payments because they simply did not have the money to pay it. “Most people don’t pay their rent because they don’t have the money. It’s not rocket science. If you have the money, you pay the rent.” Rather than make it harder for landlords to evict renters, Flynn argued for government policies to increase subsidies for renters and to encourage the building of more affordable housing.

While Flynn’s call for more affordable housing is not objectionable by itself, the problem is that the private sector, even with governmental incentives, has little motivation to build anywhere near the amount required to meet the demand. Tyron Moore, interim director of Tacoma For All, made this point in a February opinion piece responding to Initiative 1’s critics in the TNT. Moore noted that with population growth, according to the city of Tacoma’s figures, “we must build 43,000 new homes by 2044, with 60% of those new homes affordable to those earning less than 80% of the area median income.” However, Moore observed:

“This requires 1,400 new affordable homes annually—five times the current rate of production. The city’s reliance on subsidizing private developers is clearly inadequate when building luxury apartments remains far more profitable. To make matters worse, city council stripped affordability requirements for developers from the Home in Tacoma zoning reform.”

For their part, Moore and other Initiative 1 supporters point to successes: with the moratoriums many people have been kept sheltered who would otherwise have been evicted. The eviction rate, while rising in Tacoma during 2024, rose at a significantly slower rate than in other areas of the state lacking the renter protections provided by the Landlord Fairness Code. Lauren Romero, an attorney working with Tacoma For All’s tenant legal assistance program, told the TNT that in her experience, the eviction moratorium gave tenants with rent payment difficulties breathing space to approach landlords to secure alternative payment plans.

A Statewide Rental Increase Cap

On May 7, Washington state’s Democratic governor Bob Ferguson signed into law legislation that will cap statewide rent increases at 10% annually or 7% plus inflation, whichever is lower. State progressives were pleasantly surprised that Ferguson attached his signature to the legislation—just as they were pleased that he backtracked to some extent on his loud proclamations upon assuming office in January that he was against new taxes on the wealthy and wanted draconian budget cuts across all state government departments in order to address the state’s estimated two year \$16 billion dollar budget deficit. Upon signing the rent stabilization bill, Ferguson proclaimed that “too many folks are getting priced out” of the housing rental market “and we can’t have that, right? That’s not an option.”

However, the legislation actually contains major loopholes that will likely allow the continuation of the “option” of “folks...getting priced out” of rental housing. As Tyron Moore noted in an email to Tacoma For All members, the legislation allows landlords to engage in “vacancy de-control,” meaning they can raise the rent above the new rent cap if a unit is vacant; this may lead to landlords to put pressure on existing tenants to vacate units or plot to evict them so they can raise the rate higher for new tenants. Also, the legislation exempts new housing from the rent cap for 12 years after the units are occupied. Moore wrote that “with cities pushing for a major expansion of construction over the next 25 years, this means hundreds of thousands of tenants will still face steep rent hikes.”

The rental control law signed into law by Ferguson will undoubtedly provide very modest yet tangible assistance to some Washington renters. However, it can also be said to at best merely nibble around the edges of a deep structural problem within American capitalism: the free market in housing in the United States has failed at providing affordable housing for a large number of American workers and families. As ruling class politicians like Ferguson nibble around the edges of such problems (and often ignore them altogether), it will be up to grassroots organizations like House our Neighbors and Tacoma For All to continually fight for true housing justice for all Americans.

How to Win the Nation's Highest Minimum Wage

Sonali Kolhatkar

Tourism workers in Southern California just won a historic battle for the highest minimum wage in the nation—a perfect counterpoint to the Republican-led tax bill that rewards billionaires at the expense of low-income Medicaid recipients. The union-backed campaign is a powerful lesson in creative, proactive, and long-term mobilizing for economic justice.

Southern California's tourism industry has been salivating at the prospect of an influx of visitors during the upcoming 2026 FIFA World Cup and the 2028 Olympics, both of which Los Angeles will host. Why shouldn't low-wage workers exploit the opportunity as well?

In April 2023, unions, faith groups, and advocacy organizations formed into a coalition called Tourism Workers Rising and cleverly labeled their demand for an “Olympic/Paralympic wage.” They proposed that the Los Angeles City Council pass an ordinance raising the minimum wage for all workers in the tourism industry to \$30 an hour. This includes airport workers and workers at all hotels with more than 60 rooms.

