If Capitalism Must End, What Should Replace It?  
Michael D. Yates

What Professors and Fast Food Workers Have In Common  
Elizabeth Oram

Elizabeth Warren and the Trap for Black Voters  
Margaret Kimberley

There Is No Good Kind of Nationalism  
David Swanson

Post-Jobs Societies  
Robert Kocis
On October 2, 2018, Amazon announced that it will implement a $15-an-hour across the board wage floor for all its 350,000 workers, including part-time and contract workers. It also announced a commitment to work to lift the national federal minimum wage (stuck at $7.25 per hour since 2009). It’s fair to say that pressure from activists of the Fight for 15 movement, combined with journalistic exposes of poor working conditions at Amazon’s workplaces, Bernie Sanders’s Stop BEZOS Act, and so on had something to do with this decision by Amazon, the 2nd largest employer in the US (after Walmart).

But, much more needs to be done and demanded. Amazon should allow workers to unionize — and that includes the workers at the Whole Foods grocery chain that Amazon acquired last year. The Whole Foods workers have been pushing to unionize despite opposition from Amazon. Amazon should not use the increase in wages as a cost-cutting ploy. It should not swap minimum wage increases with stock options for its long-term warehouse workers. Furthermore, capitalists can increase profits by speeding up work and hiring fewer workers. What guarantee is there that Amazon won’t do just that? After all, increased productivity combined with fewer workers can more than offset the cost of paying higher wages. Also, will workers now accept unsafe conditions and long
If Capitalism Must End, What Should Replace It?

Michael D. Yates

Today, the world faces multiple crises. Foremost among them is an impending environmental catastrophe, marked by rapidly rising temperatures and sea levels, widespread extinction and diminution of species, poisoned air, contaminated and polluted water, including our oceans, the loss of soil elasticity, and worsening desertification. We are rapidly reaching a point at which human societies, as we have known them, will be impossible to sustain. At the same time, we are witness to a phenomenal increase in every manner of inequality—income, wealth, health, life expectancies, access to everything from schooling to drinking water; the spread of neofascist movements in both the Global North and Global South; the spectacular accumulation of power by a few global corporations; and what appear to be endless wars. Everywhere, there is a palpable sense of multiple alienations: we are separated from and in competition from one another; we are divorced from the goods and services our labor produces; our relationship with nature has been torn asunder; and we are even divided within ourselves, internally plagued with anxiety while we put on a happy outward face.

While there may be any number of proximate causes for these many woes, the root cause is the nature of the system our system of production and distribution. Capitalism is a mode of production at whose heart is the ceaseless accumulation of capital, the drive to make as much profit as possible and to utilize it to expand the initial capital, to grow. Accumulation is, in turn, made possible by the exploitation of wage labor and the expropriation of both human bodies and nature. The manner is which exploitation and expropriation occur and the institutional structure that allows the entire enterprise to be continuously reproduced is complex and space limitations do not allow me to explain them fully. However, suffice it to say that the whole edifice rests upon the monopoly of ownership of land, natural resources, buildings, machines, and tools—the very things everyone must have access to in order to survive—by a tiny minority of the world’s people. Today, the richest 1 percent own more wealth than the other 99 percent. This gives the rich tremendous leverage over everyone and everything else, at work, in the political sphere, with respect to the expropriation of Mother Earth itself. They exert control over every aspect of our lives, and they ravage nature, all in the endless pursuit of money. As Marx said, “Accumulate, accumulate! That is Moses and the Prophets!”

The consequences of capital’s drive to accumulate are those outlined in the first paragraph above. These will, without doubt, intensify in the coming years, with more and more wealth concentrated at the top, with those at the bottom enduring nothing but suffering, with the planet heating up and making human life increasingly precarious. This means that we are doomed unless
radical, all-encompassing change takes place. There are two implications of this. First, we must abolish every aspect of capitalism, root and branch. At a minimum, these must end:

- Private ownership of the means of production, including land.
- Production for profit.
- The obsession with endless economic growth.
- The exploitation of wage labor.
- The expropriation of peasant land, of urban and rural common spaces, of the labor and bodies of women, of black bodies, of all forms of patriarchy and racism.
- The private plunder of the natural world.
- Imperialism. Capitalism has always meant the subordination by the rich capitalist nations of the rest of the world.
- The pro-capitalist role of all institutions and mechanisms that reproduce society, from family to state and from education and media to the legal system. 4

These are daunting tasks, to put it mildly. They will require unprecedented global solidarity by wage laborers and peasants. New labor unions will have to be initiated and old ones radically transformed; new political formations, militant and principled, must form; radical, critical education must become central in all struggles and organizations; direct confrontations with governments to win programs guaranteeing greater working-class security must be waged; and direct actions, forms of collective self-help must be developed, aimed at providing basic necessities and creating alternatives to capitalism within its shell.

Second, we will have to figure out what kind of society should we aim to create? Some form of eco-socialism would seem indispensable if humanity is to survive on anything resembling a sustainable earth. While neither I nor anyone else can or should lay out a detailed blueprint of such a mode of production, it is possible to describe in general terms what our goals are. Here are some of them, put in the form of demands:

- A sustainable environment. What we appropriate from nature must be restored. We are headed for multiple environmental catastrophes threatening human existence. There will be no world for the working class to change if this isn’t done. All economic decisions should be made with a sustainable environment a central determining factor.
- A planned economy. The anarchy of the marketplace should be replaced by conscious planning of what is produced. Periodic economic crises and unconscionable inequality are the direct results of reliance on the market. These are neither desirable nor necessary. Corporations plan, so why can’t society as a whole plan?
- Socialization of as much consumption as possible, especially transportation and childcare. Living arrangements could be more collective as well. Not only will this save resources, it will socialize us in ways
supportive of feelings of belonging and happiness. We are social animals not meant to live isolated lives surrounded by unnecessary privately-owned consumer goods.

- Democratic worker-community control of workplaces, with, to the extent possible, the elimination of the detailed division of labor and with machinery built and introduced with social usefulness as the guiding principle. The abolition of wage labor.
- Public ownership of all the social institutions that help a society reproduce itself, from schools to media. The same should be the case for as much of the production of goods and services as possible. In many cases, cooperatives run by workers and communities should be responsible for production and distribution decisions. Local supplying is especially important for food, both in terms of transportation expenses and a healthy environment. It will be much easier to return nutrients to the soil organically when food is grown close to where it is consumed.
- A radically egalitarian society, with equality in all spheres of life—between men and women, among all racial and ethnic groups, among all people irrespective of their gender identity or sexual preference, among and within every country with respect to work, region, and access to all social services and amenities.\(^5\)

What we must always struggle against is the rampant individualism and egotism that allows the many to be dominated by the few. Such a society cannot possibly be liberating; it cannot terminate the multiple alienations we feel. We are thinking and purposive beings, with tremendous potentialities. A good society must ensure that these can develop for the good of all. If we keep these simple ideas in mind in all our struggles, then we are bound to begin to create a world worthy of our best instincts and desires. There will be many mistakes along the way and many lessons to be learned. However, if human beings lived for most of their time on earth in a collective, sharing manner, there is no reason why we cannot consciously take everything we have learned since the demise of our previous way of living and create something that builds a modern and better version of it.

Michael D. Yates is Editorial Director of Monthly Review Press. For many years he was a college professor and labor educator. His most recent book is Can the Working Class Change the World?

Notes
2  See https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/stories/richest-1-percent-captured-82-percent-of-wealth-created-last-year-while-poorest-half-of-the-world-got-nothing-1
4  See Yates, Can the Working Class Change the World?, chapter six.
5  Ibid.
What Professors and Fast Food Workers Have In Common

ELIZABETH ORAM

My father was a tenured professor at a large southern university. His income provided a secure, middle class life for our family of four in the 1960s. But my father was not brilliant or ambitious and I am certain that were he a PhD job seeker in today’s academic “marketplace,” our family would have known neither security nor abundance. He would have been among the 73% of higher ed faculty with advanced degrees who survive by cobbling together a living teaching an overload of classes at multiple institutions for part-time wages so low they often qualify for food stamps. As an adjunct professor, he would have received three weeks notice or less of appointment every semester, and no notice of classes being cancelled or changed. Instead of walking to work in a leafy college town, he would have spent many hours every day commuting to area colleges to teach enough classes to survive. Our family might have made ends meet by tapping Precaricorps, a nonprofit founded by adjuncts that provides money to professors to pay the bills when paychecks are delayed. The start of every semester could have meant a brutal regime of overwork, or the inability to make the rent or mortgage.

Everything about life in academia has changed since my father’s day. When instructors get together now, talk runs to side hustles, not sabbaticals. It’s a frenetic, unpredictable freelance existence that has more in common with an Uber driver’s life than with my father’s tweedy unhurried world. If you are an adjunct, you are contingent labor and your existence is defined by precarity and often penury.

In the 1970s, an “adjunct” professor was someone from an outside profession, like law or medicine, who taught a course not offered by traditional academic disciplines. Fast forward 40 years and adjuncts now teach most courses. This replacement of secure tenured positions by part-time faculty did not happen overnight. The adjunct crisis is a slow-moving tsunami situated in the transformation of work and everyday life that began with the ambitious projects of Thatcher and Reagan. The declaration of TINA – There is No Alternative – christened the neoliberal age, defined memorably by Adolph Reed as “capitalism that has freed itself from working class opposition.” The decline of the labor movement tracks the rise of adjunctivization. Reagan’s dismantling of PATCO, the Air Traffic Controller’s Union, and Thatcher’s crushing of the Yorkshire Miner’s Union were defeats that defined the next 30 years; deindustrialization, financialization, and the ideological triumph of markets uber alles. The world shifted. And nowhere more so than within the hallowed walls of academe – universities that once birthed revolution are now
job training centers filled with managers who speak in the corporate language of benchmarks, market metrics, and ROI (return on investment).

A student is a bundle of human capital who is encouraged to increase her value on the market by investing in a credential. The long-standing egalitarian and democratic ideal of a humanistic liberal arts education has been swept away, and in its place are food court cafeterias, corporate branded stadiums, and dorm rooms with saunas. As competition defines the corporate world, so too the business of education: most universities now have more administrators than full-time faculty. And those managers have balance sheets—they need to attract customers (students) and lower costs. As tuition escalates (rising 140% at public colleges over 30 years), student debt forecloses the future of a generation, and creates a securitized bonanza for Wall Street. It may be diabolical, but adjunctification is no conspiracy—whether its Walmart or Wellesley, the way to lower costs is to increase the rate of exploitation. We are all flexible workers now.

The adjunct crisis is part of a larger assault on the right to education, public funding and academic freedom. Faculty who express dissident opinions are everywhere under attack, and adjuncts, unprotected by tenure, are seen as easier to discipline and control in a managerial system. The attack on dissent is less overt with students, who are now disciplined not by police truncheons but by high and often unpayable debt.

The two-tier labor structure exemplified by adjunct/tenure status became a key weapon against worker organizing in the 1980s. The logic is fundamental to capitalism: in any setting, workers who can be divided and compelled to compete with each other make fewer demands. Also in the toolbox of capital are selective privileges that adhere to one class of workers in exchange for their acquiescence. Both dynamics are at work in the academy, where tenured and tenure-track faculty often cultivate their singular prestige and superiority to their “deskilled” colleagues who do exactly the same work. The result is a downward spiral in wages and degraded conditions of labor for everyone, not just the lower tier.

Intellectuals with advanced degrees are coming to terms with their proletarianization, and they are fighting back. Adjuncts who organize collectively are uniquely at-risk—they have no job protection, their contracts can be cancelled, and they can be fired at any time. The danger is worse in New York State where the Taylor Law makes public sector strikes illegal. Nonetheless, adjuncts and graduate teaching assistants are organizing and unionizing in unprecedented numbers. This trend, along with public teacher strikes, is a bright spot in otherwise dismal union participation numbers. While public university unions are still more common, the rapid rise in unionization comes from private colleges.

In a study published in 2017, the Journal of Collective Bargaining in the Academy reports that “the growth in private sector faculty representation and bargaining constitutes a major new shift in higher education.” By far the largest group organized has been non-tenure track faculty. Most of this growth is through SEIU’s Faculty Forward campaign with 53,000 faculty and graduate
student workers on 60 campuses organized. As unionization brings serious gains across the sector, successive fights become easier to win: the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), which represents faculty at CUNY campuses, mounted their demand for $7,000 per course for adjunct professors at the same time as major victories at Rutgers, Barnard and Fordham. Non-salary workplace issues are also important: reduction of workload, office space and time (many dedicated adjuncts advise students at Starbucks on their own time), paid research time, shared governance, and the right to sabbaticals. If tenure is a thing of the past, everything has to be in play.

International alliances are also critical and reflect the global scope of this trend. For years COCAL (Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor) has been a networking organization for contingent faculty in Canada, Mexico and the US, a place where adjuncts are able to transcend their isolation and experience being part of a larger, global movement. Learning about adjunct struggles in other cities and countries is empowering and shows how victories are won. The New Faculty Majority, an advocacy campaign for contingent academic labor, serves as a clearinghouse for resources on organizing and coalition-building, takes public stands on policy issues, and offers tool-kits for unionizing on campus.

Higher education is in crisis and adjuncts are the most visible symptom. Mainstream media outlets have discovered that stories about poverty-stricken professors forced to live in their cars have tabloid-worthy shock value. But so too should the wholesale closure of humanities departments, unsustainable student debt from ever-rising tuition, the replacement of faculty governance with corporate managers, the attack on student and faculty academic freedom, a dwindling commitment to public funding, and the poverty wages of janitorial and food service workers in institutions with billion dollar endowments. All of these abuses have the same root cause: the normal functioning of capitalism.

