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Contents

The Immigration Con Job  *Ted Morgan* .............................................................. 1

The Social Democratic Pipedream  *Michael D. Yates* ............................ 10

Obama and Trump: The Present as Prologue to a History of Inequality  
*Eric Cheyfitz* ................................................................................................. 15

On Class Consciousness and the 2020 Presidential Election  *Gary Olson* .......... 19

This Freedom  *Elaheh Farmand* ........................................................................ 22

What Is Happening in Bolivia’s 3 May Elections?  *Vijay Prashad* .............. 24

‘The Only Logic of Trident is Omnicide’  
*Christopher Helali interviews Peace Activist Martha Hennessy* ..................... 27

Iran Is *Not* Responsible For US Dead in Iraq  *John Grant* ......................... 44

Who Are the Terrorists?  *Jack Gilroy* ............................................................... 48

A century of politics and culture in Brazil  *Greta Browne* ............................. 50

Impressions from Brazil  *Guy Gray* ................................................................. 53

Class War and the 2020 Election  *Alex Fischer* .............................................. 55

Thomas Paine: America’s Most Radical Founding Father  *Lenny Flank* .......... 59

How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States  
Reviewed by Doug Heath .......................................................... 61

Notes from the Editor

President Trump’s targeted assassination-by-drone of Iran’s top commander, General Ghassem Soleimani, on January 3, 2020, vastly increased the risk of deadly military confrontation with Iran. Fortunately, Iran’s de-escalatory response in the form of missile attacks against US military bases in Iraq killed no US soldiers thereby allowing Trump to choose not to further escalate the confrontation. Predictably, however, a dominant narrative emerged quickly among the mainstream media talking heads and politicians from both parties, with a few exceptions, that amounted to a little more than cheerleading for a state-sponsored assassination of a senior foreign leader. 

(continued on page 64)
The Immigration Con Job

TED MORGAN

For many years now, an immigration “crisis” has regularly emerged as a hot topic in the corporate media. Presidents and Members of Congress from both political parties have in different ways raised alarms about undocumented or “illegal” immigrants in the United States. And both parties have raised false expectations that they might resolve the nation’s crisis.

Befitting what Noam Chomsky called the “legitimate discourse” of corporate media, however, there is a familiar commonality to the arguments of both sides. Each side frames its arguments around a kind of moral appeal regarding victims of one kind or another. Both omit the fact that US foreign policy drives much of the flow of immigration, and thus immigration becomes a form of blowback—a phenomenon thrust upon Americans because of US actions largely hidden from public view. In sum, the immigration discourse is sanitized in ways that consistently legitimize the US, while blame is simply cast on the other side of the argument or on the immigrants themselves—a classic example of what Daniel Hallin called the “sphere of legitimate controversy” that leaves out views that are “unworthy of being heard.”

Immigration history and the controversies over contemporary policy are, of course, complex and detailed phenomena. Given space limitations, my intention here is to include enough information from these realms to illustrate the validity of my argument about mainstream discourse. There are, of course, many sources one could pursue to gain a more comprehensive understanding of immigration in the US.

The Contemporary Debate

Echoing earlier Breitbart attacks on President Obama, Donald Trump began tweeting about immigration during the Republican primary of 2016, typically claiming that “I will end illegal immigration and protect our borders! We need to MAKE AMERICA SAFE AND GREAT AGAIN!” During the presidential campaign, Trump repeatedly claimed that if elected, he would end the “invasion” of “criminals,” “terrorists” and others who “steal American’s jobs.” Evidence suggests that his anti-immigration stance helped him get elected in 2016.

As has been well documented during his presidency, Trumpian discourse is full of lies and inflammatory personal attacks. Whereas Trump claimed that illegal immigrants “compete directly against vulnerable American workers,” studies have demonstrated that immigrants do not, in fact, take American jobs. As Aviva Chomsky notes, the two major structural developments causing downward shifting employment patterns in the US during the late twentieth century are deregulation and deindustrialization—the latter largely driven by globalizing capitalism.

Nor, as many studies have documented, does immigration cause crime rates to grow; in fact, if anything, immigration produces a slight reduction in the crime rate over time. According to one such study, “Americans have long believed that immi-
grants are more likely than natives to commit crimes and that rising immigration leads to rising crime.... This belief is remarkably resilient to the contrary evidence that immigrants are in fact much less likely than natives to commit crimes."

During the 2018 caravan of Central American migrants marching north from Honduras and Guatemala, Trump announced that “criminals and unknown Middle Easterners are mixed in,” creating a “national emergency” requiring the deployment of about a thousand active duty Army troops to the border. The administration later admitted it had no evidence of “unknown Middle Easterners” in the caravan. Furthermore, the administration pressured Mexico to arrest and deport immigrants arriving across Mexico’s border with Guatemala, and Trump threatened the governments of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador with a cut-off of US “massive” aid to those countries—a mere $450 million to the three countries, much of which has bolstered government repression in all three (more on this below).

Trump’s language about crime and job threats is couched as a kind of emotional, moralistic argument appealing to marginalized white Americans’ sense of their victimhood—part of his ongoing appeal to a crucial component of his political base. Trump’s rationale echoes earlier Republican state and local officials’ complaints about the impact of immigration on their communities. As reported by Aviva Chomsky, for example, back in 2014 Massachusetts state representative Mark Lombardo remarked of the “invasion” of children: “We just can’t afford it. We’re not adequately taking care of our own children, our own veterans, our own families who are struggling here in Massachusetts. We gotta put American families first.”

Hundreds protested on the Boston Common demanding “Americans before illegals.” These kinds of complaints echo a long US history in which immigrants have been racially “Othered” as a way of allegedly protecting “native” populations.

**Detention of Children**

As we shall see, mainstream critics of Trump’s policies also use moralistic arguments revolving around the victimhood of the very immigrants he attacks. From 2017 through 2019, the detention of migrating children increased exponentially; a joint investigation by the Associate Press and Frontline revealed that a total of 69,550 children were so detained over the course of 2019 alone. Nowhere has public controversy been more evident than in the responses to the Trump administration policy of separating migrating children from their parents and subjecting them to barbaric conditions of long-term detention—a policy begun in April 2018.

The separation of children from their parents, especially when visually documented by television or photojournalism and social media, inflamed the public discourse on immigration, unleashing a torrent of denunciation of this inhumane policy. Images of desperate children held in crowded cells without basic amenities, toddlers abandoned in isolation, and teenagers peering through chain link fences aroused public antipathy towards the detentions. Psychologists and other critics highlighted the traumatic nature of children being separated from their parents (who were then typically returned across the border). “Families Belong Together” protests erupted across the US, and the sponsoring organization’s chair declared, “Thousands have been traumatized, ripped away from their families, and at least six children have
died preventable deaths in custody…. Congress must act to end these abuses immediately.10 In June 2019, Congress passed a compromise bill providing $4.6 billion in humanitarian relief, including some funds for enhanced border enforcement.

Fearing lawsuits (which soon occurred), administration officials had earlier discussed ways they might claim that the policy made children safer. Initially, officials defended the practice of separation and detention as a “deterrent” to future immigration, yet failing to mollify the critics, they began to couch the detentions of children as a way of protecting them from “criminals” and “smugglers.” As former Office of Refugee Resettlement, Scott Lloyd put it, the administration had a “moral imperative” to “protect children from smugglers and ensure that gangs were not exploiting the shelter system to enter the country.”11 By contrast, a New York Times op-ed denounced the family separation policy as “immoral.”12

The “Wall,” Militarized Border, and Deportation

Detention of children hasn’t been the only controversy over Trump’s immigration policies. His bombastic claim that he would build an impenetrable wall across the US-Mexico border became a hot-button issue in both the media and Congressional debates. Although only a minor portion of a wall has been built, Trump continues to claim he will find the funds to construct it.

Similarly, in response to the wave of Central American immigrants approaching the border (or marching in the “caravan”), Trump dispatched Army and National Guard troops to block their entry, in addition to increasing the numbers of border patrol agents. As noted by immigration analysts Douglas Massey and Karen Pren, escalating border restraints have a kind of self-fulfilling impact: border apprehensions increase even as actual migration numbers level off or decline, and thus they are used by politicians and bureaucrats to inflame public opinion, leading to more restrictive immigration policies.13

Finally, inflamed fears of undocumented immigrants in the United States have been used to facilitate the removal of millions of immigrants over the years. Trump’s incendiary language and brutal enforcement policy via the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE) became a particularly inflammatory part of the “sphere of legitimate controversy.” ICE tracks down immigrants in their homes, schools and workplaces, holds them in custody, determines their ‘criminality,’ and typically returns them to their native countries, where they face the very real threat of violence they originally fled from. Legitimate grounds for deportation were expanded from actual criminal convictions to “pending criminal charges” or being a “known gang member,” subject to ICE interpretation. Newspaper headlines warned of “Mass Migrant Roundups,” and undocumented immigrants curtailed their activities and lived with constant anxiety about their potential apprehension. In the words of Senator Elizabeth Warren, Trump’s policies were “deeply immoral,” and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand and other Democrats have called for the abolition of ICE.14 Aimed at Latin Americans, ICE’s enforcement can be seen as an extension of broader, racist criminal justice practices in the US.

Whereas Trump’s deportation policies have stirred significant controversy, they are nothing new. President Clinton oversaw the repressive Illegal Immigration Reform
and Immigration Responsibility Act in 1996 and had 1,864,343 immigrants either “removed” (arrested on criminal charges) or “returned” (sent back over the border via administrative action) during the year 2000 (188,467 were removed). In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, President Bush oversaw the creation of ICE, passage of the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (that, like the “Illegal Immigration Reform Act” increased the number of categories of criminal activities by immigrants and green card holders) as well as the removal or return of 1,171,028 immigrants in 2008 (359,795 were removed).15

While President Obama has often been praised by liberal commentators for his “Dream Act” (DACA), aimed at protecting children of undocumented immigrants who were born in the US, he has also been labeled the “deporter in chief” by immigration advocacy groups, largely because the number of “removed” immigrants increased substantially during his presidency (333,592 in 2016). His policies created a division between a relatively few “good” immigrants (DACA recipients) and the remaining “bad” or “criminal” 10 million or so undocumented immigrants. It should also be mentioned that tech billionaires like Mark Zuckerberg and Bill Gates, whose industries depend on immigrant labor, have funded organizations like FWD.us to push for “comprehensive immigration reform,” while Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella criticized the precariousness of the “high skilled labor” necessary for “American competitiveness.”

A Factual Context for the Contemporary Debate

Not surprisingly, the contemporary immigration debate echoes the history of immigration to the United States. In successive waves, the Irish and Germans; Southern and Eastern Europeans and Jews; the Chinese, Japanese and eventually all Asians, encountered a virulent backlash, variously targeting their alleged immorality, criminality, disease, or in the case of the Chinese, racial characteristics that made them “aliens” who could not be assimilated. Aiming to “preserve the ideal of American homogeneity,” the 1924 Immigration Act created the first, sharply-limited quotas for European immigrants, and banned immigrants from Asia. Immigrants from the Western hemisphere faced no such restrictions. [It should be added that post-9/11 Arabs and Moslems in general faced harshly racist attacks.]

Beginning during World War II, Mexican immigrants were encouraged to enter the US to fill vacant industrial jobs. From the 1940s until its elimination in the mid-60s, the government’s Bracero Program brought millions of mostly Mexican “guest workers” to perform the most onerous agricultural work, chiefly on the expansive farms of California. Finally with passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, immigration from all nations were subjected to quotas. The aftermath of the Act saw a dramatic increase in immigration from Latin America (including Mexico) so that more than half of all foreign born Americans in 2017 came from Latin America, a significant number being unauthorized.

Much of the contemporary hype about immigration focuses on “illegal” immigrants, chiefly those from Mexico and Central America. Yet, as Aviva Chomsky has noted, their very “illegality” was created by the 1965 quota system. Prior to that, Latinos and Latinas weren’t illegal in any sense, though for years it was chiefly Mexican migrant workers who came during the agricultural months and returned home.
The number of unauthorized immigrants living in the US grew rapidly from around 1990 to a peak of 12.2 million in 2007 to an estimated 10.5 million in 2017. 2011 saw a surge in immigration from the three “Northern Triangle” nations of Central America –Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Between 2007 and 2017, the estimated number of unauthorized immigrants from Mexico fell by 2 million –a drop-off attributed to growing US hostility and improved opportunities in Mexico— whereas the estimated number from Central America increased by 400,000.16

As controversies around immigration swirled, a number of liberal commentators in the media began to note that, in contrast to the punitive stance of the Trump administration, the current “crisis” was being “pushed” by the violence prevalent in all three Northern Triangle nations, rather than “pulled” by the potential of economic opportunity. The official “legitimate” explanation for the violence coming from the Council on Foreign Relations in 2018 was that the Northern Triangle “remains menaced by corruption, drug trafficking, and gang violence.” This explanation has echoed through much of the corporate media where Central American violence has been fingered as a catalyst for immigration. The New York Times, for example, ran a multi-page article on the plight of victimized women in Guatemala. Filled with grim details about widespread fear and stories of rape and murder victims, the 6000-word article about migrants “fleeing a society controlled by criminals” includes two fairly brief references to the United States, both critiquing Trump’s repressive policies and his threat to cut off aid to the Northern Triangle—aid “we now spend on strengthening civil society and chipping away at the power of gangs and drug cartels.”17 The piece can be seen as an appeal to the moral conscience of Americans. What is telling is what is left out.

The Invisible Actor: US Foreign Policy

Responsibility for the out of control violence in the Northern Triangle can be laid directly at the feet of the United States. In 1954, the US overthrew the democratically-elected Arbenz regime in Guatemala because Arbenz was planning to seize unproductive land held by United Fruit (paying the going market rate) for distribution to peasant farmers. Falsely labeling Arbenz a Communist, the US replaced him with the Rios-Mont dictatorship which proceeded to wipe out 200,000 mostly indigenous Mayans over the next few decades—an act much later officially labeled “genocide” by the Historical Clarification Commission. The New York Times’ report on the commission findings noted that “the United States gave money and training to a Guatemalan military that committed “acts of genocide” against the Mayans during … Guatemala’s 36-year civil war.”18 Entirely absent were any independent details about the extent of US military training and support, to say nothing of the overthrow of the Arbenz regime that established the US-backed genocidal regime. The Times routinely refers to struggles against the US-backed genocidal regime in Guatemala and El Salvador as “civil wars,” rendering the crucial US role invisible.

While the US supported military police states in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua for decades, it wasn’t until the 1980s that US policies began to have significant immigration implications. After the Sandinista-led revolution overthrew the US-backed Somozan dictatorship in Nicaragua, the US waged an unrelenting proxy
war to overthrow the (as of 1984) democratically-elected Sandinista government, at
the same time continuing to provide military training and support for the savagely
repressive regimes in El Salvador and Guatemala. In 1980-81 alone, the Salvadoran
military and right wing terrorists killed 35,000 Salvadoran civilians — 75,000 over
the decade of the 1980s. At the same time, the US built up a powerful US-backed
military in Honduras as the staging ground for its war on Nicaragua. Thousands fled
these repressive conditions — some 10% of all Salvadorans among them.

The US response is instructive. Refugees fleeing the so-called “totalitarian”
Nicaragua, assaulted by the US Contra War, were granted political asylum. Peasants
fleeing for their lives from the horrifically repressive Salvadoran and Guatemalan
forces were not classified as political refugees, but “economic immigrants,” most of
whom were thereby denied legal entry or shipped back to an almost certain death.
During the Clinton administration, passage of the Nicaraguan and Central America
Relief Act allowed asylum seekers from Nicaragua to obtain legal status in the US,
but prohibited this and ordered deportation for mostly Guatemalans, Salvadorans,
and Hondurans who lacked a previous visa or who previously violated US immigra-
tion laws.

The mostly Salvadoran refugees who made it to the US tended to settle in the
Los Angeles area. Their children grew up in poor, racially isolated neighborhoods
where established gangs of Mexicans (to say nothing of the more established Crips
and Bloods) often ruled the day. By the early 1980s Salvadoran youths drawn into
the dominant Mexican gang broke off and formed their own gang, Mara Salvatrucha
— roughly meaning ‘gang of vigilant Salvadorans’ — or MS-13. Traveling back
and forth to El Salvador, MS-13 began to gain a foothold in that country in the late
1980s and early 1990s. With the 1996 passage of the Illegal Immigration and Reform
and Immigrant Responsibility Act, however, the US stepped in and began deport-
ing thousands of gang members who subsequently wreaked havoc in El Salvador.
It wasn’t long before El Salvador began to be labeled the “murder capital” of the
world (to be replaced later by Honduras), and gang violence spread into Guatemala.
In both countries, gangs have carried out often violent work for drug traffickers and
organized crime syndicates.

In 2009, Hondurans had for the first time in memory elected a reformist presi-
dent, Mel Zelaya. However, the Honduran military, with US backing by the Obama
administration, executed a coup that was condemned throughout the hemisphere
with the exception of the United States. Subsequently, Hondurans have had to en-
dure violent repression and social chaos. Most recently Hondurans have matched
or exceeded the numbers of immigrants coming from the other Northern Triangle
nations.

In the end, US policy rejects immigrants fleeing violence for which the US bears
major responsibility, instead returning them to face a bleak chance at survival — a
situation for which, the US is also responsible. This clearly contradicts any claim of
morality. But what’s more important is that it is also structural, and therein lies the
key to finding a way forward. As David Feldman has observed, “Moral pleas and
strident denunciations of xenophobia and hate that are not simultaneously buttressed
by an anti-capitalist critique practically invite co-optation by the multicultural corporate elite.\textsuperscript{19}

Historically, the United States has unilaterally granted itself the right to forcefully cross national borders at will—a right that is unquestioned in the corporate media. This “right” evolves from an imperial foreign policy designed to sustain the US as a global hegemon maintaining reliable access to the exploitation of human and natural resources and to world markets—in short a climate conducive to profitable investment. The implications of such a policy were spelled out by Daniel Hellinger and Dennis Judd in their book \textit{The Democratic Façade}:

The important features of a good business climate, as defined by corporate and foreign policy elites, are: a tractable low-paid labor force; an absence of worker-controlled unions; weak or nonexistent environmental protection laws; lax health and safety regulations in the workplace; tax concessions and government subsidies for business; the use of public money to provide the infrastructure necessary for the functioning of business; and laws permitting the tax-free repatriation of corporate profits back to the United States.

