



MAGAZINE

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“History shows...even seemingly miraculous advances are the result of small steps taken by many people, often over a long period...the actions of any of us can give hope and sustenance to others.”

- Paul Rogat Loeb



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Taring Padi, The Institute Of Radical Imagination,
People's Justice n. 9, People's Liberation, (acrylic on canvas, 450×450 cm), 2026.
Photo Leonardo Gava.

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Why Ro Khanna and AOC Should Run for President in 2028

Jeff Cohen, Norman Solomon

Fifteen years ago, during President Obama's first term, we co-founded RootsAction as an online progressive group challenging not only Republicans but also the corporatism and militarism of the Democratic Party. RootsAction supported Bernie Sanders for president in 2016 and 2020. Two years before the 2024 election disaster that returned Donald Trump to the White House, RootsAction launched the Don't Run Joe campaign, with the warning that the renomination of Joe Biden by Democrats "would be a tragic mistake."

Despite polls showing as early as 2022 that strong majorities of Democrats wanted a 2024 nominee other than Biden, the "Don't Run Joe" message went unheeded until Biden's debate debacle in June 2024. By then, it was too late for the open primary process needed to produce a ticket that could inspire activists – and defeat the fascistic faux-populism of Trump.

Like the 2024 victory of the twice-impeached, repeatedly indicted Trump, his 2016 win was avoidable. Tad Devine makes the case in his new book, "How the Democrats Screwed Bernie." Devine had been a top strategist for mainstream Democrats for decades before he joined Bernie's first presidential campaign.

One lesson we've learned over the last 15 years is that it's a big mistake for activists to sit back and expect the Democratic Party establishment to serve up candidates who can mobilize voters and win elections. That establishment failed us in winnable presidential elections in 2000, 2004, 2016 and 2024. Devine, who knows the mechanisms inside and out, says the dollar-dominated process is often rigged against outsider "candidates who connect with voters, who understand voter anxieties" – and these genuinely populist candidates "are more likely



Photo by: Gage Skidmore

to succeed in general elections than those who rely primarily on insider muscle."

This week, RootsAction teamed up with Progressive Democrats of America to announce that we will jointly launch, just after the November midterm elections, a campaign urging Reps. Ro Khanna and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to run for the 2028 Democratic presidential nomination. "The voices of Khanna and/or AOC are needed in the presidential campaign to ensure that voters hear serious solutions," the campaign's petition says. "Without a progressive populist advocate atop the ticket, the Democratic response would be woefully underwhelming – enabling right-wing demagoguery to push voter unrest in dangerous and divisive directions."

The petition statement adds that the presence of Khanna and/or AOC in the presidential race "is crucial to foster debate on healthcare, jobs, AI, militarism and the U.S. relationship with Israel, along with many other issues important to a wide range of voters."

Congressman Khanna – whose name recognition has grown recently because of his legislative battles to release the Epstein files and to end the Iran War, and his detention in the occupied West Bank by Israeli settlers – represents our country's wealthiest district and much of Silicon Valley. He wants to increase taxes on the rich. He calls himself “a progressive capitalist.”

Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez entered the House with great fanfare after a 2018 Democratic primary victory over one of the party's top leaders on Capitol Hill (Joe Crowley, now a corporate lobbyist) representing a working-class, Latino-majority district in New York City. She led the effort to bring the jobs-creating Green New Deal proposal to Congress. She calls herself “a democratic socialist.”

While there is a difference in how these two politicians label themselves, most voters will be much more interested in whether each will address the needs of the working class and fight the greed of the billionaires. Both are direct political descendants of Bernie Sanders – AOC was active in the 2016 Bernie campaign, which inspired her to run for Congress, and she regularly joined Bernie last year at Fighting Oligarchy rallies; Khanna was a surrogate and national co-chair in Bernie's 2020 presidential campaign.

RootsAction's coalition partner in this initiative, Progressive Democrats of America, has a history of major success in candidate recruitment. In late 2013, PDA launched the “Run, Bernie, Run” movement, which drafted Sen. Sanders to seek the Democratic nomination in 2016 – a campaign that elevated the national conversation and helped spark today's progressive upsurge.

The RunRoRunAOC.org petition argues that either Khanna or Ocasio-Cortez – or both of them – need to be in the presidential race. If both enter it, the organizations behind this recruitment initiative are not worried that the two will somehow “split the progressive vote.” As shown by the historic wave of insurgent victories in this year's Democratic primaries, the party's electoral base is largely and increas-

ingly progressive. It's not a small sliver of voters. And a progressive bloc of delegates at the party's national convention in August 2028 would be all to the good, pushing for popular policies such as taxing the rich, resisting Big Tech's AI data centers, abolishing ICE, green jobs initiatives, enhanced Medicare for All, cutting the military budget and stopping the weapons flow to Israel.

During last year's New York City mayoral campaign – which, thankfully, employed ranked-choice voting – two progressive candidates actually ran as a duo in the Democratic primary: Zohran Mamdani and Brad Lander. Mamdani became mayor thanks significantly to Lander, and now Lander is heading to Congress thanks in part to Mamdani's endorsement and support. In other races, progressives have run in tandem in crowded fields, maintaining a non-aggression strategy while bolstering each other's positions.

We should remember that in the early months of the 2019-2020 Democratic presidential race – before a fraught personal split between Sen. Elizabeth Warren and Bernie – the presence of the two previously friendly candidates raising similar issues of inequality and corporate greed had actually moved the whole Democratic debate in a notably more progressive direction.

Despite millions of dollars flooding into the campaign coffers of corporatist Democratic candidates from special interests representing AI, crypto and Israel, and despite assists to those candidates from corporate media, the 2026 Democratic primaries have produced an unprecedented wave of victories by underfunded progressive candidates. These insurgent successes have occurred at local and state-wide levels.

It will soon be time for progressives to focus on the national level.

Leaving the 2028 presidential nominating process to the money-drenched party elites – with their record of electoral defeats, governance failures and betrayals – would be a recipe for disaster.

A Shift in Europe from Right to Left Is Possible

Ali Mokhtari

In several European countries, parliamentary and presidential elections have become the scene of a historic contest between right-wing and left-wing forces. In Germany, state elections are underway, and the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) has surpassed all progressive parties in one of the states. In Sweden, the parliamentary election on September 13 is taking place with the Social Democrats and other center-left parties facing a right-wing government, and the main issue is not simply a change of government. The Sweden Democrats, the far-right party that has supported the government since 2022, are now demanding formal participation in government. In recent polls, the gap between the two camps has been narrow.

The contest is even hotter in France. The 2027 presidential election could also affect the prospects of the left in other European countries. It is no coincidence that left-wing forces across Europe are closely following the French election campaign and the ups and downs in polling for different forces, while the media are discussing various scenarios, from the danger of France's leadership falling into the hands of the right to the left's ability to change the current direction in Europe.

The struggle between the left and right in France has taken a different form. The far right remains at the top of the polls for the 2027 presidential election, but the left has also entered the campaign with renewed strength. The French Communist Party has nominated Fabien Roussel, Jean-Luc Mélenchon has once again become one of the main candidates, Raphaël Glucksmann is preparing for the presidency on the center-left, and the Greens and other left-wing currents are also organizing their own course. As a result, the issue is not simply whether this or that individual can reach the sec-

ond round of the election. The debate is about how the French left can once again become an organizing, mobilizing and decisive political force at a time when the far right has become a dominant force.

This issue is also important for Europe. France is one of the largest countries in the European Union, a nuclear power and one of the Union's two main pillars. If the French left can come to power in the 2027 presidential election, its impact will extend beyond France's borders. Such a victory could change the debate over economic policy, public investment, social services, the environment, foreign policy and the fiscal rules of the European Union. For this reason, the ongoing struggle in France has become a point of hope for sections of the European left.

The Right's Advance, the Left's Return to the Electoral Contest

France has witnessed the erosion of traditional parties and declining confidence in the political system in recent years. Emmanuel Macron came to power in 2017 with a promise to move beyond the old divide between right and left. But his presidency gradually turned into a centrist, business-friendly policy close to sections of Europe's center-right. The end of his presidency has also left open the question of which force can fill the political vacuum that has emerged.

On the right, the National Rally, led by Marine Le Pen, is leading the polls. On the left, the situation is more complicated. The left has no single candidate, and differences among its currents over the program, relations with Europe, economic policy and the form of an electoral alliance continue. Nevertheless, contrary to the image sometimes presented



of the French left as a fragmented force without a perspective, several social and economic issues from the left's program have moved to the center of the political struggle.

Wages are one of them. In a recent debate among candidates before representatives of employers, Mélenchon's proposal to increase the minimum wage was met with reactions and even laughter from some of those present. But the debate did

not end there. Purchasing power is now one of the main issues in the election. Inflation and economic stagnation have increased pressure on wages, and a large proportion of workers have incomes that fall short of the cost of living. According to data cited by *Le Monde*, half of full-time private-sector employees earn less than €2,190 net per month, while one-tenth earn less than €1,492.

This issue is also connected to one of the important differences between the right, center and left in French economic policy. Some candidates see reducing employers' or employees' social contributions as a way of increasing net income. Critics argue that such a policy could reduce the financial resources of the social security system. Trade unions and some left-wing forces, by contrast, call for direct wage increases and emphasize the responsibility of companies to pay higher wages.

The debate over wages, therefore, is not simply one of the promises made during an election campaign. It concerns the relationship between labor, profit, social services and the role of the state, and for this reason it has gained an important place in the political struggle of the left.

Mélenchon Is a Sign of Change, Not the Whole of It
Mélenchon's return to the center of the electoral contest is one of the most important developments of recent months. He has been a candidate in the previous three presidential elections and received 22 percent of the vote in the first round in 2022. Polls now show that he could reach the second round again. In some scenarios, his support is estimated at around 16 to 17 percent, putting him in competition with moderate candidates for second place.

There are several reasons for this growth. La France Insoumise has an established electoral organization, and Mélenchon has a significant base among young people and sections of the urban suburbs. In recent years, he has also taken clear positions on the distribution of wealth, wage increases, public services, the environment and foreign policy.

But Mélenchon's importance lies not only in the number of votes he can win. He is one of the few European politicians who has tried to directly connect dissatisfaction with existing policies to a different political program. He advocates higher taxes on wealth, public investment, environmental planning and broad changes to France's political structure. In foreign policy, he has also spoken in favor of France leaving NATO, non-alignment, and greater emphasis on diplomacy and international law.

These positions have made him an important figure for one section of the French left and an obstacle to left-wing unity for another. The electoral issue is also clear: Mélenchon may be able to outpoll many of his left-wing rivals in the first round, but current polls show that he would lose by a wide margin to Le Pen in the second round. In one of the scenarios examined, Le Pen and Mélenchon's shares of the vote were 68 to 32 percent.

The divide facing the left is not limited to differences among the various forces of the left. Whenever the center of the Republican camp has faced the far right, it has reduced the left's role to supporting itself, without being willing in return to support the left or to give up its own claim to the presidency and governing the country in favor of a broader agreement. The left, too, cannot narrow the gap with this section of society by lowering its demands. The challenge for the left is to bring more people into the political arena without retreating from its program and demands, and to broaden its social and electoral base of support.

From this perspective, the problem for the left is not simply who can reach the second round. A candidate who has the greatest chance of reaching the second round is not necessarily the one who can win the largest number of votes in that round. The left must be able to bring more forces with it while maintaining its program, and become a force that others are also compelled to take into account in confronting the far right.

At the same time, reducing the French left to Mélenchon's popularity or lack of popularity gives an incomplete picture of the country's political situation. His growth is part of a broader change in which economic and social issues have once again gained a greater place in politics.

The French Communist Party and the Return of the Class Question

Fabien Roussel's candidacy from the French Communist Party is another example of this trend. In the party's recent internal referendum, members

supported his candidacy with 72.06 percent of the vote. Roussel and party leaders say their aim is to bring class issues, employment, industry and public services back to the center of the electoral struggle.

In its program, the Communist Party emphasizes retirement at the age of 60, reindustrialization and the expansion of public services. Roussel also wants to make his campaign different from the 2022 campaign and says his aim is not to confront other left-wing candidates.

This decision reflects an important disagreement within the French left. Some Communist Party members have called for joining a unified process to select a left-wing candidate, and some have even supported Mélenchon. But the party leadership has chosen the path of an independent candidacy.

At the same time, Roussel and his campaign director emphasize that presidential candidates should not stand in the way of forming a broad alliance for the parliamentary elections. They want any possible future alliance to have deeper roots in local communities than previous alliances.

This point is important because the current disagreements on the left do not concern only the presidential election. After the presidential election, France's political structure could once again turn toward parliamentary elections and the question of forming a majority in the National Assembly. From this perspective, each of the left-wing currents must also decide how to balance an independent candidacy with the possibility of cooperation after the election.

Another Path on the Left

Raphaël Glucksmann, representing the center-left and social-democratic current, represents another path. He advocates a pro-European left close to green policies and draws a clear line between himself and Mélenchon and La France Insoumise. Glucksmann supports increasing taxes on large inheritances and an ecological transition, and wants to link reducing carbon emissions with reindustri-

alization and job creation. He emphasizes forming a broad center-left with the participation of the Socialists and Greens, but is unwilling to form an alliance with Mélenchon to achieve this goal.