Reverend Jennifer Gutierrez, an elder in the United Methodist Church and the executive director of CLUE (Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice), who worked closely with campaign organizers, explained that “some of the more conservative council members requested a study to see how this [\$30 an hour minimum wage] would affect the economy in the area, and of course a study came back saying it would be good for the economy.”

Gutierrez was referencing an economic impact study commissioned by the City Council, which found that a wage hike would be good for the local



economy and benefit individual workers, small businesses, and local government. The study concluded that the “estimated 23,000 workers directly and indirectly impacted by the proposed increases are expected to spend a large portion of their new earnings stimulating the local economy by purchasing goods and other services.”

Two unions, Unite HERE Local 11, which represents hotel and hospitality workers, and SEIU USWW, whose members work at the Los Angeles International Airport as janitors, security guards, and other workers, joined forces to win the measure. “Any time unions can collaborate together, it makes a big impact,” said Gutierrez.

The coalition used social media to showcase how workers struggle to pay their bills on time in an economy where the cost of living continues to rise while wages stagnate. “I need to pay my electric bill

on time,” said Maria Romero, an airport worker and member of SEIU-USWW, in an Instagram post shared by Tourism Workers Rising. Maria Gonzales, an airline catering worker, said she needs higher wages just to be able to pay rent on time. Laura Bannet, an airport worker, maintained that “we need a raise to have a dignified living wage.”

The fight took place at the intersection of economic and racial justice, with Los Angeles Council member Curren Price estimating that “nearly 9 out [of] 10 tourism workers are people of color.” The multi-racial campaign, reflecting the city’s racially diverse populations, was relentless in pushing and cajoling members of the City Council to vote yes on the ordinance when it came up for a vote in May 2025. Coalition partners recorded social media messages urging council members to vote in favor of the measure, marched and protested in the streets on May Day, and mobilized outside City Hall while a council committee deliberated the ordinance.

In a letter to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the president of FIFA, Unite HERE Local 11 leaders urged them to support the fight for a higher minimum wage, and called out the hypocrisy of global institutions that claim their massive sporting events are good for the economy. Signatories pointed out that “Both FIFA and the IOC have committed themselves to promoting sustainable economic development and humanitarian values... Yet to date, actors like the IOC, LA28, and FIFA have done far too little to ensure that our communities will actually benefit.”

More than two years after launching the campaign, on May 14, 2025, workers testified to the LA City Council about the need for an “Olympic wage” ahead of a full vote on the ordinance. Councilors passed the vote 12 to 3, and, according to the Los Angeles Times, this “translates to a 48 percent hike in the minimum wage for hotel employees over three years. Airport workers would see a 56 percent increase.”

There was no recourse for the City Council, no good reasoning to hinge a “no” vote on, and no-

where to hide from the hundreds of people who gathered regularly to hold them accountable. While local politicians faced tremendous pressure from the hotel and tourism industry, they had to contend with 25 months of grassroots campaigning, fueled by the wrath of workers and their allies. Ultimately, they gave in to the greater pressure—a reminder that political organizing is well-summarized by the adage, “the squeaky wheel gets the grease.”

But moneyed interests will not back down. Hotel chains are enraged at the ordinance and have threatened to withdraw from agreements to offer blocks of rooms at discounts during the 2028 Olympics. Mark Beccaria of Hotel Angeleno told a local channel KTLA, “Common sense says you cannot raise wages over 30 percent in less than a year when revenue is flat.” What he didn’t add is that when revenues spike, shareholders generally pocket the profits—this is by design—rather than voluntarily giving workers increased wages.

If profitable years for hotels translated into higher wages for workers, there would be no worker struggles to pay rent or electric bills. Common sense is precisely what workers are driven by when their unions campaign for higher wages.