They add: Because political revolutions commonly arise in reaction to such a system of exploitation, a repressive political system is a necessary feature of a ‘good business climate.’\textsuperscript{20}

In short, the US seeks to impose a neoliberal world on the peoples of Latin America, and has done so consistently. Increasingly, of course, corporate elites, and the Republican Party in particular, seek to impose such a world on the American people.

Needless to say, the impact of US foreign policy extends well beyond Latin America. Indeed, the mass migration from the Middle East to Europe has been driven by the decades of war and chaos the US has imposed on that region. And globally, much immigration from the South to the North reflects the long history of Euro-American colonial and imperial exploitation. In both European and American contexts aroused fears about these waves of immigration have helped right wing and nativist interests gain political power, thereby skewing the political discourse to the right.

Furthermore, it must be added, immigration, whether documented or undocumented, is highly functional for capitalist economies. Most immigrants provide relatively cheap labor for the US economy; they often fill low-pay, menial jobs that Americans are loathe to accept, and by keeping the labor pool expanding they enable corporations to suppress wages.

The implications of the restricted discourse in our corporate media and political institutions are profound. An understanding of the roots of the immigration problem point to a very different kind of debate, one that foresees a democratic world far different from the neoliberal capitalist order we live in.

Nancy Fraser has argued that the 2016 Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump campaigns reveal that public support for neoliberalism has declined to the point that there is now potential for a new counterhegemonic ideology to take root. Debate between “progressive neoliberalism” represented by the Democratic Party mainstream, and “reactionary neoliberalism” represented by Donald Trump and the Republican mainstream is consequently “dying.” Instead, she sees Bernie Sanders candidacy (and
popular base) representing “progressive populism” and Donald Trump’s rhetoric and his base representing reactionary populism. To counter the reactionary element with more progressive neoliberalism is to “exacerbate the very conditions that created Trump. And that means preparing the ground for future Trumps, even more vicious and dangerous.”

In effect, the same can be said of the immigration debate. To counter the horrors of Trumpian policy merely with moral pleas and humanitarian improvements in immigration control, is simply to perpetuate immigration “problems,” to say nothing of a horrific US foreign policy. In no way does it move us closer to a truly democratic world.

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Endnotes

2 Along with several articles, Aviva Chomsky has written two helpful books on the subject: “They Take Our Jobs” and 20 Other Myths about Immigration (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007) and Undocumented: How Immigration Became Illegal (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014).
5 Aviva Chomsky, “They Take Our Jobs,” 4. See her Myth 2: “Immigrants compete with low-skilled workers and drive down wages.”
“We assume that these social constructions [countries, sovereignty, citizenship, and laws] have some kind of independent reality or existence, but in fact they don’t: people invented them to serve their own interests. There were historical reasons that people created them, and it’s important to understand those reasons in order to think critically about them.”

— Aviva Chomsky
Today in the United States, there has been an upsurge in social democracy/democratic socialism (I use these terms interchangeably; I don’t see much difference between them, at least in the U.S.) The main current of social democracy is the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), whose overall political perspective can be described as follows. There is no chance for a radically new system of production and distribution in the short term, and certainly not through a revolutionary upheaval. Only a long-term peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism is possible. Such an evolution is to be achieved through electoral politics. Given the stranglehold of the two-party system in the United States, those who hope for socialism must work within the more liberal of these, the Democratic Party, actively supporting and ultimately getting elected to Congress and the presidency what certain DSA luminaries call “class struggle social democrats.” These stalwarts of radical transformation will, when their numbers are sufficient, have a strong popular mandate to use the state to gradually dismantle the power of the wealthy and the corporations they control and replace them with worker- and community-owned cooperatives. Meanwhile, the government will enact legislation, financed by sharply progressive taxes on both income and wealth combined with central bank injections into the public treasury of newly printed money, that provides a safety net for every citizen against the many slings and arrows of modern life. Medicare for All, free public college schooling, massive livable public housing, an ambitious carbon-reducing and public-employment-generating Green New Deal, job retraining, and greatly expanded and cheap public transportation will make us happier, more productive, and freer to pursue our interests.

As the success of social democracy become apparent and part of our normal expectations, it will become possible to slowly move toward full socialism, with the withering away of both private ownership of the means of production and the state itself. I haven’t seen any details on this, but one would imagine that the hierarchical structure of workplaces will gradually give way to a much more horizontal structure of power. Internationally, similar social democracies will together engage in mutually beneficial trade, with global governance agencies that peacefully solve problems in what will continue to be a globally interdependent world.

The lineage of social democracy goes back to late nineteenth-century splits in the original communist movement, which Marx and Engels helped birth. On one side were those true to the Marxist vision of the self-emancipation of the working class through class struggle that did not shy away from armed self-defense and possible violent revolution. On the other were those who believed that a peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism was the one realistic way to realize the dream of an emancipated humanity. These differences gave rise to a complex history beyond the scope of this short essay. However, several salient points can be made.

First, the strongest social democratic party was in Germany. However, as is inevitable wherever social democrats begin to succeed electorally, the German Social
Democratic Party (SPD) built a party bureaucracy, with the typical perquisites that always accompany high public office. This meant an increasing independence from the party rank-and-file, much as labor union bureaucrats in the United States have become far removed from their members.

Second, in a society where capitalism dominates, where the military and police are committed to the steadfast defense of private property, left-of-center parties must make compromises with their original principles in order to get minimal party programs established by the state. When Germany was intent on entering the First World War, the SPD ignominiously voted to allow the government to issue bonds to finance the fighting. Thus, it fully participated and must share blame for the nine million dead soldiers and the millions of civilians who perished, most of whom were workers and peasants, the very people the SPD presumably championed.

Another horrendous example of compromise with class enemies occurred when the Swedish Social Democratic Party, which first came to power in the early 1930s and began to establish what would eventually become the best example of progressive social democracy in the world, compromised with the Nazis before and during the Second World War. As radical writer Louis Proyect notes:

To avoid war with Germany, a nation that had already conquered Denmark and Norway, Sweden took a very flexible attitude toward Nazi troop movements on its soil. On July 8, 1940 the two nations hammered out a deal that would prove useful to Nazi war plans. Around 30,000 Nazi soldiers would board Swedish trains each month as the same railway transported 1500 trainloads of Nazi armaments.

On June 26, 1941, the day that Finland entered the war against the USSR, Sweden gave the green light to a trainload of 15,000 Nazi soldiers to head East on behalf of Operation Barbarossa. Between June 22nd and November 1 of the same year Swedish trains carried 75,000 tons of German war material to head in the same direction. As the trains came back from the front, they carried wounded Nazi soldiers to occupied Norway where they were treated in Oslo hospitals until they were ready to return to the killing fields. Swedish authorities also set up base camps for the Wehrmacht fully supplied with food, oil and other necessities. And all the while German warplanes flew over Swedish air space en route to Russia. Sweden was also nice enough to sell or lease more than a thousand trucks to Germany just to make sure that the invasion of Russia would not go haywire.2

Third, Social Democracy hit its stride during the roughly three decades after the Second World War. This is when Great Britain’s fine National Health Service (NHS) was implemented. “The NHS is run directly by the government, is free, and includes a wide array of services to everyone. This was a tremendous achievement, and it removed one of the most important insecurities from working-class life.”3 In West Germany, social democracy initiated a wide array of social security measures, as well a system of “co-determination,” in which labor unions and workers have certain legal rights and powers vis-à-vis employers. “The German system is ‘corporatist,’ which means that labor and capital are seen as social partners, and the state is intimately
entwined in their relationship. German labor law, for example, is much more encompassing than that of the United States and Great Britain. Detailed laws regulate collective bargaining, guarantee all workers certain benefits, prohibit unjust dismissal, and dictate union participation in all national commissions, agencies, and policy-making bodies having to do with labor-related matters. There is also a system of codetermination, through which workers can, indirectly, through their unions, participate in corporate decision making. . . .”

It should be noted, however, that even under social democratic governments, former Nazis have held public office, served as officers in the German military, and continued to run major German corporations.

The apogee of postwar social democracy took place in the Scandinavian nations. There, extraordinarily high levels of union density, often in excess of 80 percent, combined with a close relationship between the national union federation and the ascendant Swedish Social Democratic Party, helped to forge a Keynesian program of high, progressive taxes, public employment, and cradle-to-grave social welfare programs. Strong capital controls made it difficult for Swedish capital to move freely around the globe. In return for a remarkable safety net and very low unemployment, Swedish labor did not push Swedish capital as far as its power might have allowed it to do. Instead, compromises were made so that Swedish exports maintained a competitive global advantage. The weakness of this model can be seen when as part of the Meidner Plan that underlay Swedish social democracy, a Workers Fund was proposed in the 1970s that would, through compulsory issuance of new stock that would accrue to the workers and eventually make them de facto owners of Swedish corporations. This brought forth intense opposition from capital, and the social democrats were forced to capitulate, calling into question how socialism could ever arise even in the model social democratic nation.5

To what extent did social democracy prevail in the United States? Not very great. There were some social welfare measures enacted, such as expanded social security benefits, Medicare, Medicaid, (grossly insufficient and poor quality) public housing, anti-discrimination laws, occupational health and safety statutes, and more progressive federal taxes. Capital was forced into a labor-management compromise, but it was nothing like that in Sweden or even Germany.

The Workers Fund was put forward at the very time in which the post-Second World War capitalist boom began to undergo strains and capital decided to exert its power to weaken social democracy by demanding that governments loosen controls on the movement of money and physical capital, allowing both to move more freely around the globe in search of lower costs and higher profits. The resultant austerity tax and spending policies and the concomitant weakening of the social welfare safety net hit U.S. workers with a vengeance. However, similar attacks on the working class began to occur in every country where social democracy was strong. Conservative governments became common; manufacturing began a rush toward the Global South; labor markets were made more “flexible”; and an ideological assault on Keynesianism and social democracy began in earnest. Social democracy has been able to cushion the blows in some countries better than other, but nowhere has it been able to stop them raining down. Much less has it managed to rejuvenate itself, regain
power, and bring the social welfare state back to life. The defeat of Jeremy Corbyn in the recent British election offers ample proof of this. And to add insult to injury, a recent op-ed in the New York Times declared Finland to be a “capitalist paradise.”

Social democrats/democratic socialists often seem oblivious to the facts that,

Social democracy in Western Europe took shape under special historical circumstances: the strong communist movements, allied with the Soviet Union, existing in most European nations after World War II; the rapid economic growth that followed the massive rebuilding that took place after the war, aided by US aid and US exports; the need of European capital to cooperate with and make concessions to non-communist labor unions, if only to co-opt any future radicalization; and the strict capital controls and fixed currency exchange rates that facilitated national development. We live in an altogether different world today, one in which capital and the state are in a symbiotic relationship to dismantle social democracy, privatize social services, destroy labor unions and ensure capital’s ability to do what it desires in every corner of the earth and every part of our lives.

And, now there is no Soviet Union or Maoist China to act as a break on capitalist imperialism. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union and China’s turn to capitalism, nearly 30 percent of the world’s people lived in non-capitalist societies. Today that figure is well under 1 percent.

What is more, just as the function of the US military is to kill, whatever might be said to the contrary by our “patriots,” so too the purpose of the US state is to punish those who do not conform to the norms of capitalist society, whatever might be said about the “people” and “democracy.” The state is a complex of political and bureaucratic entities established ultimately to enforce conformity, to control us so we obey the dictates of the marketplace. There can be no capitalism, no system of intertwined markets, without the willingness to violently enforce its outcomes, which are always multiple inequalities impervious to destruction within the confines of this system. Yet, somehow this state, according to our democratic socialists, will be transformed from what a state is by its very nature in capitalist society into something radically different. It is to become a tribune of ordinary persons. This has never happened, and there is no reason to believe it ever will. Capital and its state will not simply roll over and give in just because “class struggle social democrats” have been elected to public office, even if many people support them.

The entirety of social democratic/social democratic politics, political economy, and environmental projects is hopelessly naïve. Should by some miracle someone like Bernie Sanders become president, it would be nothing short of astonishing if he, his political allies, and his legion of supporters could resurrect and greatly expand the social welfare state. And should that happen, it would be truly a marvel—one akin to converting atheists into evangelical Christians—if this led straight to socialism.

And while I don’t want to overstate this, the social democratic program seems in the end to be paternalistic. Workers and peasants will be provided for, but they will con-
tinue to be what they are, just happier, in the bosom of a protective state. Their vision is not aimed nearly enough at the empowerment of those now without the ability to command their own lives. Shouldn’t attention be paid to empowering ourselves, through our own collective actions, actions in which we begin to produce and distribute, build our own media, create our own cultures, independent of the marketplace and the coercive power of the state? Shouldn’t the diseases of racism, patriarchy, homophobia, imperialism, and rabid patriotism be confronted head-on, now.

And in all of this, shouldn’t we begin to prepare ourselves to create a new kind of political structure. One that is communal, collective, self-sufficient, and willing to defend itself. When will our social democrats begin to fashion alternative regimes of production, distribution, and community such as those now occurring in Jackson, Mississippi, in rural India, in Via Campesina, in the communes of Venezuela, in urban agricultural efforts similar to those in Cuba, in labor schools like the one now being constructed in Minneapolis, and in many others I don’t know about but maybe readers do? When, for example, will we insist that the public lands are indeed ours and not to be used for private gain? Finally, shouldn’t intellectuals, those who make pronouncements, write books, and assert themselves as public figures, embed themselves in the world of workers and peasants, teaching and learning, becoming part of their own liberation, alongside everyone else?


Endnotes
2 This is taken from one of a set of nine essays written by Louis Proyect on Swedish social democracy. All are well-worth reading.
4 Ibid., 104-05.
5 Ibid., 103-04, 113-14.
8 A must-read is Christopher Ketcham, this Land: How Cowboys, Capitalism, and Corruption are Ruining the American West (New York: Penguin Random House, 2019).
Obama and Trump:  
The Present as Prologue to a History of Inequality

ERIC CHEYFITZ

In 2011, I began writing The Disinformation Age: The Collapse of Liberal Democracy in the United States, which was published by Routledge in 2017, just after the Trump administration succeeded that of Obama, and now appears in this PaperBoat Press edition. The book is an historical view going back to the 17th century of how we got to Trump, whom we should not forget “we, the people” elected. So, to start with, let’s agree that Trump is not the problem, not the cause of what I understand as our currently collapsed democracy, but a particularly virulent symptom of its collapse.

The rise of Trump has produced some strong nostalgia for his predecessor, Barack Obama. But we should remember that Obama and those before him, going most immediately back to the presidency of Ronald Reagan, set the table for Trump’s gluttony. In The Disinformation Age I go back much farther to suggest a reason for the collapse of U.S. democracy from the Constitution forward, but for now, because in the mainstream press the contrast between Obama and Trump appears as stark as that between antagonists in a medieval morality play, representing the two poles of U.S. democracy, I want to look only at the two to suggest the ways the contrast blurs on close inspection. This is a result not of any similarities between the two men—they couldn’t be more different in style and temperament—but of what they represent: neoliberal capitalism.

Obama’s economic advisers Larry Summers, Timothy Geithner, Robert Rubin and company were the very same people who engineered the Great Recession of 2008. After the Recession, with their advice, Obama invested largely in the big banks (Rubin and Geithner were two of the biggest bankers) that caused the economic collapse, not, by and large, in the millions of people who lost their homes and jobs because of it. Income inequality increased during the Obama administration as it continues to do under Trump, whose tax policy siphons tax dollars to the rich and corporations—not that they weren’t already getting an abundance under the Democrats.

Under Obama, in 2015, the U.S. military budget was $598.5 billion, 54% of federal discretionary spending. Trump has added to that budget while Democrats in Congress voted overwhelmingly for the increase, passing a $716 billion military budget in 2018. Obama proposed a trillion dollars over thirty years to modernize the U.S. nuclear weapons program. Trump supports this increase and more and has increased the danger of nuclear proliferation with his withdrawal from the Iran nuclear agreement. Obama signed a memorandum of understanding with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel to increase by eight billion dollars over a ten-year period our military support for the apartheid regime in Israel, bringing the total to $38 billion dollars. Trump supports this increase and has doubled down on U.S. support for Israel with his approval of moving the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem.
Obama increased drone warfare initiated by the Bush administration. Trump has expanded the use of drones in Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia.

However, Obama began to open relations with Cuba, while Trump is intent on closing them.

Obama deported close to three million immigrants. At the same time, he instituted the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Act (DACA), giving qualified relief from deportation to some of the children of undocumented immigrants. Trump, who is making war on immigrants from Latin American and the Middle East, began the phase-out of DACA in 2017. That phase-out is now in limbo due to court intervention. The Republican Congress failed to enact any version of the Dream Act, which would give these children, many now adults, who were brought here without agency of their own, a path to permanent residency. As of November 2018, the Democrats control the House; the Republicans remain in control of the Senate. And Trump remains in the White House so the possibilities for a stalemate on immigration are endless.

As for the Affordable Care Act, *The Disinformation Age* looks at how unaffordable this law has been for millions of people who live between expanded Medicaid (in the states where it exists) and Medicare. The Republicans want to eliminate the Act, so what seemed at best a half measure (instead of Medicare-For-All) at least protecting people with preexisting conditions, seems a full measure now, obscuring the need for universal, single-payer, affordable health care. In the 2018 midterm elections, the Democrats made health care the number one issue. But the party can’t agree on what kind of health care there should be with the exception that preexisting conditions should be protected.