Glucksmann has explicitly said that he will not form an alliance with Mélenchon and that, if elected, he will seek cooperation with the Greens and Communists. This position shows that the disagreements among the left-wing currents are not merely personal differences. They also disagree over Europe, foreign policy, the economy and the form of their relations with other parties.

The Greens have also not yet made a final decision regarding their relationship with the other left-wing currents. Some members of the party leadership favor closer cooperation with Glucksmann and the Socialists, while others support talks with La France Insoumise. Some of the left-wing parties are expected to take part in a joint primary election in October, but Mélenchon, the Communist Party and Glucksmann will not participate in this joint process.

Thus, the French left is moving along several paths. One relies on Mélenchon's electoral strength, another on rebuilding a social-democratic and pro-European left, while another emphasizes class politics and organization around labor, industry and public services. There are common points among these paths, but a shared political program has not yet emerged.

Issues That Bring the Left Closer Together

Despite these differences, the distance between the left-wing currents is not the same on every issue. Increasing taxes on wealth and large inheritances is one area where several currents have taken relatively similar positions. Mélenchon, Glucksmann and the Greens have each raised, through different proposals, the issue of transferring wealth from wealthy generations to the generations that follow.

The environment has also become another common issue, although approaches to it differ. Mélen-

chon speaks of an “ecological state” and a profound change in the way production and consumption are organized. Glucksmann links the ecological transition with industrialization and employment. The Greens, for their part, emphasize adapting to climate change and reducing carbon emissions.

Public services, wage increases and combating inequality are also present in the programs of different sections of the left. The greater differences concern the scale and form of state intervention, how it should be financed, and the relationship between such policies and the rules of the European Union.

This is where one of the most important issues facing the French left in the future emerges. If a left-wing force comes to power in France, it will face a set of European rules and financial constraints. This reality lies directly ahead of the left and is not an abstract theoretical debate.

France and the Boundaries of European Economic Policy

Mélenchon recently proposed cancelling around 18 percent of France’s public debt, namely the portion held by the Bank of France, so that the government would have greater fiscal space for social spending. Christine Lagarde, President of the European Central Bank, has described the proposal as financially dangerous and contrary to European Union regulations. According to a Reuters report, France’s public debt has now reached around 116 percent of GDP.

Lagarde referred to Article 123 of the Treaty on European Union, which prohibits the direct financing of governments by central banks. As a result, this disagreement could become a clear example of a left-wing economic program coming into conflict with the EU’s fiscal rules.

This proposal, of course, is not the position of all currents of the French left and should not be attributed to the left as a whole. Its significance lies elsewhere. If a left-wing government in France wants to increase public spending, invest in industry, expand public services and implement a

broad redistributive policy, the question of financial resources and European rules will quickly become a political issue.

France differs from Greece in 2015 in this respect. Greece had limited power in relation to the European institutions, and the Syriza government was forced to retreat in the face of pressure from the European Union and financial markets. France is the European Union’s second-largest economy and a nuclear power, and its political role within the Union cannot be compared with that of Greece.

For this reason, a victory by a left-wing force in France could open a debate that goes beyond the country’s borders: How far can the EU’s fiscal rules be changed? How much public investment is possible? Can industrial policy have a greater role in Europe? How should the relationship between debt reduction, social spending and economic growth be defined? To what extent are wage increases and the expansion of public services compatible with the existing economic rules? How will capitalists respond?

These are issues that are no longer limited to Mélenchon and France.

France in the European Perspective

The importance of France becomes clearer when it is considered alongside other developments in Europe. In Germany, the recent electoral victory of the Alternative for Germany in Saxony-Anhalt, with nearly 44 percent of the vote, has caused a wave of concern in France. French politicians from different political currents have warned about the strengthening of the far right in Europe.

In Sweden, elections are also taking place this week under conditions in which the Sweden Democrats, the country’s far-right party, after four years of supporting a right-wing government, now want to enter the government. The Social Democrats and their allied parties are seeking to return to power and are emphasizing social welfare, reducing inequality and climate policy.

Of course, France and Sweden cannot be placed within a single political framework. In Sweden, the main contest is between the Social Democrats and the right-wing bloc, and the Swedish Left Party is one of the members of the center-left camp. In France, several left-wing currents are preparing separately for the presidential election, and the boundary between the radical left, social democracy and the Green movement remains a subject of contention.

Nevertheless, a common issue can be seen in many European countries: the far right has managed to turn part of the discontent caused by economic insecurity, weak public services, immigration and distrust of traditional parties into an electoral base. The challenge for the left is to turn its own social and economic responses to these same grievances into a social force within society and to organize, along class lines, part of the social force that the far right has mobilized with populist slogans.

France is particularly important in this respect because the left remains a major electoral force there and has been able to turn part of the social discontent into organized politics. If this force can move beyond protest and competition among candidates and win a majority, its experience will also be important for other European countries.

An Opportunity, Not a Guarantee

The renewed growth of the French left does not mean that it will win in 2027. The National Rally remains at the top of the polls, and even if a left-wing candidate can reach the second round, the question of winning a majority of the vote will only then begin. The divisions among the left-wing currents also remain serious.

But the situation today is different from what it was a few months ago. Mélenchon has reached the range of the second round in several electoral scenarios. The Communist Party has begun its campaign. Glucksmann, representing the center-left and social-democratic current, is seeking to es-

tablish an independent base in the center-left. The Greens are debating how to cooperate with other currents, and issues such as wages, public services, wealth, industry and climate change have once again moved to the center of electoral debates.

From this perspective, the importance of the current struggle in France cannot be reduced to Mélenchon. He is one of the most important figures in this struggle, but the issue is broader: Can the left turn the existing discontent in society into political power? Can it offer a program on employment, wages, public services, the environment and inequality that is acceptable to a majority? And can its different currents, despite serious disagreements, remain capable of cooperation after the election?

France's experience is important for the European left for this reason. At a time when the far right has grown in many countries, a victory by a left-wing force in a major European country could show that social discontent does not necessarily move toward nationalism and the far right. Such a victory could also create new space for debate about European economic policy, public investment, the welfare state and the environment.

But no election can create this change on its own. Even a left-wing government in France would face resistance from opposition parties, financial markets, European institutions and powerful economic interests. What is won in the election must be transformed into social and political organization if it is to withstand these pressures.

For this reason, the 2027 French election is not merely a struggle to seize the Élysée Palace and put a left-wing figure in the presidential office. It can be a test of what answer the left has to Europe's economic and social crisis at a time when the far right has gained strength, and how it intends to mobilize its social force to put that answer into practice. Whatever the outcome, the struggle now taking place in France is one of the most important arenas of this test.

Brazil, the Bells Toll for You!

Boaventura de Sousa Santos

The presidential elections this coming October in Brazil (currently in the eye of the storm) are an internal matter for the country, and it is up to Brazilians alone to decide who will be the next president. In theory, that is how it should be, and practice should reflect it, but unfortunately it does not. This could have dramatic consequences for the future of democracy in Brazil and around the world.

The Strength and Weakness of Democracy in Brazil

Forty years ago, Brazil overthrew one of the three longest and bloodiest military dictatorships of the past hundred years in South America. The other two were in Chile and Argentina. The transition to democracy was negotiated with the dictators – a sign of weakness that continues to haunt Brazilian democracy to this day. Furthermore, redemocratization took place against an international backdrop of the global imposition of neoliberalism, a weapon of mass destruction against social justice and the democratization of society and the state. But thanks to social movements and a vibrant labor movement (in which current President Lula da Silva distinguished himself), Brazil was able to turn weakness into strength. Democracy was consolidated and deepened through local experiments in participatory democracy (such as participatory budgeting), which caught the attention of the democratic world. In 2001, Brazil became a global model of the power of social movements in the pursuit of social justice by organizing the first World Social Forum, and in 2002, the tenacious labor leader Lula da Silva – hailing from the impoverished regions of the country's Northeast, a world apart from the São Paulo elites who had always governed Brazil – was elected president.

What followed was a glorious decade of economic development, improvements in the living conditions of the working classes (who were finally able

to fly to visit family or enjoy vacations, much to the chagrin of the classes accustomed to that privilege of mobility), transformative investment in public education, especially at the university level (another source of annoyance for the privileged classes, who until then “were convinced” that there was no structural racism in Brazilian society and that, therefore, compensatory policies, affirmative action, and quota systems were unnecessary). Brazil became one of the “emerging countries” in the Global South, ranking among the world's ten largest economies, and in 2006 it formally became a founding member of BRIC, the precursor to BRICS. In short, a world power that, moreover, seemed to demonstrate that there is no contradiction between capitalist development and democratic development.

Tragically, however, appearances can be deceiving. The 2008 financial crisis and the changes that followed (the financial capital responsible for the crisis was the very same force tasked with resolving it, with the usual consequences: those at the bottom – whether social classes or countries – are the ones who pay for the crisis), combined with the “need” for the U.S. to return to “tending” to its Latin American “backyard” after the disaster in Iraq – and alarmed by China's growing influence on the subcontinent – (easily?) destabilized Brazilian capitalism and Brazilian democracy, primarily through Operation Car Wash. After all, strength was also a weakness. The “soft coup” of 2016 against President Dilma Rousseff was followed by the “fabrication” of grounds to disqualify the strongest candidate in the 2018 elections, Lula da Silva, his 580-day imprisonment, and the election of an obscure and mediocre far-right radical.

But the strength of democracy was not entirely exhausted. This time, weakness turned into strength. Faced with pressure from Brazilians and democrats around the world denouncing these legal abuses, the very same judicial system that had fabricated

Lula da Silva's disqualification and his imprisonment redeemed itself, from a democratic standpoint, by restoring the rule of law and allowing Lula da Silva to run again and win the presidential election, which took place in 2022.

President Lula da Silva returned, but Brazil's democratic vitality and the richness and diversity of its social movements did not. Nor has the Afro-Catholic-pagan joy of rebellion returned – that joy which disarms self-righteous orthodoxy, offers hope in the struggle amid the harshest adversity, and disguises itself as outward reverence to better conceal the clenched teeth of nonconformity. The rebellious rappers continued to revolt, but increasingly on their own.

The fact is that, in the meantime, Brazilian society had undergone a new form of recolonization based on two types of extractivism: the extractivism of belief and the extractivism of deliberation. As in the realm of other raw materials, extractivism is unequal exchange, expropriation, and physical, psychological, or symbolic violence used to extract natural or human resources. What is new about this recolonization is that it presents itself as an exhilarating decolonization in relation to the old world of the old religion and the old politics. It is an expropriation disguised as reappropriation, a servitude disguised as autonomy, a super-objectification of consciousnesses disguised as exhilarating super-subjection. In short, dispossession as a new form of empowerment.

The intensity of the recolonization that has already taken place was evident in the way the far right reacted to the election results. Having failed to “peacefully” take control of the elections, it reacted violently, vandalizing the buildings at Brasília's Praça dos Três Poderes, brilliantly designed by Lúcio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer to celebrate democracy. On January 8, 2023, the world watched in astonishment and disbelief as shocking images of vandalism unfolded at the heart of the institutions of political power. The strength of Brazilian democracy revealed that it had feet of clay.

But once again – and this time on the brink of the abyss – Brazilian democracy gathered the shards and pulled itself together. Once more, weakness turned into strength, but that strength was no longer the strength of the previous era. It was not the strength of flourishing; it was the strength of survival because, in the meantime, the operations of extractivism had advanced significantly.

The Extractivism of Belief

To avoid any misunderstanding, I begin by reiterating my full respect for people's religious feelings and beliefs, while affirming at the same time that I am totally opposed to any political use of religion other than following the example of the Nazarene: to fight in this world for the well-being and dignity of the working classes – the impoverished, the excluded, and the victims of racial and sexual discrimination – against the temple merchants, the architects of inequality and discrimination, and to take the risks that this entails in the capitalist, colonialist, and patriarchal societies in which we live.

The extractivism of belief drains the religious energies of the earth's downtrodden – energies meant to critique and transform this unjust world – and redirects them toward zealously ensuring that the justice of a better life is safeguarded in the other world, the world of eternal salvation. The conduits of these energies are the pastors, especially the evangelicals of the neo-Pentecostal denomination, who – with the proliferation of their churches and the millions of followers on social media and in their daily videos – ensure the greatest yield of these energies in the next world.

The spiritual energy expended in trances within the churches does not spill out onto the streets. On the contrary, the believer steps out onto the street relaxed, resigned to this world, and content with the prosperity they are accumulating in the next world. That the conveyors become increasingly prosperous in this world is the just reward for their effort to carry the flock's energies so far. The believer's nonconformity now takes on a narrow focus: changing one's family and convincing one's neighbors.

The extractivism of deliberation

This extractivism consists of getting people hooked on outsourcing – to accredited and readily available intermediaries – the thought, information, and emotions necessary for deliberation. This leaves free time to look for work, help feed the family, and distract oneself with television, social media, and soccer – and, until recently, Carnival (the extractivism of belief is eliminating Carnival).