Working class life has always been defined by insecurity—stagnant wages, no benefit jobs and at will employment are the norm. Professors who are adjuncts are realizing that theirs is first and foremost a labor crisis and must be fought with the only tool workers have – our numbers, our right to withhold our labor, and the alliances that solidarity can bring. Contingent faculty are making common cause with students against tuition increases—our struggles are the same and we should refuse to be pitted against each other. Public universities are a key site of struggle, but without the weapon of the strike, unions are virtually powerless. In New York State, we cannot wait and hope that the Taylor Law will be ended legislatively; it must be challenged now by direct action. Within universities and colleges, the “ladder” faculty must recognize that devalued and degraded academic work hurts everyone, and their acquiescence to a two-tier system is both shameful and self-defeating. Sometimes the struggle begins inside the union: adjunct issues on CUNY campuses did not begin to be addressed until the progressive New Caucus of the PSC was elected in 2000. Unionization is necessary, but not sufficient. This is a struggle for the democratic university, not just the next contract. And inside or outside of unions, it is
the militant minority, willing to risk all for the benefit of all, that can jumpstart a disruptive insurgency.

The university as a site of critical inquiry is more important than ever if we are to counter decades of neoliberal hegemony in a fight for ideas that the Right has been winning. Confronting fatalism means re-building the power to imagine alternatives.

Is the university destined to become just another “lean and agile” corporation in a race to the bottom? As Stanley Aronowitz writes in *The Knowledge Factory*: “the challenge is to become agents of a new educational imagination.”

*Elizabeth Oram is a nurse and adjunct lecturer at Hunter College. She is a member of the Professional Staff Congress.*

---


[Graph showing percentage changes in full-time tenure, full-time non-tenure track, part-time, and graduate student employees from 1975 to 2015.]

Compiled by the American Association of University Professors Research Office, March 2017. Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System.
Elizabeth Warren and the Trap for Black Voters

MARGARET KIMBERLEY

Whether Democrats are openly obstructionist corporatists like Pelosi, or liberal sounding like Warren, they will not consider any meaningful systemic reforms.

The next presidential election in the United States is now just one year away. In January 2020 the process begins with the Iowa caucuses followed quickly by the New Hampshire primary and contests across the country. Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren is the first to officially announce the formation of a campaign exploratory committee.

The role of black voters in this process must be discussed before any more candidacy announcements are made. If not, black people will be no better off than when Donald Trump was elected. As the race begins let us remember that there is still a rock solid attachment to the Democratic Party and to all of its failures. The black misleaders have not been dislodged. The Democratic Party’s corrupt alliance with corporate interests led to their defeat and to the election of the openly racist Donald Trump. Unfortunately there has been little examination of the 2016 debacle and in fact Democrats have doubled down on all of their strategies which led to a Trump administration.

Elizabeth Warren talks a good progressive game but her description of herself as “capitalist to my bones” is an indication that she will only go so far. She signed on to Medicare For All legislation but also sponsored her own bill which undercuts that effort. That stance isn’t surprising. Adherence to private sector control of the health care system is what capitalists do.

But Warren herself is not the only issue. She will be followed by others throwing their hats into the ring. Bernie Sanders, Joe Biden, Kamala Harris and Cory Booker are all expected to follow suit. Texas congressman Robert “Beto” O’Rourke is the latest flavor of the month and favorite of corporate Democrats. O’Rourke has been called Obama 2.0, a pretty face with center right politics who is sold to voters as a progressive savior.

Black voters will again be the losers if there is no discussion or debate about how to make political demands. If there is no serious reflection about 2016 that will be the case even if a Democrat wins. We already see the meager benefits of Democratic control of Congress. Nancy Pelosi speaks of forcing Donald Trump to release his tax records but doesn’t discuss anything that will motivate new voters to come out or bring any benefits to the masses of people.

Their choice is quite deliberate. Whether Democrats are openly obstructionist corporatists like Pelosi, or liberal sounding like Warren, they will not consider any meaningful systemic reforms. The Warrens of the world may in fact be equally dangerous. Instead of Medicare For All she proposes The Consumer Health Insurance Protection Act. This mouthful of a name is a
plan to provide subsidies to pay for a system that is unnecessarily costly. Like Obamacare, it enshrines private sector control, which is the cause of all our health care problems.

Likewise, her Accountable Capitalism Act is a sleight of hand. Capitalism is inherently unaccountable to the people. It sounds good to include workers on corporate boards but Warren’s proposal would apply only to those valued at $1 billion or more. That loophole leaves out millions of people. Managing capitalism never works very well in any case. Warren and her ilk ought to be known for accepting the status quo and not for turning back the clock to regain what right wing Democrats like Bill Clinton and Barack Obama gave us: endless austerity and war.

Black people must take the lead before it is too late. Our reluctance to deviate even slightly from Democratic Party dogma has done us no favor. While the fear of Republican control silenced us, Democrats lost over 900 legislative seats across the country. Silence is not golden in the political arena. The early primaries located in southern states will play a huge role in determining the eventual nominee. In the South, Democrat means black and those voters have every right to ask hard questions and make clear demands. Going along gave us nothing but NAFTA, the loss of the right to public assistance, bank bailouts, a right wing health care scheme and finally a Republican in the White House who embodied all of our worst fears.

Our plight will worsen if the people who failed so miserably are given undeserved trust yet again. The moment is ripe to oppose them, to assert our own political will, and to speak for true self-determination. That effort may lead to a split in the Democratic Party but that outcome should not be feared either. Up until now our political power has been wasted on fear, fear of the Republicans who have ended up in office anyway.

On election night in 2016 this columnist wrote, “The destruction of the Democratic Party and creation of a truly progressive political movement is the only hope for black America.” That movement is stymied whenever a particular Democrat is examined for his or her worthiness. By now we know that is a loser’s game. The 2016 campaign must be the last one in which black voters played the role of loyal chumps.

*This article was originally published in Kimberley’s Freedom Rider column for Black Agenda Report at blackagendareport.com

Let’s Not Forget: the CIA Overthrew Mossadeq in Iran

FARAMARZ FARBOD

Editors’ note:

A centerpiece of the Trump administration’s Middle East policy is targeting Iran. (For greater details, see the Notes from the Editors.) Consequently, Iran is again in the eye of the storm and one hears frequently from official sources that Iran is a dangerous threat to the interests of the US and its close allies in the region. While the officials engage in regular threat-inflation, the public remains unaware of how and why the US-Iran relations have reached such a deadly state. If asked, most US-Americans may place the origin of this animosity back to the 1979-81 Iran Hostage Crisis, viewed as rooted in the anti-Americanism of the post-revolutionary Islamic leadership. Few will know about how and why the US engineered a coup in 1953 that toppled Iran’s democratic government and led in due time to the rise to power of political Islam.

We cannot be certain whether the US is seeking regime change, change in regime behavior, regime chaos, military confrontation or a grand bargain with Iran. However, one thing is clear: the image of Iran as an enemy is back—all the more reason to tell the truth about the forgotten overthrow. The reprinted article below reflects on the history of the US coup that toppled the democratically-elected prime minister Mohammad Mossadeq, the icon of nationalism in Iran. It exposes the official US proclamations about the benign nature of its foreign policies as crude propaganda. It also serves as a corrective to the official narrative that ignores this past or merely justifies it by placing it in the context of the Cold War, rather than one of confrontation between western imperialism and third world independent nationalism. — Faramarz Farbod

Fifty-five years ago this week, in mid-August of 1953, Dr. Mohammad Mossadeq, the prime minister of Iran, was toppled in a royalist coup code-named Operation AJAX by its US and British backers. The coup delivered a severe blow to the cause of constitutionalism, democracy, and the rule of law in Iran, and ultimately altered the path of politics there, in the region, and globally in ways that ought to be familiar to discerning readers today.

Recently, fully a third of my students in a class of thirty on the politics of the Middle East identified Dr. Mossadeq as the founder of the religion of Islam! And no, I don’t think Mossadeq’s name will resonate any better with the North American public at large. For the political managers and the mainstream media in the US have not shown any sustained inclination to inform the public of the crimes of the state they serve. They fear that an informed citizenry aroused by its sense of moral outrage may act as an unstoppable agent of humanizing change. But ignorance about Mossadeq and his fate renders a proper understanding of how and why global politics has come to its present disastrous course in the Middle East and beyond rather unlikely. So let’s break
the silence on this epochal event and remind ourselves of what had taken place, why, and what it has meant for us all.

Mossadeq’s cardinal sin was that he had the audacity to nationalize British imperial property in Iran in 1951 in the form of the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, which had a monopoly over this most important Iranian asset for more than four decades. To punish Iran the west imposed an embargo on her sale of oil. The ensuing economic hardship created a climate of disaffection and subversion, which set the stage for the US/UK-backed Operation AJAX and the removal of Mossadeq from office by force. Mossadeq was charged with treason in a military court, sentenced to three years in jail, banned from the history books, and later exiled and kept under house arrest in a remote village of his birth until his death in 1967.

August 1953 marks the end of Iran’s only significant experiment with parliamentary democracy, which had been accompanied by great popular mobilization and struggle. The coup restored unrestrained royalist rule. The shah established martial law until 1957, meted out harsh treatment to those who had defied him and his Western masters, settled the oil question in 1954 in favor of a western consortium of oil interests, embarked on an uneven economic modernization program, introduced social reforms, build a vast army, but never allowed any degree of political development to take effect in the country. The US meanwhile dramatically increased its aid to the coup regime from $33 million between 1946 and 1952 to $501 million between 1953 and 1957. In 1957 the shah, aided by the US and Israeli intelligence agencies, established Savak, a dreaded secret state police, to ensure that no other Mossadeqs would ever arise in Iran again.

As a New York Times editorial makes abundantly clear, the Anglo-US imperial planners shared the shah’s latter objective. The editorialists, articulating the interests of the ruling elite a year after the infamous coup, write:

“…the affair may yet be proved worthwhile if lessons are learned from it. Underdeveloped countries with rich resources now have an object lesson in the heavy cost that must be paid by one of their number which goes berserk with fanatical nationalism. It is perhaps too much to hope that Iran’s experience will prevent the rise of Mossadeghs in other countries, but that experience may at least strengthen the hands of more reasonable and more far-reaching leaders. ²

Unlike the shah’s parochial interest, the US planners were concerned with making an example out of Mossadeq’s insubordination to western capitalist interests in order to check forces of independent resource nationalism not just in Iran but elsewhere in western controlled domains. That is what to “prevent the rise of Mossadeghs in other countries” means. Thus regardless of its impeccable democratic credentials, and its promise, Mossadeqism had to be crushed.

The US elite opinion makers also display their own form of parochialism associated with their imperial consciousness. They offer shortsighted analysis
that fails to understand and account for the potential long-term consequences of imperialism for peoples at home and abroad. For an instance of this, note how the *Times* editorialists only warn of “the heavy cost” the “fanatical” nationalists must pay for their insubordination to colonial dictates. Arrogance of power prevents them from seeing a fuller range of the consequences flowing from nefarious interventions in the affairs of others.

It did not occur to the imperial mindset of the editorialists that the US had managed with a single act in 1953 to severely diminish its moral capital in Iran and the region. The sympathy the US had once shown the Iranian constitutionalists during the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1911 had now become a thing of the past. It did not occur to them that in due course the anger of Iranians might turn into a rage against both the increasingly authoritarian shah and his consistent western backers. It did not occur to them that undermining secular, liberal nationalism may lead to mobilization and consolidation of opposition forces by the obscurantist Islamist opponents of the regime who would alone have access to sufficient institutional resources (network of mosques) to mount a challenge against the shah and enjoy a strategic position from which to dictate the postrevolutionary agenda and conquer political power. It did not occur to them that undermining liberal constitutionalism through a foreign-backed coup would help poison the political culture of Iran by freezing the development of foundational republican virtues such as trust, honesty, courage, civility, citizenship, and respect and cultivating instead cynicism, mistrust, suspicion, servility and pretentiousness.

Further obliviousness is evident when after the victory of militant Islamists in Iran, and the boost it gave to politics of Islamic identity in the region and beyond, Washington astonishingly set out to mobilize an army of fanatical Sunni Jihadists from across the Arab world in order to bloody the former USSR’s nose in Afghanistan. Washington’s Jihadi wars did defeat the Soviets by the end of the eighties, with help from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, thereby handing militant Islamists yet another significant victory. Soon after, in the late nineties, the Taliban took control of the ruins of the destroyed state of Afghanistan and made its famous alliance with Bin Laden’s Al Qaeda. The rest is history, or rather is the present as history, with even greater displays of unawareness or indifference by the state officials to the plight of victims, peoples, and regions, and the rule of law at home and abroad, as Bush II has used the cover of “war on terror” to pursue maddening dreams of empire that have produced as yet another destroyed state this time in the heart of the Arab world with consequences that are hard to imagine today.

Silence about state atrocities abroad is another hallmark of the imperial consciousness. It is instructive that despite official claims that 9-11 has changed everything, and more specifically that Washington has since 9-11 rejected the pre-9-11 foreign policy of privileging stability over liberty and democracy, in particular as it relates to the Middle East region, and at a time of a tense US/Iran standoff, no one that matters in the US notices the anniversary of the 1953 overthrow of democracy in Iran, which is arguably the first act in the narrative
Let's Not Forget: the CIA Overthrew Mossadeq in Iran

that leads to 9-11. Such a silence at a time like this speaks volumes about the nature of things that are far more durable than is readily admitted or acknowledged by propagandists for the state.