While Trump demonizes the press—his unsuccessful attempt to remove the press credentials of CNN reporter Jim Acosta resonates—the Obama administration prosecuted whistleblowers, including sending the very visible Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden, who sought to inform Americans of autocracy-creep in the federal government, to prison and exile. Following the April 2019, arrest of Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, Paul Waldman notes in his online April 11, 2019, opinion column in The Washington Post: “The Obama administration, while critical of Assange, decided that the First Amendment implications of charging him with a crime were too troubling, so they declined to do so.” Following suit in a way, the Trump administration at first charged Assange, if the British ever succeed in extraditing him, not with publishing documents obtained illegally, which would constitute a violation of press freedom, but with aiding Chelsea Manning in obtaining those documents by hacking U.S. government computers, even though the specific attempt charged was unsuccessful. But as of the end of May, 2019, the administration has changed those charges to espionage, thus threatening the basis of the First Amendment.

Under Trump, we now talk about “fascism” in the U.S.; but the militarized, corporate, surveillance state was already being put in place when Trump took office and added the singularly fascist component of scapegoating—demonizing difference from the white, male, Protestant, heterosexual model.

While the Democrats are relatively strong in a generally conservative U.S. matrix on social issues of race and gender, and want to protect, by and large, Social Security and Medicare, the Republicans and Trump hate difference (demonized as “de-
viance”) from the white, male, Protestant, heterosexual model—hence their war on Muslim and Latinx immigrants. If we imagine a strong, government-supported network of basic social institutions in the areas of health, education, and welfare, think of the Republicans as the neoliberal wrecking crew without a plan for reconstruction except privatization to which the Democrats offer relatively little resistance (in comparison with the social programs of other Western European democracies): the economic condition of African Americans and other minorities deteriorated during the Obama administration as the entire U.S. middle-class continued to disappear. In his 2013 budget proposal Obama himself proposed cuts to Social Security and Medicare in order to compromise with the Republicans and reduce the deficit, something that the Congressional Republicans as of 2018 were proposing, while simultaneously increasing the deficit with Trump tax cuts.

Obama, who was certainly rhetorically strong on the environment, implemented some modest measures in that area along the lines of reducing coal and carbon emissions and at the end of his administration in 2016 instituted a substantial ban on drilling offshore in the Atlantic and Arctic, which Trump may be able to overturn. As Marianne Lavelle notes: “By relying on executive orders and regulations after his legislative majority disappeared, President Obama leaves his climate policies at risk under Donald Trump.” For it was only in his second term, as Lavelle documents, long after his Congressional majority disappeared, that Obama began to get serious about the environment, having concentrated in his first term on rebuilding the collapsed corporate economy, including increasing fossil fuel production. After waffling in his first term on implementation of the Keystone XL pipeline with its deadly load of tar sands oil, Obama rejected it in his second. Before leaving office Obama also put a check on the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), set to run under the Missouri river at a place immediately threatening the water supply of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe. As expected, Trump has issued executive orders approving both pipelines. Both orders are being contested in the courts. But while the legal process has so far stopped the implementation of the Keystone XL, oil is flowing through the DAPL.

Obama signed the Paris Climate Accords, while Trump understands the environment only as a commodity to be traded for profit and signaled as much by planning to withdraw from the Accords. But many advocates of environmental justice have noted that the Accords, voluntary in the first place, are too little too late. This is no reason to shred but a reason to strengthen them and certainly not Trump’s reason for opting out—he is in denial about climate collapse—but only to note that the recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report tells us that if we do not reduce global warming by 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit by 2040 we are facing a catastrophic situation. The report “describes a world of worsening food shortages and wildfires, and a mass die-off of coral reefs as soon as 2040—a period well within the lifetime of much of the global population.” In many ways, the catastrophes the IPCC describes resemble the world we are living in right now.

Overall, in a catastrophically unbalanced world, the Democrats are marginally preferable to the Republicans. But as The Disinformation Age argues, neither party, under the control of militarized, neoliberalist capitalism, has a demonstrable agenda to bring the world into economic, social, political, and environmental balance, which
is a necessity if the human race is to survive. The world has already ended for millions of people and ends every year for millions more due to poverty, which is intensified by climate change. In the last chapter of *The Disinformation Age*, I ask us to think about how to achieve balance from an Indigenous perspective.

Although Barack Obama figures prominently in *The Disinformation Age*, the book is not about him—he mattered and yet matters little in the catastrophic global scheme of endless war and climate collapse. The same could be said for Trump, for that matter, or for any single leader. The book is, rather, an analysis of a destructive system, capitalism, for which Obama as the leader of the Democratic Party provided the principal, charming, hopeful mask at the time I was writing. Other presidents have worn the same mask. However unintentionally, Trump has ripped the mask off. *The Disinformation Age* focuses on the mask and what is beneath it, not the man.

Obama talked progressive and walked regressive, maintaining the neoliberal agenda (hegemony of privatization) at home and the neocon agenda (military expansion) at home and abroad. Trump marks the line where neoliberalism and neoconservatism begin to shade into fascism. On the level of style, Trump is the anti-Obama. He operates without Obama’s charm or cosmopolitan intelligence and with a vicious political cunning that plays to the racism and misogyny of his base in contrast to the “Hope” Obama proffered but inevitably failed to realize because it can’t be realized within the current system.

This failure, or more specifically, the failure of the Democratic Party as exemplified in the disastrous Hillary Clinton campaign offering more of the same, gave Trump his opening.

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"Reason has always existed, only not always in reasonable form."

—Karl Marx (1844)
On Class Consciousness
and the 2020 Presidential Election

GARY OLSON

After several weeks of intensive reading and discussion on class, capitalism, and socialism in my undergraduate course, The Politics of Labor, we would do the following exercise: Standing before the blackboard, I encouraged the students to list existing, objective, and determining conditions that might prompt the American working class to seek the abolition of capitalism. As the response flowed there wasn’t enough space on the left side of the board to write down all the urgent unmet needs, egregious grievances, and vanquished hopes. And the fact that these young people were aware of being the first generation that won’t live as well as their parents was not lost on me. We labeled the list “Determining Conditions.”

Then, leaving a space between, we moved to the right side to enumerate all the “Determined Responses” aggrieved citizens could take to satisfy their demands. Again, the space was insufficient to list all the options which ranged from letter-writing, boycotts and voting to civil disobedience, mass movements and revolution. I then posed the question: “What’s preventing the determining conditions from eventuating in a successful determined response?” After a lengthy and sometimes contentious debate that went on for two periods, we (mostly) agreed to fill in the remaining empty space with the words “Class Consciousness.” To summarize and paraphrase political theorist Bertell Ollman, class consciousness is when the objective, general, and rational interests of a class become its recognized goals.

Further, and with a special bearing on our current situation in the United States, class consciousness is the growing recognition that the capitalist framework will never allow the collectivity to realize its needs, that the existing economic and political system must be transformed at its roots. Finally, and equally germane today, is the realization that the people themselves, not a Knight in Shining Armor, can bring about this change through their own actions. Put another way, ordinary people learn that a history of carefully cultivated class unconsciousness is what permits the predatory class and its enablers to rule.

What about today? We know there are no magic elixirs for arriving at class consciousness – an extraordinary mass achievement by any measure – but certain experiences can enhance understanding and on rare occasions provide a quantum leap. I might be letting my heart overrule my intellect but I sense that a confluence of favorable factors is emerging that offers a pivotal point in terms of increasing class consciousness.

For example, some folks have wondered aloud if the brazen perfidy in Iowa and those likely to follow (like Bloomberg buying his way into the debate) will bring Sanders supporters into the streets. But in all likelihood, they will remain seated until the convention in Milwaukee. At that point, if Sanders is denied the nomination, much depends on whether he abides by his signed DNC pledge to support any nominee.
and resumes his sheepdog role from 2016 or he denounces and bolts the DP to lead a new movement. That would be revolutionary and many of us would get behind it. How many would do so is impossible to predict and really depends on as yet unknown events.

While the radical option cannot be ruled out, there is nothing in Sanders’ background to suggest that he would take this step. He has been totally consistent in his convictions as a loyal Democrat in all but his self-designated title as an Independent. As such, any “Et tu Bernie” taunting would be unfair and inaccurate. Further, I would never deny that Sanders has played an incalculably valuable role in contributions in broadening the national political dialogue and energizing people, including the previous nonvoters. For younger Americans with greatly diminished futures, Sanders has given traction to socialism (albeit an abstraction) to the point where fully half now embrace it over capitalism.

So, what might happen? It might be fruitful to engage in some blue-sky thinking and hypothesize that the DNC’s machinations are beaten back and Sanders wins the nomination and the general election. The day following his acceptance speech, the powerful predator class/deep state forces aligned against him will insure that his “political revolution” is stillborn. In the adroit words of left political scientist William Grover, he’ll be simultaneously confronted by a “capitol strike” and a “capital strike.” After issuing a few of his promised executive orders, Sanders will face intransigent political reality. At that critical juncture his opponents might find reason to grant some severely circumscribed, modest New Deal-type reforms. This would be contingent upon his agreement not to alter the nation’s imperialist foreign policy. Again, there is little in Sanders’ history to indicate he would try to close the 1,000 U.S. military bases and begin bringing home the 450,000 troops enforcing the empire.

Further, Sanders has said “I am not only going to be commander-in-chief, I am going to be organizer-in-chief.” This sounds promising but as political analyst James Dennis Hoff notes, in practice this “...will send those potential activists right into the Democratic Party where social movement go to die.” While capitulating, Sanders will (sincerely) claim fealty to his principles, utter some democratic socialist rhetoric, and encourage folks to vote in more Democrats in the 2022 bye-election. Here, we can sketch two possible scenarios with some possible overlap.

The first, my ultimate political fantasy, is that a few weeks after the inauguration, President Sanders undergoes a Saul-to-Paul conversion and schedules two hours on primetime television. He combines his new role as Political-Educator-in-Chief with a consummate, unparalleled teachable moment to carefully explain what he is up against and why the people’s democratic will is not being carried out and won’t be under our existing political structures.

Assuming he is not yanked off the air (remember, it’s a fantasy) President Sanders goes on to say that it is not only about some “billionaires” but about the capitalist system itself. The fact that this admission resembles a heartfelt mea culpa only serves to heighten the urgent need for the people themselves to assume responsibility for their future. Just prior to his speech, he offers his vast organizational apparatus to creating a new movement and political party. This includes fund-raising lists, state by state contacts, social media expertise and links to thousands of progressive discussion
groups. What happens next is unknowable but the continuum ranges from the most dire to the potentially transformative.

The second and slightly less fanciful scenario is that if Sanders capitulates, even his most loyal followers will realize the flock is now being (unintentionally) herded toward the metaphorical abattoir. The “us” in “not me, us” takes on a radical, self-emancipatory meaning and this, in turn, ignites the aforementioned street action – sustained, obstructive, non-violent civil disobedience. In this case, the role assumed by his national organization remains unclear. Most importantly, “the people united,” not the White House occupant or the Democratic Party, are credited with forcing adoption of an interim program that will mark the first stage of actual political and economic democracy, in a word, socialism.

Finally, imagine that if instead of squandering so much time and energy over the years on reforming the Democratic Party, those efforts had been expended on political education and organizing a serious mass movement. The developing situation in 2020 may provide a chance to make amends with whatever means are available and all the creativity we can muster. The onus is on us if we do not take advantage of this opportunity.

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

“No social system with inequality of power and multiple hierarchies touching most of life can be liberating, if liberation means living unalienated lives, lives in which we are not artificially and intentionally separated from one another, from what we produce, from our natures as thinking, purposive beings, and from the natural world. By contrast, the working class must be for whatever is social, collective, sharing and unalienating.”

— Michael D. Yates
This Freedom

ELAHEH FARMAND

I came to America 21 years ago
with rose-colored glasses,
a suitcase of memories,
and my mother’s dreams
unfolded.

I came to America
with little English
and a lot of bitterness because
our struggle as new immigrants
embarrassed me.

But I came with hope
and from my mother,
I learned that I was lucky,
privileged,
fortunate
to be living
the American Dream.

I am grateful, but...
this freedom is not as pure as I imagined
destroying Mother Earth and building walls
stopping dreamers from dreaming a better life
demanding documents as proof of our humanity
forcing us to put up signs on our windows:
“Hate has no home here.”

This freedom has been making me very angry lately
with its absurd necessity for a right to bear arms
because it hasn’t learned from history, because of
deep-seated ignorance and fear and hate.

There are people dying around me
and I am helpless,
drowning in His moronic madness.
This freedom questions my womanhood again, forcing me to march on Washington again, to raise my fist in the air again because yes sir, I’m a nasty woman!

I come from Iran, where dreaming is forbidden, and execution arbitrary where a ticket to America is a ticket to heaven my parents brought me here so that I could be free so that I could dream and be who I want to be a proud woman, uncensored and unabashed

And yet here I am again, my voice shaking with anger “My body, my choice!” this poem is continuing to get longer this freedom is reminding me of the very place I left

This freedom is breaking my heart.

Elaheh Farmand immigrated to the US when she was 11 years-old, leaving her birth country of Iran. In 2016, she founded Immigrants & Exile: Stories of Nostalgia & Longing (https://www.immigrantsandexile.org/) to create a space in which artists can share their feelings of nostalgia, longing, and exile.
What Is Happening in Bolivia’s 3 May Elections?

VIJAY PRASHAD

On 10 November 2019, a coup d’état took place in Bolivia. The commander-in-chief of the Bolivian Armed Forces asked President Evo Morales to resign. The police had already mutinied, and society had already been destabilized – this had been triggered by a presidential election whose results had not been recognized by the opposition and whose results had been suspiciously discredited by the Organization of American States (OAS). Two days after Morales resigned, a largely unheard-of opposition politician, Jeanine Áñez, declared herself to be the interim president without the necessary quorum in the Plurinational Legislative Assembly, where Morales’ party, the Movement to Socialism (MAS) holds the majority of the seats.

The new government said that it would only remain until elections could be held. However, from the inauguration of Áñez, the government has prosecuted a policy of repression against the leaders and militants of MAS and against social movements (36 people have died), and it has implemented political and economic policy changes that are inspired by the neoliberal agenda driven by the United States government. The interim government has a racist, patriarchal, and fundamentalist character, as expressed through symbolic and reactionary acts of violence, such as the denigration of the Wiphala (a flag that represents the diversity of the indigenous people and nations of Bolivia).

In January 2020, the government announced that the presidential and legislative elections will be held on 3 May. The election process began under conditions of severely restricted democratic freedom; by January’s end, the interim government had militarized the country’s main cities to prevent any possible demonstrations. It has continued to harass and persecute members of the MAS government who have sought asylum in foreign embassies for fear of their lives. The interim government has closed more than fifty radio stations; it has accused them of sedition and of incitement to violence for having broadcast stories critical of the interim government.

A number of coalitions of political parties have registered tickets for the presidential election. The candidates for MAS are Luis Arce Catacora (President) and David Choquehuanca Céspedes (Vice President). Catacora was the Minister of Economy and Public Finance under Morales and the architect of the administration’s economic success. Céspedes was the Foreign Minister in that government. He managed Bolivia’s policy of international sovereignty and is an important person to Bolivia’s indigenous and peasant movements. Early polls show that the MAS ticket is in first place.

In the first days of February, one of Morales’ two attorneys was detained. The government sought to arrest MAS’s attorney, who was in the midst of registering candidates for the May elections. Threats began to mount against Luis Arce Catacora, the presidential candidate of MAS, as he returned to Bolivia, including the possibility
of his arrest. Parts of the country with the deepest support for MAS face repression and threats that their right to vote might be withdrawn.

The interim president – Áñez – announced that she will be a candidate for the presidency without leaving her current position; this is in contradiction to her earlier statements. The other candidates who supported the coup d'état nonetheless criticized her move, which validates the coup character of this government and its officials.

The international community must be seized of the danger that the interim government will ban MAS, commit fraud, and destroy the possibility of democracy in Bolivia.

**Why the Coup and Why US Intervention in Bolivia?**

Bolivia has the largest known lithium reserves in the world (with the potential to produce 20% of global lithium). Lithium is a central component for batteries, which are used in electric cars, laptops, watches, and cell phones, as well as for the storage of renewable energy. The largest deposit of lithium in Bolivia is in the Uyuni salt flats in the department of Potosí, where Morales’ administration had planned to extract it through the state-owned company.

Bolivia has considerable hydrocarbon reserves – especially natural gas – which it supplies to Brazil and Argentina. When Morales took office, an early measure was to nationalize these resources and develop state control over them. A substantial part of the hydrocarbon reserves is located in Santa Cruz, in Bolivia’s eastern region. This is also the home of its agribusiness, especially soy. The government of Santa Cruz and its civic committee have been the base of the opposition to Morales from the very beginning and played a central role in the social destabilization that led to the coup.

Morales won the 2005 election with more than 50% of the vote. In his first term (2006-2010), his MAS-led administration nationalized hydrocarbon production and other strategic parts of the economy; it pushed for land reform; and it reformed the constitution through a Constituent Assembly process, which became the foundation for the formation of Bolivia as a Plurinational State. Morales, from 2006, drove a policy to substantially improve all social indicators; his government was able to reduce poverty (38.2% to 15.2%), eradicate illiteracy, and improve hygiene as well as life expectancy (by 9 years).

Despite being a majority indigenous country, Bolivia has been governed by a caste that is predominantly made up of groups who consider themselves to be white. Indigenous people have long suffered from subjugation, racism, and discrimination in political, economic, and social spheres at the hands of this governing caste. Morales’ government represented a complete shift in the social sense. It forcefully combatted the violence of racism and the xenophobic discourse about indigenous peoples and cultures; this was a government committed to ending the structure and culture of colonial domination. The symbols that define the interim government, on the other hand, are marked by racial hatred and fascism; this is what has sustained them in their fiercely racist attacks against MAS.

The US government hastily recognized and warmly welcomed Áñez into the diplomatic world; it immediately pressured the Mexican government, and then later the Argentinian government, to deny asylum requests from members of MAS and
from Morales’ administration. It is now clear that the US government participated in the preparation and the execution of the coup against Morales. There was an immediate dislike by the US of Morales for his policy of economic resource nationalism, for his expulsion of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) from Bolivia, for his suspension of the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) military eradication program against coca, and for his denunciations in international forums of the US policy of economic, military, and political intervention.