The extractivism of deliberation is particularly intense when linked to the extractivism of belief. For if politics is important for governing this world, those who govern it best are those who most closely resemble the One who governs the Other World – the world of eternal salvation. Now, if God is not democratic, why must the one who manages this world be so? What matters is that he be one of “ours” – that is, trusted by “our” agents of deliberative energy and by “our” conveyors of religious energy to a safe place in the world of salvation. Tomorrow, if the mediators and conveyors so desire, artificial intelligence may be the one to choose candidates to vote for and turn them into rulers. If it ensures that “the one elected is one of us,” the addicted believer sleeps soundly, having fulfilled his duty and earned a few points toward eternal life.

Extractivism stems from the massive transfer of individual democratic deliberation to opinion-makers and agents of deliberative energy. The world of uncertainties surrounding election candidates – and the fear of choosing wrongly and suffering the consequences – is left at the doorstep of churches and screens. What one gains by following the opinion of “our own” and by joining millions like us is worth far more than individual deliberation and the solitary vote – which, incidentally, is of little value because politicians, “except for our own,” are all the same and never deliver on what they promise during election campaigns.

As Claude Lévi-Strauss taught us, myths are the great stabilizers of hierarchies. Thus is the anti-democratic myth consolidated. What is new is

that the combined effect of today’s two myths stabilizes the hierarchy, not only between this vale of tears and the other world of eternal happiness, but also within each of them.

Stabilizing hierarchies in a socially, racially, and sexually unjust society means freezing conformity in place. This is not the passive conformism of resignation and abstention; rather, it is militant conformism, intolerant of anyone who challenges it. And those who challenge it are the devil or the communist – whether it be a candidate who “is not one of us,” opinions that disagree with “ours,” that is, with the agents of “our” thought, “our” preferences, and “our” deliberative energies. One does not make deals with or discuss matters with the devil or the communist. The devil and the communist must be fought, and all weapons are legitimate if they are effective.

The origin of these forms of extractivism

The super-agents and super-carriers of these forms of extractivism have a well-known origin: the United States. They come from afar, from U.S. imperialism on the subcontinent dating back to the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, according to which the subcontinent is a U.S. sphere of influence that no one can challenge – whether Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries or China in the 21st century. More recently, these two forms of extractivism intensified at two different but converging moments.

Faced with the failure of the Alliance for Progress to contain the Cuban Revolution, Nelson Rockefeller proposed to President Richard Nixon, in his 1969 Report on Latin America, that the solution lay in exporting en masse to the subcontinent the most conservative theologies of Protestantism (especially Neo-Pentecostal evangelism) that would effectively counter the danger of the subcontinent’s communist drift, whose main agent was the liberation theology of Catholic priests and bishops energized by the Second Vatican Council. It was they – and not secular politicians, communists, or anti-religious leftists – who lived side by side, on the ground, with



Brazilian voting machines

the poor, amid the misery, discontent, and revolt of the subcontinent against the status quo, promising redemption in this world and not in the next.

From then on, an avalanche of Protestant pastors poured into the continent. I witnessed this firsthand when, in Cuernavaca, Mexico, I observed them between 1970 and 1973 voraciously learning Spanish to head south. For those who had to learn Portuguese, there were other linguistic stopovers. Perhaps most were unaware of the grand imperial design they were carrying out. They sought only the “salvation of souls” and the spread of their religious denomination. Many of the pastors weren’t even conservative. But the project was imperial, and it worked perfectly.

Protestant churches, especially evangelical ones, are scattered across the entire continent and have no qualms about turning their religious proselytism

into political proselytism in favor of “our” candidates, that is, those who serve the interests of the ruling class and U.S. imperialism – not because they are virtuous in and of themselves, but because they are the ones who defend “our” family, “our” traditional values, and effectively ward off Satan from the left, which is entirely communist – the embodiment of the Devil. The two dimensions of extractivism share a valuable characteristic: they spare citizens the time of listening to communists and the time of resisting the Devil’s temptation.

This was the origin of the religious dimension of extractivism (the extractivism of belief). The secular dimension of extractivism (the extractivism of de-liberation) has intensified more recently with Donald Trump’s rise to power in the U.S. and his aim to recolonize Latin America as the most effective means of making up for lost time and definitively preventing China from entering or remaining in its

backyard. The agents of deliberative extractivism are digital platforms, social media, communicators, influencers, and, above all, the purveyors of fake news. The two forms of extractivism have not only become more violent but have also acquired the ability to spread virally. In fact, the two forms of extractivism have become two viruses – two viruses disguised as vaccines against the Devil and communism.

The Dissolvers of Democracy

These two forms of extractivism were designed to operate within democratic regimes, distorting democracy and eroding its potential to exercise popular sovereignty until it is transformed into proud subservience to the geopolitical interests and designs of U.S. imperialism – paradoxically justified in the name of the “higher interests of the homeland.” Historically, they correspond to the third major strategy of interventionism. Each employs a preferred instrument of intervention. But once used, no instrument is entirely discarded; it remains in reserve to be deployed should the new instruments fail.

The First Strategy

The first major strategy was the imposition of civilian or military dictatorships. In this phase, the preferred local instrument for carrying out the intervention was the armed forces of the target country. To this end, they were trained at the School of the Americas, headquartered in the U.S. and specializing in teaching techniques of torture, extortion, blackmail, and summary executions. For this reason, it became known as the “School of Assassins” or the “School of Dictators.” It is estimated that more than 60,000 Latin American military personnel were trained there. With regard to Brazil, the National Truth Commission states in its final report that more than 300 Brazilian military personnel were trained at the School of the Americas between 1954 and 1996.

The Second Strategy

In light of the failure of this strategy – due to Latin Americans’ resistance to dictatorships and the re-

turn of democracies – the second strategy consisted of “soft coups,” or the manipulation of democratic institutions to favor the election of candidates subservient to the interests of imperialism. The primary local tool was the judicial system. Especially beginning in the 1990s, hundreds of prosecutors and judges (some of whom were already known for their conservative views) were invited to take specialized courses in the U.S. or at U.S. embassies in their home countries under the guise of “training, exchange, and international cooperation programs,” where, under the pretext of training, they were indoctrinated with an anti-communist, anti-socialist, anti-left, and anti-social-democratic ideology, whose main pillars are as follows: an inquisitorial conception of the Public Prosecutor’s Office (in the U.S. tradition) based on the priority given to institutional security and criminal investigation policies; the defense of private property and freedom of expression without regard for dignity or truth; and the fight against corruption and terrorism – with the implication that these evils are more widespread among politicians considered progressive.

The Third Strategy

As the cases of Brazil, Chile, and Colombia clearly demonstrate, this second strategy has not always been effective. In light of this, a third strategy has come to be favored: the manipulation of consciences and subjectivities through “extractivism of belief” and “extractivism of deliberation,” which I have been analyzing. In this strategy, the local instruments of intervention are pastors (especially evangelicals), corporate media, and journalists, communicators, and influencers considered to be on the right and far right who, like the judges before them, are invited to training courses, retreat or reflection weekends in their own countries, and visits or stays in the U.S.

Religious indoctrination is dominated by the prosperity gospel – that is, the celebration of wealth as a blessing from God. The significance of this celebration is that, through it, wealth and poverty are no longer linked by a causal relationship. The enrichment of minorities is no longer tied to the

impoverishment of the vast majority. If they obey the pastors' teachings, the poor of this world will be the rich of the next.

Secular indoctrination is openly reactionary in the technical sense of the word. High-tech methods of extracting deliberation are put at the service of ideas from the Ancien Régime, that is, the political ideas that prevailed before the individualistic liberalism of the seventeenth century and the bourgeois revolutions of the eighteenth century (the American Revolution and the French Revolution) and, in the nineteenth century, the revolutionary wave in post-1848 Europe: the Church's dominion over consciences and the King's absolute power over secular life. The crucial difference from the pre-Enlightenment period is that today's reactionary ideology includes the unconditional defense of private property, something that was unthinkable in the pre-revolutionary 17th and 18th centuries.

The Interplay Between the Strategies

The sequence among the three strategies is not linear. It has been a cumulative process of instruments of interference in which only trends and emphases are visible. It is possible that, at any given moment, the three strategies are being adopted in different countries or even within the same country as a toolkit of anti-democratic measures to be used according to specific circumstances.

Intervention differs depending on whether (1) it aims to prepare in advance for a political change through elections, (2) it takes place during an electoral process, or, finally, (3) it takes place outside of an electoral process. In case (2), the intervention aims to influence voters' voting intentions as much as possible; thus, election fraud occurs before the vote and, therefore, does not involve the counting of votes. It sometimes includes accusations of electoral fraud against the "enemy" with the aim of delegitimizing the election results and paving the way for other, more violent and overtly coup-oriented strategies, as happened in Brazil on January 8, 2023.

It is important to note that U.S. interference in Latin American countries has been intensifying and diversifying its methods. In the past year, we can cite three paradigmatic cases.

In Honduras, U.S. interference in the November 2025 elections combined the second strategy with the third. Faced with the likely failure of the latter, a form of "soft coup" – typical of the second strategy – was employed. Donald Trump intervened personally. By publicly expressing his support for the far-right candidate, Nasry Asfura, he accused the National Electoral Council of fraud in the vote count and threatened the country with economic sanctions if the other candidate – also on the right but more moderate – were to win. The interference was so blatant that the outgoing President, Xiomara Castro, accused Donald Trump of orchestrating an "electoral coup" through blackmail, coercion, and direct interference in the country's sovereignty.

In Venezuela, the U.S. resorted to a combination of the first and second strategies: a full-blown coup d'état disguised as a "soft coup" within the framework of democratic normality, because it was "tolerated" by the legitimately elected authorities. After committing war crimes by killing some two hundred fishermen in the Caribbean Sea, the U.S. launched a military invasion of Venezuela on January 3 of this year, in an operation whose name makes its purpose clear: "Operation Absolute Resolution." They killed more than twenty members of the presidential guard – most of them Cuban – captured President Nicolás Maduro and the First Lady while they slept, and took them prisoner to the U.S. The top leader of the far right, María Corina Machado, had repeatedly called for U.S. military intervention. This is what happened, but not with the outcome she intended: power was not handed over to her; instead, the current government, led by Vice President Delcy Rodríguez, was left pathetically powerless. The expropriation (theft?) of oil operations – the main objective of the intervention – was handed over to U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, the new Viceroy of Venezuela. Not only has China lost its privileged access to Venezuela's oil, but the oil revenues – recently estimated by the Financial

Times at twelve billion dollars – are deposited in the U.S. Treasury and are made available at the Viceroy's discretion.

In Colombia, the third strategy was employed with unprecedented intensity in the May and June elections of this year. The platforms and agents of deliberative extractivism utilized the most sophisticated technologies in the digital realm – with the active participation of Israeli technology – to rob Colombians of their autonomy to inform themselves and choose for themselves the candidate for whom to vote. In turn, “belief-based extractivism” dealt the final blow to the electoral prospects of left-wing candidate Iván Cepeda, particularly during the final week of the election campaign. The pulpits, prayers, worship services, “spontaneous prayers,” videos, and social media posts from evangelical churches flooded the public sphere with urgent appeals for the sacred defense of the family against the threat of the red devil. This strategy was reinforced by Donald Trump's now-familiar statements of support for far-right candidate Abelardo de la Espriella, combined with warnings from the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá about potential outbreaks of violence and protest. The election's outcome was set in stone – or rather, in the transparent stone of fake news.

Brazil in the Eye of the Storm and the Global Significance of the Outcome

Everything suggests that Brazil will be the next target of U.S. interference, and it is likely to surpass in intensity and scope everything we have observed so far.

Brazil is the largest and most populous country in Latin America, the region's most important economy, and China's largest trading partner. It is, moreover, one of the founding members of the BRICS, and former President Dilma Rousseff is the current president of the BRICS bank, the New Development Bank. And above all, it is a democracy weakened by its recent past and the country where “extractivism of belief” and “extractivism of deliberation” have been at work for the longest time and with the greatest intensity. Furthermore, the

Brazilian far right is the most internationalized and displays an arrogance that puzzles the democratic world, especially in light of the far-right president's disastrous handling of the pandemic, which resulted in between 120,000 and 400,000 preventable deaths, according to World Health Organization estimates.

What happens in Brazil in the coming months concerns Brazilians and should be their sole responsibility, but whatever happens will have significance that far exceeds Brazil's borders.

It will certainly be significant for the entire sub-continent because it will signal the extent of U.S. interference in the destruction of the region's democratic regimes. The far right uses democracy to seize power, but once it has seized it, it neither exercises it nor remains in power democratically. It is the foretold death of democracy.

The significance of what is about to happen in Brazil is, however, global in scope, because the technologies characteristic of the third generation of interference are already being used in Africa and Europe as well. It is therefore worth highlighting their main characteristics.

1. The two forms of extractivism are being used worldwide wherever U.S. imperialism seeks to establish or maintain influence.

They are a fundamental part of the global far-right movement operating in a wide variety of countries, adapting the basic playbook to local conditions but resorting to U.S. intervention as a last resort whenever deemed useful.

2. There are global linkages between the two forms of extractivism.

Far-right parties in various countries now have a vast and diverse global network (sometimes extending to the most conservative right-wing parties): the Conservative Political Action Conference, founded in the U.S. and now with a global reach; the summits and groups within the European Par-

liament (Patriots for Europe, Europe of Sovereign Nations, European Conservatives and Reformists); the Madrid Forum, and the Madrid Charter.