Local business leaders are also urging the council, ahead of a final vote, to hold off on the wage increase because of the federal government’s tariffs championed by President Donald Trump. And while it’s true that tariffs have impacted Los Angeles’s local economy, that’s not the fault of tourism workers. Why should workers pay the price of Trump’s tariff-related damage? The Tourism Workers Rising campaign offers an “Organizing 101” course on how to effect change. The dynamics between politicians and their constituents is one of push and pull, of requests, gratitude, public pressure, and uncompromising demands. And, although \$30 an hour is the nation’s highest minimum wage, “it is still not enough for a family to live on in Los Angeles,” said Gutierrez. “It is not a living wage. One job should be enough, and it’s still not enough.” For as long as there is predatory capitalism, there needs to be worker pushback.

Defusing The Next Carbon Bomb: The Fight to Stop Big Oil In Congo

Alexandria Shaner, François Kamate

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is at a critical turning point: while violent conflicts persist in the east of the country, the relaunch of oil and gas block auctions risks worsening instability, steamrolling human rights, and jeopardizing the country's environmental commitments – turning the world's largest terrestrial carbon sink into a massive carbon bomb.

In response to this threat, the Notre Terre Sans Pétrole (Our Land Without Oil) coalition is calling for an immediate halt to the process of putting the 52 oil blocks up for sale, the cancellation of the three oil and gas blocks already awarded, and a complete moratorium on oil and gas exploration and production in the DRC.

They call on international partners, donors, multilateral agencies and companies not to support, finance, or participate in these destructive projects, which betray the aspirations of the Congolese people for a future of peace, justice and dignity. International allies worldwide are urged to join an International Week of Action from June 22 to 28 against oil expansion in the DRC and for climate justice by organizing marches, sit-ins, performances, open letters, online campaigns, and more.

ZNet's Alexandria Shaner and François Kamate, a young climate and human rights defender from North Kivu province, discuss the situation in-depth and share a call to action for the international community.

This interview was conducted in French, then translated and edited for length and clarity.

On May 3rd, the government of the DRC announced it will open the sale of 52 new oil blocks, in addition to the three already assigned to a state owned company. What are the implications of this announcement in terms of ecology, human rights, and government transparency?

This is a decision with serious ecological and legal consequences. It will result in the direct destruction of the Kivu-Kinshasa Green Corridor, a project that is crucial to the preservation of our biodiversity and the national ecological balance.

The decision also runs counter to the DRC's international commitments in terms of environmental protection, particularly in the context of safeguarding the Congo Basin. The Cuvette Centrale (central basin) is home to wetlands vital for the global climate, including vast peatlands and tropical forests, recognised as one of the largest carbon sinks in the world. It does not need oil wells, but protection and restoration.

In addition, this decision constitutes a clear violation of human rights, in particular the right to a healthy and equitable environment. Even today, we are being told by our government about their “expertise and respect for protected areas”, but where is the transparency? Which local community was consulted? The project has been relaunched in opacity, following the cancellation of a previous tender tainted with several irregularities.

Our struggle is being waged on several fronts, and it is imperative to make them transparent and to connect them, both for local communities and for the international community:

As mentioned, after the previous failed attempt to auction 27 oil blocks, the Congolese government launched a new map of 52 oil blocks, many of which



Notre Terre Sans Pétrole (Our Land Without Oil) is a citizen-led campaign that firmly opposes the expansion of oil and gas projects in the DRC.
Image credit: Congo Basin Alliance

are located in the Cuvette Centrale. This vital carbon reservoir is crucial for the global climate; exploiting it would release billions of tons of CO₂ and endanger ecosystems and Indigenous communities.

Additionally, in the Albertine Graben, a highly biodiverse region, oil blocks are being targeted for integration into the EACOP (East African Crude Oil Pipeline) megaproject. A petroleum resource-sharing agreement has already been signed between the DRC and Uganda, increasing the risk of unregulated cross-border exploitation.

Three gas blocks are also part of this fossil fuel offensive. The Congolese government is currently seeking to allocate them to controversial companies involved in financial, environmental, and corruption scandals, as documented in past investigations. This lack of transparency is deeply concerning and incompatible with responsible governance.

Meanwhile, the Anglo-French oil and gas company PERENCO, already active in Moanda (DRC), continues to extract oil under disastrous human and environmental conditions – without the free, prior, and informed consent of local communities. More recent-

ly, the Congolese government signed a new agreement with Trafigura Group, a multinational company already accused of large-scale pollution and human rights violations in several Global South countries.