*This article was originally published by ZNet at ZComm.org in August of 2008.

Faramarz Farbod, a native of Iran, teaches politics at Moravian College. He is a founder of Beyond Capitalism Working Group. Email: farbodf@moravian.edu.

"If the attitude in Iran spreads to Saudi Arabia and Iraq, the whole structure may break down along with our ability to defend ourselves."

—UK Foreign Office warning to US State Department (1951)

Notes


Far Right Pulls the Wool Over Voters’ Eyes

GRETA BROWNE & GUY GRAY

“If the poor of this country knew what is being planned for them, there wouldn’t be enough streets to fit all the people protesting against it.” — Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff

From our viewpoint on a small farm in the interior of Brazil, with limited access to the internet and other media, we watch the unfolding of a frightening phenomenon. This coming Sunday, October 28, we have a run-off election between the top two vote getters in the October 7 presidential election. On the far-right a former army captain, Jair Bolsonaro, won an impressive 46% of the vote. Known by his last name, Bolsonaro came to the country’s attention, after 27 unremarkable years in Congress, when, during a congressional hearing on rape, he told a colleague that she was too ugly to deserve to be raped by him. That caught the media’s attention and amused the large portion of the population that doesn’t mind laughing at the expense of women, or anyone else, even themselves. Bolsonaro became a figure, a character who caught the fancy of a people who were disgusted with politics as usual.

On the moderate left the Workers Party (PT) candidate, Fernando Haddad, mayor of São Paulo, the largest city in South America, from 2013-2017, and political science professor, received 29% of the vote. The remaining 25% of votes went to the ten other presidential candidates along with a significant number of blank votes. Our candidate, Marina Silva, former Minister of the Environment from 2003–2008, the only candidate with a clear position on protecting Brazil’s biomes and in favor of maintaining the country’s participation in the Paris Treaty, dropped from a favored third or fourth place in the presidential race, polling up to 30% in the weeks before the election, to a meager 1% as voters switched their preference to Bolsonaro, and to a lesser extent, Haddad.

One would think that in a country that elected socialist Lula of the Workers Party in 2002 and 2006, and his chosen successor, Dilma Rousseff, in 2010 and 2014, Lula’s hand-picked candidate Haddad would have gained more votes. However, a mere four years after Dilma’s re-election, a hefty number of Brazilians thoroughly reject the Workers Party, condemning Lula and other party leaders for their role in the governmental corruption scandals, and this rejection extends to anyone associated with the PT; presidential candidates Marina Silva, Ciro Gomes, Henrique Meirelles, and Fernando Haddad all served as Ministers in Lula’s presidency. Former president Lula, who left office with an 80% approval rating in 2008, now languishes in prison, sentenced to 12 years for an unclear and lesser crime of receiving an apartment as a bribe during his time in office, while a large number of congressmen, senators, and governors with much more
serious corruption charges enjoy the freedom guaranteed by the ‘foro privilegiado,’ which protects those in office from indictment. There is general agreement among the leftist intelligencia that Lula’s trial and imprisonment were prioritized and pushed through the judicial system to get him out of the way.

The question that few Brazilians ask is who is behind Bolsonaro. And are they the same people that wanted Lula out of the way? If there has been a deliberate attempt to vilify the Workers Party, making Lula and his cohorts the scapegoats for all that is wrong with Brazil, it has worked. Who really orchestrated the 2016 impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff of the Workers Party? Who convinced Brazilians of the absurd notion that the country is in danger of becoming a Venezuela?

Several times in the last few years I’ve heard Brazilians, including people I truly respect, voice their dislike for foreigners, the international media, who try to explain what’s happening in Brazil. “They don’t know,” they say. “They don’t understand Brazil.” When with a jerk of the knee you dismiss the involvement of foreigners, are you more likely to be blind to the international neo-liberal cartel that infiltrates nations on all continents? Would you accept without a bat of the eye that Bolsonaro’s economic advisor is Brazilian Paulo Guedes, trained in Chicago and involved in the neo-liberal coup in Chile?

Bolsonaro’s supporters see him as the handsome devil-may-care loner riding into town. They like to believe that he will save Brazil from violence and corruption, and his rants against feminists, gays, blacks and indians, against abortion and drugs, resonate with the huge socially conservative evangelical population. He claims that he will empower people by placing guns in the hands of all citizens. Talk of killing—shooting revolutionaries, gays and blacks, even environmentalists that get in the way of ‘progress’—comes easy to him, and to his most ardent followers. Already threats against PT supporters and gays have increased, and at least one murder is on record, that of a beloved martial arts (capoeira) master who voiced his support of the Workers Party in a bar and was stabbed 12 times by a Bolsonaro follower.

This is the scary scenario we are witnessing, with just a glimmer of hope. Three days before the election there seems to be an increase in the number of those who disapprove of Bolsonaro, and a gradual increase of people willing to overlook their anger with the PT and vote for Haddad in order to keep Bolsonaro from winning. The pundits doubt that it will be enough.

Greta Browne and her husband, Guy Gray, are former residents of the Lehigh Valley who now live on a farm in the central highlands of Brazil, about 70 miles west of Brasilia.

Editor’s note: On January 1, 2019, Jair Bolsonaro joined the other two far-right leaders who have won power in the hemisphere — Iván Duque in Colombia and Donald Trump in the US. Bolsonaro won 55.1% of the votes three days after the article above was written. Many now worry about the fate of Brazil’s fragile democracy, as do the authors of this article. But, this may also be a defining moment for the region. Brazil’s GDP is the 8th largest in the world. Close to 209 million people live in Brazil — that is nearly half of the entire South American population. Watch out Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua and Bolivia!
Juan Gonzalez’s book *Harvest of Empire* is a great illustration of the effects of US hegemony in the Western hemisphere. Gonzalez, a Puerto Rican American, is best known these days as a co-host of Democracy Now! He was a long time columnist for the *New York Daily News*. His book is of great value in exposing the crimes of the American empire to the general public.

The first half of the book catalogs the domination of the lands south of the border. The focus is on the countries that have had large immigration to the US devastated by corporate America’s plunder. The second half of the book is mostly about Democratic Party politics with regard to Latinos.

Gonzalez’s technique is to give an anecdotal account of one family for each country he discusses. He uses his own family to illustrate Puerto Rico. These stories are always powerful. The only anecdote that I found problematic was the family that fled Cuba because Castro “stole” their small business. Gonzalez appears to be very critical of the Cuban revolution in discussing this family. They go to Miami and become CIA agents trying to overthrow Castro. In most of the book, the CIA is denounced. Here the CIA seems to be doing good because they are opposing the Castro regime. I would have at least liked Gonzalez to include an extra family who fled Cuba from Batista, the US backed dictator whom Castro overthrew. This family might have illustrated a very different point of view. It appears to me that Gonzalez may be overly critical of the Cuban revolution. If so, the danger of this is that all US violence can then be justified as stopping communism.

Gonzalez points out that many Latino immigrants are proud of their service in the military of their new country. They often continue to be discriminated against despite this service. But there is an incredible irony. Here are people “harvested” from the empire after their countries are devastated, who then serve the empire to dominate poor peasants and workers in countries in Asia and Africa.

I recently saw a documentary based on the book shown at the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Lehigh Valley in Bethlehem. In the discussion that followed the movie, a number of people expressed astonishment at the extent of American misdeeds in Latin America. Obviously, the mainstream media and our education system have done such a good job at covering things up that even some of the very liberal Unitarians weren’t aware of much of the material. I pointed out that what was shown was merely the tip of the iceberg and that further important reading would include William Blum’s *Rogue State* (meaning the US), Greg Grandin’s *Empire’s Workshop*, which shows how techniques of domination developed in the Western hemisphere have been used to dominate Asia and Africa (the wars in Vietnam and Southeast Asia, the Philippines,
and the perpetual wars in the greater Middle East), and Noam Chomsky’s *Manufacturing Consent*, which goes into much greater detail of US crimes in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua.

Chomsky implicates the mainstream media, including the *New York Times*, for serving as propaganda vehicles for the empire. Gonzalez doesn’t indict the mainstream media in his book, which is problematic from my point of view.

In the documentary Republican presidents are shown smiling and shaking hands with some of the worst dictators of the 20th Century: Eisenhower with Batista and Trujillo, Nixon with Pinochet and Duvalier), George H.W. Bush with Noriega, and George W. Bush with Rios-Montt. All of these murderers were backed or even installed by the US.

Gonzalez goes easy on the Democratic presidents. They are shown giving flowery speeches about human rights. He leaves out actions taken by Democratic Presidents not necessarily in the best interests of the people of Latin America. Harry Truman backed the brutal dictators Francois Duvalier and Raphael Trujillo. Kennedy attacked Cuba in the Bay of Pigs, tried to assassinate Castro repeatedly, and intervened in the Dominican Republic. Under Johnson, the CIA overthrew the reformist President Juan Bosch and invaded the Dominican Republic in 1964 to prevent the restoration of the elected President leading to a bloodbath of retaliation against the supporters of Juan Bosch. Thousands of these people then fled their country and settled in Washington Heights in upper Manhattan. Clinton helped to overthrow the elected President of Haiti Jean Bertrand Aristide. Obama and his Secretary of State Hillary Clinton backed the overthrow of the elected government of Manuel Zelaya in Honduras. The current refugee caravan from Honduras is partially a result of that.

There is a segment on the assassination of Catholic Archbishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador by the right wing government. Romero was using his position to speak out for the rights of poor people. The documentary implicates the Reagan administration. Gonzalez leaves out that the government of the great “humanitarian” Jimmy Carter completely backed the right wing government. Romero wrote a letter to Carter appealing to him to stop backing the government. Carter never even answered Romero who was assassinated not long after the letter was written. The Carter administration had been pressuring the Vatican to have Romero removed because he was backing progressive forces that threatened US business interests in El Salvador.

The final scene of the documentary *Harvest of Empire* shows Latinos waving American flags. The cover of the book has a young Latino child waving an American flag. You certainly can’t blame people for wanting to share in the prosperity that many of us have here in America. We’re rooting for all people here, in Latin America and the rest of the world, to have peaceful and prosperous lives.

*Harvest of Empire* and the associated documentary are very important as jumping off points for far more extensive knowledge of the real problems that face the world due to American hegemony.

*Todd Carpien is an actor in Allentown. Email: tcarpien@yahoo.com*
Marx and Earth-First Socialism

ALEX FISCHER

“A new report from the United Nations’ climate panel warns humanity has only a dozen years to mitigate global warming and limit the scope of global catastrophe. Otherwise, millions will be imperiled by increasing droughts, floods, fires and poverty. The sweeping report by the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change urges immediate and unprecedented changes to global policy in order to keep global warming at a maximum of 1.5ºC.”

Democracy Now! 9 October 2018

The burning of fossil fuels during the first and second industrial revolutions, and the period after WWII (dubbed The Great Acceleration) were the major drivers in the rise of CO₂ in earth’s atmosphere, and thus climate change.

As scientists gathered evidence and discovered that humans induced climate change, the misinformed, misanthropic proverbial tropes began: “humans caused climate change”, (and if) “humans have a nature”, (then) “human nature caused climate change”. The fatal error when interpreting the scientific data is to assume that if climate change is a result of human nature, our humanity has led us to destroying the earth: we are doomed because of our species.

In fact, this argument continues that if we expect to mitigate climate change, we must expect to suppress human nature. But do humans have a nature as such? For those who blame climate change, global warming, and biodiversity loss on capitalism¹, is capitalism even part of human nature? Karl Marx provided us with this answer in 1867:

“Nature does not produce on the one hand owners of money or commodities, and on the other hand men possessing nothing but their own labor-power. This relation has no basis in natural history. It is clearly the result of past historical development, the product of many economic revolutions, of the extinction of a whole series of older formations of social production.”

Marx asserted that society under capitalism is historically specific: not necessarily unnatural, but certainly not inevitable. He deepened this analysis as he began to study the degradation of ecosystems. If human society was destroying the planet, he thought, what is wrong with human society?

While studying the relationship between humans and nature under capitalism Marx was led to studying climate change in the late 1860s. He became close friends with chemists, biologists, and agronomists as socialist scholars have pointed out. This is no strange coincidence. Older Marx was meticulously studying this relationship because of the fundamental tension between capital and nature.
Marx did not of course foresee the three ecological rifts of the Anthropocene epoch: global warming, nitrogen cycle disruption, or biodiversity loss, per se. Marx studied what was available to him at the time. The science of the day assured that two main capitalist modes of production had the potential to change the local ecosystem, and thus local climate: deforestation, and, (building on David Ricardo’s theory,) robbery of the soil (of its nutrients.)

Marx was keen on integrating soil chemistry, agronomy, alluvial theory (theorizing the silt-rich mineral substances that are created via geological formations—as against the intensification of chemical fertilizers) and other natural science into his critique of capitalism. Like any good scholar, Marx incorporated empirical analyses to his “critique of political economy” (the subtitle to his three-volume work Capital).

He came to realize through his critique of the capitalist mode of production (that involved disrupting local climates) that under capitalism, profits must be realized whether or not the earth’s ecosystems are disrupted. The central contribution Marx offers humanity in 2019 is what Kohei Saito discovers in Karl Marx’s Ecosocialism: Capital, Nature, and the Unfinished Critique of Political Economy (2017), that Marx “came to regard ecological crises as the fundamental contradiction of the capitalist mode of production.” In other words, Marx’s analysis of capitalism was robust enough to imply the system’s ecocidal tendencies—destroying the earth—was in capitalism’s DNA.