The issues they debate are, unsurprisingly, the following: anti-immigration (advocating for closed borders and criticizing multiculturalism); sovereignty (opposition to supranational bodies, such as the European Union or the UN); culture war (rhetoric focused on defending the “traditional family” and opposing progressive and gender identity agendas); digital tactics (sharing methodologies on the use of algorithms, social media, and structured disinformation to attract the young electorate).

Nonpartisan far-right organizations also have their own global meetings and networks, and the topics under discussion only partially overlap with those of far-right parties: coordination of narratives (alignment of discourses against immigration, minorities, and the liberal order); export of strategies (local adaptation of digital communication tactics and grassroots activism that have worked in other countries); transnational financing (links between private international donors, wealthy foundations, and political pressure groups); cultural warfare (focus on the profound transformation of social norms, academic institutions, and cultural values prior to actually winning electoral power).

In turn, major global conferences of evangelical churches are held regularly, focusing on missionary cooperation, leadership, and theological alignment. There is a World Evangelical Alliance, which held its fourteenth General Assembly in 2025. Obviously, part of this global movement does not serve imperial designs, nor does it subscribe to far-right ideologies, although it is anti-communist – just as the Catholic Church has always been, with the exception of the brief period of liberation theology.

When “extractivism of deliberation” is present, “extractivism of belief” tends to ally itself with it at decisive moments – that is, during election campaigns. As has happened in other countries, the explicitly political intervention of pastors and their

churches occurs at the very end of campaigns, when nothing can be done to counteract it.

3. Digital Capital

In recent decades, the U.S.-led phase of capitalist globalization has been characterized by the central role of financial capital in controlling political choices – both domestically and internationally – in peripheral and semiperipheral countries (austerity policies, sanctions, tariffs, and the freezing of dollar-denominated assets deposited abroad). Today, this central role is increasingly being shared by digital capital, which has the distinct feature of being directly used to control minds – whether through the “extraction” of beliefs or the “extraction” of deliberation. Far-right parties and organizations are increasingly relying on digital capital, as it allows them to personalize political indoctrination to the utmost degree. The more personalized the indoctrination, the more easily it becomes credible information for the recipient. Citizens choose only after having been selected by the algorithm to favor the choice they ultimately make of their “own free will.” The algorithm is the great anti-democratic decision-maker of our time.

The U.S.-led far right is staking everything on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to disseminate its messages, to shape and condition minds and consciences, and to turn it into a privileged tool for accessing and exercising power – economically, socially, politically, and culturally. For the most extreme figures, such as the philosopher Nick Land, AI is the God of our time. The Techno-Optimism Movement, entirely centered on the hubris of AI, is becoming increasingly popular within the far right.

4. Israel's Involvement

U.S. imperialism is today a joint endeavor of the U.S. and Israel. Without profound political changes in either of these countries, neither can survive without the other. The importance of digital capital in systems of information, disinformation, surveillance, intelligence, security, and cyberwarfare grants Israeli companies and the State of Israel a

strategic position that often supersedes that of the U.S. AI-based warfare technologies have found in the Middle East – and especially in Palestine – a testing ground so sophisticatedly barbaric that it far surpasses that of the Nazi concentration camps.

5. The Far Right as Civil Society

When discussing undemocratic interference or U.S. imperialism, one might be misled into thinking that we are dealing exclusively with actions by the U.S. government. Far from it. The global far-right movement, committed to the “extractivism of belief” and the “extractivism of deliberation,” is a movement within what liberalism has termed “civil society.” It comprises churches, nongovernmental organizations, foundations, newspapers, digital platforms, radio stations, social media, fake news factories, communicators, influencers, left-wing intellectuals who act as useful idiots to gain notoriety, and activists for supposedly progressive causes whose main objective (of which the activists are not always aware) is to foster public opinion favorable to activism originating in the North and to U.S. imperialism.

6. Holding political power without ever having held public office

One of the major innovations of the current model of anti-democratic interference in the political processes of countries within the U.S. sphere of influence is the political power wielded by figures who have never held any public office and who, when they are not influencers, are unknown to the public, operating behind the scenes and, at times, in the underbelly of disinformation campaigns in favor of far-right candidates, as managers of multinational “digital trash” factories, thanks to their mastery of algorithms and AI in general. They are sinister figures, powerful eroders of the democratic spirit and of respect for the truth and the dignity of people. They often combine legal activities with illegal ones: mercenaries of false ideas and fascist causes – as long as they are paid – operating in various countries. They represent a dimension of the underground globalization of fascism that has received little attention.

They only come to the attention of the general public under exceptional circumstances, as in the recent case of Fernando Cerimedo, an Argentine disinformant currently imprisoned in Bolivia for the attempted murder of his pregnant partner, who was carrying his child. And he might not even be in prison if there were no disagreements between Bolivia’s president and vice president.

For whom do the bells toll?

The phrase by the 17th-century English poet John Donne, made world-famous by Ernest Hemingway’s novel, is entirely relevant at this historic moment in Brazil’s life. The coming days will be decisive for the future of democracy in Brazil. Given Brazil’s position in Latin America and the world, what happens in Brazil will affect the entire democratic world and will have a decisive impact on the management of rivalries between China and the U.S.

Brazil is facing an act of aggression that has only one recent precedent: the 1964 military coup. The challenge is on the scale of the aggression’s objective: the profound recolonization of Brazil so that it becomes yet another few thousand kilometers of the “Wall Against China.” The perpetrators of this aggression are sectors of the Brazilian upper bourgeoisie, aided by a gang of lumpen-politicians and military officers who have never forgotten what they learned at the infamous School of the Americas.

The challenge for democrats is to fulfill a two-fold mission. In the short term, the mission is to prevent the fascists from coming to power and turning Brazil into yet another U.S. protectorate. In the medium term, the mission is to convince Brazilians that victory in the upcoming elections, however comfortable and satisfying it may be, is merely the starting point for a much greater struggle, grounded in this simple yet immense idea: profound recolonization can only be combated through profound democratization.

25 Years of War Was the Wrong Response to 9/11

Medea Benjamin, Nicolas J.S. Davies

The lesson of 9/11 should be that war is not the answer to any of the problems facing the United States. After inflicting violence and chaos on country after country for twenty-five years in a “global war on terror” that has evolved into a Zionist genocide and a revived Cold War against Russia and China, the widespread public opposition to Trump’s war on Iran suggests that most Americans have finally learned that lesson.

Unfortunately, powerful sections of our corrupt business and political elites have not.

Most Americans old enough to remember September 11, 2001, can still recall the horrifying images played endlessly on our TV screens as the scale of the mass murder became clear. But we also remember something else: the sinking feeling that the hopes and dreams of billions of people, in the US and around the world, would be pushed to the back-burner for the foreseeable future, as our leaders and corporate media all too predictably embraced a new agenda of revenge, fear-mongering, jingoism and military violence.

We found out later that only hours after the attacks—less than six hours after the first plane struck the World Trade Center and barely five hours after the Pentagon was hit—the planning for America’s military response to the 9/11 massacre was already under way.

At 2:40 p.m., Defense Secretary Rumsfeld convened a meeting at the Pentagon. Notes taken by Undersecretary Stephen Cambone, later obtained by CBS News, recorded Rumsfeld demanding the “best info fast. Judge whether good enough hit S.H.” – meaning Saddam Hussein – “at the same time” as Osama bin Laden. Then came the chilling instruction: “Go massive. Sweep it all up. Things related and not.”

Twenty-five years later, we can look back and see how the US government used September 11 to unleash a crusade of violence, war crimes and chaos across the world. Experts like Nuremberg prosecutor Ben Ferencz and military historian Michael Howard warned from the beginning that declaring a “war on terror” made no sense and would make matters worse.

They were right, of course. But when the State Department’s annual Patterns of Global Terrorism report for 2004 showed an unprecedented increase in global terrorism following the US invasion of Iraq, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice simply cancelled and discontinued the report, replacing it with a new one with different criteria to prevent comparison with previous years.

But, as Rumsfeld made clear to his subordinates from the outset, the 9/11 crisis provided an open-ended pretext for endless wars against enemies who had nothing to do with the attacks, and for the remilitarization of the United States after the small reduction in its military spending after the end of the Cold War.

Total US military spending for the past 25 years has exceeded \$21 trillion (in 2024 dollars), surpassing the combined spending of the other 18 largest military powers in the world. During that time, China has built a whole new civilization and infrastructure, and leapfrogged the US economy to become the world leader in clean energy, high-speed rail and technological sectors in which the US was once preeminent.

Both Democrats and Republicans are responsible for these counter-productive choices, and the appalling human costs of these wars on the countries the Unit-

ed States has attacked, bombed or invaded make this an especially atrocious way to squander our nation's wealth.

The history of the United States during this period calls to mind an old Greek myth. Croesus, the famously wealthy king of Lydia, asked the Oracle at Delphi what would happen if he invaded Persia. The Oracle told him, "If you cross the Halys river, a great empire will fall." Encouraged, Croesus launched the invasion. But he lost the war, and the empire that fell was his own.

In pursuing their global imperial ambitions, our leaders and ruling classes have discounted and betrayed the real sources of America's prosperity and security: the well-being of the American people and peaceful relations with our neighbors around the world.

They have led us into war, poverty and extreme inequality, and hollowed out a system of government that was slowly becoming more democratic. At home, decades of political struggle by labor, civil rights and other social movements produced enormous advances, including Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, major investments in public infrastructure and education, and a highly progressive tax system—with the top income tax rate at 91% until 1963—that helped finance those public goods and narrow the gap between rich and poor.

Contrary to the "End of History" theory embraced by many policymakers after the Cold War, and Margaret Thatcher's famous insistence that "there is no alternative" to the extreme neoliberal capitalism that she and Ronald Reagan ushered in, societies always have political and economic alternatives. It is only a transparently self-serving choice by America's corrupt ruling classes that saddles us with a system that keeps all decision-making power in their own hands in order to build their own wealth to the detriment of the country we all share.

We can see one alternative today in New York City, where Mayor Zohran Mamdani is pursuing a different set of priorities: expanding free childcare, making

major investments in affordable housing, improving public transportation, and freezing rents for tenants in rent-stabilized apartments. Electoral politics can be part of the solution, but only if it reflects what ordinary people really want, instead of limited choices between oligarchic "lesser evils."

Americans are demanding a renewal of social progress, with universal healthcare, quality public education, and all the things we need but can't afford as long as this bloated, destructive war machine remains our government's top priority. As Martin Luther King lamented in 1967, "I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continued to draw men and skills and money like some demonic, destructive suction tube."

Twenty-five years is a long time to keep moving in the wrong direction, especially when that direction involves endless war and the destruction of other countries. We are a long way from where most Americans would like our country to be. But we have a pretty good idea of what is wrong and what we need to do.

Stop throwing money at a broken, destructive war machine. Stop threatening and blockading our neighbors. Close overseas bases and bring our troops home. Tax the wealthy. Start rebuilding our country, and replace war and militarism with cooperation and problem solving. Take public ownership and responsibility for things we all need and use, like education, healthcare, housing, infrastructure, and utilities. Abolish ICE, and other militarized institutions that waste our national resources and do not serve the public good. Insist that the military be scaled back to its legitimate role of defending the United States against a possible, but very unlikely, foreign military attack.

If we have truly learned the lesson of the past twenty-five years, then we must translate it into policies that reflect that. The real test is not whether we can finally see what went wrong after 9/11. It is whether we are able to change course.

Facing the Crooked of Hormuz

Tom Engelhardt

I was born on July 20, 1944, in the midst of World War II. My father had just returned from Burma where he had been operations officer for the 1st Air Commandos in the China-India-Burma Theater. I, of course, remember nothing about that war — except that my father (on extremely rare occasions) would barely mention what he had gone through but would sometimes take me to World War II movies like *The Caine Mutiny* and Merrill's Marauders at local movie theaters.

In a country that has never stopped fighting wars, however, that's certainly the last one that any American could truly be proud of, the global defeat of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan.

In fact, we're talking about a country that, between 2001 and 2024, spent an estimated \$21 trillion on its military, which, it turns out, was equal to the military spending of the next 18 — yes, 18! — countries combined (if you can even believe it). And in those years, of course, like the 55 preceding ones, the United States managed to never — no, never — actually win a significant war (or, in truth, even come close). In short, Donald Trump's present disastrous war with Iran is anything but out of the ordinary when it comes to American military power destroying all too much, but sooner or later finding itself in a remarkably dead-end situation (with an emphasis on dead, of course).

And that should be considered strange indeed. I doubt there's another example in history of a great imperial power that, for a significant part of its rise (and potential fall) simply couldn't win a war.

It certainly gives that old song "War (What Is It Good For?)" with the response "absolutely nothing" new meaning. Of course, if you happen to be Donald Trump and you're the president who simply can't win a war (which certainly leaves you in good

company among American presidents of the last 80 years or so), then the least you can do, when it comes to Iran, is declare that the Strait of Hormuz, through which about 20% of global oil and even more natural gas used to pass and which was closed down by the Iranians in response to his warring acts (distinctly harming the global economy), is now actually U.S. property, or, to be specific, a potential "territory of the United States." (Phew, that was exhausting!)

And hard as it might be to believe, he really did say that recently. How logical, right? After all, it's only perhaps 6,500 miles or so from Washington, D.C. So, what could possibly make more sense?