How do you see the links between the ongoing violence in the DRC and extractivism – whether of fossil fuels, minerals, or labor?

The current violence in the DRC is closely linked to extractivism. You could even say that extractivism is the driving force behind the decades long armed conflict. Multinational corporations, with the complicity of neighboring countries, support armed groups in their bid to control Congolese natural resources. Furthermore, several bilateral agreements between the Congolese state and foreign powers, such as the sovereignty agreement with Belgium, hardly benefit the Congolese people. Instead, these agreements facilitate the takeover of our natural wealth by countries like Belgium and the United States, to the detriment of our development.

Our position on this dynamic remains steadfast – we say NO to this policy of masked destruction dressed as “development”. We reiterate our position against

this project that threatens biodiversity, vital ecosystems, the rights of local communities and the planet's climate future.

The cancellation of the DRC's 2022 oil tender in late 2024 sent a clear message: the oil sector here is neither viable nor credible. With no serious bidders and widespread irregularities – from total opacity to ignored environmental and social assessments – the process collapsed under the weight of its own failures. This outcome reflects a broader truth: the Congolese oil sector cannot deliver sustainable development. It lacks transparency, accountability, and legitimacy in the eyes of the global energy industry.

Moanda, where oil has been extracted for nearly 50 years, is a stark example. Rather than improving lives, oil exploitation has deepened poverty, destroyed ecosystems, and fueled injustice. The harm there has triggered legal challenges and left a legacy of pollution, division, and disempowerment. Ignoring these realities, oil companies risk repeating – and amplifying – those harms, facing severe legal, financial, and reputational consequences in the process.

The promise of oil as a development engine is an illusion. Revenues benefit a small elite while most Congolese face worsening poverty and hunger. In a country where corruption in the extractive sector is systemic, any new oil project will only entrench inequality and instability. This is especially dangerous in a region already experiencing climate stress, displacement, and conflict. Far from bringing peace or prosperity, oil fuels unrest and repression.

We call on oil companies and our government to withdraw from this harmful trajectory. True development lies not in deepening extractive dependency, but in supporting community-led solutions, clean energy alternatives, and a just transition that protects people, nature, and the future.

How is the resistance organizing itself against this new fossil fuel project? Could you talk about Notre Terre Sans Pétrole, local groups, and international solidarity?

A well-coordinated, citizens' fightback is already underway to stop this dangerous project. Notre Terre Sans Pétrole (Our Land Without Oil) is a citizen-led campaign that firmly opposes the expansion of oil and gas projects in the DRC. We have brought together Congolese environmental groups and other civil society groups, as well as local and international social movements – we are now a growing coalition of more than 176 Congolese, African, and international organizations. We call for the definitive abandonment of all future hydrocarbon exploitation projects in the DRC and are also proposing sustainable alternatives to fossil fuel projects.

For example, part of our coalition are the Extinction Rebellion groups in the DRC, who have released demands and a call to collective action, to raise our voices to say no to fossil energies and yes to a free and green DRC:

- The immediate cancellation of the sale of these oil blocks
- An independent and public audit of the process
- Respect for the rights of and inclusion of local communities
- A real transition to renewable energies

We are also building on the successful cancellation of the previous oil and gas tender in 2024. Over a multi-year campaign, activists and affected community members in the DRC, alongside international allies, campaigned tirelessly to defeat the previous sale of these oil blocks. Several campaigns were run to oppose the auctioning of oil blocks, including Pétrole Non Merci, Save Virunga and others. During the implementation of these campaigns, we faced many challenges: insecurity and repression, arbitrary arrests, impassable roads to affected areas, and lack of resources to cover all target areas. Now, we must again sound the alarm and mobilize.

Despite these obstacles, important lessons were learned that empower us for the struggle ahead – the power of nonviolent action as a means of exerting pressure, the importance of frequent field actions, and the need for continuous mobilization to force the authorities to respect their commitments.

In Uganda, 11 nonviolent protesters were recently arrested and illegally detained while trying to hand over a letter to KCB Bank Uganda asking them to stop funding the highly controversial East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) project, a pipeline criticized for its devastating consequences including destruction of natural habitats and displacement of more than 10,000 families. Eco-defenders in the DRC have come out in support of the Stop EACOP activists – how do you understand the connection between this repression in Uganda and the ongoing struggle of eco and human rights activists in the DRC?