Marx’s insights stretch much further, however. He suggested, as many indigenous societies and environmental activists do today, that neither individuals nor societies are owners of the earth: “They are simply its occupiers, its beneficiaries, and they have to bequeath it in an improved state to succeeding generations as boni patres familias.” In addition to his critique, he acknowledged a metabolism between humans and nature. Nature exists only in relation to man’s social production. Thus nature and society can only be comprehended in their interrelationship with one another.

According to Saito, the “essential task of socialism” for Marx was the “conscious and sustainable regulation of the metabolism between humans and nature.” It is imperative that the world, especially “progressives” heed Marx’s ultimate insights into the relationship between humans and nature in capitalism because these insights are as important as ever. Marx’s analysis of the capitalist mode of production provided the framework to forecast capitalism’s future which constitutes ecosystem disruption ad infinitum.

Marx’s analysis and critique of capitalism are more salient than they were at the time of his writings. If capitalism will make life unlivable, we have to ensure our ways of living are in no way capitalist, in order to heal the metabolic rift. That is, to eradicate production for the realization of value, in no way to exploit people and the earth’s ecosystems in our economic activities. We need to consciously learn to interact with nature: produce and consume, and with renewable energy, in order to avert catastrophic anthropogenic climate change.
We are living in what Andreas Malm, author of *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steampower and the Roots of Global Warming* and recently *The Progress of This Storm: Nature and Society in a Warming World* has called “The Warming Condition.” Unless we heed Marx’s warnings, we may not understand the behemoth that is capitalism, and how it works as a system in which growth is part of its DNA. If the original major critic of capitalism recognized its ecocidal tendencies, all solutions to ecological catastrophe thereafter will be doomed to failure if they do not heed this very old understanding: capitalism requires a historically specific mode of production—in no way a “natural” part of human society—that destroys ecosystems ad-infinitum.

If we cannot realize that our predecessors saw this coming, how can we truly understand what is here and how to solve it? As Benjamin Kunkel has written, we have made it to the point of *Utopia or Bust*. The good news? At the end of his book, Saito exclaims: “Marx lives!”

Alex Fischer is pursuing a Masters degree in Political Science at Lehigh University and is a member of the steering committee of the Alliance for Sustainable Communities–Lehigh Valley and the Beyond Capitalism Working Group. Email: fischeraj5@gmail.com.

"As long as the individual manufacturer or merchant sells a manufactured or purchased commodity with the usual coveted profit, he is satisfied and does not concern himself with what afterwards becomes of the commodity and its purchasers. The same thing applies to the natural effects of the same actions."

—Friederich Engels

**Notes**

1 Some geologists have termed our geological epoch the Anthropocene which indicates that earth’s history from here on out must be understood by including the epoch in which humans (anthropo) have irreversibly impacted the earth. Others have sought to use the term Capitalocene, charging that Anthropocene blames human nature, and that Capitalocene corrects this error. To follow this debate, I recommend first reading the article “Anthropocene: The Human Age”, a 2015 article in *Nature* by Richard Monastersky, followed by Ian Angus’s 2016 *Facing the Anthropocene: Fossil Capitalism and the Crisis of the Earth System*, Andreas Malm’s 2018 *The Progress of this Storm: Nature and Society in a Warming World*, as well as a series of articles by *Monthly Review* editor John Bellamy-Foster in 2018 which can be found online at MRZine.com.


3 In addition to Saito’s latest work, other scholars have witnessed this in Marx’s work, though Saito purports to have understood it as fundamental to Marx’s critique of capitalism. Other scholars credited with similar insights of Marx are Paul Burkett, John-Bellamy Foster, Joe Kovel, Chris Williams, Fred Magdoff, and Brett Clark.
There Is No Good Kind of Nationalism

DAVID SWANSON

Trump is for nationalism. So the “Resistance” is predictably for... wait for it... the right kind of nationalism—or nationalism worn properly, as The Week advises. The problem isn’t nationalism, The Hill informs us, it’s phony nationalism and spurious nationalism, or as the Washington Post explains along with CNN, the problem is actually white nationalism. Of course, white nationalism is a problem, but not just because it’s white—also because of the nationalism. Unless you read Esquire which comes up with the oh-so-novel pronouncement that nationalism is indeed bad, but patriotism is good.

Excuse me. I’m sorry. This is why the Resistance doesn’t resist. This is why people offering flags and manure win. The loyal opposition is offering smaller flags, manure, and air fresheners.

What’s wrong with nationalism, you ask. Can’t I love a location? Can’t I care for my loved ones? Must I hate babies and apple pie? What is wrong with you?

Well, if you love your town why not try out townism? Does your town have a flag? An anthem? Can you perform the proper rituals? Why not? You’re not a traitor, are you? Did Putin hire you to tear up treaties with Russia, and sanction Russia, and take over markets from... oh, forget it.

Do you love your state? Your region? Your continent? Well why aren’t you insisting on all of those isms? I’ll tell you why. Because they aren’t needed. It’s not that they aren’t needed because those levels of collective identity aren’t associated with war machines. Rather it is that nationalism consists of association with a war machine, identification with that war machine, and belief that you and your war machine are superior to others.

Well, can’t that be a harmless private matter?

Some have seriously tried to make that case, and I’ve found it completely unconvincing.1

Here’s a brief excerpt from Curing Exceptionalism:

“What we’re dealing with in US nationalism is not just valuing the United States, but also devaluing the rest of the world—and not just as observers, but as people who believe they have the right, if not the duty, to impose their will on the rest of the world. Exceptionalism is an attitude that tends to include arrogance, ignorance, and aggression, and these tend to do a great deal of damage.”

In recent polling on possible future wars, a majority in the United States is willing to support an air attack, even a nuclear attack, on a foreign country, such as Iran or North Korea, that kills 100,000 civilians if it is an alternative to a ground attack that could kill 20,000 Americans.2 In fact, the US public has largely sat by for the past 17 years of wars in which the nations attacked have suffered tens and hundreds of times more deaths than the US military.3
Americans overwhelmingly tell pollsters that it is fine to kill non-Americans with US drones, but illegal to kill US citizens. Keith Payne, a drafter of the 2018 US Nuclear Posture Review, back in 1980, parroting Dr. Strangelove, defined success to allow up to 20 million dead Americans as the price for killing a much higher number of non-Americans. The US government has placed compensation for an Iraqi life at no more than $15,000, but the value of a US life at no less than $5 million.

When people ask how President Harry Truman could have used nuclear weapons that killed so many Japanese people unless he actually believed he was saving at least some significant number of US lives, they are assuming that Truman placed some positive value on the life of a Japanese person. Truman was the same man who had earlier remarked, “If we see that Germany is winning we ought to help Russia and if Russia is winning we ought to help Germany, and that way let them kill as many as possible.” US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright famously remarked that the deaths of a half million Iraqi children was “worth it,” without really being pressed to explain what the “it” was. During the war on Vietnam, the US military bragged on a weekly basis about how many people it killed. In recent wars, it has avoided mentioning that topic. But in neither case does it weigh the non-US lives taken against whatever the supposed good is that’s being attempted, as it might do if it believed those lives had any value.

This is where exceptionalism looks like a form of bigotry. One type of person is much more valuable. The other 96 percent of humanity is just not worth very much. If people in the United States valued all human lives equally, or even remotely close to equally, discussions of foreign aid funded by the US government would sound very different. The US government budget devotes less than 1 percent to foreign aid (including weapons “aid”) but the US public on average believes that 31 percent of the budget goes to foreign aid. Reducing this mythical generosity is extremely popular with the US public.

US exceptionalism does not just devalue the individual lives of others. It also devalues the earth as a whole. US policy is generally not shaped by concern for its impact on the planet’s environment. And the attitude of constant competition for the most growth on a finite planet is destructive and ultimately self-defeating. As an exceptionalist—or, as the US government would call the same attitude in someone else, a rogue—the United States keeps itself out of more international treaties than do its peers. It also keeps itself out of the jurisdiction of courts of international law and arbitration. This position hurts the US public, by denying it new developments in human rights. And it deals a severe blow to the rule of law elsewhere, because of the prominence and power of the world’s leading rogue nation.
There Is No Good Kind of Nationalism

The US Constitution and US laws are not independently updated to match world standards. In fact, it seems that the further the United States’ ancient constitution falls behind, the more it is treated as a sacred relic never to be improved. In an exceptionalist outlook, it is the responsibility of foreigners to learn from the US Constitution, not the responsibility of the US public to learn from the constitutions or laws more recently developed elsewhere. If you give rights to the environment or to indigenous people, you’re being silly. If we give rights to corporations, we’re being American—and that’s not to be questioned. End of discussion.

In an exceptionalist worldview it is of absolutely zero interest that many countries have figured out big advances in healthcare coverage or gun control or fast trains or green energy or drug treatment. Why would anyone in the United States care to hear such news! A study of presidents’ state of the union speeches between 1934 and 2008 found 2,500 mentions of other countries, but only three suggestions that the United States might learn anything from any of them. As the Greatest Nation on Earth it is the rightful US role to continue bumbling along with its always greatest policies, even if those policies kill us—but especially if they merely kill other people.

The United States not only turns away ideas. It also turns away actual emergency aid offered by other countries following natural disasters. What are human lives in comparison with the pleasures of nationalism?

*This article was originally published in October of 2018 at DavidSwanson.org and reprinted with David’s permission.

David Swanson is an American anti-war activist, blogger, and author. His most recent book is Curing Exceptionalism.

Notes

"The nationalist not only does not disapprove of atrocities committed by his own side, but he has a remarkable capacity for not even hearing about them."

—George Orwell

Notes (continued)

6 While the U.S. has typically paid $0 to $5,000 dollars as compensation for an Iraqi life, (see www.informationclearinghouse.info/article18576.htm) the State Department and Blackwater arrived at the figure of $15,000, (see www.scienceblogs.com/authority/2007/10/08/how-much-is-an-iraqi-life-wort). At the same time, the lowest government value for a U.S. life was $5 million assigned by the Food and Drug Administration, (see www.nytimes.com/2011/02/17/business/economy/17regulation.html
8 “Madeleine Albright – The deaths of 500,000 Iraqi children was worth it for Iraq's non existent WMD's,” Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RM0uvgHKZe8.
Pope Francis and the Battle Over Cultural Terrain

GARY OLSON

“... [W]e should not be fooled: Much of the organized opposition to Francis has nothing to do with how we care for the divorced and remarried. It is this, his trenchant critique of modern capitalism that keeps money flowing to conservative outlets intent on marginalizing what the pope says.’


So far, we have the still unsubstantiated allegations by Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò that Pope Francis covered up sex abuses by the now disgraced Theodore McCarrick, the Cardinal who oversaw Washington, D.C. churches from 2001-2006. Vigano named 32 other senior clerics, all allies of Pope Francis and called for the pontiff’s resignation.

Although I remain highly skeptical of Vigano’s charges, I’m reluctant to draw any hard conclusion at this juncture. And being neither a Catholic nor a believer, I don’t have an ecclesiastical dog collar in this fight. However, my sense is that this matter is far more serious than a civil war within the Church—and that larger context warrants our attention.

Pope Francis has provoked powerful opponents who are outright bigots regarding what the pope terms “below-the-belt issues,” issues that he believes receive far too much attention by the Church. However, according to biographer Paul Vallely, it was Francis’s shift in emphasis to issues of economic justice, that was so “deeply disconcerting to those who sat comfortably atop the hierarchy of the distribution of the world’s wealth.” (p.405) In response to my written query, Villanova University Professor Massimo Faggioli, an expert on Vatican and global politics responded “This is a key issue to understanding the present moment.”

Here it’s important to note that the pope’s radical political metamorphosis preceded his ascension to the papacy. According to Vallely, it was not until Jorge Maria Bergoglio (the future Pope Francis) was nearing 50 years old that he fully grasped that capitalism was to blame for making and keeping people poor. And it wasn’t a Saul to Paul on the road to Damascus moment.

Bergoglio had been elected Procurate of Argentina’s Jesuits in 1987 but it was a rocky tenure and he later acknowledged making “hundreds of errors,” including a rigid and authoritarian leadership style that was offputting to his fellow Jesuits. His own journey to a profound personal change began when his superiors in Rome sent him to the Argentine city of Córdoba, a forced exile during which time he was virtually ignored by the Church hierarchy.

During this period of intense soul-searching and close interaction with ordinary people on the street, he gradually underwent an inner transformation
and a radically altered political vision. He returned as an auxiliary bishop and in 1998 was named Archbishop of Buenos Aires. Bergoglio’s actions soon earned him the informal title “Bishop of the Slums” while his strong social advocacy which employed the language of Liberation Theology, earned him the intense enmity of Argentina’s most influential economic actors.