Of course, I'm sure you won't be surprised to learn that Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi responded that, whatever Trump might think, the Strait "cannot be seized with a tweet, nor with an aircraft carrier, nor by issuing an order, nor through an election speech." He added, "This strait will only be opened and closed under Iran's command, and as long as you do not accept the reality of defeat and stop indulging in delusions, Iran will continue to enforce the blockade."

Defeat Donald Trump? In what world could that possibly happen? How delusional could the Iranians be about our distinctly delusional president?

Oh, but in case you think that's just so much enemy blather, the fact is that, in the ongoing war with Iran, the U.S. has already lost about one quarter of its crucial Reaper Drones, valued at \$30 to \$50 million each (or more than \$1.3 billion worth of them), mainly around — yes, of course! — the Strait of Hormuz. And many of them have been taken down by Iranian drones valued at \$20,000 to \$50,000 each.

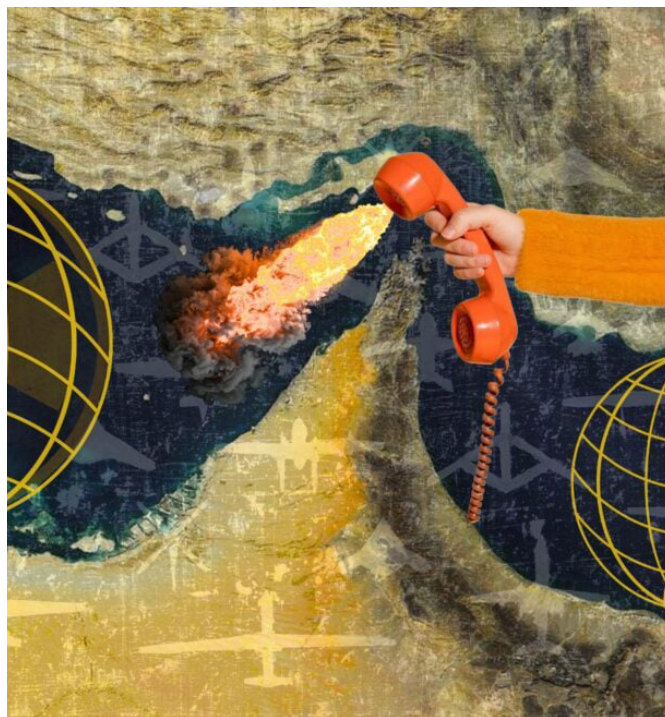
And while losing so many of its drones, the Trump administration has also been losing other things as well, including its previous insistence that a complete Iranian surrender was the order of the day. No longer, it seems. Now, all that it appears Donald Trump wants (whatever he's said) is the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz and the free flow of oil and natural gas globally. In other words, what he now yearns for is essentially a return to the very situation that existed six months ago just before he launched his disastrous war.

Or as Vice President J.D. Vance put it recently, all the Trump administration now wants is to ensure "that the Gulf countries continue to send oil and gas to the world economy so that we have energy price stability," and, of course, to ensure as well that the Iranians won't ever have a nuclear weapon. No matter that, as far as anyone knows, they are not faintly close to having, no less possibly even trying to develop such a weapon.

On the other hand, the Iranians are now threatening to continue the state of war with the U.S. until the end of Trump's second term in office in 2028 (and his approval ratings are, of course, already plunging to new lows). As a senior adviser to the commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guard put it, "One way is to prolong this war until we get to the next term of the presidency and cause attrition, so that if anyone else wants to attack Iran, they will know there is a cost... We have to attain deterrence so that the enemy never dares to attack us, so we can live with security."

And let's not forget that, lest you think Donald Trump has learned anything from all of this, he has only recently been threatening to "bomb the shit out of" long-time American ally Oman, if it "gets in the way" of his Iranian plans — and what, I ask you, could possibly go wrong with that? (I can't even imagine.)

Of course, we're talking about the rule (or do I mean reign — or perhaps I actually mean rain, or even thunderstorms or tornados?) of Donald Trump, a president for whom, according to a recent



poll, only 29% of potential voters in the coming midterm elections approve of how he's handling the situation with Iran.

And yet, sad to say, what's new? Not much, it seems. After all, Trump, who may indeed be unique in so many ways, is proving anything but unique as president of the greatest power on planet Earth (in certain ways, perhaps the greatest in history) when it comes to making war all too miserably, even disastrously. In fact, give him a certain amount of credit. After all, despite what anyone, including him, might have learned from American history since 1945, he decided to go to war with Iran anyway in 2026. It evidently mattered not at all to him that the most obvious and self-evident fact about American warmaking since 1945 is that defeat (or minimally nothing faintly approaching victory) would essentially be guaranteed. And yet, he still managed to launch another disastrous all-American war on this distinctly embattled planet of ours.

At the very least, the Iranians should consider renaming the Strait of Hormuz, the Crooked of Donald Trump, and let me just hope that I'll never have to take one of my grandchildren to a movie about his disastrous war.

Atatürk's Legacy, Erdoğan's Impasse: the Kurdish Question, Uneven Development, and the Turkish Semi-Peripheral State

Majid Maleki Meighani

Turkey's republic is approaching its centenary, built on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire as a nation-state that, rather than accommodating the ethnic plurality it inherited, was constructed through forced assimilation, erasure, and coerced absorption of non-Turkish groups. The Armenian genocide and the forced population exchange with Greece in 1923 were the violent preconditions that made the new republic's ethnic homogenization possible. What survived that project were two minorities: Arabs, small and, from the state's perspective, unthreatening; and Kurds, large, territorially concentrated, and therefore a perceived danger. This essay draws on world-systems theory (Wallerstein) combined with class analysis to argue that Turkey's Kurdish question cannot be understood merely as an identity crisis or a security problem. It reflects Turkey's semi-peripheral position in the world capitalist system and the uneven development that has split the country's east from its west — a split that runs, through a specific causal chain, from semi-peripheral capitalism to the securitization of Kurdish-majority regions. The question of whether Erdoğan can set aside Atatürk's century-old legacy is therefore misframed as a matter of one leader's political will. It should instead be posed at the level of the structural logic that has driven both Atatürk and Erdoğan, despite their evident ideological break, to reproduce the same fracture.

State-Building Through Homogenization: The Republic's Founding Legacy

Contrary to its official narrative of secular modernization, the Turkish republic was built from the outset on the systematic suppression of ethnic plurality — though not through physical elimination alone.

Forced integration, cultural Turkification, population displacement, and security repression operated together. The Armenian genocide in the empire's final years and the forced population exchange with Greece in 1923 were the demographic precondition for the new nation-state. What Kemal Atatürk called "Turkishness" was an imposed, homogenizing identity that either erased the "other" or dissolved it into itself. Kurds, given their large population and territorial contiguity in southeastern Anatolia, occupied a different place in this homogenizing project: they could be neither expelled nor ignored, so they had to become Turkish. For nearly eighty years, the Turkish state denied Kurdish identity through schools, media, and the military; the Kurdish language was banned, and even the word "Kurd" was replaced in official discourse with the demeaning label "mountain Turk." This was not an exception to the nation-state's founding logic — it was that logic.

After the First World War, the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres had envisioned an independent Kurdish state, a prospect abandoned entirely with the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne and the consolidation of the new republic's borders. This reversal should not be attributed to a unified, premeditated Western intent — the reality was more complicated. Sèvres reflected the immediate post-war balance of power, but the Turkish nationalist movement's military victory over Greek occupying forces and the Allies overturned that balance entirely. Facing a central government that now commanded real military power, Britain and France abandoned their earlier declared support for Kurdish autonomy and judged it more expedient to come to terms with a victorious Ankara. This was not a preconceived conspiracy but a pragmatic recalculation in response to a

shifting military and political landscape — one that nonetheless illustrates how far the great powers' declared commitment to "national self-determination" in the Middle East has historically bent to the geopolitical convenience of the moment, a pattern noted in an earlier analysis of Turkey's place in the world system.

From Denial to Armed Struggle: The Formation of the PKK

Rather than resolving the Kurdish question, this suppression of identity produced a deep social rift between Turkey's Kurdish population and the central state. Repeated civil-society efforts in the mid-twentieth century to secure recognition of Kurdish cultural rights were met largely with repression. Against this backdrop, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) was formed in 1978, initially presenting itself not merely as a Kurdish representative but as a project for class and ethnic justice for all of Turkey's oppressed. The banning of Kurdish civil and party activity paved the way for the movement's radicalization; from 1984, the PKK's armed struggle against the central government began — a war that lasted decades and, by various estimates, cost tens of thousands of lives, mostly civilians and Kurdish fighters, along with a smaller number of state soldiers.

What matters here is the dialectic of repression and pretext: every PKK armed operation supplied a fresh justification for intensifying cultural and political repression against the entire Kurdish community, including its unarmed, civilian segments. This pattern locked Turkey into a cycle in which the securitization of the Kurdish question kept deferring any lasting political solution.

Semi-Peripheral Turkey: From Uneven Development to Securitization

To understand why the Kurdish-Turkish rift is not merely "cultural," it must be placed within the framework of Turkey's political economy in the world capitalist system — and, more importantly,

the intermediate links connecting that position to Kurdish repression must be traced explicitly. Turkey's NATO membership since 1952 and its gradual integration into Western capital markets made it a textbook case of semi-peripheral power in Wallerstein's sense: a state neither fully at the center of the world system nor entirely on its periphery, but a mediating position that is simultaneously exploited by the center and itself exploits the periphery.

The causal chain can be stated plainly. Turkey's unequal integration into global capitalism imposed a pattern of uneven development in which industrial and infrastructural investment concentrated in the west — Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara, and the central-western Anatolian industrial corridor. This concentration of capital drove a corresponding concentration of political and military power in the central state, since sustaining and extending this pattern of accumulation required a unified state facing no internal challenge. The east, where the Kurdish majority lives and whose territorial contiguity with Iraq, Iran, and Syria made it strategically sensitive, was for the central state not merely an economic periphery but an arena of potential contest over territory and resources. This combination of economic marginality and geopolitical-security centrality pushed the Turkish state toward the systematic securitization of Kurdish-majority regions: militarization, restricted investment, and demographic control all functioned as instruments of containment for a region held both economically underdeveloped and, from the security standpoint, "problematic."

On this basis, being Kurdish has, statistically and structurally, correlated with a higher likelihood of living in a less-developed region with fewer economic opportunities — not because all Kurds are poor or because ethnicity alone explains eastern Turkey's poverty, but because ethnic and class-regional cleavages in Turkey have systematically overlapped. This overlap gives the Kurdish question a dimension that exceeds cultural or linguistic recognition: the issue is simultaneously the real redistribution of capital and political recognition.

Erdoğan: Ideological Break, Structural Continuity

The AKP's rise to power in 2002 initially raised hopes of a break with the Kemalist legacy, and that hope was not baseless. Erdoğan is not a Kemalist; he and his party emerged from a conservative Islamist tradition that had itself been a target of Kemalist state repression. In his first decade in power, Erdoğan launched what became known as the “Kurdish Opening” or peace process (2009–2015), which included direct talks with imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan and cultural reforms — including permitting Kurdish-language broadcasting and easing some linguistic restrictions — that none of the preceding Kemalist governments had been willing to undertake. In this sense, a simple thesis that “Erdoğan merely reproduces Atatürk” would be inaccurate.

Yet the process collapsed in 2015, coinciding with a shift in Erdoğan's electoral calculations: after the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) cleared the parliamentary threshold for the first time in the June 2015 election and threatened the AKP's parliamentary majority, Erdoğan's government swiftly returned to securitization and an alliance with the nationalist right, the MHP. The central point is this: Erdoğan's ideological break from Kemalism did not dissolve the structural continuity of centralized statehood and territorial nationalism. He could distance himself discursively, and even in some cultural policies, from the Kemalist legacy — but when his political survival, through alliance with the nationalist right, or his party's economic project, the export of Turkish productive capital via construction and defense firms into the more peripheral Middle East, was at stake, he reverted to the same instruments of centralized nation-statehood and border-territory control.

Turkey's military intervention in northern Syria, justified by reference to the “security threat” of the Syrian Kurdish YPG, is a clear instance of this continuity: the expansion of Turkey's economic and military sphere of influence in Syria has come bundled with the suppression of Kurdish autonomy across the border, precisely because any legitima-

tion of Kurdish autonomy in Syria reverberates directly into Kurdish demands inside Turkey. The article's thesis is therefore not that “Erdoğan is simply Atatürk,” but that the ideological break from Kemalism has not removed the structural imperatives of a semi-peripheral state — the need for domestic nationalist legitimation and territorial control to sustain capital export.

A Counter-Argument: Is This Time Really Different?

Advocates of the current process — including figures close to the Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM), who have taken part in recent talks with the government — argue that a combination of factors distinguishes the present moment from earlier attempts: shifting regional geopolitics, developments on the ground in Syria, and Erdoğan's need to stabilize the southern border to realize his economic reconstruction projects. On this view, PKK disarmament could offer a genuine opportunity to move from armed conflict to political bargaining, and Kurdish civil society should seize this window rather than dismiss it.