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Martha Hennessy is a longtime anti-war activist and the granddaughter of Dorothy Day, the co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement. She is 62, a retired occupational therapist, and grandmother of eight. She has been arrested and imprisoned protesting nuclear power, war, the use of drones, the torture of prisoners in Guantanamo and other prisons, and the use of starvation as a weapon of war in Yemen. She has traveled to Russia, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Jordan, Palestine, and South Korea to understand the effects of war on other peoples. She divides her time between her family farm in Vermont and volunteer work at Maryhouse Catholic Worker in New York City.

Can you describe how you, Elizabeth McAlister, Carmen Trotta, Patrick O’Neill, Fr. Stephen Kelly S.J., Clare Grady, and Mark Colville (Kings Bay Plowshares 7) joined together and decided on this action? What was the collective purpose of you all coming together for this action which coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the martyrdom of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (April 4, 1968)?

We have known each other over the years as friends because of the Catholic Worker communities but also something that Phil Berrigan started called the Atlantic Life Community and we would often meet in New York, Philadelphia, or Camden, New Jersey. The Plowshares movement began in 1980 so the purpose of us coming together was to keep that tradition alive of protesting the nuclear bombs. Liz being Phil’s widow, she just turned 80, it was her last chance to do such an action. She had done one in the mid-1980s at Griffiss Air Force Base in upstate New York. Fr. Steve Kelly, this was, I think, his fifth Plowshares action. Mark Colville had done at least one previously. They were all very committed to this movement. Many of them live and work in houses of hospitality, caring for the homeless. What brought us together and the particular timing of our particular group, I would just simply say the Holy Spirit somehow got a hold of Steve Kelly. He initiated things. He and Liz had been doing some discussion. I had corresponded with Steve when he was in the SHU (Segregated Housing Unit) out in California with his last action and last imprisonment. I had a connection with him that really made me think deeply about the nuclear arsenal.

I’ve traveled to these places, Korea, Iran, that have been called the enemy of the US. I’ve met incredible people in these incredible places. I’ve been to Russia three times. It just was so clear to me that the world over we’re all just people trying to take care of our families [and] educate them. War was just the absolute antithesis of life. When I was 14 years old, my brother Eric was drafted. He attended Vermont Technical College for one semester, dropped out and was immediately drafted into the military. [He] was sent to Vietnam [and] saw combat. It was 1969 when we were on the streets of New York protesting the Vietnam War. So, I think my whole life was pretty much preparation for joining this particular group and participating in what we call the Kings Bay Plowshares.
You know, we really didn’t have a site picked out until the very end of our discernment process. We did a lot of studying, a lot of prayer. We are all Catholics. We do the daily readings [that] the universal church reads around the world simultaneously. We thought about how those readings, the New Testament readings were the word for what we were to do two thousand years after the death of Christ. If we’re gonna call ourselves Christians, if we’re gonna call ourselves Catholics, what does discipleship to Christ look like in the 21st century? So, it was like translation, looking at what was said in that context, in that time, and applying it in our own time. Stuff was very clear to me. It all resonated for me.

Of course, with the fiftieth anniversary of the state killing of Martin Luther King Jr., I believe it was a state killing, just like JFK and RFK, we wanted to acknowledge King’s life, King’s work, and King’s sacrifice. But we also wanted to tie in what the nuclear arsenal really represents in terms of white supremacy [and] empire building. Dr. King worked very hard on the domestic level with the civil rights movement. The red lining of an entire race of people in this country, completely oppressing them with regard to education, housing, [and] medical care. The apartheid of the United States.
King came up against that, and then he extrapolated beyond that. [King] tied the racism at home with the wars abroad. We wanted to show that all of these issues we’re faced with today climate collapse, racism, oppression, poverty, war, advanced capitalism, all of this is held together with the keystone, the capstone, of nuclear weapons.

We’ve kept them very well hidden. We supposedly have not used them since Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I would challenge that notion in terms of what happened to the Marshall Islands people. They were bombed. The Nevada desert test site, that’s the most bombed spot on earth. Nuclear weapons have taken an immense toll over the decades, both with the research and development and the cost and the pollution. We’ve got the Hanford Site, we’ve got the Savannah [River] site. We have so many sites, Oak Ridge, where the contamination is significant. The cleanup is impossible. The storage is unresolved. That was the weapons systems to target.

Kings Bay became the obvious target for a couple of different reasons. The Trident system, nuclear sub system, is the most deadly and efficient system on earth. I mean, they can strike anywhere on earth within 15 minutes. They’ve got enough firepower to kill the world several times over. Kings Bay specifically had not been targeted by peace activists. Kitsap out on the West Coast, the sister naval base to Kings Bay, houses eight Tridents. Kings Bay houses six submarines. Kitsap had a Plowshares action in 2009, Oak Ridge 2012, and Kings Bay in 2018.

Tell us about the action you all took on April 4, 2018 at the Kings Bay naval submarine base in the U.S. State of Georgia. What happened that night?

[It took] nearly two years of spiritual discernment, planning, preparation, education, and study of the issues, weapons systems, and current geopolitical situation. We were in the middle of the discernment when Trump was elected into office. I stepped out of Maryhouse November 9, 2016, and the streets were totally silent. It was as if everyone understood “My God how did this happen? What’s next?” These world events certainly played a role and they just kept escalating as we prepared ourselves.

So, we had to get ourselves out to the base after dark so that we wouldn’t be detected. The two issues that I do have with this kind of resistance is the secrecy and the so-called “destruction of property.” But we can clarify that with some of the comments Dan Berrigan made about “what is property?”, “What’s proper to man?”, and “Are nuclear weapons proper to man?” It’s not property. I also have the rationale [that] I worked for twenty-five years as an occupational therapist. I paid my taxes. I own that base. I’m responsible for that base, helping to build it and the weaponry. So, I had to go there. I had to go there with this particular group of people who had come together. We had prepared together.

One of us cut the lock on the gate and we walked through. It’s a 17,000-acre naval base. It’s huge. So, we chose a remote area in which to get in. We walked, we walked, and we walked and it was very quiet. There were stars overhead. The beautiful pine forests of Georgia. I mean, it’s an incredible sight. I don’t know the native peoples who were displaced by building the site. It was given to the U.S. military by Jimmy Carter in 1979 and developed since then. We had to find our way to these different areas and it was not easy. With many of these Plowshares actions, we have somehow found our way to where we need to go. You know, without a lot of knowl-
edge. It’s like doors open. If you step up to this task of going to these places of great sin, doors open. It happens, it works. We never saw anyone until we broke up into three different groups.

Three people went to where we thought were the nuclear warhead bunkers. Then the other four of us went together to a different site and then split up at the other site that contained this missile shrine. A display that the public actually goes in and visits where the different mockups of the weapons system, as it was getting more and more refined, more and more deadly, more and more huge, and more and more expensive. They had these mockups out here to display and brag about this so-called evolution of the weapons system, a devolution! Two folks went there and myself and Clare Grady went to the actual administrative building that houses the whole nerve center of running the whole base.

We did see people working at the administrative building. By the time we got there, it must have been midnight. I posted an indictment on the door. I don’t think it was the main door. We weren’t sure what was where, but we found a door. The indictment talked about the Nuremberg principles, the US Constitution, the rule of law that has made these weapons illegal. We’ve put up crime scene tape. We put up a banner, “The ultimate logic of Trident is omnicide,” basing that on King’s words, “the ultimate logic of racism is genocide.” We left a book there by Daniel Ellsberg called The Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner. It was in a nice little neat Ziploc bag and we set it in the middle of a painted heart on the sidewalk. We wrote “May love disarm us all,” “Love one another,” “Disarm now.”

Then Claire and I walked over to the Missile Shrine where our companions, Patrick and Mark also wrote on the mockup missiles, “Idolatry, blasphemy, disarm now.” They hung the Martin Luther King Jr. banner with his beautiful face on it and that quote, “The ultimate logic of racism is genocide.” They poured blood. We poured blood, too, on the threshold. The iconic, symbolic disarmament of the Plowshares movement is to pour blood as a means of stating we are not to shed innocent blood. We are to shed our own blood before we shed innocent people’s blood. It’s an act of contrition and atonement.

At the missile shrine we hammered on them. They weren’t necessarily missiles themselves, but it was a nonviolent symbolic disarmament of the nuclear weapons system. I think one of the most significant visual logos that came out of that action was the Strategic Weapons Facility Atlantic logo, and it had a picture of the Trident submarine horizontally and the Poseidon three-pronged spear running vertically.

It was a cross! That was not lost on us. Someone put blood on it. That logo went out to the world because we were also carrying GoPro cameras and cell phones. We took these pictures and sent them out right away. So that was a very strong visual of the Trident logo with blood on it dripping down from it.

Then we just simply sat and waited. Meanwhile, there were cars coming and going, and they completely ignored us because everyone was attending to the bunkers. The three folks had to cut fences. We had not cut any fences to get where we went. But the bunkers obviously have several sets of fences. They penetrated two of the three, I think.
When it came time for us to be intercepted, the base personnel just simply walked up to us. He wasn’t armed. He wasn’t yelling. He knew who we were. He knew what we were, what we were up to. Peace activists, nonviolent peace activists. We were sitting there. We read our statement. We did the daily readings. We prayed. We just sat and waited. He walks up to us and says, “you realize you’re in a bit of trouble here now, don’t you?” He was very laid back. He was very professional. He was very good about training to base soldiers who were there to assist him.

Meanwhile, over at the bunkers, they quickly realized what they had on their hands. One of those peace activists says “We’re Americans. We’re unarmed. We come in peace. We mean you no harm.” That was the first thing they said. So, there was no mistaking the situation. They had their banner [which] said “nuclear weapons, immoral, illegal.”

They ended up taking the opportunity to do a drill, follow the protocol of what they would do if they’re under siege. So, they took advantage of the fact that these peace activists were there. They had guns and they did certain things that were not done with us. They made them lie on the ground. They made them step back. “Three steps, stop! Step back, three steps, stop!” It’s all described very well by Carmen Trotta and some of the other news casts.

So, it was a very long night. Then we spent probably four hours with our hands handcuffed behind our backs. We had not slept all night. It was painful. It was difficult, but it was glorious. It was fun. You know, I don’t mean to use the word fun in a facetious way or in a taunting way, because this all is very, very serious stuff. But there was joy in what we did and a liberating sense of having done it and gotten it behind us. And no one was hurt.
When you entered the naval base, you brought an indictment with you. Can you explain what the indictment said?

Essentially, it indicts the President of the United States, the captain of the base, and I’m forgetting the third entity. Then we had ‘whereas’ on all of these bullet points, whereas the Nuremberg principles state that when you know that your government is committing illegal acts or war crimes, you as a citizen are responsible to stand up, say something, and do something. We also in the indictment cited the U.S. Constitution Article 6, Section 2, where the supreme law of the land are these treaties. We have the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which has been violated for the past 20 years. Every five years, the U.N. goes through this sham of an exercise of reviewing the NPT. Nothing changes. Meanwhile, the IMF treaty has been violated and the new START treaty is probably going to be violated.

So, we just simply tried to cite the laws that have been put in place to protect the world from nuclear holocaust and to hold someone accountable to this development of this kind of arsenal. I firmly believe that Russia under Gorbachev said to Reagan, “let’s disarm.” The corporate pressures on Reagan. They wanted Star Wars and now we have Trump talking more about Space Force. Reagan understood what Gorbachev was saying and was thinking deeply about why can’t we do this together? But then the corporate interests got to him and he simply walked away from it. So, I believe on more than one occasion, the Russians have advanced proposals to get out of this insane arms race. The Russians know what war looks like. They lost 20 million people. Most recently Putin, I believe, you know you can’t hear this in the mainstream media, but Putin was saying we will start these talks for New Start unconditionally, let’s begin to revisit this. Donald Trump doesn’t even have to bother to respond. I mean, he doesn’t even bother to say no. It’s just like, “of course, we’re not doing that.”

Where are the legislators? Do the legislators, number one, understand the cost of these weapons and the danger of these weapons? How much damage one bomb can do now as compared to 1945? These legislators are rubber stamping the budgets. I mean what did we just pass. $737 billion budget, giving free rein to the military and the corporate interests. I’m quite convinced that this recent behavior on the part of the Trump administration of executing a top military official of Iran, they’ve got the go ahead. They’ve got this huge budget to work with. I also feel like the killing of Khashoggi, we’re constantly upping the ante. We cross one threshold and then we cross the next threshold. I see that happening. The use of drones was crossing a threshold similar to the atomic bomb. I mean, you’re unleashing a technology that may not be retrievable. So, it’s outright outlaw behavior.

One of the banners you had on the base read “The ultimate logic of Trident is omnicide.” Tell us about the struggle against nuclear weapons. What does it mean to live in a nuclear world?

What does it mean to live in a nuclear world? Well, I was born in 1955, so we were definitely sitting under the desks at some point in time right around the Cuban Missile Crisis. I clearly remember that. I clearly remember the killing of John F. Kennedy. I was standing in line outside the school. I was eight years old. Of course, I grew
up in a family with Dorothy Day, my grandmother and the Catholic Worker, where we were acutely aware of what was happening in the world.

Dorothy, of course, in 1945 had written this scathing article about the dropping of the bomb. She talked about breathing in the dust of our Japanese brothers and sisters in the fog of New York. She understood the mystical body, we are all one of another. So, I grew up with that. So, my understanding was from a very early start. Dorothy also handed me the book John Hersey’s Hiroshima. I read that as a kid and

that just changed my understanding completely and permanently of what nuclear meant. My conception and birth occurred when we were still doing atmospheric testing out in the West and in the South Pacific. So, I mean, I was literally exposed in utero [and] as a young child to fallout.

What does it mean to my kids? They didn’t hear about it the way I heard about it. It was not a living memory of the Cold War and this huge fear of the United States
and Russia facing off as they were. Very dangerous times, the 50s and 60s. I think being a nuclear state has incredibly corrosive effects on all of us at every level. Whether my adult kids are aware of the size, the potential, the cost of this arsenal, they don’t have any fresh memory of Nagasaki, Hiroshima and what that means. But it’s corroding us. Martin Luther King Jr. certainly talked about that. The destructiveness of this practice. This constant practice and culture of violence, fear, greed and hatred. You keep practicing it and you keep refining it to a more and more horrific level.

I think we’ve seen that with what we did to Iraq and then Libya, Afghanistan and now this recent threat of thinking that you can lie to the public, you can lie to the people, and you can just waltz into this. Use these weapons. Donald Trump talking about using fire and fury in Korea. We flattened North Korea in the 50s. That was a horrific war crime. I think probably we have been softened up one generation after the next. We committed horrific war crimes in WWII. The Nuremberg trials only went so far because we understood we would be next for the firebombing of whole cities in Germany and Japan.

We got away with it. We got away with the Korean War. The Vietnam War things shifted a little bit. The public realized what was happening. The horror, the visuals coming out of Vietnam. We weren’t allowed to see the visuals of 1991, Operation Desert Storm, the burying of soldiers alive in trenches. I remember listening on NPR 1992, whenever it was, “we’re shooting, they’re like sitting ducks. They’re like fish in a barrel. We’re just shooting them like fish in a barrel.” They had Saddam Hussein’s soldiers, kids. No chance of survival. I did have a friend’s son who was sent over there. He described what was going on. I worked at the V.A. Medical Center some years after that. You know the Gulf War syndrome. What was that? These anthrax immunizations, supposed vaccinations, in conjunction with burn piles, in conjunction with oil fields burning. How could these men not come back horrifically damaged?

*The use of depleted uranium?*

Yes, the burn piles included. The Iraqis call it enriched uranium. We call it depleted uranium. So how do we fool ourselves? How do we lie to ourselves about what we’re doing? Where are the world courts? Where is the U.N.? Where is the Security Council? Where’s the rule of law? We are the sole rogue nuclear superpower. With that comes a heavy, heavy price for the whole population, our psyches, whether we understand it or realize it or not.

*All of you belong to the Catholic Worker Movement and you are the granddaughter of Dorothy Day, the co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement. What is the Catholic Worker Movement?*

That’s quite a story in and of itself. The Catholic Worker started in 1933, May 1st of 1933, which was, you know, IWW’s Labor Day. You know, the freedom of the workers. All this talk about capitalism for the workers and socialism for the corporations. I mean, all of this was coming into question. Dorothy was indoctrinated by a French peasant by the name of Peter Maurin. Dorothy was a journalist just like her father and brother. She was a writer. They started the newspaper and they called it the Catholic Worker newspaper. They handed out the first issue in Union Square on May 1st of 1933, the height of the [Great] Depression, the height of the ecological disaster of the Dust Bowl, the horrible agricultural practices out west. The utter dis-
placement of thousands of people from the land. I mean, internally displaced persons because of economic [and] ecological collapse. It was a horrific time. Catholic Worker was birthed at a time of great crisis.

The paper was to be the instrument of the voice of the homeless, the workers, the workers who were unemployed, the workers who were on strike. The order of the day had to be questioned. Peter brought to Dorothy the teachings of the church. The Catholic Church has what are called Catholic social teachings. Peter Maurin called that the “dynamite of the church” and that the clergy was stuffing it in a box, sitting on it, and not letting it out to do what it should be doing. I mean, there are encyclicals written Rerum Novarum, written 1891, talking about the workers do have a right to organize, to take care of themselves, to feed their families, and to have decent living conditions. Peter Maurin talked a lot about “the dignity of work.” The whole industrialization of the labor force came at a horrible human and environmental cost. The full speed ahead with this mechanization, burning of fossil fuels, putting children in factories, throwing everybody off the land, [and] causing starvation.

Dorothy, as a young journalist in the 19 teens and 20s, was writing about working families starving in America. So, the Catholic Worker was born out of all of those desperate, desperate needs. Peter instructed Dorothy on Catholic social teachings. The paper reflected worker’s rights, the dignity of each person, and the respecting of everyone’s individual human rights and how the capitalist system violates all of that. So, in the thirties, she was addressing the capitalist economic system that wasn’t working. She was also addressing Hitler. She saw that happening. There was this luxury liner called the S.S. Bremen, a German ocean liner. It would dock in New York Harbor twice a month. In 1936 she went out there and it was all about the elite,
the American elite, rubbing elbows with Nazis. Dorothy went out there to picket and protest this developing fascism in Europe. She saw it happening. She understood what it meant. Tried to report on it.