Bergoglio became Pope Francis in 2013, the first Jesuit and first non-European to be elected in over 1,200 years. From his first day in office, those who believed he’d follow in the conservative tradition of John Paul II and Benedict were quickly disabused of that notion. From washing the feet of a young female Muslim prisoner to his first visit outside Rome to the “boat people” island of Lampedusa where he expressed solidarity with illegal African economic refugees, Francis sided with the wretched of the earth. But it was his excoriating, systematic critique of global capitalism and free market fundamentalists when he linked symptoms and cause, that alarmed global economic elites:

- In his papal exhortation “Joy of the Gospels,” he wrote “We have to say ‘Thou shalt not kill’ to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills.”
- He wrote that some people defend “trickle down theories which have never been confirmed by facts...and express crude and naive faith in the goodness of those wielding power.” In his home country, Francis had observed the cruel consequences of IMF policies on the most vulnerable.
- He described an amoral, throwaway culture where the elderly are deemed “no longer useful” and the poor are “leftovers.”
- Offshore banking, credit default swaps and derivatives were described as “proximate immorality.”
- His encyclical, Laudatory si’: On Caring for our Common Home,” named capitalism as a primary cause of climate change and in preparing the document Francis consulted with Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff, the leading theorist of Liberation Theology.
- Echoing Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the pope proclaimed that “Working for a just distribution of the fruits of the earth and human labor is not mere philanthropy. It is a moral obligation. For Christians, the responsibility is even greater. It is a commandment.”
- Francis directly challenged Washington’s rationale for its war on terrorism by saying that because “the socioeconomic system is unjust at its root, violence and conflict are inevitable.” Further, wars in the Middle East are not about Islam but a consequence of political and economic interests where disenfranchised people turn to desperate measures. He concluded that “Capitalism is terror against all humanity.”

Given the intellectual heft of his argument, the fact of some 1.3 billion Catholics and possessing, arguably, the world’s foremost moral credentials, the pope’s political enemies were at a disadvantage in fighting ideological battles on his turf. While biding their time, as John Gehring noted in The American Prospect, major Catholic businesspersons threatened to withhold
sizable financial donations to the Church. Influential Catholics and publishing outlets set out to discredit the revolutionary pope. For example, the Heritage Foundation’s Stephen Moore, a Catholic, wrote in Forbes Magazine that Francis had “aligned himself with the far left and has embraced a philosophy that would make people poor and less free.”

To obtain a more decisive impact, the pope’s enemies needed to conjure up an issue or wait for one. Vagano’s allegations about a Vatican cover-up either fell or were deposited in their laps. If Francis could be smeared over this matter, his moral authority on matters closer to their hearts would be tarnished. And barring a definitive resolution, doubts could be sown as a default strategy.

Emblematic of these efforts is the friendship between Vagano and OPUS DEI member Timothy Busch, a right-wing, Catholic, California lawyer and businessperson. The August 27, 2018 issue of The New York Times reported that Busch advised Vagano on the letter prior to its publication. Busch also sits on the Board of Governors that own the National Catholic Register, one of the first outlets to publish Vagano’s 8,000 word, 11-page letter, entitled “Testimony.” Conservative Catholic journalists acknowledged helping to prepare, edit and distribute the letter. In the meantime, digital Catholic media hostile to Francis worked overtime to undermine him.

The contrast between Francis and Busch couldn’t be more stark. On the one hand, Francis asserts that the manner in which those who run the financial system are trained, favors the “advancement of business leaders who are capable, but greedy and unscrupulous.” On the other hand, the Catholic University of America (CUA) in Washington, D.C, recently renamed its business school the Tim and Steph Busch School of Business after receiving a gift of $15 million from the Busch Family Foundation. Five other donors brought the total to $47 million. Among them was the Koch Family Foundation which chipped in an additional $10 million even though Koch readily admits he’s not religious, is pro-choice and approves of same sex marriage. Busch also persuaded Art Ciocca, CEO emeritus of The Wine Group to ante up another $10 million.

In announcing his gift, Busch said it was to help “show how capitalism and Catholicism can work hand in hand” and he wrote an complementary op-ed in The Wall Street Journal entitled “Teaching Capitalism to Catholics” in which he claimed that free markets are buttressed by moral principles taught by the Catholic Church. In a speech to CUA students, as reported in the Catholic Standard, Busch noted that as the only pontifical university in the United States, “We’re the pope’s business school” and later added, “We realized that a professor in a business school can impact 100,000 students in his or his lifetime.” To the influential, conservative Catholic organization, Legatus: Ambassadors for Christ in the Marketplace, Busch told 160 well-heeled members that the business school’s mission is to “impact how students think.” Note: Lest anyone question his motives, Busch said “The focus of my life is getting myself into heaven and to help others get there.”
Busch, along with Fr. Robert J. Spritzer, S.J., also co-founded the Napa Institute, which promotes a mix of free-market economics and theology. Among its goals is to “continue the work of the Apostles and their successors.” Napa hosts hundreds of wealthy Catholic philanthropists at its annual gathering where they hear lectures from conservative bishops, philosophers and theologians. In a September 5, 2018, letter to Napa’s “constituents,” Busch denied any involvement in Vagano’s letter but otherwise has not responded to further requests for comment. He also encouraged “constituents” to attend Napa’s upcoming conference on how to exert lay person influence on the Vatican.

In closing, Antonio Gramsci, the twentieth-century Marxist, explained that culture, class and politics are inextricably intertwined. Powerful groups seek to influence culture with the human mind as the target. From the outset of his papacy, Francis sought to alter this landscape by vocalizing how capitalism is the primary cause of social injustice. In doing so he became a marked man. We’re witnessing one site in the larger struggle for cultural terrain, a battle occurring on many levels, including the Catholic Church.

* This article was originally published in September 2018 at CounterPunch.org

Gary Olson is professor emeritus of Political Science at Moravian College. His most recent book is Empathy Imperiled: Capitalism, Culture, and the Brain.

"Human rights are not only violated by terrorism, repression or assassination, but also by unfair economic structures that creates huge inequalities."

—Pope Francis
Identity Crisis?

Martin Boksenbaum

Wouldn’t it be great to win the lottery and live like one of the rich and famous and powerful? At least that’s something to aim for, isn’t it, living the upscale life-styles the media flashes before our eyes?

Whoa! Is somebody screwing with our brains?

What exactly is the reality of our situations anyway? What do we need to be conscious of as economic, social, and political beings? For leftists, this is important stuff: workers need to have class consciousness and class solidarity to win out in the class struggle. Y’know, the old “workers of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains”?

So, what is your “economic” role? There are a bunch of possibilities. Do you identify yourself as being of the working class (the proletariat, the “proles” in George Orwell’s *1984*)? That is, do you work for wages? Or are you of the revolutionary intelligentsia/organizer class living off the kindness of others? No shame in that. Marx, living in poverty, got financial support from Engels. People working for non-profits rely on the contributions sent in by supporters. We’re always being asked to throw in a few bucks to help this or that cause. Or are you of the lumpenproletariat – of the riffraff: criminals, the destitute, prostitutes, urban toughs? Or of the peasantry – perhaps one of the new, sustainable, organic farmers with a small family farm? Of the petit-bourgeoisie – a small business owner, perhaps a socially-conscious entrepreneur? Or a select member of the bourgeoisie – a capitalist, a majority owner / controller of large corporate holdings? How do you identify yourself?

As if labels matter. Well, they kinda do.

The glitch is that these identifications, like all labels, are intellectual constructs we come up with in trying to make sense of the realities. And the realities are complicated.

Say you’re a “professional,” someone who has an M.A. in counseling. You may be a prole if you earn wages as an employee of a school district, university, hospital, or large corporation. Or you might hang out a shingle and have your own clients and office personnel and are therefore of the petit-bourgeoisie. Or you might throw your lot in with the intelligentsia, using your understanding of sociocultural systems and alienation to work on systemic change. Or you do some combination of them. So which are you? And do you have class consciousness? Or do you identify yourself as a professional and not use a “class” perspective at all and stand above the fray? That would lead to matters of social standing and a whole other way of identifying yourself.

So, what is your “social” standing? Is it a good thing to be white collar rather than blue collar? Or upper middle class rather than lower middle class? Or to be identified by your status, your social standing, rather than your
economic class, like wanting to belong to a professional association rather than a labor union? Or like wanting to be a house slave rather than a field slave in the antebellum South, because house slaves had it better, despite the fact that they both were slaves?

Where are you in the pecking order? What respect is due you based on how much money you have or the way you make money? Should you care how others rate you? What privileges and benefits are associated with your social standing?

Do concerns about upward mobility and moving up the ladder, conflict with the horizontalism of class unity? Do status considerations help you navigate through life, help you make decisions, provide paths to power? Whoops, we’re getting into political matters, which leads, of course, into political ways of identifying yourself.

So, how do you identify yourself as a “political” being? There are political labels galore: conservative, neoliberal, liberal, progressive, leftist, independent, socialist, communist, Democrat, Republican, Libertarian, in the Green Party or in the Tea Party. And there are more. And on top of this confusing diversity of political options, each label covers a diverse range of clashing beliefs and fickle practitioners.

Take “socialist,” for example. Lots and lots of variability there. Are you a scientific or a utopian socialist? According to Frederick Engels, the scientific socialist understands the contradictions and the fracturing possibilities inherent in the present capitalist system and therefore what kinds of changes can be expected, whereas the utopian’s head is in the clouds gushing about the beautiful future ahead but without understanding present realities and actual possibilities. You can read about it in Engels’ fittingly titled short work Socialism: Utopian and Scientific first published in 1880.

Should you, as a socialist and as a worker, support your country when it goes to war (as most European socialists advocated vis-à-vis World War I) or should you oppose your country going to war, it being against working class interests for workers of one country to fight against workers of another country to protect capitalist interests (the position of most socialists in the United States vis-à-vis World War I)? You can read about these clashing perspectives in James Weinstein’s The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912–1925 published by Monthly Review Press in 1967.

Are you a democratic socialist or social democrat or democratic centralist or anarchistic socialist?

Does the socialist believe in the primacy of industrial workers or of craft workers or of sustainably farming peasants or of socially-conscious entrepreneurs or of the intelligentsia or some combination of them in actually bringing about change? Or does the socialist believe the role of any of them may be only to help speed up the coming changes, the changes themselves being the inevitable playing out of contradictions built into the system?

And the changes that the socialist advocates, are they slow reformist incremental changes or are we talking about systemic revolutionary change? And, if revolutionary, would it be peaceful or violent? In one country or worldwide?
All of these variations on a socialist theme are enough to make me want to ask the “real” socialists to please stand up and explain themselves.

Do these economic-socio-political labels do any good? Well, yeah. Some of them, at any rate, do good in providing people with the semblance of community. If you and others identify yourselves using the same labels, you might think of yourselves as kindred spirits and form a community based on shared interests. But the label doesn’t say it all. You still have to get down to the nitty-gritty of figuring out what to do.

Which brings us to Allan Savory, developer of holistic management as a framework for decision making. He would ask us to lay out our holistic goal, the complex holistic context which would frame our thinking, as a first step in a process that would enable us to make decisions that simultaneously consider economic, social, and environmental realities, both short- and long-term.

And he would want us to say who is “us.” You can get into these matters in Savory and Butterfield’s 1999 *Holistic Management: A New Framework for Decision Making*.

I don’t think labels alone work to define functioning groups or spell out who the decision makers are. So I do a lot of head scratching when anybody asks me to identify myself. Admittedly, words are necessary for communication, but I have good reasons for treating labels with suspicion.

Number one: it seems to me that most of these identifications merely serve as guidelines for others to figure out how they think they should relate to me. They provide a quick but stereotypical assessment of whether I am a friend or foe. Labels keep us from the difficult, time-consuming, but necessary task of learning in concert what we can do about the mess we’re in.

Number two: as I have been pointing out, labels are moving targets. People don’t necessarily agree on their meanings. Arguments, disagreements, and misunderstandings may mean brittle, poorly functioning organizations, with people preferring to work on their own rather than collectively. Y’know, the Lone Ranger Syndrome, and the related “herding cats” problem that has organizations spinning their wheels?

Which leads to number three: efforts to stabilize meanings may result in rigidity, communities based on the sharing of labels may become doctrinaire, closing themselves off, checking members for the purity of their convictions, carrying out periodic purges to eliminate the heretics, and treating other, closely related communities as foes, this last problem evidenced by the splintering and infighting of the left.

It may be necessary to focus on place-based communities, on people who are living in the same settings, facing the same problems, the same societal dysfunction, communities being turned into sacrifice zones and resource colonies by the corporate face of the 1%. Indeed, communities may already be on the forefront of change, close to what Engels in 1887 described as just having taken place for the working class in America: a veritable revolution over the period of ten months involving “vast masses of working people, over a vast
extent of the country, the simultaneous outburst of their common discontent with miserable social conditions, the same everywhere and due to the same causes, [making] them conscious of the fact that they formed a new and distinct class of American society.” The difficult task confronting communities coming to consciousness of their subservient condition is to operate democratically, addressing their settings and problems and dysfunction in a sustainable and corrective manner, and working in concert with other communities to both protect themselves and the environments of which they are part.

Here are two complementary approaches that can help in that project.

Transition Towns

The Transitions Town model provides ways for our communities to acknowledge the mess we’re in and come together democratically to figure out what positive steps to take. See, for example, *The Transition Handbook: From Oil Dependency to Local Resilience* by Rob Hopkins (2008). Reviewer Jerry Mander, founder/director of the International Forum on Globalization, put it this way, “Rob Hopkins has written the most thorough description so far of how we get from the present chaos of cities and towns that are killing the planet and the people in them, to viable new ecologically sustainable urban and rural systems. This is more than a theoretical how-to manual; it is based on his own team’s ground-breaking work, engaging whole communities in a transformative process that accepts the crucial need to reverse course, and has succeeded in doing so.”