What is happening in Uganda against the eco-defenders is similar to our situation in the DRC. We stand in solidarity to demand that the Ugandan activists must be released immediately, and the EACOP project, with its disastrous consequences for local populations, must be halted. It is unacceptable for critical voices to be repressed. Activists deserve respect and dignity for their selfless struggle in the service of humanity and the planet.

Notre Terre Sans Pétrole was actually inspired by the success of the StopEACOP campaign in Uganda. We share a call for the definitive abandonment of all future hydrocarbon exploitation projects in our countries, and the vision to promote energy alternatives that respect the environment and the rights of local communities. Stop EACOP's initiative and bravery under extreme repression has raised awareness and strengthened the global fight against hydrocarbons.

Our struggles are inextricably linked beyond borders because extractivism, and the repression required to carry it out, is an international project. A recent enactment of a law by President Tshisekedi ratifying a long-hidden 1990 agreement with Uganda is deeply alarming. This law paves the way for oil exploitation in some of the most sensitive ecological zones in the DRC, including areas near Lakes Albert and Edward and the UNESCO-listed Virunga National Park. The Notre Terre Sans Pétrole campaign strongly condemns this decision, which directly contradicts the president's own rhetoric of the DRC as a "solution country" to the climate crisis.

Instead of protecting biodiversity and local communities, this law doubles down on fossil fuel extraction, threatens critical ecosystems, and risks deepening tensions with Uganda. It also reinforces the destructive EACOP project, already widely condemned for displacing communities and endangering Lake Victoria. Past cross-border oil deals, like the one with Angola, have shown these agreements to be both environmentally devastating and economically ineffective, costing the DRC tens of billions.

We urgently call for a permanent renunciation of oil and gas exploitation in these regions. The future lies not in fossil fuels but in clean energy, sustainable development that puts people over profit, and conservation that genuinely benefits local communities and protects our shared natural heritage.

Are there upcoming campaigns or actions that you'd like to amplify? And how can people around the world accompany the people of the DRC in this struggle?

We have set up a task force to fight this new oil project. The first field actions will begin in June, where we will denounce this ill-considered and damaging government decision, and demand that Multinational corporations like PERENCO, Trafigura, and TotalEnergies/EACOP be held to account for the damage already caused to communities. As they continue to destroy ecosystems, violate human rights, and endanger lives, we must stop their ongoing exploitation of the DRC, which has enjoyed the complicity of government.

We make an urgent appeal to the international community: turn your gaze to what is happening in the DRC, and act to save the Congo and its people. Save the entire planet from the release of a massive carbon bomb whose harms will not respect borders.

There will be an International Week of Action from June 22 to 28 against oil expansion in the DRC and for climate justice. We ask international allies to organize marches, sit-ins, performances, open letters, online campaigns, and more.

David and Goliath—Northampton Activists Want Munitions Icon, L3 Harris, to Leave Town

Phil Wilson

You might survive a nuclear strike, but I won't. I live on the Sharpie X that some foreign general scratched upon the globe. Maybe all of us not residing in Hiroshima or Nagasaki suffer from an imaginative deficit when it comes to matters of mushroom clouds, slow radiation deaths, and the lucky creatures instantly vaporized. You might not live down the road from weapons manufacturer, L3 Harris, but I do. Northampton, Massachusetts has been called the top "lesbian friendly" city in America, and is rather known as a countercultural hub, but I don't want to idealize my town – we underfund our schools, harass our homeless and might generally be seen as an affluent, complacent town with little diversity. Still, Northampton's citizens lean as far to the left as any people in our dystopian nation. In 2020 we voted in the Democratic primary by a two to one margin for Bernie Sanders over Joe Biden. We filled our downtown streets with thousands of angry people after the murder of George Floyd and thousands marched a month ago against Trump.

If we can't offer substantial pushback to one of the most evil outposts of the military industrial complex, who else can? Northampton might be the perfect setting for a pitched battle in opposition to the cold hearted engine of America's dying empire. We have a rather dramatic clash of inevitable foes – a major manufacturing hub of Gazan genocide, the site where guided systems of nuclear delivery receive loving refinement, and a local town government that conceivably might one day reflect the anti-war values of a dazed, trembling constituency. This is where the rubber meets the road.