In the 1940s, it was all about war again. She stood out against WWII. I think there were maybe 30 communities by then. We call them houses of hospitality. Part of Peter’s program was houses where you care for the poor based on a very, very old model of pilgrimages where people were traveling in medieval Europe. The Middle East has this hospitality where you don’t leave someone out in the desert. You take care of them. This was part of the programs providing food and shelter for the homeless. It certainly started with the paper and not with houses of hospitality until Dorothy was galvanized to start providing beds when she had two women visit her once who were homeless. [They] were just riding the subways, just had no place to go. Then a few weeks later, one of the women came back to her and Dorothy said, “where’s your friend?” She said she threw herself in front of a subway. So that just was so horrific that Dorothy immediately rented an apartment and just started trying to provide housing for people.

During WWII, there were about 30 houses in most of the major cities around the country, in the poorest of neighborhoods where they had soup lines, clothing rooms, a bed for a certain number of people. We couldn’t house them all. I mean, she talked about being accused of trying to put a Band-Aid on a cancer, which is exactly what she was faced with doing this work. In the 40s, she spoke out against WWII. She spoke out against the Spanish Civil War. She understood every war that occurred in her lifetime to be unnecessary.

With WWI, my grandfather had a nervous breakdown about being drafted into that kind of service. I’m trained as an occupational therapist. That was the beginning of aerial bombardment, which was a whole new technology which superimposed a whole new kind of trauma on the human psyche. So, the shell shocked had to be worked with out of WWI and that impacted both my grandmother and my grandfather. They were young people. So, every war that she witnessed, she understood it to be profiteering, unnecessary.

In the 50s, her readership was cut in half. People condemned her for writing in the paper against World War Two because that was the supposed “good war.” She saw how Hitler came into being. With the complicit help of the elites of Europe and America. She witnessed the sending Jews back to their death from U.S. shores. In the 1950s, it was the McCarthy era and the Cold War. She started with the air raid drills, refusing to go underground. June of 1955, a month before I was born, they were arrested sitting out at city park benches saying, “we’re not going underground where we’d be going to our deaths in the subways.” You can’t survive a nuclear strike on Manhattan Island. She said this is psychological warfare and we’re not participating. So, they did that for six years, 1955 to 1961. Each year the protests grew in size. Finally, in 1961, New York City called off these air raid drills. This duck and cover charade.

In the 1960s, the Catholic Worker was addressing the Vietnam War and the homelessness. I mean, she directly correlated war and poverty. You know, the more money you spend making these corporations rich and Eisenhower laid it all out, warned us what was to come. Dorothy, of course, understood all of this. So, the op-
position to the Vietnam War, the Catholic Workers were some of the first to publicly burn their draft cards. It was the only voice coming out of the Catholic Church against war, pacifist voice. She got it in the neck from the bishops and the cardinals for taking the stance that she understood Jesus had taken.

Of course, you know, my memories of her are very strong with the 60s and 70s. She died in 1980. I was twenty-five years old. We would go down to the Catholic Worker, we would spend our summers at the Tivoli farm. It’s a university, the Catholic Worker University. It’s where you go to learn about what your own needs are and what your own shortcomings are. Everyone goes to this community with need and everyone comes with your prickly edges about not having willingness or the strength of heart to share and to be with the most destitute.

So, I grew up with this incredible sense of what it means to look at the suffering of others. Much of the homeless are veterans, traumatized veterans, the mentally ill whose families can no longer take care of their mentally ill members. Dorothy simply said “do what needs to be done at hand.” Living in the Lower Eastside of New York, the Empire State of the U.S. Empire, and seeing the destitution, the suffering, she responded with the Catholic social teachings and a program. It still goes on today. There are probably 200 communities around the world, New Zealand, Germany, England, Belgium. I forget where they all are, but there are communities everywhere.

How does your faith inform your activism? Here I want you to speak about how your conception of Christianity is different from the Christianity of Trump, Pompeo, Pence, and their ilk.

Yes. George W. Bush calling himself a Christian. I was raised Catholic and, you know, my mother and my grandmother, Tamar and Dorothy, they were very kind, intelligent, compassionate people. Loving kindness is what I learned from them. The Catholic social teachings are all about love thy neighbor as thyself. The message was clearly there for me as a child in the Catholic Church. When Dorothy converted or was baptized as an adult, she didn’t have a full understanding of what she was entering into. She saw that the church was complicit with the capitalists and that they weren’t taking care of the people. She despaired of that. She was in socialist circles before she converted. Finally, she came to a place of understanding what true Catholicism meant, and that brought together her skills as a journalist, her newfound faith as a Catholic, and her socialist understanding of what needed to be done to take care of people. It turned out to be an incredibly beautiful model in her hands and Peter’s hands.

I was fully aware of social justice within the context of Catholic faith. But then my father left the family when I was six. He was very tormented by mental illness and alcoholism and a head injury as well. He couldn’t take care of nine children. My mother and father followed the Catholic doctrine to a T. And it just led them to a place where he had nine children and utter poverty. So, he left the family when I was age six. My mother just kind of drifted away from the church. I mean, she was raised Catholic. Dorothy was not. It’s a very distinct experience being raised Catholic or converting as an adult. I kind of feel like I have had both experiences. I was raised Catholic, but then we drifted out of the church in my teen years. I was acutely aware of peacemaking. We were on the streets protesting Vietnam War. I had that activist bent, but I had walked away from the faith base of it.
So, then I had to go through a conversion experience. My first arrest, political arrest, I’ve only had political arrests, no criminal arrests, was in 1979 at the public service office building in Manchester, New Hampshire, protesting Seabrook Nuclear Power Plant. I understood nuclear power, nuclear weapons to be two sides of the same coin, the same industry. That was my first dipping my toes into the water of arrests. I mean, I knew that Dorothy was arrested for the air raid drills and then her last arrest being in California with Cesar Chavez in solidarity with the migrant workers.

So, 1979 was my first arrest. I served three months in prison and my son was two years old at the time. It was a traumatic experience. Most of the inmates were people who were in Special Ed, had special needs, and weren’t attended to. [They] didn’t have proper educations, came from poverty, violence. All of this prison complex [is] totally preventable. That was a real eye opener for me. Now I did that before Dorothy died. She died the next year.

Then I just worked for 20 years as an occupational therapist raising my kids, and then I just had this tremendous epiphany. I guess it started with Dorothy’s induction into the National Women’s Hall of Fame in 2001. She was inducted with maybe eight other people and then 9/11 happened. That induction ceremony was postponed till 2002. She was given this award and the family was contacted and they said, will someone come and receive this? None of us wanted to do it. My mother couldn’t do it. I said to myself, this is important. You need to pay attention to this. What is this? What can you do about this? That was my internal dialogue. So, I wrote a three-minute speech. I presented it at this event and my life went downhill from there.

Nothing but trouble from then on out. Essentially, what my 3-minute speech said was “we’re beating the war drums. We’re about to invade this tiny country. You know, what is this colossal war machine? If you really do admire Dorothy Day, you don’t support war!” I instantaneously polarized the audience. I thought to myself, “Oh, my God! what is this dynamite I’m sitting on?” I couldn’t go back. My eyes were opened. The scales fell from my eyes.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Rosalynn Carter were two of the inductees. After I gave this speech, when the speech was over and everybody was leaving, Bader Ginsburg darted up to me, grabbed my hand, didn’t say a word, and then was gone. I thought, oh, shit, you know, I’ve got this soapbox. I better use it. Rosalynn Carter came up to me, shook my hand and said, “thank you for saying what you said.” So here we have a former first lady and we have a Supreme [Court] justice telling me you better do something in so many words.

So, I don’t know what happened next.

The Iraq War

October 2002 and then March of 2003. I remember exactly where I was standing in my house listening to NPR with George Bush threatening for days on end. The Iraqi people like totally not knowing when the bombs were going to start dropping. I thought, what kind of world is this?

I remember I was at a Boy Scout camp and the newspaper came “Shock and Awe.” I just remember my heart sinking because also on the trip was my father. As you know, we are Iranian
Americans. So instantly, again, the drumbeats of war, the country next door. It’s our people! It’s the Middle East!

My uterus actually contracted when they said the bombs are dropping. So, 2003, watched that debacle. 2004, my son joins the military. I am in absolute psychic agony. It was as much pain as watching my sister die of melanoma. I was just beside myself. I started a correspondence with Dan Berrigan. Dan had just lost Phil. Phil had died two years earlier. Dan was still mourning his brother’s death. It was Dan who started to open the door back to my faith. What did my baptism mean?

So, my son joined the military that year and by some amazing divine intervention, he couldn’t breathe during physical training and he was out. I had to pay attention to that. I had to pay attention to what that meant. That wasn’t just some little coincidence. Then on Dorothy’s birthday, November 8th, 2004, we invaded Fallujah. We used white phosphorus, outlawed illegal chemical weapon. We used depleted uranium in Fallujah. The birth defects coming out of there years later, 30 percent live births, severe birth defects. I worked in Amman, Jordan, as an OT in 2013, my last OT job, and we were hearing what was coming out of Fallujah. I was working with special needs kids. The horror, the crime, and the horror.

That galvanized me, this destruction of this city on my grandmother’s birthday. Just something inside me just wrenched. It was also the season of Advent, and I found myself praying for the first time in my adult life. The local church that I had been confirmed in as a little kid was holding this art show. I just was looking in the local weekly paper and that kind of thing just caught my eye. I don’t know how or why. I said, oh, I’m going to make something for this art show. I made a triptych icon. It was the Holy Family’s flight into Egypt, Giotto’s painting. I put all these little litanies around it. Mothers of Vietnam, Forgive us. Mothers of El Salvador, Pray for us. Mothers of Fallujah, it just went on and on. This fell out of me. So, I gave the icon to the church and it was sold at this art fair.

Things just started clicking into place from then on out. I left the school district where I had been working in the spring of 2005. One of the special educator’s son was entering the priesthood, seminary. The school where I worked was rented from the local Catholic church. The special education teacher said to me, “go see Father Ernie, go talk to Father Ernie, who’s right next door in the rectory.” You know, I was totally uncomfortable. The Catholic Church has done such wrong, you know, politically and in my mother’s life. I went to talk to Father Ernie and he said, start praying the rosary. He was very hands off. I went to him and said to him, “Oh I’m from the Catholic Worker, Oh, Dorothy Day, Oh, you know, I am from this legacy.” I was just like moaning. What does this mean to me? I couldn’t make head or tail of where I was going with this background and where it was leading me to. He just said, “Oh start praying the rosary.” He was very laid back, very hands off, very decent. So that was just like a blessing. These blessings just kept happening that drew me deeper and deeper in. I mean, I could’ve met a really shitty priest and been scared away very easily. My faith was so tenuous anyhow.

Then I took a job in Hawaii in the fall of 2005, and it was there that I started going to church, the little ohana that I had rented from a Filipino family. She was Catholic. She’d left the crucifix in there. I put a picture of granny next to the cruci-
fix, started going to church, and then all hell broke out in my soul. I was just sitting there weeping, weeping, and weeping every time I went to church, every Sunday. I did nothing but weep. I had to go through this process of grieving. I mean, I was homesick, too. I left home. But that was an incredible experience. I mean, here you have Hawaii, the most remote piece of soil on Earth out in the middle of the Pacific, a military outpost of the US empire and a corporate colony, Dole Pineapple. I mean, the whole history of Hawaii is something to be studied. How they brought in the labor, who they brought in as overseers, who they brought in as laborers, how the Polynesians dealt with it all. We also had Marshall Island folks who, you know, I saw this little girl they weren’t saying it was exposure to depleted uranium, but like extra digits, organs outside the body cavity. The nuclear fallout is just everywhere. Many of these families, the fathers were in the military exposed to God knows what on the islands themselves. There are all kinds of unexploded ordnance. The US with its war games, just an incredible history. So, each step of the way, God put me in just the right place at just the right time to prepare me.

Two thousand eight was the year my mother died. I attended what’s called a Father Hugo retreat. Those were famous in the 1940s where Dorothy would attend. Every year she would make the whole community attend. I grew up hearing about how horrible the Father Hugo retreats were from my mother because she was forced to attend. Then I went to it and I actually loved it. It was father Hugo’s nephew who was giving the retreat. I was totally nervous about meeting him. He was totally nervous about meeting me because I was one of Dorothy’s grandchildren. It was a great retreat. I loved it, but I didn’t get to share it with my mother because she died in March and I attended the retreat in July. I said to her in January, “I’m going to a father Hugo retreat!” She looked at me like I was nuts, but she didn’t say anything. She knew that I was going through this conversion experience, that I was returning to the church. She was very good about not saying anything bad about it. She understood even though she had left the church herself. So, 2008 was a very powerful, significant year.

Then I went to the Catholic Worker Farm in London, England. I kept skirting around Maryhouse. I had not gotten into Maryhouse until 2004. I attended to Dorothy’s funeral, 1980. I never set foot in the house for 24 years. Then I went to the London Catholic Worker. I started visiting Maryhouse in ’04 and then I did an internship at the London Catholic Worker in ’08 after my mother died. It was there that I had a spiritual director who said to me, “Write down all the times that you think God was speaking to you in your lifetime.” This whole panoramic sequence fell out of me starting at age three, sitting on Dorothy’s lap. So all of that further solidified my faith. Then I started volunteering part time at Maryhouse 2010. That was horrific. It was really hard. Very horrific. Very difficult for me. The community just, you know, a lot of mental illness in the house. A lot of blurring of the lines between volunteers and guests. It was really tough. But I stuck with it. I stuck with it. Going to church, I came back to Maryhouse for two reasons. St. Benedict, by the way, I was born on the feast of St. Benedict July 11th. Dorothy was a Benedictine oblate. So, I said to myself, I’m going back to the Catholic Worker to work and to pray. I mean, I love to work. I was trying to learn how to pray. So, I stuck it out. It was over the course of those years
that I got to meet all the folks that ended up acting with. The rest is history in terms of how I ended up in a Plowshares action.

What is the history of the Plowshares Movement?

Founded by Phil Berrigan in 1980. The first one was in King of Prussia, P.A. They hammered on some Mark 2 nose cones at a G.E. plant in King of Prussia. That was the beginning. There have been over one hundred actions since then. Most of them on military bases but some of them at corporate headquarters where the weapons are produced. The whole system is, you know, every congressional district in the US has a piece of that pie. It’s just all little components. Everything’s compartmentalized so nobody can see the end product as it becomes. So, there have been various actions at various sites. As I said earlier in ‘09 at Kitsap, 2012 at Oak Ridge, Los Alamos is another location. Newport News, Virginia, huge, huge corporate military project.

Many different people have participated, non-Catholics, atheists. But this particular group of ours were clearly Catholic. It just came together in a way that worked out. There are several books written that document all the different actions up to a certain year. It needs to be updated. You know Isaiah 2:4 “they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks and nations shall study war no more.” So that was Phil’s vision of “from within.” We had to resist the empire of the United States and the empire of the US Catholic Church. It’s about self-disarmament. You don’t go through this process without realizing that you’ve got to face the war in our own hearts. Dorothy talked about the revolution of the heart. This is where it has to begin. Phil clearly understood that.

Catonsville 9 was a precursor to the Plowshares Movement. The burning of draft cards during the Vietnam War. Plenty of studying to do to learn more about the Plowshares movement. Some people feel that it’s faded and it’s ineffectual. But we keep trying.

*I would disagree. Your actions prove that it’s very relevant, that it’s very here, present and necessary. Can you describe the ongoing court case, and what happened during the trial?*

So, we were put on trial in October. We were stripped of any meaningful defense, international law, justice – necessity, justification – necessity, religious beliefs. So, we pretty much walked into the courtroom without any kind of a defense. We had to work with a jury who was not allowed to learn anything about the context of what we did and why. They were able to convict us under two hours on 24 counts, which amounts to about discerning every four minutes per count. So, you can imagine what that looked like in deliberations. The judge, of course, completely orchestrated what occurred in the courtroom.

Federal court has done this multiple times to many of the Plowshares defendants. So now that was in October and she said 30 to 60 days presentencing investigation report gets put together. That’s where they put together all those criteria for this point system to determine how many months of prison you deserve based on your family life, your past, criminal history, all of those factors get looked at. So those reports have recently been finally trickling in. So, I don’t know. I think that my sentencing hearing will be the end of February or something like that. We do want to go in together to
be sentenced together, but we think that the reports are being staggered as a way of breaking up the dates because we have supporters coming. Over 200 people came for the trial and the same thing would happen with the sentencing hearing. But we’re not sure what that’s going to look like.

I was convicted. I’m now a convicted felon. I was convicted of three felony charges, conspiracy, depredation of government property, destruction of naval property, something like that, and trespass, which is a misdemeanor. So, I don’t know. I am looking at supposedly 20 years, but I think after this presentencing report, it’s more like 18 to 24 months. Then, of course, we look at it even further and some of the things that they have put in there can be refuted very easily. They’re just really padding it to try and give us the maximum. It was a nonviolent disarmament action. I mean, trespass. So, we’ll see. It’s all unknown and it’s all part of the waiting. The patience, the waiting, the listening to the tiny voice of God in all of this. You know, two years of my life, nearly four years of my life now have been taken up by this. It’s just an exercise in faith.

As an Iranian-American I think it is very important to hear your perspective on Iran since you have been to Iran. Given the current situation what would you tell the people of Iran? How do you feel about the situation?

My first thing would be, I love you. I visited Isfahan, Shiraz, Yazd, Tehran. I visited those incredible sites that somebody is saying they’re going to bomb, which is a total war crime. I mean, how much more can we violate the rule of law and each other? I met so many Iranians who love the United States. It’s not the fucking government they love. It’s democracy. They recognize democracy. Let’s not forget Mossadegh in 1953. You know, right now they’re talking about the revolution and the hostage taking 1979. Their minds can’t even go back. They can barely go back that far. Never mind 1953. I would say to the Iranian people, “I’m so sorry. I am so, so sorry.”