Community Rights

The Community Bills of Rights approach advocated by the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF), and the hundreds of communities traveling that path, are models of how communities can use a rights-based approach to claim their sovereignty and protect themselves. See, for example, *Rebelling Against the Corporate State: Forging a community rights movement*

It contains Community Rights Papers, printed between 2014–2017, that re-frame contemporary and historical events through a Community Rights lens. From the foreword by Karella Gore, attorney, advocate, writer and educator, and Director of the Center for Earth Ethics: “This nation was based on the conviction that local self-government was an inherent natural right. Only the voice of people who deeply care about the land they live on is powerful enough to push bureaucracies to pay attention to the ecological crisis. In the name of both American democracy and life on Earth, this community voice must be heard.”

I am not speaking academically about these approaches. The Alliance for Sustainable Communities–Lehigh Valley has been actively working on both.

The Alliance has endorsed the rights-based approach of the CELDF and, together with its Beyond Capitalism Working Group, presented CELDF
programs, most recently the screening of Invisible Hand (see “Community and Ecosystem Protection: Two Films” on page 43). And we’re planning on holding a CELDF Democracy School early in 2019.

Another Alliance working group, Transitions Lehigh Valley, an official Transition US hub initiative, is presently focusing on Transitions U, which offers re-skilling and re-thinking programs, most notably Left Turn editor Fara Farbod’s courses on political economy and foreign policy.

Visit the Alliance website or contact me for more information about these approaches. I hope you will find both approaches worth checking out.

Martin Boksenbaum is a founding member of the Alliance for Sustainable Communities–Lehigh Valley. Email: martin@sustainlv.org

"Man is the only animal for whom his own existence is a problem which he has to solve."

—Erich Fromm
Exploitation of the Powerless: The Essence of Capitalism

PHILIP REISS

My American Heritage Dictionary of The English Language defines a welfare state as “A social system whereby the state assumes primary responsibility for the welfare of citizens.” This definition didn’t say ALL citizens. So, it seems it’s open for interpretation. Also, what is meant by social system? A definition of the term social system is not presented per se. As I see it our social system is basically rooted in the economic system known as capitalism. If one doesn’t understand the implications of capitalism’s consequences on society then one would barely know the essence of the American culture—its beliefs and values.

Going back in history to about 1,600 BC in the Middle East, one can learn of a legal system known as Hammurabi’s Code which posited “The first duty of government is to protect the powerless against the powerful.” When considering capitalism one should realize the powerful are those who have an economic interest in exploiting the powerless not protecting them. But, in the USA most workers are reluctant to acknowledge how powerless they are. One reason American workers don’t think about being powerless is because the corporate media always reminds them they have the highest standard of living in the world. This is not factually true. Scandinavian countries have a higher standard of living of which too many Americans are unaware. One reason for those countries having higher standards of living is because they have a greater percentage of their workers belonging to militant unions.

What should be obvious is that American companies have overseas manufacturing facilities because workers there are without social security, unemployment benefits, and have very few unions to engage in collective bargaining to obtain wages and benefits comparable to what Scandinavian workers have. Unfortunately American workers aren’t likely to understand how powerless they are until they find themselves out of work because their employer has decided to send their jobs overseas. At that point some might realize how powerless they are and better understand the exploitative nature capitalism.

Then too, there are many corporations in the US where most of the employees make only minimum wage, with no benefits such as paid sick leave and vacations—think fast food chains and convenience stores. Corporate executives of those enterprises vehemently object to doubling the minimum wage. Considering the minimum wage as a living wage at this time is ludicrous. It lacks credibility; it’s basically immoral. I used to tell my students capitalism doesn’t have morality built into how it functions. When considering the minimum wage in this time, it’s officially recognized by the US Bureau of Labor statistics that a married couple, both working at minimum wage jobs, and having two children, are living below the recognized poverty level.
To sum up I quote British economist John Maynard Keynes (whose ideas influenced FDR’s economic policies.) “Capitalism is the extraordinary belief that the nastiest of men, for the nastiest of reasons, will somehow work for the benefit of us all.”

*Philip Reiss is a retired SUNY community college history professor now living in Bethlehem, PA.*

"The Hours men and women worked, the wages they received, the conditions of their labor—these had passed beyond the control of the people, and were imposed by this new industrial dictatorship."

—Franklin D. Roosevelt
Post-Jobs Societies

ROBERT KOCIS

I. The Problem

A spectre is haunting the industrial and post-industrial world—the spectre of job insecurity. While globalization explains some job insecurity (jobs have been shifted from the more- to the less-developed parts of the world), the greater threat emerges from artificial intelligence (AI), computerization, and robotization, which threaten jobs everywhere. At many McDonalds, one can order a Coke and pay with a Visa card without interacting with human beings via computerized interfaces. At some restaurants it is literally a tablet that has displaced your friendly waiter. Robots weld together cars more efficiently and more reliably than did human welders. Even in dentistry, 3-D printers have driven traditional creators of dental appliances from the market. Whose job is next for elimination?

A. Theoretically

The central thesis to be elaborated here is that the internal logic of our ever-modernizing system of production is carrying us towards a future where virtually everything we think of as “work” will vanish. The central insights of the most prominent political economists will be employed to understand better this dilemma. The dilemma is: a) either we stop modernizing to save jobs or b) we keep modernizing and eliminate vast swaths of jobs. Either way, there is a danger of systemic collapse with unpredictable social consequences for which we must prepare. The US election of 2016, Brexit, the rise of right-wing parties in Europe, and recent French protests illustrate the beginnings of this dynamic as legions threatened by globalization and modernization angrily expressed their angst.

At the beginning of the capitalist era, Adam Smith proposed that the wealth of nations is dependent upon (actually, is a function of) the productivity of its workers.¹ The productivity of workers, in turn, was a function of: a) the quality of labor (skills, literacy, work ethic, etc.) and b) investment in capital goods (machinery which enabled workers to produce finer goods more quickly). This insight became the foundation of the “Labor Theory of Value”. The conundrum will arrive when, at a tipping point, capital will prefer to purchase “smart” machines, replacing labor on a massive scale.

We are rapidly approaching the day when, alongside cars “smart” enough to drive themselves, the production lines could also become autonomous. Robots already exist that could, in principle, create and build other robots, and diagnose and repair one another. Artificial intelligence (AI) only compounds
the difficulty. We could all wake up one morning and find that we need not report to (manufacturing and related) jobs; labor could become irrelevant. This creates three related problems. First, if workers will not be needed for production, would they have any claims for wages? A new type of theory of social justice would need to be developed. Second, unless the irrelevant workers were to have some source of income, they would not be able to generate the effective demand that drives production in an economy in which 66-68% of economic activity is domestic consumption. The economic system would become so efficient that it would collapse under its own weight; without effective demand, productive machinery would rest idle. Third, and most seriously, although our initial reaction might be celebratory (Yay, every day is a weekend day!), the greatest concern is that surplus workers would lose self-esteem because they could not produce anything of value. But, as Marx saw correctly, humans need to produce something of value to feel that their lives are worthwhile. This is the central point of the principal type of Marxian alienation, namely alienation from oneself as a productive being. The principal sin of capitalism is that we have to take what is a sacred part of our “species-being”—our productive capacity—and sell it on a labor market. This dehumanization is akin, Marx continues, to selling one’s reproductive capacities on a street corner. The crucial difference between feudal exploitation and capitalist alienation is that now we must be our own pimps. But if modernization succeeds in eliminating our jobs, we may not be able to pimp ourselves any more; every employer will have robo-lovers.

B. Practically

It would appear to be a peculiar kind of folly, during a period of high employment rates, to be concerned about this loss of jobs. Nevertheless, jobs of all sorts are disappearing. For example, between Thanksgiving and Christmas
of 2018, General Motors announced the elimination of 14,000 positions. Of these, 6,000 were blue-collar and 8,000 white-collar, so we can no longer assume that only low-skill workers are endangered by the effects of globalization, mechanization, robotization, and artificial intelligence (AI). Some were engineers who had devoted their lives to figuring out how to make internal combustion engines cleaner and more efficient, skills no longer needed with the advent of electric and autonomous cars. While unemployment is low by recent standards, none of us is immune to these threats of modernity. Even jobs that appear immune may not be; engineers could be replaced by AI, educators could be replaced by “distance” education, physicians and surgeons may succumb to robotization and data-based diagnostics. Bank tellers and meal servers are beginning to be replaced by ATMs and tablet computers. In the middle of a shortage of truck drivers, autonomous trucks are already delivering freight. Computerized robots, via networking, “talk” to one another in production lines that have become cyber systems. And, if we want superior batteries to power cars and trucks, it may be that AI can get there before a team of engineers.

According to the Demographics Research Group, Census data reveal certain overall patterns of occupational loss. On the basis of census data, between 1910 and 2000, the percentage of farm laborers dropped from about 18% to about 2% of the population. In the same period, the percentage of farmers dropped from about 16% to about 2%. Private household servants dropped from about 7% to about 1%; laborers dropped from a bit over 10% to about 1%. Others, like boarding-house keepers, switch-board operators, manufacturers of horse drawn carriages, and elevator operators have disappeared. Similarly, manufacturing and other blue-collar occupations dropped dramatically from 1920-2010; only sales, clerical, and professional occupations showed relative growth. More recent developments, like the elimination of white-collar jobs in the automotive industry suggest that even the professional and managerial occupations are endangered. While innovators, professional and managerial positions will become an ever larger proportion of the work force, they, like the workforce in general, will be declining in absolute size. Can an economy employing only relatively few innovators and certain service professionals be sustained?

II. Tools to Understand the Problem More Deeply

To address this question in a systematic way, let us consider what the great political economists have taught us and use their insights to investigate the possibility that, as capital investment in automation increases, many occupational paths will become irrelevant. It might seem utopian to believe that most of us need not appear for work on any given day, but two intransigent problems make the picture more dystopian. First, there is the question of distributive justice: if most people have no jobs, how will they support themselves? What impact would there be on an economy that depends on domestic consumption for 66-68% of its economic activity? Could we pay people not to work just to keep the engine running? Or would we take a Social Darwinist perspective and
simply put them out of sight? Second, and more importantly, what would be the damage to the self-esteem of superfluous, unemployable masses? How could they retain their dignity, their sense of self-worth without creating something of social value?

As mentioned, Adam Smith argued that the wealth of nations depends directly upon the productivity of their workers which, in turn, depends upon the collective skills of workers and a willingness of entrepreneurs to invest in the machinery that maximizes outputs while minimizing inputs (the definition of economic efficiency). We may be, as the Moody Blues put it, “on the threshold of a dream,” a dream in which no one needs to appear for work any more. Smith’s all-consuming optimism about the viability of a capitalist system provides us with little guidance in a new capitalism in which there will be declining need for workers to create things of value. In Smith’s world, given growth, a lack of increasing demand for labor is inconceivable. When labor is not required for the production of goods, the Labor Theory of Value will implode. Smith cannot provide much help in confronting this new quandary.

Malthus, by contrast, was darkly pessimistic about Smith’s vision of capitalism. In his famous essay on population, he posited that it would grow geometrically while the means to support population growth would only increase arithmetically; he also foresaw episodes in which markets would be faced with “gluts” which would result in negative growth (recessions). In his vision of the future, populations would suffer terribly, by means of famine, wars, and pestilence. In our post-industrial world, the problems merged: we can produce more than we (can afford to) consume while the “gluts” that he feared as occasional dangers of a capitalist economy will become endemic. Malthus leaves us with a gloomy feeling that there is no solution to our post-modern quandary.

Ricardo, who shared Smith’s optimism but sought only to “correct” Smith, effectively revised away Smith’s paradigm. Smith had assumed, perhaps incorrectly, that rent on land and profits for entrepreneurs were relatively constant, so that the amount of skilled labor needed to create a good was the prime determinant of its value. Yet, although value defined this way would be resistant to change, Ricardo observed that prices vary; how can that be? Ricardo “improved” upon Smith by distinguishing between several notions of value as they impacted the Labor Theory of Value. Without intending to, he laid siege to its foundations. After all of these distinctions, one can rightly wonder how much of the Labor Theory of Value remains intact. Most importantly, Ricardo recognized that the “market price” of goods may at times differ from “their primary and natural price.” Paradoxically, if markets drive prices, the Labor Theory of Value is of even less utility and validity. If, then, the demand (or need) for labor approaches zero, then, in a post-job capitalist system, the price of labor approaches zero, and the marginalized workers who may be lucky enough to find jobs would find that their salaries are exceedingly low, perhaps not even enough for subsistence. All of the proceeds of sales would flow to capital. Ricardo, then, despite sharing Smith’s enthusiasm, offers us little help in dealing with our current dilemma.
Marx interrupted this line of thought by working out some of the inner contradictions of capitalist theory. Using the assumptions of Smith, Ricardo, and Malthus, Marx 1) developed theories of several types of worker alienation and exploitation and then 2) demonstrated that capitalist markets are inherently inclined toward periods of boom and bust. (Following Marx, we now call this series of alternations “the business cycle.”) One implication of the business cycle is that, during periods of “bust,” marginal firms will fail and their capital will be acquired by ever-growing behemoths. At some point, this widening gap between the hyper-wealthy and the oppressed workers would motivate a social revolution that would remake the mode of production. So far, however, workers of the world have not united. Nevertheless, if a socialist workers’ paradise were one without productive work for all who can and want to work, it would fail to meet our human needs, as Marx described them. (Signs of mental health are correspondingly negative for involuntary joblessness.)