L3 Harris occupies one of the highest points on a rolling terrain of glacial origin. It operates within

a nondescript glass and metal rectangular structure that might house a Tire Barn or a Planet Fitness. Atop the bland construction sits a large glass room that overlooks a practice target on Mt Tom, situated several miles to the southeast. Here, the technicians of extinction tinker with state-of-the art optical devices aimed at local geology – Mt Tom, and maybe Beijing or Moscow after that. It's a dangerous world. L3 Harris has already helped to level Gaza.

Only a few decades ago, this area was the site of an enormous state hospital, with lavish and ornate Victorian brick structures that recently succumbed to the wrecking ball. The mental health tradition of Northampton still colors the neighborhood with nonprofit ServiceNet buildings and The Department of Mental Health staring across the street from the offices where L3 Harris employees design, build and test the optical devices that might someday contribute to the end of organized life on earth. Diagonally from the front of these offices one gazes upon a large, somewhat sterile sprawl of new housing development. A left hand turn out of the L3 Harris parking lot brings you to lush community gardens in a half of a minute. Nothing on Spring Street arouses alarm. I must have jogged past L3 Harris a thousand times on my daily runs without ever imagining that I trotted on the edge of an invisible precipice.

On May 1st my wife and I, with my son's dog, Pogo, go to a Northampton protest of several hundred people who March from Prince Street to the local town hall. Lately, whenever I take Pogo to a protest I bring his sign which reads, "Dogs Against DOGE – Bite Fascism." This is clever enough to attract a "Springfield Republican" photographer and get our pictures in the

local paper, but other folks carried more appropriately themed slogans, like “L3 Harris Murders Children in Gaza,” or, “L3 Harris, Out Of NoHo!” The latter sign made me curious – can we really get L3 Harris out of Northampton?

After the protest I call one of our most courageous city council members and ask her, is that a possibility, can the town force them to leave? Funny that you ask, she responds, a group of people are going to meet in my office to explore this. Want to join us?

That is how I learn that I live on a Sharpie X drawn by a hypothetical Russian general. One of my fellow group members emails us this:

“L3 is a contributor to one of the three triad legs of the US nuclear forces. The sea based leg through its optics related work on the SSBN Ohio Class nuclear subs carrying the Trident D5 ballistic missile (SLBM.) It is this work that qualifies Northampton as a potential counterforce strike target in a nuclear war between the US and Russian nuclear forces.”

I also learn via the group that the City of Northampton has made a rather vague, ineffectual swat at the nuclear industry in the form of a 2019 executive policy order by then Mayor, David Narkewicz:

“Notwithstanding the provisions of chapter thirty B of the general laws and any other general or special law to the contrary, the City of Northampton may disqualify from an award of a contract any bidder or vendor who participates in the design, manufacture or maintenance of nuclear weapons. Such disqualification shall apply to any bidder that is a subsidiary entity controlled by a company that engages in the design, manufacture or maintenance of such weapons, and to any bidder that is a parent or holding entity of a subsidiary company that engages in the design, manufacture or maintenance of such weapons.”

It takes an agile reader a few seconds to understand that this executive order has no teeth. It merely says that the architects of nuclear doom, if they attempt to engage in, say, a side-gig of patching roads or repairing bridges, can be scratched from local contract bidding on the basis of their intention to destroy planet earth. I’d rather assume that L3 Harris could give a rat’s ass about local projects – as the sixth largest munitions manufacturer in the most armed nation on earth, they rake in billions of dollars arming some hundred different nations to the teeth. L3 Harris, of course, plays a major role profiting over the bloody destruction of Gaza, but they also sell arms to Qatar, which supports Hamas. Arming both sides of a conflict is the norm for armaments makers, who see nations as “customers.” Think of Nike giving massive contracts to both LeBron James and Kevin Durant. If either the Lakers or the Suns win, so does Nike. But L3 Harris doesn’t dabble in pull up threes and windmill dunks – their products deliver more important results, leveled cities, tons of rubble, smoking hospital ruins and bodies crushed underneath.