What can people do to help support the Kings Bay Plowshares 7 and, more importantly, how can they contribute to the anti-war and anti-nuclear movement?

You can always go to the web site, https://kingsbayplowshares7.org/ and learn more. There is a donation button. We’ve had a wonderful support system with all of this. We have to put our bodies out there. We have to take the risks. We have to pay attention and we have to open our hearts. I think that Democracy Now! is one of the best outlets for journalism nowadays. Stay informed with alternative media that is, true journalism. Jeremy Scahill, Intercept. So, educate ourselves, realize that we’re all at risk. We’re all in this together. We’re all one another. Any tiny little bit that any one of us can do from where we stand is helpful. I mean, that’s the best we can do. I’m not saying go out and do a Plowshares action; any small contribution makes the difference. I’ve been doing this canvassing for Bernie Sanders. Not that I believe in the political system. I think it’s totally corrupted. But, you know, get involved. Be aware. Stay awake. Don’t be brain dead.

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"...U.S. presidents have used our nuclear weapons dozens of times in "crises," mostly in secret from the American public (though not from adversaries). They have used them in the precise way that a gun is used when it is pointed at someone in a confrontation, whether or not the trigger is pulled. To get one's way without pulling the trigger is a major purpose for owning the gun."

—Daniel Ellsberg in the introduction to his book *The Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear Planner*
Iran Is Not Responsible For US Dead in Iraq

Democrats Need Backbone on Militarism to Win in 2020

JOHN GRANT

Who exactly is responsible for US casualties in Iraq during the Iraq War? The question has been raised thanks to President Trump’s decision to assassinate Iranian General Ghasem Soleimani.

On January 13, the New York Times published a front-page story about a lawsuit filed against Iran in federal court by US veterans and veteran families; it charges Iran with wounding or killing these men. The crux of the lawsuit is that the explosive devices that killed and maimed these soldiers were designed by Iran’s Quds Force led by General Soleimani. Whether this is true or not, the allegation has been used to argue the general’s assassination by a drone was justified. Reports that General Soleimani was to meet Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi the day of the hit and was actually on a mission to advance a fledgling peace dialogue with Saudi Arabia suggest that what Americans concerned about avoiding future wars should be arguing is that the Soleimani drone hit was a criminal act.

In 1980, Iraq initiated a war with its much larger neighbor Iran that like a runaway train stretched into an incredibly gruesome and bloody eight-year war in which the US allied with Iraq and supplied Saddam Hussein with chemical weapons and intelligence; over a million people died in that war. Next, there was the Gulf War in which the US turned on its ally Saddam Hussein. 9/11 happened and the United States invaded and occupied Afghanistan, the smaller, weaker neighbor to Iran’s east. In 2003, the most powerful nation in the world, then, chose to send a huge army halfway around the world to bomb, invade and occupy Iraq, Iran’s smaller neighbor to the west. The US wrecked the Arab city of Baghdad. While many Americans are ignorant of the geography, Iranians knew that these US decisions left their country boxed in by its very powerful worst enemy.

In 1953, US and British intelligence operations overthrew the legitimately elected government of Iran and installed the Shah, who turned out to be a bloody tyrant, turning Iran (it already had Israel) into a US proxy in the Middle East. The indisputable fact is the United States has militarily dominated the Iranian people since the 1953 coup. At the beginning, the issue was control of Iranian oil. By 1979, the Shah’s brutality had push opposition to the level of critical mass and the so-called Islamic Revolution threw out the Shah. This led to the hostage crisis that destroyed Jimmy Carter’s presidential career.

To expect the sovereign nation of Iran to passively accept United States military action on its eastern and western borders and not to look out for its own interests is willfully naïve and arrogantly hypocritical. Unfortunately, this is typical of US war-making behavior. The rule is simple: 1) Pretend that history began with the outrageous incident mounted against you. 2) Act righteous and indignant at the
Iran Is Not Responsible For US Dead in Iraq

inhumanity of the act. And 3), most important, conveniently have amnesia about the abusive history the US is responsible for, abuses that, in this case, reach back to 1953. It’s a familiar formula that focuses on Power and ignores Truth. Our pain is important and, since they’re an “enemy” and inhuman, their pain doesn’t matter. Trump administration belligerence vis-à-vis Iran is, thus, classic: Instead of non-existing WMDs, as in the disastrous invasion/occupation of Iraq, this time it’s charges of “terrorist” crimes committed by Iran, while the many years of crimes done by the vastly more powerful United States are ignored.

Except for some pretty egregious examples of corrupt journalism (i.e., Judith Miller, etc.), The New York Times has covered the day-to-day details of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan pretty well. But in the context of the current war fever vis-a-vis Iran, the January 13th front-page story on the lawsuit against Iran for US casualties is a good example of the Times pandering to right-wing narratives following President Trump’s assassination-by-drone of a beloved leader in a sovereign nation we’re officially not at war with. In a purely human context, this would be called murder – and certainly an act of terror.

I’m not questioning widows or relatives who take vengeful satisfaction in the assassination of General Soleimani, who they feel was responsible for the IED death of their relative over ten years ago in Iraq. Nor am I suggesting General Soleimani was some kind of boy scout. A father whose son was killed by an IED is quoted as taking delight in the news of General Soleimani’s assassination: “I do take comfort that the last thing he [General Soleimani] heard was the sound of a United States missile coming down on his head.”

The point is such feelings are understandable, but in this case they’re mis-directed for political purposes. Had it not been for the disastrous decision by newly elected President George W. Bush to invade and occupy Iraq — following an attack on September 11, 2001 that had nothing to do with Iraq — none of these men would have been wounded or killed. Again, indisputable facts like this are regularly twisted.

Because of President Trump’s willful belligerence toward Iran, the question who is responsible for the deaths and maiming of US soldiers sent to Iraq cries out to be addressed with courage in the 2020 presidential campaign.

On January 13th, the Times also did a front-page story discussing Joe Biden’s 2002 senate vote to grant President George W. Bush the power to invade Iraq. Before he made that vote, he reportedly touted President Bush’s “moderation.” The fact of Biden’s decision to support Bush’s war returned as farce on Veterans Day 2018 when, as chair of the US Constitution Center in Philadelphia, Biden arranged for himself to hang a Medal of Freedom around the neck of a grinning George Bush, while outside the huge tent this took place in Iraq veterans and others hollered “Shame! Shame! Shame!” In his acceptance remarks, Bush spoke movingly of his personal relations with wounded Iraq veterans and the paintings he’d done of some of them. As with war-widows, I would not dispute the authenticity of President Bush’s emotions in this area, since even presidents can suffer from survival guilt and other traumas of war. Especially presidents who know damn-well how guilty they are.

Candidate Biden’s Iraq War vote reportedly has him under a microscope in Iowa. After assuring everyone that General Soleimani was a monster, Biden told a
crowd that, in the context of tension with Iran, only he had the experience to be a Democratic “war president.” This was Joe Biden at his worst, doing something he takes great pride in as a bipartisan compromiser-in-chief with Republicans. Go-with-the-flow-Joe. What candidate Joe should have said was, if elected the first thing I’ll do is re-appoint John Kerry secretary of state and special representative to re-establish the diplomatic channel with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, with whom he worked out the Obama/Biden anti-nuke agreement with Iran.

But that’s not how Biden rolls. The Great Compromiser wants our vote because he’s the man with the chops to hit the ground running and manage the war fever Trump has stupidly set loose. American voters should be fed up with this Biden instinct and demand that the Democratic presidential candidate in 2020 be someone unambiguously opposed to Trump’s belligerent Iran policy.

In war, everyone is guilty of violence; everybody crosses the line into illegal and immoral behavior, which releases a runaway train of violence and destruction. That’s why we try to avoid war if we can. One hundred years ago, international dialogue came unglued and we had WWI. The conditions today are eerily similar, and humans should know enough history to avoid something called WWIII. The way to do that is to balance the understandable urgencies calling for vengeance with mitigating and realistic efforts of forgiveness. This is not wimpy thinking. It’s forgiveness as a negotiated means to facilitate a better future for everyone involved; that is, forgiveness as a way to move on. A way to get past the past.

The problem is, some people thrive on vengeance as a useful emotion to manipulate for other purposes. They disdain Martin Luther King’s concern for pulling out of the ever-rising spiral of tit-for-tat violence. Between WWI and WWII, Sigmund Freud tried to understand the impulse toward violence in his analysis of a death-instinct and a life-instinct, Thanatos and Eros, respectively. He never quite made that analysis clear on the anti-intellectual level of war-making where war and violence are the playthings of politics and journalism and the first casualty of war is truth.

The mainstream journalism business lives by two rules:
1) If it bleeds it leads.
2) There’s no story unless you have a pissing-contest of elites.

War with Iran certainly covers the first rule: Lots of bleeding potential to make it exciting to cover. As for the second rule, the question for Democrats should be critical: Now that President Trump has killed a workable peace deal, will his personal decision to strut around playing war brinksmanship with Iran be politically accommodated by moderate Democrats like Biden? That is, if Biden wins the nomination, will Trump’s war fever be Bidenized in a Biden ideological meat grinder?

That is, in the main election, will Trump’s Iran policy be clearly and morally opposed and turned into a proper campaign pissing contest?

Noam Chomsky has characterized the problem with the Democratic impeachment effort as a miserable failure to address Trump’s real crimes in the areas of finance, environmental catastrophe and militarism. “The worst crimes by far are those that literally threaten human survival, not in the distant future: [Trump’s] policies on escalating global warming and the race to develop still more destructive weapons,”
Chomsky told Law & Crime. “But the Dems would never agree that these are ‘high crimes’.”

In the corrupt, legalistic jujitsu world of lawyers and politicians, the problem is issues of human survival like runaway Global Warming and Militarism are not codified crimes. As Republicans like to whine ad-nauseum that to impeach Trump he must be guilty of a real crime “codified in the federal registry of crimes,” the things Chomsky cites get overlooked by Democrats for much the same reason. This is summed up well by a bumper sticker:

Kill one person it’s called murder; kill 100,000 and it’s called foreign policy

The question really comes down to this: In the presidential election campaign, do Democrats have the vision and the backbone to forge a re-energized, post-imperial America for the 21st Century that provides real future security but doesn’t rely on the worship of militarism? The nation’s needs are obvious: a massive job program in the area of alternative energy; an improved, much more fair education system that strengthens Americans from the bottom-up so we can compete in tomorrow’s world; a health-care system that makes working families feel they’re a respected part of the nation.

Torpedoing workable peace treaties and the art of diplomacy, relying on hi-tech lethal drones, hero-worshiping psychopathic Seal Team killers and ratcheting up war-fever against Iran are disastrous omens for the future of the United States as the 21st Century unfolds.

John Grant is a Vietnam War veteran and a founding member of ThisCantBeHappening!, the new independent two-time Project Censored Award-winning online alternative newspaper.

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“I will never apologize for the United States of America. I don’t care what the facts are.”

— George H.W. Bush, after a US navy warship shot down an Iranian passenger airliner killing 290 civilians in 1988
Who Are the Terrorists?

JACK GILROY

Why do Americans tend to believe the myth that terrorists are mainly people of the Middle East—dark skinned people, mostly Muslim people who want to kill Americans?

Long before the extremist Saudi Arabian terrorists crashed planes into the Twin Towers, Americans used terror against the people of the Middle East. It took 64 years before the United States government revealed documents that showed the CIA’s major role in the fall of the democratically elected Iranian government in 1954. On July 3, 1988, Iran Air Flight 655 with 290 passengers including 66 children was shot down by the US Vincennes a guided missile cruiser in Iranian waters. Long before 9/11, American troops were stationed in Saudi Arabia, detested by many Saudis as foreign devils on their sacred lands. Our planes were dropping bombs on Iraq long before 9/11, killing people through direct fire and indirectly through sanctions. In 1997, four years before the 9/11 Twin Tower event, Madelyn Albright, Our Secretary of State under President Clinton, told CBS 60 Minutes interviewer Leslie Stahl that our responsibility for the death of over 500,000 Iraqi children “was worth it.” Just imagine what the people of the Middle East must have thought about that terrorist comment.

Presidents Bush, Obama and Trump have ordered killing Middle Eastern people on an almost daily basis for the past 19 years. The past three years has seen an escalation of these killings with Predator and Q9 drones.

There are no Afghan or Iraqi or Somali or Libyan soldiers occupying our towns and cities. None of our neighbors’ doors have been kicked in by foreign troops. American women are not being raped by foreign troops. Americans are not being dragged into the streets for interrogation, not imprisoned and tortured by foreign troops as American soldiers did to Iraqi people in numerous prisons. Americans do not experience daily and nighttime killer drones humming over their heads as do people of the Middle East who cower 24/7 under our Predator and Q9 killer drones. American Hellfire missiles (produced by Lockheed Martin) have smashed into families, wedding parties, bus stations and funerals as well as assassinate leaders of sovereign nations. The people of the Middle East have experienced this American terror countless times.

So, who are the real terrorists?

We as a people can change but only if we break our denial of terrorism. It’s not a new addiction. It has deep roots in our genocidal treatment of Native Americans and lynching of African-Americans. We can start by encouraging our political leaders to change the ease of war making. The Authorization for the Use of Military Force (2001) is far too much power for one person whether that person is stable or unstable. The AUMF must be changed.
Who Are the Terrorists?

The United States House of Representatives must regain its constitutional obligation to check the executive branch. Acting now to vote down the AUMF would not only check the recklessness of the Trump administration but it would eliminate future irresponsible actions by an administration out of control.

But, this is not all. We must go beyond the demand that the House exercise its constitutional obligation to check the executive branch and vote down the AUMF. We must be ready to oppose wars of aggression even if the House supports them. The difficult but necessary task ahead for anti-war activists is to mobilize the public to democratize US foreign policy decision-making and replace militarism, war, and sanctions abroad with a just foreign policy.

*Jack Gilroy is the President of Broome County NY Veterans for Peace.*
A century of politics and culture in Brazil

GRETA BROWNE

For Christmas I was gifted the autobiography of Fernanda Montenegro, a 90-year-old Brazilian actress who became known worldwide for her role in the movie Central Station, as the tough old lady from Rio who took a young orphan boy to find his father in the interior of the country.

Montenegro’s autobiography provides a vivid comparison between the Brazil of the mid-20th century and the current Brazil of Bolsonaro. Born in 1929, Fernanda Montenegro began her acting life as a teenage radio presenter in her working class neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro. Her two sets of grandparents were immigrants from Portugal and Sardenha, come to Brazil in the nineteenth century for the opportunities of work on farms, mining projects, and specialized construction. Her paternal grandfather, for example, was an expert stucco worker from Italy.

I was interested in Fernanda’s description of life in the 30’s under the 15-year rule of President Getulio Vargas. She defines him as a fascist for his ruthless military actions in rooting out all signs of communism. However, his social programs provided Brazil with superior new departments of health, education and culture, and he actively supported labor, blacks and women. She benefited directly from high quality public education, with French and Latin in middle school, and from the official support of cultural programs.

Montenegro progressed over the years from radio broadcasting of music shows and dramatic presentations, to live theatre performances, and then to television skits and plays in the early years of TV. Eventually she landed roles in cinematic productions as early as 1965. She continued performing in theatre and cinema right up through 2019, including Simone de Beauvoir monologues in working class venues despite being discouraged by those who thought the material was too dense and difficult for the less educated population. She comments on one woman who during the post-show discussion said the “that woman [Beauvoir] was weak, too dependent on that man [Sartre],” and another who proclaimed “I’m just like her.”

Montenegro lived through many regime changes — Vargas’s popular dictatorship (1930–45), several elected presidencies, the military dictatorship (1964–84), the return to direct elections, several more presidencies, two impeachments, and in 2019 the election of the current far-right-wing anomaly. I lived in Brazil as a child and remember much of what she describes, especially the good quality of education and the excellent music, art, and theater.

As a young adult I also remember the fear during the military dictatorship and the censoring of music and the written word. Montenegro describes theater productions that were censored piecemeal and others that were banned outright, causing severe financial stress to the companies. In 1981 I was asked to leave an acquaintance’s apartment, where I was staying temporarily with my three children, because I hung a poster of Che Guevara on the wall.
A century of politics and culture in Brazil

Education and culture in current Brazil reflect the lack of funding from the government at every level as well as the deleterious effects of decades of television and more recently of cell phones, both of which have taken the place of newspapers and books. President Bolsonaro, himself a poorly educated non-reader, believes that reading creates bad citizens and that reporters should be eliminated. Progressive journalists that I continue to read, in newspapers such as the Correio Braziliense, the major newspaper of Brasília, describe the deliberate dumbing down of the population by neo-liberal administrations, first that of Temer, the vice-president who took over when leftist president Dilma Rousseff was impeached in 2016, and now Bolsonaro’s government. There is the belief among leftists and progressives here that Jair Bolsonaro is the puppet of US-led neo-liberal operatives who are undermining democracy throughout Latin America, as they have done intermittently for a hundred years. Montenegro decries in her book the pervasive meddling of American operatives in Brazil after the Second World War.

Northern-hemisphere vultures who see the Southern hemisphere as rich in raw materials – minerals, lumber, oil, arable land, and pasture for cattle – seek to ensure that southern countries remain open to the market forces that enrich the major corporations. Both governments and the people south of the equator can be influenced – manipulated – to serve the market interests of the wealthy. Undermining education and using the virtual media to influence public opinion weaken support for independent and creative endeavors. True art does not serve the interests of the powerful but the masses have been taught to be spectators of mass shows rather than creators or appreciators of culture. It is a crime against humanity to cripple people in this manner.

As I finish up this article the news appears on the media in Brazil and is echoed around the world: “Brazil’s culture secretary, Roberto Alvim has been fired after he appeared to paraphrase the Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels in an online video to promote a national arts prize.” (The Guardian, Jan. 17, 2020) Alvim’s online speech indeed includes a paragraph that is almost identical to a 1933 speech by Goebbels, in which he says that art in Germany will be heroic and nationalistic. The good news is that the outcry in Brazil’s Congress and in the legal community, as well as from abroad, was so strong that President Bolsonaro had to fire Secretary Alvim.