This argument deserves serious consideration and should not be dismissed as naive. But it faces two significant limits. First, even if the ceasefire holds, there is no clear indication that the Turkish state is prepared to address the structural economic gap between east and west through genuine capital redistribution; without that redistribution, political reconciliation alone leaves untouched the material inequality that keeps reproducing distrust. Second, the 2009–2015 peace process demonstrated that such processes, so long as they remain tied to shifts in Erdoğan's electoral or security calculations, can reverse as quickly as they began. The current opening therefore warrants cautious optimism, not confidence.

Has the Role of Kurdish Civil Society and Parties Ended?

The short answer is no — but its nature needs redefining. If the disarmament and negotiation process



Kurdish protesters attend a demonstration against Turkey's military action

advances mainly at the level of political elites — among Erdoğan, Öcalan, and DEM's leadership — the real risk is that it collapses into a narrow settlement between the central state and Kurdish party leadership, without incorporating the structural demands of Kurdish society: regional economic justice, mother-tongue education, and the restoration of local self-governance. In that scenario, the role of Kurdish civil society and the Turkish left is not diminished but becomes precisely one of scrutiny and pressure from below to prevent that reduction.

At the same time, Kurdish parties and movements need to move beyond purely ethnic isolation and rebuild class ties with labor and democratic movements in western Turkey, which have themselves suffered under the AKP's neoliberal policies — the very project the PKK claimed at its founding, even if, in practice, repression and the militarization of the struggle largely confined it to an ethnic frame.

Conclusion

Turkey's Kurdish question is the product of three converging layers: the founding legacy of a homogenizing nation-state; a specific causal chain linking semi-peripheral capitalist uneven development to state power concentration and, from there, to the securitization of peripheral regions; and the geopolitical imperatives of a moment in which Turkey is

simultaneously a NATO member, a regional actor, and a claimant to influence in postwar Syria. Within this framework, asking whether Erdoğan can and will set aside Atatürk's legacy is the wrong question — Erdoğan, unlike Atatürk, has genuinely broken ideologically with Kemalism and, for a period, placed the Kurdish question seriously on the political agenda. The better question is whether Turkey's political-economic structure — its dependence on reproducing state nationalism for domestic legitimacy and on capital export into the region — allows for a structural break that goes beyond discursive and episodic gestures. Historical experience suggests that such structural dependency is not easily set aside, even under the cover of cultural reform or peace negotiations.

The future of Turkey's Kurdish question should not, then, be tied to elite negotiations or the state's declared goodwill. A durable solution lies not in regime change, nor in replacing one ruling coalition with another, but in rebuilding transnational, class-based solidarity among social forces from below — Turkey's labor movement, Kurdish civil society, and international solidarity networks — capable of insisting simultaneously on economic redistribution and cultural-political recognition, without being captured by the short-term geopolitical calculations of a semi-peripheral power.

Qusra is Just a Warning: Israel's Blueprint for the West Bank

Ramzy Baroud

If you want to understand the bleak future awaiting the occupied West Bank, do not look away. Just pay attention to the events in the small Palestinian town of Qusra, south of Nablus.

The story of the future of the West Bank begins here.

While much of the media is treating reports emerging from the area as simply another episode of “settler violence,” it is not. Qusra represents something far more consequential: a glimpse into the new Plan Dalet that Israel has in store for Palestinians.

Plan Dalet was the military blueprint through which Zionist forces conquered much of historic Palestine, village by village, during the Nakba.

The plan did not suddenly emerge in 1948. It built on military schemes dating back to 1945, developing into a strategy for conquering Palestinian towns and villages, destroying communities and expelling their inhabitants.

The significance of this history today is not merely symbolic. The Nakba was a process, implemented in stages. So, too, is the annexation of the West Bank.

Nor is this merely an intellectual argument. Israeli officials have openly invoked a new Nakba as an intended outcome. In November 2023, Avi Dichter declared: “We are now rolling out the Gaza Nakba,” adding, “Gaza Nakba 2023. That’s how it’ll end.”

True to form, this new Nakba carries many of the characteristics of the old one: coordinated violence, massacres, ethnic cleansing, forced displacement and land confiscation.

The genocide in Gaza represents the zenith of this violence — a more devastating manifestation, but a continuation of the original sin upon which the Israeli state was established.

While all eyes were on Gaza beginning on October 7, 2023, the West Bank was largely ignored, allowing Israel the space to escalate violence in all its forms to levels unseen in decades.

The result has been staggering. Since October 7, 2023, Israeli forces and settlers have killed more than 1,100 Palestinians in the West Bank, including over 240 children, and wounded thousands more. Tens of thousands have been detained, while more than 33,000 Palestinians remain displaced from the Jenin, Tulkarem and Nur Shams refugee camps alone.

Now, back to Qusra.

Beginning on August 9, armed Israeli settlers surrounded three Palestinian homes in the Ras al-Ain area on the outskirts of the town.

They blocked access to the houses, erected tents outside them and cut water and electricity supplies. Families, including young children, were effectively trapped inside.

The Israeli military subsequently declared the surrounding area a closed military zone, restricting access by Palestinians, activists and journalists.

What emerged was not simply settler violence but a division of labor: settlers create the crisis; the army imposes the restrictions; Palestinian movement is curtailed; and the victims themselves are pressured to leave.



And the siege continued. As I write these words, the siege of the Qusra homes has concluded its second week.

Qusra is not incidental to this strategy. Israel has already confiscated its land for the settlement of Migdalim, while nearby outposts including Esh Kodesh have long been associated with attacks and attempts to seize Palestinian agricultural land.

Control of such areas is essential to the larger project of connecting settlement blocs, fragmenting Palestinian territory and transforming Palestinian communities into isolated enclaves.

A few years ago, the Israeli government behaved as though its plan to formally annex large swathes of the West Bank had been placed on hold. Yet, since October 7, annexation has moved from aspiration to obsession — in both words and action.

National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir oversaw the mass distribution of weapons after October 7, arming thousands of civilian security-squad members with rifles amid an already heavily armed settler population.

Meanwhile, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich has systematically worked to transfer powers over the West Bank from military administration to Israeli civilian authorities — one of the clearest institutional mechanisms of annexation.

And now another piece is falling into place: Defense Minister Israel Katz has ordered preparations to transfer law-enforcement responsibility over Israeli settlers in the West Bank from the military to the Israeli police, another critical legal step toward annexation.

The picture is becoming complete: settler militias, government funding, weapons, the army, police, civilian bureaucracies, courts and political decisions originating at the highest levels of the Israeli state.

Seen in this wider context, Qusra becomes a microcosm — and potentially a testing ground — for the mechanisms through which larger-scale annexation can be implemented. These realities echo the past. The Nakba did not simply ‘happen,’ but followed years of planning and incremental military schemes. That is why Qusra matters.

Some governments are warning of accelerating annexation; others sanction individual settlers, as though targeting a few extremists could reverse a blueprint implemented by an entire state apparatus.

Palestinians in the West Bank are fully aware of the challenge awaiting them. Urging the Palestinian Authority, which maintains security coordination with Israel, to suddenly devise a ‘strategy’ is painfully redundant.

But for the rest of us who understand the horrors of the Nakba — and the reverberations of that catastrophe from Deir Yassin to the genocide in Gaza — recognition is no longer enough.

The price of silence is already being paid by every Gazan living among the ruins of the Strip and every Palestinian in the West Bank confronting the violence of settlers and their military partners.

Labor Day Lessons: Can CIO Best Practices Aid Union Organizing Today?

Steve Early

Industrial union building in the 1930s has long been the lodestar for the post-New Deal labor left.

If organized labor in the U.S. could go from historic membership lows in the 1920s to an early 1950s peak union density of nearly one-third of all private sector workers, maybe that great leap forward could be repeated again, sometime in the future?

Other than the public sector worker upsurge of the late 1960s and 1970s—which has propped up (with less success over time) overall unionization rates ever since—there has been little sign yet of the second coming of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), in some 21st century form.

Unless a union like my own, the Communications Workers of America (CWA), or the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), or the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) was able to neutralize management opposition, using bargaining leverage with a partially unionized employer, there have been few recent private sector organizing breakthroughs on a large scale, certainly not industry wide ones.

Starbucks workers have won hundreds of National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) elections in small retail store units but, so far, have been thwarted in their effort to reach an acceptable national agreement covering thousands of workers. At Amazon, representation votes have been far harder to win; when bargaining rights have been won, union supporters face even longer first contract delays.

In their own struggle for collective bargaining, workers in basic industry in the 1930s also had to overcome past defeats and find new ways of organizing themselves to change the balance of power

between themselves and giant corporations. In his new book, *Unions, Race, and Popular Democracy: Building a Progressive Labor Movement* (Cornell), sociology professor Kim Scipes examines parallel efforts to build two CIO unions in the Midwest—via the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC) and the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee. (PWOC)

Mixing Theory and Practice

The author is a long-time labor educator and faculty union member, as well as an academic researcher with many prior publications. He has devoted much of his career to mixing theory and practice, and is adept at popularizing his findings and ideas to reach a non-academic audience.

In his detailed case studies, Scipes recounts the key role that rank-and-file activists played in the creation of what became the United Steel Workers of America and United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) respectively.

The book is full of valuable lessons for those hoping to have 21st century success in “developing an inclusive, rank-and-file based unionism guided by democratic decision making,” rather than having full-time officials, far removed from the shop floor, exercise too much bureaucratic control.

Just like Depression-era radicals in the SWOC and PWOC, activists in present-day networks like the Emergency Workplace Organizing Committee, co-sponsored by Democratic Socialists of America, have to navigate a labor landscape still overly-dominated by the latter-type of labor organization.

Scipes’ book includes a compelling indictment

of the US labor movement's historic failures to resist racism and, in the case of some unions, their disgraceful record of discriminating against black workers and even white women as members.

He also provides much evidence that denying workers of color an equal voice in union affairs—where and when that was the case—ended up being self-defeating, because it reinforced the divide-and-conquer strategies of management and hampered efforts to raise working class living standards for all. The result was a steady “weakening of labor’s power” and “white workers getting less themselves than they would have gotten had blacks and other peoples of color been included as equals...”

Rank and File Militancy

Among the book's many strengths is the author's understanding that rank-and-file militants can also be “marginalized” and deprived of “appropriate attention” in labor history because both academic researchers and authors of labor leader biographies have, in the past, focused too much on the role of top officials.

The author highlights the UPWA's exemplary record of developing black leadership in half of its founding locals “in racist, segregated Chicago” will be very instructive for seekers of greater racial and gender diversity among elected local officers today.

Scipes' discussion of the UPWA's approach to membership education and political action, building alliances with non-labor groups, and fighting racial injustice on the job and in the community has great contemporary relevance and resonance. Modern day organizers face similar challenges to building unity between “white ethnics,” African-Americans, and recent immigrants from Latin America, the Middle East, and Haiti.

Unions, Race, and Popular Democracy very much follows in the footsteps of Tony Gilpin's *The Long Deep Grudge*, a history of the militant, racial-

ly integrated, and internally democratic Farm Equipment Workers, a left-led union similar to the Packinghouse Workers in its heyday.

UFCW Reform Struggle

The evolution of PWOC into a far more democratic and progressive union than the USWA—deeply committed to developing and elevating African-American leadership long ago—will be of particular interest to union reformers now seeking to transform the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW).

That AFL-CIO affiliate, with 1.3 million members, is the conservative amalgamated union that UPWA eventually ended up in, via a series of mergers that much diluted its original organizational heritage and culture.

As Scipes suggests, if more unions today were like the original Packinghouse Workers, they might not have had such a hard time rallying their own members against the clear and present danger of a right-wing, anti-union Republican control of Congress and the White House.

During three presidential election cycles, Donald Trump's electoral college win in 2016 and popular vote victory two years ago exposed how the decline in union social and political influence and membership density in the rust belt has left too many working-class people overly receptive to MAGA appeals, based on “white supremacy” and immigrant bashing.

The “social justice unionism” that Scipes advocates as a better way forward, now and in the 1930s, definitely proved to be a buffer against fascism during the Great Depression. Readers of *Unions, Race, and Popular Democracy* will find it to be an important contribution to current discussions about how to create more militant, progressive unions through internal restructuring, democratization, and reform—or starting all over again with independent labor organizations outside the AFL-CIO.

Labor Daze and Class Struggle

Nicholas Hefling, Peter Bohmer

Oh, Labor Day, what a glorious day! In leftist circles, we sometimes hear conspiracy theories about how the September Labor Day was a “counterrevolutionary” move by the state to distract workers from the real labor day, May Day. The truth is a bit more nuanced.

The late 19th century was a vibrant period of labor militance and major worker strikes. To appease labor unions and the growing support for making Labor Day a holiday — and to undermine the radical association with May Day — the United States made Labor Day a national holiday in 1894.

The idea for a September labor celebration actually came from across the border. In 1872, Toronto printers struck for a nine-hour workday, and the annual labor celebrations that grew out of their fight became a fixture in Canada. When Peter J. McGuire (a key leader of the early American Federation of Labor) witnessed one such Canadian festival in 1882, he was inspired to bring the idea stateside. The first U.S. Labor Day was in fact celebrated September 5, 1882, in New York City — before May Day was immortalized in 1886.

May Day, on the other hand, was inspired by the sacrifice and fierce determination of Chicago workers in the 1886 Haymarket Affair. What began as a peaceful rally became violent as police attacked the rally and a bomb exploded killing demonstrators and police. Although there was no evidence linking leaders of this movement to the bombing, seven anarchists were sentenced to death; four were hanged and one committed suicide. Two had their sentences reduced. Workers’ demands for an eight-hour workday enraged bosses who enlisted the police to crack down on the labor movement with lethal force.