The policy order from former Mayor Narkewicz illustrates something of the confused ambiguity manifest by town officials regarding local munitions manufacturing. When L-3 Communications took over Kollmorgan Electro-Optical a decade and a half ago, the town authorities greeted the development with 13 years of tax breaks for one of the key players in the nuclear weapons industry. The bloody crimes of US military aggression, and US armaments trade has been fueled with the poison of small town complicity. Now, Northampton’s radical community has woken from a long slumber.

On May 14th I attend, via zoom, a Northampton Ordinance Review Committee meeting that is set up to talk about mundane local things, but also to devote a few moments to the topic of city options vis a vis L3 Harris. The city lawyer, Alan Sewald, stated that he has researched and found no precedent for a local government successfully challenging the rights of an arms manufacturer



Protesters at the rally in Northampton condemn the city for tax breaks to the weapons manufacturer, L3Harris, and are demanding a weapons ban and a transition to ethical local jobs and industry. The protest started outside the L3Harris offices on Prince Street and continued through Smith College to the Northampton City Hall, Thursday, May 1, 2025. (Photo: Douglas Hook)

to operate within city limits. He does not, however, eliminate the possibility of Northampton doing so, but his voice conveys little enthusiasm. He mentions that a city somewhere challenged such a manufacturer on the basis that a munitions factory had been found to have polluted local water sources and endangered the environment. This would not be a factor, he continues, with L3 Harris which poses no direct threat to the Northampton community.

I unmute myself and ask to respond. Only some six people are present and nobody opposes my speaking. I jump right into the idea that some imaginary Russian general wielding a Sharpie might see Northampton as a huge swollen in-

fection upon the planet. I sheepishly admit that this might appear to be far-fetched, but we live in a moment of unlikely events tumbling forth with ever more startling momentum. I am paraphrasing myself somewhat poetically – in truth, I stammer something nervously, groping for each word. To my surprise, people nod approvingly, and the town lawyer offers no pushback.

Later, I meditate rather skeptically on the idea that L3/Northampton comprises the fulcrum of US nuclear threat. After all, we have Lockheed Martin, RTX (formerly Raytheon), General Dynamics, Boeing, Oshkosh, Pratt and Whitney, Northrup Grumman and on and on. These corporations have hundreds of factories distributed

across all fifty states. These are all major employers holding massive military contracts, and nonchalantly buried (almost invisibly so) within neighborhoods no more exceptional than the bucolic, rolling hills of Spring Street, Northampton. Maybe everyone in the US lives in the shadow of the munitions empire. It seems possible that I do not inhabit a particularly iconic X drawn by one of Putin's generals, but does that make L3 Harris any less insidious?

These mega arms conglomerates are connected in highly complex ways. L3 Harris, for example, makes parts for missiles made by Northrup Grumman. All of the big players in the death industry cavort, conspire, merge and grow. And they advertise in the same Orwellian fashion as junk food makers, oil companies and car manufacturers. The advertising strategies that promote Coke, Pepsi and MacDonald's markets serve Lockheed Martin and L3 Harris. We have been disarmed with a tsunami of advertising bullshit. Here is how L3 Harris would like you to imagine them:

"We are proud of our ability to deliver innovative solutions for our customers' mission-critical challenges while helping to make the world a safer place. Our 46,000 talented and dedicated employees are committed to creative problem-solving and continuous improvement in everything we do." – Chris Kubasik L3 Harris Chair and CEO

Here is commercial spin from Boeing:

"We deliver the decisive mission advantage for our customers through enabling global control, global reach and global strike. Our open systems architecture approach delivers flexibility for customers to rapidly upgrade and continuously insert capabilities to outpace the threat.

Boeing ushered in the jet age, launched the space age, revolutionized rotorcraft and defends freedom around the world: Our work matters for those who matter the most."

No connoisseur of advertising spin can miss the critical valence of the word, "freedom." The most Orwellian word in the English language has become a mantra in the Madison Avenue, mind embalming slogans of America's death industry.

Lockheed Martin says it this way:

"Lockheed Martin has a long history of successfully providing its customers with missile and missile systems that are affordable, proven, and in production.