But this government is intent on reining in the bold and innovative art that has been typical of Brazil. Recently an international Film Expo in Rio saw its public funding slashed. “The consensus is that the destruction of the Brazilian film industry is in full joyful swing by this far-right government,” Kleber Mendonça Filho, one of Brazil’s most celebrated directors, wrote on Facebook last week.” (The Guardian, Dec 9, 2019) I imagine the intense disappointment of 90-year old film star Fernanda Montenegro, who participated in the development of the film industry here, and also recalls the fascist positions of President Getulio Vargas 80 years ago.

Montenegro represents almost a century of Brazil’s struggle to be a democracy, and her story points to the gifts of artists as custodians of the country’s culture and freedom. As her presence fades, younger Brazilian artists continue the struggle, such as filmmaker Petra Costa, whose documentary The Edge of Democracy has just been nominated for an Oscar. The film covers the political events in Brazil from the first election of Lula, a highpoint of democracy, to the election of Bolsonaro, cause of
despair for Petra Costa. Even as President Bolsonaro decries her film as crap, Costa is a spokesperson for progressive Brazilians. (See the interview on the Laura Flanders Show: www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhV1BKbBxjg.)

Greta Browne and her husband, Gay 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: The author mentions the military dictatorship from 1961–1964 and the Brazilian leftists’ “belief” that Bolsonaro is a puppet of US neoliberals. There is ample evidence of the US involvement in the creation of each of those governments.

“A Greek writer said that democracy is only working when the rich feel threatened. Otherwise, oligarchy takes over. From father to son, son to grandson, from grandson to great grandson, and so successively.”

— Petra Costa, The Edge of Democracy filmmaker

“I don’t usually waste time rebutting scumbags like Mrs Petra Costa but the level of her absurdities is criminal.”

— Eduardo Bolsonaro, politician son of president Bolsonaro
Impressions from Brazil

Guy Gray

In 2011 Greta and I moved to Brazil. We had both retired and we planned to live on
the farm Greta had founded with her first husband and was recently reformed by
her son. I had visited Brazil before but now I was going to be an expat in a new culture
and language. I can tell you about the food and scenery but I will instead concentrate
on the impressions of a new resident, not speaking the language well, that would in-
terest the readers of the Left Turn.

One of our first public activities was to join a demonstration against corruption.
It was large and lively and filled the main avenue of the capital, Brasilia. What struck
me was the variety of people: young and old, people from the left and the right. The
current president was Dilma Rousseff, successor to the popular Lula de Silva, both
of the Workers Party. Lula had led the country to prosperity, had initiated programs
like a guaranteed income (Bolsa Familia) for the very poor, and had improved the
education system. Dilma had started a program of affordable small houses for the
poor. But Brazil was still a country with great income inequality, and persistent cor-
ruption. During Lula’s first term a scandal was uncovered in which many members of
congress were receiving secret monthly payments that cost the government millions.
In order to govern, neither Lula nor Dilma had worked aggressively to end this cor-
ruption, but Dilma had supported the investigations into it. Lula and Dilma also po-
sitioned themselves toward the center to work with the business community and the
elites and to deal with debt payments. So, the reforms they could initiate were limited.
The hospitals are still overcrowded and the schools continue to be underfunded. The
mood of many in this demonstration was one of general frustration but there was also
playfulness in true Brazilian style. The demonstrators wanted change in the whole
system, not just the party in power. The population is much more polarized now.

I have witnessed both much that is good in Brazil that I wish to see in the United
States and much that is bad that may forewarn where the US maybe heading. On the
positive side, there are large packages of basic foods at a low price in the supermar-
kets. These are part of the Bolsa Familia program. When I cut myself on the farm I
get treated in the hospital with no charge as any person in Brazil is able to do. Older
folks like me are given a special shorter line as we wait our turn for many services so
we don’t have to stand so long. On the farm we are visited by health workers once a
month to check on how well we are doing.

The Independent Truck Drivers struck in 2018 to protest a sudden rise in fuel
prices. They were able to shut the country down for over a week. In our local town
the citizens led a parade out to the intersection the truckers had partially blocked.
They carried banners and were singing the national anthem. Many people here have
family members who drive trucks so it became their struggle too. The demonstration
ended with a prayer and several people stayed to give the strikers some food and share an outdoor meal with them. The government finally agreed not to let fuel prices change suddenly and to reform some regulations such as lowered toll rates.

But the negative: There are people selling small items to car drivers waiting for the traffic light to change on most intersections. These people are out in the hot sun all day for a bit of money. There are not enough good jobs for people, especially for the unskilled workers. Medical care is for free, but when I had a hard-to-diagnose injury I ended up visiting several clinics, waited in long lines, and did not get good answers. I finally paid a private doctor who was able to properly diagnose my injury. A potentially good system has been underfunded and private insurance and doctors are profiting from its shortcomings. Most houses have high walls topped with cut glass, barbed wire or electric wire. Whole communities can be gated with a guard house at the entrance. Brazilians seem obsessed with security. As the US society becomes more unequal I fear it could begin to look more like Brazil today.

There has been a decline in the quality of literacy even as the literacy rate has climbed up. To help start a conversation in our English class, I asked the students what books they had read the past year. Only two raised their hands. One mentioned Harry Potter and the other wanted to know whether the Bible counted as a book. WhatsApp is the main source of news for many people here. Bolsonaro was elected in part by misleading memes. One showed the hand of Jesus guiding his hand as he wrote laws. Another showed a baby bottle with a nipple in the shape of a penis. It claimed that his rival Workers Party candidate had distributed these bottles in schools while he was education minister to promote homosexuality. In fact, Bolsonaro’s rival had set up a program to encourage respect for all sexual orientations. One farm extension worker in our community who advocates for sustainability told us that the fires in the Amazon were fake news. He quoted a prominent woman who said that she had flown in a helicopter in her area of the Amazon and had seen no fires. I am reminded of a quote by Steve Bannon: “You just have to flood the news with shit” so nobody knows what the truth is.

But Brazil is also the country that produced Marina Silva, a daughter of rubber tappers in the Amazon, who as a young person worked for Chico Mendes, the famous environmental organizer. Illiterate until she was sixteen, she got educated, entered politics, and rose to be a federal senator. Later, Lula appointed her Environmental Minister. She then oversaw the largest drop in deforestation in the world. She left after Lula backtracked on environmental reforms to appease state governors and agribusiness. She ran for president three times, twice getting 20% or third place in the first round but not making it to the runoff. She now continues to be a progressive voice through her “Rede” party. Her story gives me hope for Brazil.

If you want to stay informed about the current situation in Brazil, I recommend the internet sites The Intercept and The Brazilian Report.

Guy Gray and his wife, Greta Browne, 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.
Class War and the 2020 Election

ALEX FISCHER

Class war is heating up in America. Endemic to capitalism, class war is a crude term for the general struggle led by the poorer classes against the war led by the bourgeoisie or capitalist class over the fruits of the national economy.1

Basic human rights such as food, housing, healthcare, education, and transportation are increasingly unaffordable. The purchasing power of the average wage in America has declined since 19702, while personal debt3 and record inequality4 are both increasing. The 3 wealthiest individuals in the U.S. have amassed as much wealth as the bottom half of the population (roughly 163 million people).5 As home to 27 percent of the world’s billionaires6 (though only 4.5 percent of the global population), America’s political system has been shown to favor the wealthy and corporate power over the many.7 72 percent of business owners disagree with the statement that “the government should attempt to reduce economic inequality.”8

Bernie Sanders presidential run can be seen in the context of fighting inequality in America. Aiming to redefine the government’s role in mediating class conflict, his platform includes broadening the welfare state to provide universal healthcare, a livable minimum wage, free college education, “green” jobs, a wealth tax, and tax increases in corporate profits, policy proposals which have led to a surge in his popularity. The “Green New Deal” is the first federal jobs program hoping to reignite income growth for working Americans while also investing in socially responsible infrastructure that runs on renewable energy.

A New Holy Alliance

In the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels wrote that the spectre of communism is haunting Europe. They continued, “All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre...the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.”9 Marx and Engels were writing during a time when communism and its call for an equal and democratic society gained momentum and a “holy alliance” was formed to stomp out such efforts.

David Harvey documents how in the 1970s business “refine[d] its ability to act as a class,” a new holy alliance. He writes that “the dominant theme in the political strategy of business became a shared interest in the defeat of bills [favoring progressive taxation and labor law reform].”10 Harvey also notes that political action committees were utilized by corporations to “assure the financial domination of both political parties.” Corporate PACs burgeoned from 89 in 1974 to 1,467 by 1982.11 The result was a growing dependency on big money, which made even Democrats “highly vulnerable to direct influence from business interests.” According to a 2018 poll “money in politics” is still a major bipartisan issue, with 77 percent of Americans agreeing that “there should be limits on the amount of money individuals and groups can spend on campaigns.”12
Citing Bush tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans, Warren Buffett asserted in an interview that “There’s been class warfare going on for the last twenty years...and my class has won.” In late 2019 the richest man in the world, Amazon and Washington Post owner Jeff Bezos, hosted an event in which Trump administration officials and billionaires were present, a fact indicating “class solidarity” between members of America’s ruling elite.

The restoration of class power since the 1970s is generally referred to as the neoliberal turn. Neoliberalism is a series of austere economic policies marked by a concerted assault on the welfare state and labor, tax cuts for corporations and the richest Americans, and deregulation of the financial sector which led to the 2008 recession. Large banks in America invest to make a profit. After gambling on profitable investments by lending to potential homeowners the banks knew would not be able to pay back their loans, the bubble eventually burst.

Obama entered office amidst the worst global financial crisis of capitalism since the Great Depression. He invited executives of top banks and corporations to meet him and told them that he stands between them and the pitchforks and that he is on their side. By responding to the crisis with a $3 trillion bailout, Democrats codified the notion that the modern banking system is “too big to fail.” Three years later the short lived Occupy Wall Street movement popularized the slogan “We are the 99%” in opposition to the 1%.

Yet, it is unlikely that most Americans are aware of the depths of the growing inequality. The richest 20% of Americans own 89% of the wealth in the US while the poorest 60% hold only 3%. Even if they do grasp this disparity, Americans are unable to link their financial status with a coherent class analysis. Needless to say, the class war from above has been more refined than the struggle from below.

The Sanders “Political Revolution”

Is 2020 a different story? The ruling class has failed to delegitimize Sanders whose rise to prominence, against all odds, has been striking. Fair and Accuracy in Reporting has documented the systemic media bias against Sanders. Critics have charged the mainstream media outlets, such as CNN, of being Sanders’ most “vociferous opponent.” Yet, as of this writing, Sanders seems poised to present a challenge to the establishment, a billionaire President, and the concerted effort by the capitalist class to transfer wealth upwards.

The mainstream pundits have also raised the question of the electability of Sanders. Yet, 87.5% of polls from December 2019 through January 2020 suggest Bernie Sanders will defeat President Trump in an election. A National poll in late January 2020, just weeks before the first Democratic Primary in Iowa, showed that Sanders is leading nationally for the first time since announcing his candidacy.

Clearly, the wealthy donors have favored the corporate-friendly candidates. Their current favorite since the decline of Joe Biden is Pete Buttigieg who has received the most support from the billionaire donors out of any of the candidates running in the Democratic primary. Sanders, on the other hand, is bucking the trend of buying the presidency with corporate money and has relied instead on an average of $18 per donor and indeed leads all other candidates in money raised.
What if Sanders wins the Presidency, and the Democrats sweep the house and the senate? Will he be able to implement the core policies he has been advocating for long? The present balance of class power bodes ill for any prospect of Sanders successfully implementing his core policies. Class war after all is endemic to capitalism and Bernie Sanders is not calling for a movement to go beyond capitalism (he is a social democrat). The class war will not go away and if Sanders persists capital might go on strike paralyzing the economy. Perhaps, Sanders will have to initiate a shift in vision from a political to a social revolution in order to bring about a fairer society, one that can begin to address the many crises it faces, including the “existential” one of climate disruption.

Capital’s Counterrevolution

Capitalism is not just a global economic system that we can overcome by means of electoral politics alone. Capital is deeply embedded in our society and government and we are dependent on capital for investment. Even a candidate like Sanders who doesn’t seek to move beyond capitalism must contend with how capitalists would respond to losing ground in the class war. If capitalists perceive their investment opportunities to be less profitable, they will do what they can to change their circumstances. This is why corporations leave a country and move to countries with more profitable investment opportunities. This is why corporations move their wealth and income to offshore accounts safe from taxation. Capital may withhold investments if it deems the investment environment not to its liking. This is a likely reaction by capital not just to a seriously socialist government but also to a government with a Sanders social democratic orientation.

Can Sanders contend with capital going on strike? The author Mike McCarthy argues that the key to success for socialists in power is “subjecting massive financial markets under public control.”24 American banks are deeply dependent on domestic markets for profits, which gives the U.S. government considerable leverage over these institutions. He contends that “Only a break with the for-profit model of investing and a sharp turn toward allocation of credit for public purposes can provide socialist governments the space to implement their program.”

In sum, the left ought to support Sanders but must not be limited by the scope of his vision. We have seen the welfare state rolled back. What is to say it will not happen again? If Sanders reaches the White House (a big if) he would certainly face the most serious challenges ever to govern effectively. If McCarty is correct, the supporters of Sanders should urge him to assert public control over the banks. Of course, the more likely outcome is that Sanders will face political paralysis. In that case, the left should be prepared to treat this circumstance as a national teaching moment about how capital works in the twenty-first century.

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Endnotes for ‘Class War and the 2020 Election’

1 I say “crude” because this (“poorer” and “capitalist”) categorization is a simplification to understand a general historical trend. We have moved well beyond the bourgeois and proletariat classes. There are many in between. Crude and simplified like the language of the 99% vs. 1%. Both help to understand the gist of inequality.


3 “Key Figures Behind America’s Consumer Debt,” Debt.org data, last modified January 2020, https://www.debt.org/faqs/americans-in-debt/. The report notes that consumer debt was approaching $14-trillion after the second quarter of 2019, according to the New York Federal Reserve, the 20th consecutive quarter for an increase.


11 Ibid.


13 Greg Sargent, “‘There’s been class warfare for the last 20 years, and my class has won!’,” The Washington Post, September 30, 2011, https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/plum-line/post/theres-been-class-warfare-for-the-last-20-years-and-my-class-has-won/2011/03/03/glQApafbAL___blog.html.


15 Reagan’s infamous firing of 11,345 striking air traffic control workers in 1981, the first time the Presidency was used to intervene in a private labor dispute in such a way, represented a direct form of neoliberalism’s labor-crushing policies.

16 Paul Street, They Rule: The 1% vs. Democracy, (London: Routledge, 2014)


19 Anthony DiMaggio, Rebellion in America, 3.


Of all the leading figures of the American Revolution, there was no one quite like Thomas Paine.

Born in England in 1737, Thomas Paine first became involved in political matters as a young man in a minor government office. In his first published work, a pamphlet entitled *The Case of the Officers of Excise*, he argued for better pay and working conditions for Royal Government tax officers – an ironic topic, given the events that would follow in Paine’s life.

In 1774, while living in London, Paine was introduced to the American inventor Benjamin Franklin and, inspired by Franklin’s description of his life in the colonies, sailed to Philadelphia in November. He became the editor of Pennsylvania magazine.

By 1775, colonial resentment at the arbitrary authority of the English government seethed, and after the Battles of Lexington and Concord, open rebellion was imminent. The growing revolutionary movement, however, still had no unifying goal. Some colonials wanted direct representatives in Parliament; others wanted autonomy and home rule under the British Crown. It was during this time, in January 1776, that Thomas Paine published (anonymously) a short booklet titled simply *Common Sense*. Paine proposed a goal that only a few had considered seriously before, namely, independence from Britain and the establishment of a brand new nation.

The effect was like an atom bomb. *Common Sense* started, virtually single-handedly, the movement for American independence. Within six months, over 100,000 copies of the booklet had been printed, the colonies had declared their independence, and the American Revolution began in earnest.

If Paine’s views on independence proved to be wildly popular, however, most of his other views were not. Paine was a man far ahead of his time, and many of his “radical” ideas shocked even his fellow revolutionaries. At a time when slavery was unquestioned and African-Americans were considered nothing more than property, Paine argued for the abolition of slavery. When women were viewed as little better than property, Paine made the case for full female citizenship and equality, including the right of women’s suffrage. When most Americans viewed the huge disparity between rich and poor as part of “the natural order of things”, Paine argued for the redistribution of wealth, for full social and political equality, and for safeguards to protect the poor from the rich. These views were particularly horrifying to the wealthy elite who made up the Continental Congress and would go on to write a Constitution which prohibited direct election of the Senate and the President, and laws which reserved the right to vote solely for white male property-owners who made up less than five percent of the American population. And while most Americans viewed churches and religion as central parts of their lives, Paine attacked the hypocrisy of the church and openly argued for freethinking.

Paine’s radical views on wealth, slavery, the role of women, and religion, made him a pariah among the leaders of the revolution. His political writings remained
popular with the people, however, and soon after the Revolutionary War broke out, and at a time when Washington’s Continental Army, the hope of the Revolution, was broken and starving at Valley Forge, Paine published a widely-read series of pamphlets under the title *The Crisis*, urging the colonists to actively fight for independence. “These are the times,” Paine wrote famously, “that try men’s souls.”

In 1777, Paine was appointed to the Continental Congress’s Committee on Foreign Affairs. After a conflict with the powerful delegate Robert Morris, however, he was expelled from the Continental Congress but was then appointed to travel to France in 1781 as part of Benjamin Franklin’s diplomatic effort to enlist French support against Britain. Paine successfully negotiated a number of loans to the Continental Government and returned to live in New Jersey.