Partly in response to Marx, “neo-classical” economists sought to restore Smith’s optimism and to resolve his “paradox of water and diamonds.” In Smith’s “paradox,” the demand for water—a necessity of life—should be quite high but is not. (Let us abstract for the moment from concerns about supply because, for instance, there are many very scarce but fine gemstones—like tourmaline and peridot—whose price is low compared to diamonds.) Meanwhile, the demand for diamonds (seen as mere trinkets or ingredients for industrial bits) should be very small but is not. Concentrating on the demand for a good at the edges or margins of the market, where an individual is trying to decide whether or not to buy one more, explains this anomaly. What drives decisions at the margins is the comparative utility of marginal units, or marginal utility. Normally, the marginal utility of water (the utility of the next gallon) is quite low and we will
be disinclined to spend hundreds of dollars for small amounts. But for those in love but lacking a ring, the marginal utility of a diamond is quite high and we are inclined to spend hundreds of dollars for a small amount. Interestingly, then, aggregate markets are frequently defined at their edges by individual decisions. Less exotically, the prices of sugar and salt are not set simply by global supply of and demand for sugar, commodities for which prices are relatively stable. They are set at the point at which consumers derive less utility from marginal units of sugar than from marginal units of salt. Alfred Marshall developed this powerful notion of “marginality,” the belief that pricing is set at the margins of the market, as one is deciding to buy or sell an additional—marginal—unit (or units) of a good.

Marshall’s famous Law of Diminishing Marginal Utility—the closest thing in the social sciences to the Law of Gravity—illustrates but does not resolve our problem. The law mandates that there is always a point at which additional units of any good do not provide as much utility (or joy) as previous units had; it is frequently graphed as a rising curve that peaks and then declines, implying that too much of the good might actually have negative marginal utility. (There is such a thing as too much ice cream.) Applied to our problem, it seems apparent that the investments of the capital class in units of capital have—in certain locales—reached a point at which capital would prefer to purchase a device over hiring another worker. (Devices do not need wages, insurance, vacations, sick days or pensions; investing in them is a comparatively good investment even if the first year’s expense is significantly higher than the annual cost of a marginal unit of labor, especially given that its cost can be amortized over decades.)

Addressing concerns about the Marxian business cycle, both Keynes and Friedman sought ways to minimize its extreme swings. In other words, both assumed that the business cycle is an integral propensity of capitalist economies; they merely disagreed on the method of controlling it, so that we might approach long-term, stable growth. Keynes preferred to control the economy by prudent adjustments to governmental expenditures; when the economy is “cold,” the government should spend more (via deficit spending) to augment effective demand; when it is “hot,” governments should reduce spending by turning surpluses to dampen excessive demand.11 Friedman, by contrast, believed that when an economy is cold, government should increase effective money supply; when it is too hot, government should reduce money supply. However, both operate at such a macro level, concerned with systemic growth, that they lose sight of workers and their job security; neither offers a solution to job insecurity caused by mechanization.

We have, in short, a dilemma: if capital does not invest in new technology, worker productivity will stagnate and other economies will out-compete us; if capital does invest in new technology, workers will become irrelevant and earn no salaries, again leading the economy to implode for lack of effective demand.

Practically, it is hard to predict when this crisis will manifest itself. Currently, there are parts of the (developing) world where human labor is still cheaper than the machines to replace them; the point of diminishing marginal
utility of labor lies still ahead of us. Already, though, Chinese labor is becoming more expensive; even Vietnamese labor is rising in cost. At some point, machines will be less expensive than manual labor; additional units of labor will have negative utility while additional units of machinery will be cost-effective. Are we prepared for all of the social consequences?

Robert Kocis is a professor emeritus from the Department of Politics at the University of Scranton. Email: robert.kocis@scranton.edu.

Notes
1 The central irony of early capitalism – mercantilism – was to explain that, while Spain brought back galleons of gold and silver from the new world, this money quickly wound up in the coffers of England – because Spanish consumers demanded English goods presumed to be cheaper and of higher quality. And English goods were superior and cheaper at that time because conditions in England made workers far more efficient than their Spanish counterparts.
2 Some occupations are more resistant to automation than are others. The innovators, for instance, may remain necessary; the only threat to them is AI. Certain service providers (social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists) and professionals (workers in the system of justice) and supervisors (to oversee the robots and direct them to make goods that are in demand) are instances of those more immune to job insecurity. (A somewhat more advanced AI could eventually threaten even these occupations.) For a somewhat different, and less worrisome, perspective, see: www.investopedia.com/articles/personal-finance/022017/7-jobs-cant-be-automated.asp
3 Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis: https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/DPCEREIQ156NBEA.
5 Ibid., 93-94.
6 Morning Call, 8 December 2018, p. 1.
7 http://statchatva.org/2012/04/06/occupation-change-1920-2010
8 https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/DPCEREIQ156NBEA.
9 If, as disciples of Smith and Ricardo assume and Locke argues (Second Treatise, Chapter 5), one’s compensation is some function of the wealth one creates, how is it that the wealth creators (workers) haven’t seen real wage growth since the 1960s, despite unprecedented increases in their productivity? http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/08/07/for-most-us-workers-real-wages-have-barely-budged-for-decades/ and https://www.epi.org/productivity-pay-gap/.
10 Among the types of labor-based theories of value that Ricardo identified are: value in use; value in exchange; amount of labor “in” the good; amount of labor the good can command on the market; and the amount of labor a worker can command for it on the market.
11 The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation, (1817), London: John Murray; Chapter 4.1, p. 32
13 https://www.google.com/search?q=graph+of+business+cycle&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&i&f=ryk-9PJ-1MPWYM%253A%252CSW6tp1qh_t_WM%252C%2528256&usg=AI4_-kSe80yZr$qF0zPUYKOsj6QW0mioKAsa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiR99rw8sjfAhXmVvKHcXqDe8Q9QEmAXoECAMQBg#imgref =ryk-9PJ-1MPWYM;
14 In Friedman’s optimal situation, the money supply would increase slowly and continuously, in a range from 2 to 5%, thereby eliminating the business cycle.
Audiences made up of community activists and college students were treated to one-night-only showings of two important new documentaries: *Invisible Hand* on October 21st at Lehigh University and *Unfractured* on October 23rd at Northampton Community College. Both films focused on significant examples of efforts to protect communities and ecosystems from industrial intrusions. Both showed strategies that were aggressive and smart, strategies that avoided the usual regulatory channels that waylay citizens. Both films were excellent. And, importantly for audience understanding of what was at stake and the strategies used, filmmakers and major protagonists in the films were present for post-screening Q & As.

For the *Invisible Hand* screening, present were filmmaker Melissa Troutman and Chad Nicholson of the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF), who, in the film and in person, articulated CELDF’s approach. CELDF is spearheading a democracy movement, one whose goal is to establish rights for people and nature over the systems that control them. CELDF’s role is to help communities, states, countries, rivers, lakes, coral reefs, you name it, create supporting legal frameworks for those rights.

*Invisible Hand* shows this approach in action. A couple of major examples. First off, the stand being taken by small, rural Grant Township in PA using a rights-based approach to fight against Pennsylvania General Electric’s (PGE) attempt to put a fracking wastewater injection well within the township. The tiny township, in saying no to the injection of toxic waste water in their community, has been engaged in ongoing battle against PGE, state preemption, a decision by a federal judge, a Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) suit, and other state and federal bodies’ efforts to crush the township’s rights-based claims. For its part, the people of Grant Township built its legal bulwark. They created a Community Bill of Rights containing Rights of Nature provisions, used Home Rule to work around the federal judge’s ruling, created an ordinance that legalized nonviolent civil disobedience, and more.

A second example, on a national scale. In the film we see CELDF’s rights-based approach, particularly its work on the Rights of Nature, becoming part of Ecuador’s new constitution. And we see the constitutional guarantees in practice, protecting the right of a river, being threatened by development, to exist and thrive.

Also in the Q&A panel with Troutman and Nicholson: Tara Zrinski, Northampton County Councilwoman, and Rachel Rosenfeld, Community Outreach Coordinator of the Sierra Club Pennsylvania Chapter – Lehigh Valley. They talked of their deeply felt connections to the natural world and...
of the importance of adding a rights-based approach to the protective arsenal available to communities.

Sixty-five or so people attended this program, which was co-ordinated by the Alliance for Sustainable Communities-Lehigh Valley and co-sponsored by thirteen organizations, including: Green Action Club at Lehigh University, the campus host; Sierra Club, Lehigh Valley Chapter, which provided additional services; and the LEPOCO Peace Center.

For the Unfractured screening, present were filmmaker Chanda Chevannes and Sandra Steingraber, a major leader in the fight against fracking in New York State. The film was an intimate portrait of Steingraber’s total commitment to the anti-fracking fight while being mother to two children and wife to a husband dealing with the disabling consequences of a stroke.

The film’s anti-fracking efforts ended on a positive note with Governor Cuomo’s ban of fracking as a health menace. But Sandra Steingraber’s post-screening elaboration was crucial in understanding the New York campaign: none of the strategic matters she talked about in person made it into the film.

She described a campaign that was rather like a military operation in its leadership, organizational discipline, and focus.

For example, an act of civil disobedience, blocking truck entry to sites, was shown in the film; the strategic planning involved was not shown. Steingraber, in the Q&A, elaborated on the process. The decision the leadership (some five people constantly in touch with one another) made was that: blocking entry to the sites would be done in a way that would not result in criminal charges—even though some went to jail for fifteen days—so no one getting arrested would get a career-endangering criminal record; activists who wanted to be more aggressive, like chaining themselves to equipment, were excluded from the action; the arrests were orchestrated with the local sheriff so that people who did not want to be arrested could simply leave.

The entire campaign was solely about stopping fracking, first with the goal of continuing the moratorium a previous governor had declared, then as a ban on fracking. There was no talk of community rights or the rights of nature. Or of democracy. Their well thought out, creative, and community-engaging, single-minded campaign was incisive: publicize their efforts with events featuring high profile allies and judicious use of nonviolent civil disobedience; use the bureaucratic regulatory process against itself so as to paralyze it; marshal the science growing out of the disastrous health consequences of fracking in Pennsylvania; find ways to engage and empower the community. All of these came together in a Steingraber-conceived thirty-day Advent 2012 assault on a draft of the latest proposed New York State fracking regulations.

The plan: every day for thirty days, she would write a critique of some aspect of the proposed regulations, send them out to 100 people as a basis for their comments. They would send them back to her so she could, at the end of the thirty days, deliver 3,000 letters on the last day for submitting public comment, thereby overloading the bureaucracy that would need to copy all of
these comments. The idea snowballed, with her critiques being passed along to all kinds of community groups, so by the end of the thirty days, she had amassed over 200,000 written comments, the first box of which was carried into the state capitol in Albany by Yoko Ono and which led to a *New York Daily News* January 13, 2013 story: “‘Fracking kills’: Yoko Ono joins star-studded cast fighting against hydraulic natural gas drilling in upstate New York”. Steingraber’s 16-hour days during that intense thirty-day period paid off big time. Again, none of this made it into the film. It was indeed important to hear about such strategizing in Steingraber’s post-screening comments.

Thirty-five or so people attended the *Unfractured* program, which is part of a six-city Pennsylvania tour organized by Better Path Coalition. The Lehigh Valley screening was co-hosted by Berks Gas Truth and two local partners: The Climate Reality Project: Lehigh Valley Chapter and Northampton Community College Climate Action Network.

Community and ecosystem protection: two films, two approaches to consider in our deliberations.

*Martin Boksenbaum is a founding member of the Alliance for Sustainable Communities–Lehigh Valley. Email: martin@sustainlv.org*
Remembering William Blum

FARAMARZ FARBOD

The year 2018 witnessed the passing of William Blum, the author and fierce critic of U.S. imperialism. He died on December 9, at a hospice center in Arlington, VA., at age 85. The news was not entirely unexpected as he had suffered an injury from a fall at his home two months earlier.

Blum had ceaselessly researched and exposed in meticulous detail the U.S. military and CIA interventions since the Second World War. His work is an antidote to the official narrative about the benevolence of U.S. foreign policy. In his book \textit{Rogue State: A Guide to the World’s Only Superpower}, he wrote:

From 1945 to the end of the century, the United States attempted to overthrow more than 40 foreign governments, and to crush more than 30 populist-nationalist movements struggling against intolerable regimes. In the process, the U.S. caused the end of life for several million people, and condemned many millions more to a life of agony and despair.

Predictably, however, the US mainstream media ignored his work until in 2006 when a recording emerged on which the then al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden (OBL) recommended that all US-Americans read \textit{Rogue State}. OBL’s endorsement caused the book to leapfrog to No. 26 (from No. 205,763) on Amazon’s sales ranking.

But Blum’s media “fame” was short lived. After all, the proper function of a media in a well-established system of power is precisely to marginalize dissent and protect the public from exposure to the truth of how the world works. Power always prefers to dwell and rule in darkness; it fears light that exposes its duplicity and cruelties. It is not surprising then that most US-Americans are clueless about the immense destruction the US policies have caused in the rest of the world. Indeed, US exceptionalism depends on a programmed ignorance and goes hand-in-hand with the denial of US atrocities. As Blum wrote in his book \textit{Killing Hope}, “Our leaders understand how this works. They make it a point to keep our American eyes away from our foreign victims as much as possible.”