International Workers’ Day (May Day) is inspired by, and in memory of, the fight of those courageous

Chicago workers. Beginning in 1926, May Day was commemorated worldwide with huge demonstrations and the closing of most workplaces. From Russia to France to Mexico, the massacre at the hands of the Chicago Police is honored by labor movements everywhere — with one notable exception, the United States.

The capacity for organized workers to win better wages, benefits, conditions, and the ability to make decisions over the workplace faces steep challenges. As a result of increasingly hostile federal and state governments, labor is weakened in both the private and public sector. Most people in the U.S. work for private companies. Only 6% of workers in the private sector are unionized, a steady decline since the mid-1950’s when more than a third of workers in the private sector were in a union. The few private unions that are still active are often unable to win even limited demands. Since the 1990s, when massive trade deregulation opened borders for large corporations, private sector unions have faced the challenge of capital flight — where employers pick up and move to a new location without organized labor.

Capital has the ability to transcend borders while the majority of workers do not. When capital can move freely but workers can’t, the scale is tipped in favor of the capitalist class. Beginning on May 1, 2006 and on every May 1st since, May Day in the U.S., although not an official holiday, is observed with demonstrations and rallies as International Workers Day with an emphasis on immigrant justice. Confronting globalized capitalism requires a globalized working-class struggle. May Day is explicitly international while nationalism splinters the working class — something the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) has long recognized and challenged.



Labor Day protest in New York

Although the public sector employs only 15% of all workers, in the U.S., 33% of them are members of unions, more than five times the private sector rate. Half of all union members work in the public sector such as in local, state and national government. That turns public sector unions into a primary target for anti-democratic, free-market actors. Namely, major corporations and right-wing leaders. Conservatives attack the public sector precisely because it is where labor most often still wins. For example, the structural assaults against teachers and public education are designed to crush union membership and demonstrate the uphill battle facing labor advocates and social justice movements as a whole.

The growth of neoliberalism causes heightened individualism and lack of solidarity among workers. Revitalizing the labor movement counteracts the atomization of the working class. Organizing a union is about more than winning concessions. It is about restoring the dignity of workers, reversing the obscene expansion of wealth inequality, and resisting authoritarianism. It's about transforming an economic system that reinforces the exploitation of the many for the benefit of the few.

There is growing support among the public for unionization is a prerequisite for reversing the decline we've seen over the last few decades. While

society would benefit from increased union membership and unionized workshops, strengthened collective bargaining power alone cannot deliver economic justice. To make that a reality, what is needed is social movement unionism — a more radical, class-wide political struggle whose demands go beyond better wages and benefits.

Labor Day should stand for something more than a day off work and a chance to attend a picnic or rally. It should stand for workers having more power in the union, the workplace, and the right to more fulfilling work. It should stand for organizing all workers including the precariat and winning demands that benefit the whole working class.

One powerful narrative that keeps workers' rights limited is the contemporary concept of "work-life balance." This is a controversial position that many labor advocates champion. But the unfortunate and unintended result of this framing is that it ends up telling workers that your life at work is somehow not your life. In the "work/life balance" narrative we're all made out to be either an employee or a civilian, as if there are two severed halves of our existence that aren't intrinsically related, and what matters most is your time off work. Labor organizing taken seriously seeks to materially improve working conditions and life outside the workplace. Organizing should never be reduced to a workplace; it is a transformation of our relationship to power in all spheres of life.

Labor is more than unions and the workers in unions; it is also nonunion workers and the unemployed. Everyone does labor every day; some just get paid for it.

We need to build a labor movement that also organizes for causes off-the-clock that meets worker needs such as universal health and free childcare, that challenges militarism, authoritarianism and AI; that unites with other social movements for justice and liberation and acts in solidarity with workers across the globe.

Happy Labor Day

Black Power, White Heat, and the Work of Solidarity

Alexandria Shaner

There is a particular kind of political amnesia that can overtake movements in difficult times. We remember the victories but forget the arguments that preceded them. We remember the marches but forget the years of patient organizing that made them possible. We remember solidarity as a feeling rather than a political practice.

Alice Echols' "Black Power, White Heat: From Solidarity Politics to Radical Chic" is a useful antidote to that amnesia.

Echols tells the story of interracial and cross-racial organizing within the Black freedom movement through two organizations that bookend the decade: the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, or SNCC, and the Black Panther Party. The Panthers' commitment to armed self-defense, and later debates over militancy and guerrilla warfare, form part of that history. Echols' central concern — and the focus of this review — is the difficult work of solidarity: how movements build relationships across differences in race, power and political position.

This book arrives at an important moment. Across the United States and elsewhere, racism, xenophobia, and religious and white supremacist nationalism are again being mobilized to divide people who might otherwise have common interests. Authoritarian movements understand something the left sometimes forgets: people who can be persuaded to see one another as enemies are much easier to govern.

The question of how we build solidarity across difference is therefore an urgent question of power.

From Black Power to "Radical Chic"

The title captures the book's historical arc.

Black Power meant, among other things, the assertion of Black autonomy, self-determination and political power.

White Heat comes from SNCC organizer Bob Moses's metaphor for the transformative potential of white participation in the 1964 Mississippi Summer Project. Nearly 1,000 mostly white college students traveled to Mississippi that summer to support Black voter-registration efforts. Moses hoped their presence would expose white America to the reality of racial violence and help generate political transformation beyond Mississippi.

And then there was "Radical Chic," Tom Wolfe's infamous 1970 caricature of wealthy white liberals hosting a fundraiser for the Black Panther Party at Leonard and Felicia Bernstein's Manhattan penthouse. Wolfe transformed cross-racial political solidarity into a punchline: wealthy liberals playing at revolution, fashionable people dabbling in radical causes. Echols argues that the essay became more than a satire of one awkward party: It helped create a durable political language for attacking solidarity itself.

What happened between those moments is the heart of the book. Echols resists a simple story of interracialism giving way to Black nationalism, or a morality tale in which one side was right and the other wrong. She describes experiments in solidarity that were sometimes extraordinarily productive, sometimes painful, and often both at once.

That complexity is precisely what makes this history useful now.

Solidarity is not sameness

The early SNCC experience illustrates both the promise and limitations of interracial organizing.

SNCC brought Black and white activists together in a shared struggle against segregation and disenfranchisement. But Freedom Summer also intensified questions about power inside the movement. What did it mean for white people to participate in a movement led by Black people? Could interracialism reproduce the racial hierarchy it was supposed to challenge?

Echols gives this contradiction a particularly revealing form. Some Black SNCC organizers noticed that local Black people who had repeatedly ignored their appeals to get involved would suddenly listen to newly arrived white male volunteers. In other cases, white volunteers arrived in Mississippi with assumptions about how things should be done, even taking over office work that Black staff had been doing. The conflicts revealed a deeper problem: The racial hierarchy SNCC was trying to dismantle could reappear inside an interracial movement.

These questions shaped the organization's strategy and eventually contributed to SNCC's turn toward Black Power and the expulsion of white staff in 1966.

Echols' history offers no simple verdict on interracial organizing. It shows how coalitions can generate real political power while reproducing some of the very inequalities they are trying to overcome. The people in her history wrestled with that contradiction, producing new strategies, organizations, alliances and political possibilities.

Their experiences point toward a more demanding alternative to divide and rule: organized solidarity capable of turning difference into political power.

Organizing is more than mobilizing

One of the book's most important lessons for the present concerns the difference between mobilizing and organizing.

The 1960s are often remembered through spectacular images: marches, demonstrations, sit-ins, crowds in the streets. But the power of the movements Echols describes depended on much more than protest.

It grew through people living in communities, building relationships, developing political confidence, creating institutions and learning how to act collectively. One example is the Freedom Schools organized during Mississippi Summer. Their purpose went beyond political messaging. Organizers developed curricula intended to help people understand their communities and develop the confidence and skills to participate in changing them. The schools became part of the infrastructure through which Freedom Summer could turn a national moment of attention into deeper local organizing.

Freedom Summer did not emerge from nowhere. Neither did the Panthers' survival programs or their legal and political defense networks. This infrastructure depended on relationships and material capacities built over time.

The mass protests following George Floyd's murder in 2020, and more recently against Trump's authoritarianism, demonstrated extraordinary popular anger. But mass participation alone does not create durable power. Movements need the capacity to bring people into action — and then to keep organizing them after the cameras leave. They need structures through which people develop political agency, and organizations capable of surviving repression, disagreement, electoral cycles and changes in public mood.

We need movements that can mobilize. We also need movements that can organize.

The politics of the “ally”

Another question running through the book has become familiar on the contemporary left: What should people do when they want to support a struggle that is not their own? Echols offers no simple answer.

White activists sometimes became important organizers and collaborators. Others became what Echols calls “awkward allies” or “clueless comrades.” The harder question concerned the terms of participation: what could meaningful support look like in a movement organized around Black self-determination?

Ella Baker advocated for a broad movement expansive enough even to include what she called the “matron in the fur coat.” Her approach was not merely rhetorical. When SNCC was getting started, Baker hired Jane Stembridge, a white Southern theology student and poet, as the organization’s first paid staffer. Echols notes that historian Clayborne Carson has suggested SNCC might have collapsed during that first summer without the energy and skills Baker and Stembridge brought to the work. Baker’s organizing philosophy centered on developing people’s capacity rather than accumulating authority. As Echols notes, she believed that “strong people don’t need strong leaders.”

Solidarity is a relationship, not a performance. That does not mean every contribution carries the same value or that movements should welcome everyone without conditions. It means that meaningful participation depends on relationships of trust, accountability and a willingness to support work that one may not control.

The Panthers offer a particularly interesting example. They remained committed to Black political autonomy while deliberately cultivating relationships with white radicals, lawyers, journalists, publishers and other supporters. These relationships could be politically useful, but they also created tensions. White radicals sometimes struggled with being asked to play supporting rather than leading roles, while the Panthers had to navigate relationships with people whose social position was fundamentally different from their own. Huey Newton later acknowledged the importance of progressive white activists to the Panthers, even as relationships between Black and white radicals remained fraught.

SNCC’s evolving approach to white radicals points toward another way of thinking about this relationship. Stokely Carmichael, later Kwame Ture, increasingly argued that white activists should organize in their own communities. White radicals were encouraged to confront the institutions shaping their own lives, including the military draft and the Vietnam War. Bob Moses himself worked with white antiwar organizers such as David Dellinger, A. J. Muste and Staughton Lynd.

Carmichael’s argument proposed a different structure for solidarity: people developing power in their own communities and around the forms of oppression shaping their own lives while remaining connected to a broader struggle.

That approach can help shift solidarity away from paternalism. Rather than entering someone else’s struggle primarily as a helper, people are asked to examine how the systems they are fighting also shape their own lives, communities and possibilities. That can create a more grounded basis for political commitment.

There is a tension here as well. A politics built around one’s own stake can narrow into self-interest, with people feeling responsible only for struggles in which they can identify themselves as directly affected. The challenge is to begin from one’s own lived position without ending there — to build power where we are while recognizing the larger systems that connect our struggles.

Autonomy and coalition can coexist.

The material side of solidarity

Echols also pays unusual attention to something movements sometimes overlook: the practical resources needed to keep political work going. Movements need lawyers, meeting spaces, printing presses, transportation, ways to communicate, food, bail money, staff, research, childcare, and, of course, money.

The Panthers' relationships with white lawyers and other supporters offer a useful example. Their legal defense efforts depended on people who could provide skills, money, publicity and access to institutions that the Panthers themselves could not easily command. In courtrooms across the country, mostly white left-wing lawyers defended Black radicals against prosecutors and police forces. These relationships could strengthen the movement materially and sometimes helped expose the workings of the state itself.

Political economy is inseparable from organizing. Good intentions do not build legal networks, communications systems, or the other infrastructure movements need.

Resources, however, also create relationships of power. A movement dependent on wealthy supporters can become vulnerable to their influence. A donor may want to help without understanding the political work — or may expect gratitude, access, influence or even authority in return.

Movements often need resources from people outside their core constituencies. The challenge is to build relationships in which those resources expand collective power rather than quietly shifting power toward those who control them.

Rather than resolve this contradiction, Echols shows why movements have to confront it.

Repression and the politics of division

Movements do not operate in a vacuum.

Echols shows how repression can reshape a movement from within. COINTELPRO and local police "Red Squads" amplified existing rivalries and ideological divisions inside the Panthers, helping create a climate of debilitating paranoia. Panther chief of staff David Hilliard captured the bitter irony: the party had been created to help Black people determine their own destinies, yet increasingly "the state — FBI, police, Red Squads — is deciding our fate."

Repression also pushed the Panthers toward coalition. Echols traces how the pressure of state surveillance and police attacks encouraged the party to seek alliances with other radicals and left-leaning liberals, including through the 1969 United Front Against Fascism, a broad coalition that brought together the Panthers and other groups concerned about state repression and the threat of fascism.

Authoritarian politics thrives on fragmentation. It encourages workers to blame migrants rather than employers, poor people rather than concentrated wealth, and racial minorities rather than the institutions that reproduce inequality. It turns religious difference into a political weapon and cultural difference into evidence of threat.