Our reputation is backed by a record of exceptional contractual performance and successful partnerships, in both the U.S. and international defense communities.

Lockheed Martin is supporting the warfighter by providing a wide variety of highly effective and reliable weapons systems to ensure that the right weapon is available for each situation that they may face."

I have a slight difficulty wrapping my head around the concept of the "international defense community." Is this a gated community with picnic tables and shuffleboard courts? And what is the "right weapon for each situation they may face?" Which "product" performs best when blowing up an orphanage? An elementary school? A hospital? I imagine neatly dressed salespersons excusing themselves to search the supply closet for a guided system in a cardboard box. Is there a money back guarantee? A sixty day return policy? A promise that Lockheed Martin will not be undersold by Chinese competitors?

The architects of mass extinction have mastered the universal language of capitalism so that a nuclear warhead, a sound system, an electric toothbrush, a used car and a coffee making appliance all dissolve into a murky sameness of customers, salespeople and a population united in the existential quest to get the best deal. In our society we compete as workers and consumers – a lonely

battle of one against all with only corporate winners. As democratic socialist writer Grace Blakely stated in a recent interview, “resisting capitalism is about cutting through our sense that we are all alone.”

Seven Northampton residents just a few mornings ago have taken Blakely’s advice as we picket L3 Harris at 6:30 in the morning. I learn that one of my comrades – a veteran in his eighties – has recently been arrested during a protest at L3 Harris. In the hierarchy of resistance some people show singular courage.

We hope to make eye contact with L3 Harris workers as they arrive for their shifts. Someone hands me a sign in red paint stating: “L3 Harris kills in Gaza.” The octogenarian facing court charges waves a flag emblazoned with, “Veterans for Peace.” A man drives by in a pickup truck (not an L3 worker) and screams, “you are all fucking traitors.” Others honk at us in solidarity. Most of the workers pulling into the company parking lot avert their gaze. One flashes the peace sign, but that might be sarcastic. Several wave politely. We can’t know what goes through the minds of these workers. In the well-known case of Lucas Aerospace (a UK based munitions corporation that folded during the 1970’s), a group of armaments workers attempted to turn the company into a worker owned cooperative. These workers aspired to build renewable energy technology rather than weapons. One should never assume that armaments workers do not secretly abhor their niche.

Hannah Arendt observed that Nazi war criminals had little or no access to dissenting views. The seven of us carrying signs early in the morning – five older and elderly men, one middle aged and one younger woman – attempt to jiggle whatever moral vulnerability might twitch uncomfortably within these people. We are free to see them as monsters, victims or potential allies. Our demonstration is premised on embracing the last choice. We protest with the understanding that the divide between munitions workers and anti-war ac-

tivists might have a bridge. The history of Lucas Aerospace offers encouragement.

There are 550 Northrup Grumman factories operating in the US. Lockheed Martin owns 350 facilities, and has 13,000 US based suppliers. The arms industry has millions of workers and annually earns hundreds of billions of dollars. In how many communities nationwide are local activists wrestling with outposts of the weapons industry? Are we unique in Northampton? Northampton may seem like a radical place compared to most towns, but our city government is well to the right of the population. We will need to elect a new mayor and new council members to mobilize any sort of city policy to ban weapons makers from our town. Local political movements are already preoccupied with finding new slates to properly fund schools.

I call the town clerk and ask her if it is possible to call for a referendum on L3 Harris’s continued presence. No, she tells me, but you could launch an “initiative petition” which only requires 250 signatures from voters including 25 from each ward. I will bring this information back to the group at our next meeting.

The man with the veterans for peace flag tells me that L3 has taken down their sign and no longer mows the grass adjacent to the spot where protestors gather on Wednesday mornings. With only a few old people hovering about with signs, we have evidence of nominal anxiety in the corporate ranks. What if 500 picketers gathered every Wednesday?

There may be no precedent for local activists chasing the death industry out of town. Deeds begin with thoughts and a number of people in Northampton have recently imagined that we can throw L3 Harris out of NoHo. Would this create a domino effect? Somewhere, local activists will gain control of a town government and evict the business of mass murder. If this precedent is a precondition for planetary survival, it has to happen soon – maybe in NoHo.