It is difficult to assess whether Blum was an optimist or a pessimist when it came to changing US policies from below. He died thinking that US-Americans needed a fundamental shift in consciousness if US exceptionalism is to loosen its hold on their minds. However, it is possible to view his life as a fierce anti-imperialist who was motivated by the hope that exposure to truth can move the public to demand a just US foreign policy. As he wrote in \textit{Killing Hope}:

At the close of the Second World War, when the victorious allies discovered the German concentration camps, in some cases German citizens from nearby towns were brought to the camp
to come face-to-face with the institution, the piles of corpses, and the still-living skeletal people; some of the respectable burghers were even forced to bury the dead. What might be the effect upon the American psyche if the true-believers and deniers were compelled to witness the consequences of the past half-century of US foreign policy close up? What if all the nice, clean-cut, wholesome American boys who dropped an infinite tonnage of bombs, on a dozen different countries, on people they knew nothing about—characters in a video game—had to come down to earth and look upon and smell the burning flesh?

Alas, we are not well-placed to know with any certainty whether such a rational hope is warranted as the media continue to protect power from exposure.


“William Blum,” wrote *The Times*, “who raged against United States foreign policy in relative obscurity for decades until one of his published anti-imperialist broadsides received a surge in sales thanks to a surprise public tribute from Osama bin Laden, died on Sunday in Arlington, Va. He was 85.” Note the use of the verb “raged” and the noun “broadsides,” which coming after raged invokes not so much criticisms but rants, diatribes, and harangues. Also, it is hypocritical of *The Times* to mention Blum’s “relative obscurity for decades” without pointing out that *The Times* itself was a major reason for this fact.

*The Post* was no better here either. “For years,” it stated, “William Blum toiled largely without notice on writings in which he railed against the imperialism of U.S. foreign policy.” Again, Blum “railed” and fulminated or raged and kicked up a stink about the US imperialism instead of engaging in a detailed expose and critique. And he “toiled largely without notice” and, apparently, without *The Post* letting its readers know of its complicity in this silence about Blum (and other critics too).

As both media outlets paired Blum and bin Laden in their headlines, it helps to see what bin Laden actually said about Blum:

“If Bush decides to carry on with his lies and oppression, then it would be useful for you to read the book *Rogue State*, which states in its introduction: “If I were president, I would stop the attacks on the United States: First, I would give an apology to all the widows and orphans and those who were tortured. Then I would announce that American interference in the nations of the world has ended once and for all.”

Bin Laden mistakenly cites *Rogue State* as the source of this quote which comes from another book by Blum. But, more importantly, the quote is entirely
reasonable linking US interventionism abroad to anti-Americanism abroad. The fact that the prestige media cannot see the reasonableness of this claim indicates their subservient nature to the US imperial state.

To commemorate William Blum’s passing, we have included below the text of his comments in his last public appearance at a panel discussion organized by Left Forum and CovertAction in NYC on June 2, 2018.

“We can all agree I think that US foreign policy must be changed and that to achieve that the mind—not to mention the heart and soul—of the American public must be changed. But what do you think is the main barrier to achieving such a change in the American mind?

Each of you I’m sure has met many people who support American foreign policy, with whom you’ve argued and argued. You point out one horror after another, from Vietnam to Iraq to Libya; from bombings and invasions to torture. And nothing helps. Nothing moves these people.

Now why is that? Do these people have no social conscience? Are they just stupid? I think a better answer is that they have certain preconceptions. Consciously or unconsciously, they have certain basic beliefs about the United States and its foreign policy, and if you don’t deal with these basic beliefs you may as well be talking to a stone wall.

The most basic of these basic beliefs, I think, is a deeply-held conviction that no matter what the US does abroad, no matter how bad it may look, no matter what horror may result, the government of the United States means well. American leaders may make mistakes, they may blunder, they may lie, they may even on many occasions cause more harm than good, but they do mean well. Their intentions are always honorable, even noble. Of that the great majority of Americans are certain.

Frances Fitzgerald, in her famous study of American school textbooks, summarized the message of these books: ‘The United States has been a kind of Salvation Army to the rest of the world: throughout history it had done little but dispense benefits to poor, ignorant, and diseased countries. The U.S. always acted in a disinterested fashion, always from the highest of motives; it gave, never took.’

And Americans genuinely wonder why the rest of the world can’t see how benevolent and self-sacrificing America has been. Even many people who take part in the anti-war movement have a hard time shaking off some of this mindset; they march to spur America—the America they love and worship and trust—they march to spur this noble America back onto its path of goodness.

Many of the citizens fall for US government propaganda justifying its military actions as often and as naively as Charlie
Brown falling for Lucy’s football. The American people are very much like the children of a Mafia boss who do not know what their father does for a living, and don’t want to know, but then they wonder why someone just threw a firebomb through the living room window. This basic belief in America’s good intentions is often linked to ‘American exceptionalism.’”

Faramarz Farbod, a native of Iran, teaches politics at Moravian College. He is a founder of Beyond Capitalism Working Group. Email: farbodf@moravian.edu.

"For those who fret about the use of American power, remember this: America has always been, and always will be, a liberating force, not an occupying power. We’ve never dreamed of domination..."

—Michael Pompeo (US Secretary of State)
hours because they are receiving a slightly better wage? What about the fact that Amazon paid $0 in taxes in 2017? Or, that it is said to receive an estimated $789 million in tax cuts for 2018? Is Amazon hoping to relieve itself from the public pressure to pay taxes by announcing this wage increase? Finally, a slight increase in wages for workers often leads to a loss of eligibility for critical social programs and thereby to an even greater immiseration and worsened living conditions. Will tens of thousands of Amazon workers soon find themselves in such a situation? Clearly then, this is no time for celebration. Class struggle continues.

“In war,” said the 5th c. BC Greek poet Aeschylus, “truth is the first casualty.” Could it be that with the US military the climate will be the last casualty? Readers may judge the latter question to be an example of using hyperbole for persuasion. That may be because a vast disconnect exists between what the military does and what we know. Take the Iraq war in its first four years (2003–2007): it was responsible for more CO\textsubscript{2} emissions than 60% of all countries. Try imagining the cost of endless wars in terms of CO\textsubscript{2} emissions. Take the US military’s daily use of fuel: it consumes more oil than do 175 countries combined, and generates more than 70% of total US greenhouse gas emissions—and this doesn’t even consider the impact on the planet of making nuclear bombs and generating nuclear waste, nor the trillions of dollars misspent on endless wars of choice that could have been spent on transitioning the world toward green energy with justice for workers. It is clear that we cannot have both ecological sanity and the US military. To make matters more difficult, many environmentalists avoid opposing the US military. This can only change with pressure from below. A recent small step in that direction has been the pressure placed on the newly elected congresswomen Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to acknowledge the environmental devastation of the military and the military budget as a source of revenue in her recently drafted Green New Deal proposal.

See Stacy Bannerman’s article ‘Is Climate the Worst Casualty of War?’ in Peace in Our Times (Fall 2018), p. 21. Bannerman is the founder of Women’s EcoPeace and an advocate for veterans.

On October 6, 2018 Brett Kavanaugh was sworn in as a Supreme Court Justice. His confirmation was eerily reminiscent of Supreme Court justice Clarence Thomas’s nomination. The mainstream media primarily focused on the sexual assault allegations and Kavanaugh’s temperament. What was left out was an examination of his judicial record as well as other substantive policy issues.

He has upheld mass surveillance. As an assistant to President Bush Kavanaugh helped to draft legal justifications for torture in the war on terror. Ralph Nader wrote that Kavanaugh could be the “most corporate judge in modern American history” as he has consistently ruled against workers in favor of corporatism. Public Citizen found that he ruled on behalf of corporations in 18 of 22 cases involving consumer or regulatory issues, 11 of 13 involving environmental cases, and 15 of 17 involving worker rights. Furthermore, Kavanagh has written legal justifications for why a President is above the law and has ruled that Government lawbreaking is ‘reasonable’.

Popular Resistance’s January 14, 2019 e-newsletter focuses on “Uniting for a Green New Deal.” It points out that though there are different visions of what constitutes a Green New Deal, the movement for it does include a call for a rapid transition to a clean energy economy while addressing economic insecurity. The danger is, they say, that it could reinforce current ways of doing things, thereby staying in line with our capitalist system’s inclinations rather than being transformative, that is, leading to economic, racial, and environmental justice and peace. Their call for involvement includes the requirement that we be clear about what we mean by a Green New Deal, especially so as more and more people and organizations are getting involved in this movement. Popular Resistance notes, “This week, more than 600 organizations, mostly environmental groups, sent a
letter to Congress calling on it to take climate change seriously and design a plan to end dependence on fossil fuels, a transition to 100% clean energy by 2035, create jobs and more. Indigenous leaders are also organizing to urge Congress to pass a Green New Deal that is ‘Indigenized,’ meaning it prioritizes input from and the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples.”

What should be done regarding the power and influence of Iran in the Middle East? This had been the Iran Question for multiple US administrations, until Obama signed the Iran Nuclear Deal in 2015, requiring Iran to discontinue its nuclear activities in exchange for a rollback of economic sanctions. This seemed to open a new and more enlightened chapter in Iran-US relations.

As we know, Trump withdrew the US from the agreement and placed outspoken Iran war hawks in key positions of power. John Bolton is the National Security Adviser, (due to the urging of well-known anti-Iran billionaire/casino magnate, Sheldon Adelson). Michael Pompeo is Secretary of State.

A review of Trump’s subsequent actions makes it clear that a key policy objective is to rollback Iran’s influence in the region. He has re-imposed economic sanctions and announced that he seeks to reduce Iran’s export of oil to zero, as an apparent act of economic warfare. He’s begun to build an anti-Iran alliance. The Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA), sometimes referred to as the ‘Arab NATO’, includes oppressive Gulf allies plus Jordan and Egypt. It also has strong support from Israel.

More ominously, Trump’s National Security Council under John Bolton reportedly asked for a list of military options on striking Iran in September 2018. This was in response to Iraqi ‘militants’, aligned with Iran, firing three mortar rounds into a vacant lot in the diplomatic quarter of Baghdad, which includes the US Embassy. No one was injured. The Pentagon reportedly developed such plans but it is unclear whether they were shared with Trump. The request alarmed some people within the Defense and State Departments. It appears that the administration war hawks are seeking a pretext for military confrontation.

Anti-Iran rhetoric is also on the rise. In his January 3, 2019 press statement, Secretary Pompeo claimed that “The Iranian regime is the world’s foremost state sponsor of terror,” adding that the “U.S. will not stand by and watch the Iranian regime’s destructive policies place international stability and security at risk.” The Iranian government may be a threat to its own people’s aspirations for democracy but it’s not a security threat to the world. The following week, in a major speech at American University in Cairo, Pompeo castigated Obama for signing the Iran deal on “our desire to make peace at any cost” with the demonized Iran. He then added that America “never dreamed of domination in the Middle East.” “Can you,” he asked, “say the same about Iran?”

A wild card in all this is Trump himself. He has criticized ‘endless US wars’ in the Middle East — though he suggested the US should have seized Iraq’s oil once there! Does his ‘anti-endless wars’ sentiment extend to a war with Iran? Will he oppose bellicose advice from the Iran war hawks in his cabinet? Is his tough approach aimed at incentivizing Iran to return to the (re)negotiating table with the US on Trump’s terms? Is he seeking regime change? Or is it all just another case of managing turbulent politics via spectacle? It’s hard to tell. We have seen that Trump’s instincts, or whatever motivates him, were to pull some of the US troops out of Syria and Afghanistan, while the (bipartisan) ‘establishment’ in Washington ferociously opposed him. The Iran hawks in Trump’s cabinet also claim that the US withdrawal will create a vacuum which will inevitably be filled by Iran.

It is clear the pressures to confront Iran will grow in 2019. Iran may decide to withdraw from the deal itself, if it concludes that Europe’s unable or unwilling to circumvent US sanctions which allows Iran to benefit economically from staying in the nuclear deal. If Iran were to resume its nuclear program the US will be under much greater pressure from Israel and Saudi Arabia to confront Iran militarily.

All anti-war persons in the US should pay close attention to the Iran Question and demand that the US abstain from any military confrontation with Iran. Lift the unlawful sanctions immediately, discontinue building the anti-Iran coalition in the region and rejoin the Iran nuclear deal.
Can the Working Class Change the World?

by Michael D. Yates


One of the horrors of the capitalist system is that slave labor, which was central to the formation and growth of capitalism itself, is still fully able to coexist alongside wage labor. But, as Karl Marx pointed out, it is the fact of being paid for one’s work that validates capitalism as a viable socio-economic structure. Beneath this veil of “free commerce”—where workers are paid only for a portion of their workday, and buyers and sellers in the marketplace face each other as “equals”—lies a foundation of immense inequality. Yet workers have always rebelled. They’ve organized unions, struck, picketed, boycotted, formed political organizations and parties—sometimes they have actually won and improved their lives. But, Marx argued, because capitalism is the apotheosis of class society, it must be the last class society: it must, therefore, be destroyed. And only the working class, said Marx, is capable of doing that.

In his timely and innovative book, Michael D. Yates asks if the working class can, indeed, change the world. Deftly factoring in such contemporary elements as sharp changes in the rise of identity politics and the nature of work, itself, Yates wonders if there can, in fact, be a thing called the working class. If so, how might it overcome inherent divisions of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, location—to become a cohesive and radical force for change? Forcefully and without illusions, Yates supports his arguments with relevant, clearly explained data, historical examples, and his own personal experiences. This book is a sophisticated and prescient understanding of the working class, and what all of us might do to change the world.

MICHAEL D. YATES is Editorial Director of Monthly Review Press. For more than three decades, he was a labor educator, teaching working people across the United States. Among his books are The Great Inequality, Why Unions Matter, A Freedom Budget for All Americans (with Paul Le Blanc), and The ABCs of the Economic Crisis (with Fred Magdoff).