The parallels between the present and the 1960s have limits. The present should not be reduced to a replay of that earlier period. The underlying political problem, however, is familiar: Those in power often seek to divide people who might otherwise recognize their shared interests and build power together.

Echols' history shows what becomes possible when movements resist that fragmentation — and what can happen when they cannot.

"Radical Chic" and the attack on solidarity

Perhaps the book's most surprising contribution is its treatment of Tom Wolfe's "Radical Chic."

Wolfe's 1970 essay mocked a fundraiser for the Black Panther Party held at Leonard and Felicia Bernstein's Manhattan penthouse. The image was almost irresistible: wealthy white liberals in evening clothes mingling with Black revolutionaries, champagne and revolution sharing the same room. Wolfe turned the gathering into a joke about fashionable people playing at radicalism.

Echols argues that something more consequential happened. "Radical Chic" helped establish a political language for dismissing cross-racial solidarity as fundamentally unserious: the rich were hypocrites,

the radicals were dangerous, and everyone involved was performing for status.

That framing has proved remarkably durable. Echols traces how the idea of “radical chic” migrated into conservative politics, becoming part of a broader effort to portray progressive politics as the indulgence of cultural elites rather than a response to real systems of exploitation and racial domination.

There is an important tension here. Some of the people who participated in these relationships undoubtedly were motivated by status, fashion or a desire to be close to something exciting. Yet the imperfections of individual participants do not tell us much about the value of solidarity itself. Treating privileged or imperfect allies as evidence that coalition is inherently fraudulent can become a way of making solidarity seem suspect.

Echols shows that cross-racial solidarity persisted in forms far removed from Wolfe’s caricature. Black radicals continued to find unexpected points of connection with white lawyers, journalists, activists, jurors and ordinary people who encountered their politics through organizing, political trials and community work. What mattered was whether those relationships could produce greater political understanding and collective power.

That distinction matters now. In a political culture increasingly eager to reduce solidarity to social-media signaling, celebrity activism or elite posturing, cynicism can spread easily.

We should be capable of criticizing performative solidarity without becoming cynical about solidarity itself. The first can sharpen political judgment. The second can become political disarmament.

A history worth putting to work

“Black Power, White Heat” offers no formula for building the next movement. Its value lies in the richer political history it gives us for thinking about our own organizing — and in the questions that

history leaves us with:

How do we build solidarity across real differences in power and experience?

How do we combine autonomy with coalition?

How do we organize people rather than simply mobilize them?

How do we build institutions that can survive repression?

How do we develop political power within our own communities while remaining committed to a larger movement?

And how do we build relationships strong enough to withstand the deliberate efforts of those in power to divide us?

Echols’ story offers no easy answers, and the people she writes about did not have them either. Their collaborations were productive and fraught, sometimes exhilarating and sometimes heartbreaking. That is precisely why this history is useful.

The left does not need another mythology about the 1960s. We need its contradictions.

For those of us trying to build movements now — against racism, militarism, ecological destruction, exploitation, xenophobia, patriarchy and authoritarianism — this history offers something more valuable than nostalgia. It offers political literacy.

Read it with your organizing group. Read it with your political education circle. Argue about it. Ask where the people in the book succeeded and where they failed. Ask what their dilemmas look like in your own community.

Because solidarity is something we build.

In an age increasingly defined by attempts to divide us, building solidarity may be one of the most important forms of power we have.

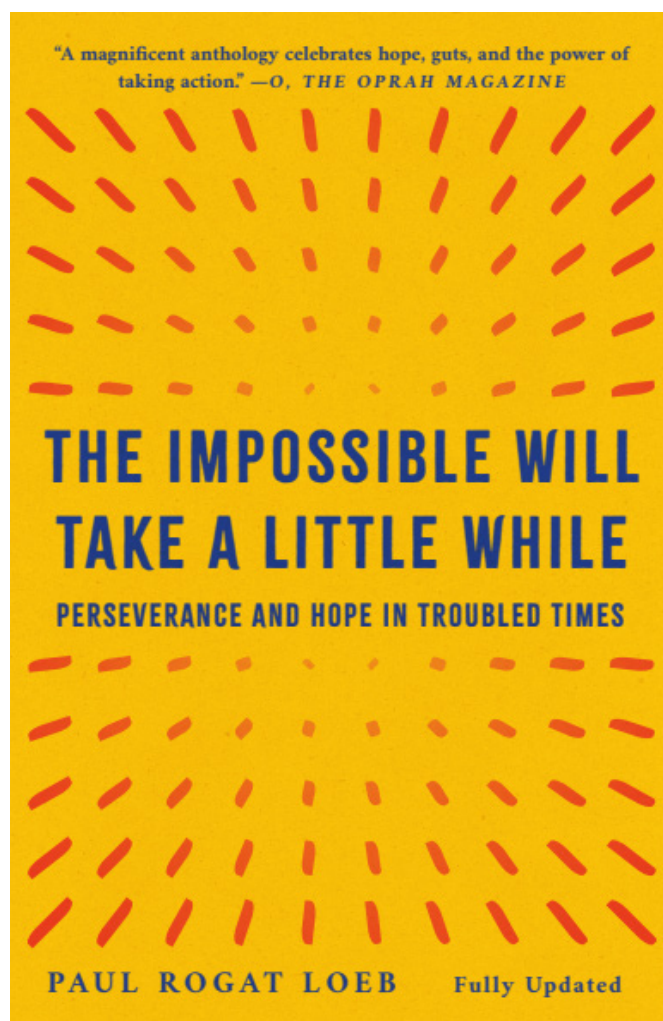
The Impossible Will Take a Little While: The Power of Persistence

Paul Rogat Loeb

We live in a time fraught with bad news: assaults on democracy, climate disasters, crippling inequality, and an endless proliferation of lies. The pace of the daily outrages reminds me of a moment from Art Spiegelman's *Maus*. The Spiegelman character asks his father, a concentration camp survivor, what it felt like to be in the camps. His father thinks, and then yells "Boo!" as loudly as he can, and Spiegelman jumps back. "It felt a little like that," his father says. "But always! From the moment you got to the gate to the very end."

Though Americans aren't living through the Holocaust, each day can bring more political horrors, more attacks on communities and lives. Exhaustion and despair are understandable, so we need to learn from people who've acted in the most difficult circumstances imaginable, and persisted with courage, heart, and even joy. Those in power—who want that power to go unchallenged—insist that our actions don't matter. But as Czech playwright, dissident, and later president Václav Havel wrote, "Hope is not prognostication. It is an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart." Havel wrote those words under a Communist dictatorship that was three years away from being unexpectedly overthrown in a nonviolent revolution. Sometimes the seemingly impossible happens unexpectedly fast—but only if we continue acting on what we believe even when times get hard.

Engagement can carry costs. Havel was imprisoned for four years, Nelson Mandela for twenty-seven. ICE resisters have been indicted, imprisoned, or killed. But if we look at life through a historical lens, we find that the proverbial rock can be rolled, if not to the top of the mountain, then at least to successive plateaus. And attacks on human



dignity can be successfully resisted with enough courage and persistence. History also shows that even seemingly miraculous advances are the result of small steps taken by many people, often over a long period. And that the actions of any of us can give hope and sustenance to others.

Courageous action can echo far beyond particular causes, countries, and historical times. Those who inspired Gandhi included Leo Tolstoy and Henry David Thoreau. Key US civil rights leaders trav-

eled to India to learn from Gandhi's compatriots. The US civil rights movement inspired those who challenged South African apartheid and the Eastern European dictatorships. Young activists from Nepal, Peru, and Madagascar have recently inspired each other in rising up against corrupt and dictatorial governments. When previously apolitical Chicago residents helped resist ICE immigration raids, they paved the way for similar responses in cities like Minneapolis. And Minneapolis residents credited both cities like Chicago and Norwegian forebears whose nonviolent resistance successfully defied the Nazis in World War II.

I created this wholly updated book, *The Impossible Will Take a Little While*, to help ordinary citizens continue fighting for democracy and a more humane world, despite all the obstacles, setbacks, and legitimate reasons for fear. Here are brief capsules from five of the essays:

Lightsticks, Ramen, and K-Pop: How South Koreans Stopped a Coup

Howard Zinn talks about "the quick collapse of systems of power that seemed invincible." In December 2024, as Korean peace activist Jungmin Choi describes, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol imposed martial law, ordering soldiers to storm the National Assembly and drag members out so they couldn't vote to end it. But 16,000 ordinary South Koreans pushed past the troops and surrounded the building to protect the legislators as other Assembly members arrived and climbed the walls to enter. Soldiers resisted by refusing to interfere with the civilians, staying in their military buses, withholding flight approvals for military helicopters, citing bureaucratic rules to refuse to distribute ammunition. One group of soldiers even detoured to a convenience store to eat ramen noodles.

The legislators finally got the necessary quorum and voted to negate Yoon's directive. Over the next ten days, more than a million people gath-

ered in front of the building, waving lightsticks, singing K-pop songs, and successfully demanding Yoon's impeachment. Many spoke of the 1980 Gwangju protests as inspiration for their actions. Courage here was collective, and contagious, and President Yoon ended up impeached, tried, and jailed for life.

Climate Hope

It's increasingly easy to become fatalistic about climate change. The ten hottest years in nearly two hundred years of recordkeeping have all occurred in the past decade. Disasters continue to escalate. Yet as environmental writer Bill McKibben describes, renewables have now become the world's cheapest energy sources. By 2025, renewable sources produced more electricity globally than coal. By 2031, solar alone is projected to produce more than gas. Costs for batteries to store the new energy have dropped 95 percent in fifteen years.

In my favorite story of McKibben's, Pakistani homeowners and storekeepers began buying dirt-cheap solar panels from China and saving money by simply laying them on the ground to collect the sun. The panels deployed in less than a single year produced more electricity than a third of the country's existing production nationwide, displacing costly diesel fuel for lights, water pumps, and cell and computer charging. A key driver was when "the German Green Party leveraged its parliamentary power to win a big government subsidy for rooftop solar power, creating a demand that led China, which was then building one coal plant after another for its own use, to start manufacturing solar panels in bulk for export to Europe." American state and federal subsidies for renewables helped as well—even as Trump has revoked the latter.

Challenging the Pipeline

Psychologist Mary Pipher, describes how helpless she felt when she learned that the Keystone XL pipeline, designed to carry Canadian tar

sands oil, would pass through Nebraska, where she lives, with potential spills jeopardizing the state's ancient aquifer. Keystone was greased by more political money than the state had ever seen, so everyone assumed it was a done deal.

Then Pipher took the radical action of hosting a potluck to figure out what to do. The movement she and a handful of friends helped launch grew quickly to include students, small-town ministers and business owners, and Republican ranchers and farmers. A Republican rancher named Randy became a symbol of the cause. Activists carried life-size cutouts of him with the message, "I Stand with Randy," and his statement, "We will not be bullied." When a TransCanada ad flashed on the jumbotron at University of Nebraska's first football game of the season, eighty-five thousand fans booed. Obama eventually vetoed the pipeline's expansion, the pipeline owner gave up, and a planned massive expansion of tar sands extraction never occurred.

Grief and Witness

On the eve of COVID, the 33-year-old husband of two-time National Book Award winner Jesmyn Ward died from a sudden respiratory illness. His last words were: "Can't. Breathe."

Ward takes us through her raging grief as she tries to stay strong for their children while finishing her novel about a young enslaved woman whose loved ones are ripped away from her. Four months after her husband's death, cellphone videos showed George Floyd saying "I can't breathe," pleading for his life, while a policeman kept pressing his knee into Floyd's neck. And protestors around the world began chanting her husband's final words.

Ward assumed Floyd's death would simply pass, as had so many other police killings of Black men, women, and children. But "I can't breathe" became the slogan of the Black Lives Matter movement, and people worldwide responded

with a river of human solidarity that restored Ward's hope. "The people marched, and I had never known that there could be rivers such as this, and as protesters chanted and stomped, as they grimaced and shouted and groaned, tears burned my eyes. They glazed my face."

"Even in a pandemic, even in grief," she writes, "I found myself commanded to amplify the voices of the dead that sing to me, from their boat to my boat, on the sea of time."

The ripples of that powerful river of solidarity continue despite an administration that works to bury even the possibility of confronting America's deep racial wounds. And the power of courage and witness continues.

Only Justice Can Stop a Curse

In "Only Justice Can Stop a Curse," Alice Walker uses an ancient curse collected by Zora Neale Hurston to grapple with the politics of bitterness—the temptation to conclude that humans might actually deserve the destruction we're capable of reaping. "Let the Earth marinate in poisons," Walker thinks. "Let the bombs cover the ground like rain. Let the heated atmosphere go mad." Might it be best, she wonders, if the ills we've created were indeed to end our tenure on this planet? But she cannot ignore the gifts of the earth, like the taste of fresh peaches and the courage of those who act for justice. And that expands her spirit, making her larger than her rage. Never complacent, never blind to human-constructed horror, Walker nonetheless chooses life.

Walker's answer isn't sentimentality, but it's an alternative to getting trapped in helpless bitterness. In the words of legendary organizer Heather Booth, it's putting love at the center—honoring the richness of life and our bonds with our fellow human beings, no matter how difficult things get. And those connections can give us the strength to continue.