After the Revolution, Paine left the United States to live quietly in London. The outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, however, once again sparked the revolutionary in him, and he traveled to France, where he would spend most of the latter part of his life. Although he didn’t speak any French, Paine threw himself into the French Revolution. He was granted honorary French citizenship and was elected to the revolutionary National Assembly. His pamphlet *The Rights of Man* was widely circulated in France. When he opposed the excesses and dictatorial methods of Robespierre and the Jacobins, Paine was arrested, and a law was passed excluding foreigners from the Assembly. While in prison awaiting execution, Paine wrote *The Age of Reason*, a seething criticism of Christianity and the churches. He also wrote a letter to President Washington, accusing the US government of betraying and abandoning him.

Only a quirk of fate spared Paine from death at the guillotine. The night before a number of executions were to be carried out, the jailer placed a chalk mark on the cell doors of the condemned. By happenstance, the door of Paine’s cell was open at the time, and the jailer placed his chalk mark on the inside of the door where it was overlooked the next day while the cell door was closed.

After the fall of Robespierre, Paine was released and returned to the French National Assembly. True to form, he was one of only three Assembly members who voted against the French Constitution of 1795 because it did not allow for universal suffrage.

Within a few years, Paine was actively opposing the growing power being gathered by Napoleon Bonaparte, calling him a “charlatan”. He likely would have ended up in a French prison again had the American President Thomas Jefferson not invited him back to the United States. Paine returned to the US in 1802, where he found that his radical views still made him an outcast. When he died in 1809, only six people attended his funeral.

Even today, Thomas Paine remains the only major figure of the American Revolution to have no monument or memorial anywhere in Washington DC.

*Lenny Flank is a longtime labor organizer and environmental, social, and antwwar activist. He was a founder of the Lehigh Valley IWW in the early 1990s.*
In *How to Hide an Empire*, Daniel Immerwahr, Associate Professor of History at Northwestern University, reframes the standard account of US history to incorporate events in all of the lands outside the conterminous 48 states that were brought under formal US rule, thereby giving us *A History of the Greater United States*. Today the most familiar of these lands are Alaska and Hawaii, which became states more than a century after the Gadsden Purchase inserted the last segment of the familiar outline that in 1854 exactly enclosed the land of the future 48 states. These lands also include territories that never became US states: the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guam, Wake Island, American Samoa, the US Virgin Islands, and nearly 100 miniscule Pacific and Caribbean islands with substantial deposits of guano. Furthermore, by employing slightly modified criteria, Cuba, the Panama Canal Zone, and the UN Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands could easily have been included in the Greater United States, and so it is appropriate that the author also addresses their experience with regard to US expansionism. Although major events would occasionally raise the salience of some of these places, most notably Pearl Harbor, they generally remained obscure, if not invisible, to Americans on the mainland.

By highlighting the importance of these territorial possessions and the experience of their inhabitants living under the sovereign power of Washington, Immerwahr generates a narrative that alters our perspective by presenting familiar things in a new or expanded way. So while we expect to read that race has played a central role in our national history, race relations in the Greater United States transcend the familiar cases of black-white and red-white because we encounter in these additional territories the specific sufferings of various other non-white peoples at the hand of white authorities. Examples include the massacres of civilians and torture of captives in the long Philippine war for independence; the callous manipulation of Pacific islanders with regard to the testing of atomic weapons on Bikini and Eniwetok; and the extensive medical experimentation on Puerto Ricans under the direction of Cornelius P. Rhoads, who called them “the dirtiest, laziest, most degenerate and thievish race of men ever inhabiting this sphere.”

In 1980, the American Association for Cancer Research established the prestigious Cornelius P. Rhoads Memorial Award with no awareness of his Caribbean crimes, and they granted it annually for twenty-three years to outstanding young cancer researchers before anyone objected. Immerwahr tells us that such an extraordinary oversight was possible only because of the “complete segregation of information between Puerto Rico and the mainland,” pointedly concluding that “that’s how you hide an empire.”
Another way to hide an empire is to radically reconfigure it. Today the US has what Immerwahr calls a “pointillist empire” of some 800 military bases scattered around the globe, all on foreign soil over which the US nevertheless exercises full legal control. No colonies visible on the map? Abracadabra! No empire.

According to Andrew Bacevich, a retired US Army Colonel and Boston University Professor Emeritus, *How to Hide an Empire* is “brilliantly conceived, utterly original, and immensely entertaining – simultaneously vivid, sardonic, and deadly serious.” This high praise is well earned and fully deserved.

*Doug Heath retired as Professor Emeritus of Geography, Geology, and Environmental Studies at Northampton Community College. Since then he has taught a course in World Geography and Global Issues as an adjunct professor at Moravian College.*

"The imperium is ruled not by fools but by liars, manipulators, murderers, and other criminals — all of whom tend to believe in their own virtue. The imperial state often functions accountable to no one."

— Michael Parenti

Readers may be interested to know that they can attend informal, free-to-the-public classes on the 1st, 3rd, and 5th Wednesday evenings (6–9 PM) of every month. The current topic is Film & Politics, and past classes have included Global Politics, West Asian Politics, and Globalization and Social Movements. There are no pre-requisites nor any requirement for regular attendance. Everyone is welcome to attend all or as many classes as schedules permit.

The classes are taught by *Left Turn* editor Faramarz Farbod, who teaches politics at Moravian College. For more information please write farbodf@moravian.edu.
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The congressional Democrats by and large only managed to raise procedural concerns about Trump’s decision. They objected to not having been informed in advance or to Trump not having garnered the approval of Congress for this action. Others, chastised the president for not having a long-term vision that would inform his actions after this particular operation was completed. Nearly everyone agreed that the operation was a tactical success. There was also a near unanimous agreement that Soleimani deserved to have been “taken out” violently, though some questioned the timing of this operation. One of the most nauseating aspect of it all was that all talking heads invariably began their remarks with what seemed to be the mandatory initial comment about how the murdered Iranian commander was responsible for the deaths of some 600 US soldiers in Iraq between 2003-2011.

Is it too much to want to hear someone, just for once, state the most obvious, elemental facts concerning this operation in the mass media?

What follows are the missing elemental truths as we see them: (i) the assassination of senior foreign leaders is a major international war crime, (ii) assassinating foreign leaders in a third country is a blatant violation of both the latter country’s sovereignty and of basic international law, (iii) armed resistance (in this case by the Iraqis and their allies) against occupying soldiers (in this case the US forces and their allies) is recognized by international law as a right belonging to the occupied – after all the US soldiers who died in those years were not killed in Detroit or New York but in Iraqi cities they had occupied militarily after waging an illegal war of aggression followed by a violent occupation that led to a million-plus excess violent Iraqi deaths and injuries, (iv) the targeted assassination of senior foreign military leaders lets the genie of high tech (drones) political assassination of senior foreign leaders loose, (v) the critical missing context is that Iran’s recent actions were a response to US policy of “maximum pressure” on Iran that has seriously harmed Iran’s economy and increased discontent among its public, rather than the US version of events that stresses it took action in response to Iran’s harmful intentions, and lastly (vi) this US action is selective and hypocritical, otherwise the US would have to violently take out other “malevolent” actors with plenty of blood on their hands, such as many US war planners in the many wars the US has waged in the region, Mohamed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia whose war on Yemen has been extraordinarily destructive, and senior Israeli leaders in charge of that country’s brutal colonization of the indigenous Palestinians, to name a few.

Staggering inequalities of income and wealth continue to mark the performance of late capitalism. Two measures give us a sense of the growing inequalities: (1) The worker productivity-pay gap: since 1979, worker productivity increased by 69.6% while worker pay increased by only 11.6% (a mere sixth of the rate of increase in productivity); (2) The CEO-to-typical worker compensation ratio: this ratio was 20:1 in 1965, 30:1 in 1978, 368:1 in 2000, and 278:1 in 2018. The CEO compensation grew by 1,007.5% from 1978 to 2018 while wages for the typical worker grew by just 11.9%. Note that these are averages which means that the ratios vary for different companies. So, for example, here are two obscene datum concerning the CEO-to-typical worker pay of two corporations: the Starbucks CEO made 1,671 times what the average Starbucks worker made in 2019; Wal-Mart CEO made 1,076 times the typical Walmart worker in that same year. Put differently, the Starbucks CEO made in about 5 hours what the typical Starbucks worker made in one year; the Wal-Mart CEO did so in about 8 hours.

Clearly, the ruling predatory oligarchs have been collecting the difference and enriching themselves beyond their wildest dreams. Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates, and Warren Buffett now own as much wealth as the bottom half of North Americans combined.

Instead of the promised “trickle-down economics,” one might say, the US workers have been experiencing a “stream-up economics” in which a predatory capitalist class takes a lion share of the wealth they create. Predictably, we are by now facing staggering levels of inequalities, a growing sense of alienation among a broad section of the public, and a dysfunctional form of politics coupled with rising authoritarianism.
Meanwhile, the federal minimum wage has remained at $7.25 since 2009, representing nearly a 40% decline in purchasing power over a half century. A full-time worker making as much cannot even rent a single bedroom apartment in any US city. Though there are only 430,000 workers earning $7.25 an hour, a raise to at least $15 will positively impact 17 million workers.

Fighting for a living wage (at least for $15 an hour) is one way to begin confronting the aforementioned inequality trends in late capitalism. Of course, even this beginner step has been opposed by “conservatives” who argue that raising wages results in higher unemployment, inflation, and automation. Research shows, however, that the actual negative effects of higher wages in the many states, cities and localities that have already raised the minimum wage is negligible. By now, 29 states have raised the minimum wage of their workers. The opponents are uninformed or disingenuous.

Activists should push for living wages indexed to rising costs and labor productivity rates in order to lock-in their gains in the long-term and not see it erode with time as happened in the past. They should require an automatic adjustment of the federal minimum wage to the average worker productivity rate. If the reader is not persuaded by this suggestion, perhaps the following can impress her: Had the federal minimum wage been tied to worker productivity since the late 1970s, it would by now have been around $21 an hour.

We think activists should also argue for a maximum cap on CEO compensation and limit the CEO-to-typical worker pay ratio to a reasonable level. The Mondragon experiment in Spain has kept the ratio of the highest paid to lowest paid workers to about 9:1. Mondragon is of course a federation of worker cooperatives and as such it would be a difficult if not impossible objective to impose its pay scale model on US corporations. But, is there any reason why activists in the US should not argue for a return to a 20:1 or 30:1 CEO-to-worker pay ratio reminiscent of the US corporate practices in 1965 and 1978 respectively?

Lastly, we favor development of worker-owned and operated enterprises. We understand that that is a difficult task and one that is a long-term goal. But, that is what economic democracy entails. Activists should push for policies that encourage democratization of workplaces every chance they get. But to get there, there would have to be a far greater level of class consciousness among the working people than exists today. Activists should take advantage of every opportunity to raise class consciousness among workers. Here is one suggestion as we indulge our editorial fantasy. Labor activists should argue for a reparation for labor. Workers have suffered through several decades of predatory capitalist assault on their working conditions and wages. What if labor organizers ask some labor-friendly economists to help them calculate what that loss and suffering has entailed? At the very least they could assess the loss of wages and income resulting from the divergence of pay and productivity trends over the past four decades. Activists could then hammer that figure into the public’s consciousness every chance they get. After all, without demanding the impossible we would inherit only a few crumbs of comfort in a dying planet.

We recommend the film The Report to our readers. The film does a fine job of exposing the CIA’s post-9/11 torture program on the basis of the Senate Intelligence Committee’s investigation. It clearly shows how the Democratic Party politicians were a co-conspirator in these crimes which took place during George Bush Jr.’s administration. For example, the Obama administration did everything to stop the investigation, it even opposed the release of a heavily-redacted executive summary of the torture report; John Brennan, president Obama’s CIA chief, even tried to have Dan Jacobs, the chief Senate investigator, arrested.

President Trump’s Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, was not pleased with the film. After viewing it, he tweeted: “I watched “The Report.” Fiction. To be clear: the bad guys are not our intelligence warriors. The bad guys are the terrorists. To my former colleagues and all of the patriots at @CIA who have kept us safe since 9/11: America supports you, defends you and has your back. So do I.”

Well, we reserve some criticisms for The Report as well. But unlike Secretary Pompeo’s, we think the film is too kind to “our intelligence warriors.” For example, it does not provide a wider historical
context for the practice of torture by the US. There is just one sentence in the film about the use of torture by the US in Vietnam and Latin America before 9/11. The fact is that since 1950, the US has developed a covert capacity to torture. It uses this capacity when or where it deems necessary globally. And when at times it has refrained from direct use of torture it has relied instead on sending the targeted individuals to allied countries that do torture.

Given this history, it is impossible not to conclude that those who run the intelligence apparatus and the White House, the likes of Pompeo himself, are sociopaths without any sense of guilt, remorse, or compassion for human suffering.

A new UN climate report has warned that present trends would lead to temperature increases of nearly 4°C by 2100, “bringing wide-ranging and destructive climate impacts.” The World Meteorological Organization has reported record-high concentrations of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Oxfam has reported that one person every two seconds is being forced from their home due to hurricanes, wildfires, cyclones, and other extreme weather, amounting to 200 million displaced since 2008. The new UN report says that we need to cut down global emissions by at least 55% in the next 10 years to avoid the most catastrophic effects of climate disruption. The fundamental choice facing humanity today is ruination (business-as-usual and incrementalism) or revolution (the fundamental transformation of the way we live and relate to one another and to nature, in a short period of time remaining). In sum, only radical action, and soon, may avert the rapidly approaching planetary ecocide.

Left Turn welcomes the coming debate about socialism in the US in the aftermath of the rise of Sanders in the polls. Of course, this is a debate arriving only 70 years too late. And what is more, it will be carried out largely by the enemies of socialism and instant know-nothing “experts” who will fill the airwaves of the corporate media with false narratives reminiscent of the performance of the post-9/11 instant terrorism and Middle East “experts” who by and large lacked even an elementary familiarity with that region’s languages and cultures let alone its history and politics. Left Turn will publish articles in its coming issues in 2020 with the aim of explaining what we think socialism is and interrogating the false narratives that will inevitably be peddled by the corporate media and the dominant political class. Be that as it may, in what follows we present a brief foray into the different understandings of socialism and what we consider to be the most important distinction between socialism and democratic socialism, a label preferred by Senator Bernie Sanders to describe his politics. We identify three different understandings of socialism.

The first understanding corresponds to what is normally labeled democratic socialism. It is associated mainly with social democratic practices and politics of the kind that have produced strong social states (or welfare states) in the Scandinavian countries of northern Europe. By social states we have in mind states that exhibit a fundamental commitment to social welfare provisions for their population and where these provisions are not subject to sharp vicissitudes of electoral politics. Social states see the protection and provision of generous social welfare programs as central to their identity albeit still operating under capitalist economic framework.

The second understanding of socialism, state socialism, correlates more or less with the experiences of the “actually-existing-socialist-countries” in the 20th century. Here, the states often merged with the communist parties and together they coordinated socioeconomic activities from above and left very little space for political dissent. Markets were replaced with state coordination and private property was replaced with collectivized, state property.

The third understanding of socialist vision and practice, and the tradition within which we understand socialism, has two critical components. First, it emphasizes socialist economic democracy in workplaces -- a critical missing element in the previous two understandings. We added “socialist” to “economic democracy” because the latter is often interpreted to mean workplaces with strong union
representations of workers, a vision consistent with social democratic or democratic socialist practices and thoughts. A “socialist” economic democracy goes beyond capitalist relations of production. It is part of a transitioning away from capitalist mode of production altogether, though it too prefers a social state under capitalist framework over a naked form of capitalism (neoliberalism), if those were the only choices. The key to the transition is the transformation of work and workplaces, that is, of how people produce what they need in order to live a decent life. This understanding of socialism aims to radically reconstruct workplaces and relations therein on the basis of abolishing class exploitation and moving towards production on the basis of what Marx called unalienated labor. The best examples of socialist economic democracy are worker-community-owned and operated workplaces.

Lastly, this understanding of socialism regards the direct struggle against racism, patriarchy, the theft of nature, and the imperialist expropriation of land, labor, markets, and bodies of the colonized as integral to the struggle to supersede the global capitalist order with a democratic, cooperative, ecological, and egalitarian one.

Recent polling indicates that 70% of millennials would vote for a socialist compared to 36% of baby boomers. That is a welcome shift in perspectives and reflects ongoing intellectual and generational progress even though we are aware that many millenials confuse social democracy with socialism. The predatory ruling class, on the other hand, sees this shift in thinking and preference as another sign of a growing legitimation crisis the system faces. They are right, of course, but have no decent ideas on how to address, let alone manage, the crisis and keep their predatory global system of exploitation and expropriation going.

The New York Times quoted Hillary Clinton on Sanders, saying, among other things, that “Nobody Likes Him.” Well, we all know that millions of people do like Sanders, which makes her comment clearly false. So, what are we to make of her comment? Should we just dismiss it out of hand as lacking any relations to the real world? If we think of the word ‘nobody’ in the ordinary sense in which it is used, then we would be warranted to dismiss her comment. But, as often, many words acquire a technical meaning when employed in the political domain by officials. For example, when a politician says “national interest,” she means the narrow ‘special interest’ of the ruling class or a segment of it. So, if we understand Secretary Clinton’s use of the word ‘nobody’ in its technical sense, we would be able to see that she is indeed correct in her assessment. What is then the technical meaning of ‘nobody’ in the phrase “nobody likes him?” Well, it means that nobody that matters in establishment politics likes Sanders. And, that’s true as indicated by the panic exhibited by corporate Democrats in response to the rise of Bernie Sanders in polls in the primaries. So, beware of words with double meanings and the corruption of language by the powers-that-be.

"Freedom is participation in power."
—Marcus Tullius Cicero (1st-century BCE), Roman statesman and orator
MARGARET THATCHER ONCE SAID

THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE

THAT THE MARKET ECONOMY IS THE ONLY SYSTEM THAT WORKS

BUT THE DEBATE ISN'T OVER

THERE IS ALWAYS AN ALTERNATIVE

Tackling T.I.N.A.

Imagining Economic Alternatives

A community discussion group dedicated to understanding economic justice and expanding the horizon of possibility.

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