

Socialist Politics in the Age of Trump

by David McNally



**RADICAL
INTERVENTIONS**

A Radical Interventions Pamphlet

A Radical Interventions pamphlet
Published by the Toronto New Socialists, 2017

Front cover photo: nj.com
Design and layout: Sandra Sarner
Printed by: Union labour at J.H. French & Co. Ltd.



Socialist Politics in the Age of Trump

But what are you to do when a dollar ain't worth shit
And the jobs ain't hiring and unemployment is gone
They gonna repo your car and foreclose your home
Me, I suggest you get yourself a shotgun
So when they come to evict you can make them run
The banks got bailed out but we still suffering

Killer Mike, "Burn" (2011)

TREMORS COME BEFORE EARTHQUAKES.¹ OFTEN THEY ARE FELT for years, even decades, before the big one erupts. The longer this goes on, the more people tend to adapt, to imagine that tremors are a normal fact of life. Then, when the earth-shattering eruption inevitably arrives, it is greeted with shock and dismay.

So it was in 2009, when the global financial system tottered on the edge of collapse. The recently-retired head of the U.S. central bank announced that he was in a state of "shocked disbelief" over the financial meltdown, even though the tremors had been rumbling for years.² Of course, political earthquakes have different registers. That of 2009 was not of the intensity of the one a hundred years ago that resulted in the overthrow of the Tsar of Russia and the short-lived workers revolution in Russia.

Yet, all political earthquakes have some rough similarities in terms of deepening insecurities and a widespread disaffection with the status quo. Notwithstanding major differences, we are again living through an era of tremors – convulsions that are de-stabilizing mainstream politics. These convulsions have grown out of the soil of the 2009 crisis, which has produced years of hardship, insecurity and growing discontent. As much as these convulsions portend great dangers, they also harbor hopeful possibilities for those of us seeking a world of global justice.

**We can't
breathe. And
we won't stop
until Freedom.**

**Ferguson Action
Committee,
2014**

Polarized Politics: Danger from the Right, Openings for the Left

Contemporary capitalism has perfected the techniques of Robin Hood in reverse: taking from the poor to give to the rich.

IT IS EASY TO FORGET THE SEVERITY OF THE CRISIS OF 2009-10, when all five Wall Street investment banks collapsed, global stock markets lost half their value, and millions lost their jobs and homes. True, the world's central bankers stopped the financial meltdown by injecting trillions of dollars of public funds into private banks. But governments then quickly turned to austerity to pay for their handouts to banks, in the process slashing healthcare, old age pensions, education and social assistance. At the same time, corporations doubled down, intensifying poorly-paid precarious work. The end result is an economy that breeds poverty and insecurity.

The effects are stunning. Researchers have shown that the share of U.S. wealth going to the bottom 50 percent of people in America is "collapsing." In 1978, the bottom half received one-fifth of all income. Today their share has plummeted to 12 per cent. Not surprisingly, the share of the top one percent of income earners moved in the opposite direction: from eleven to 20 percent.³ Contemporary capitalism has perfected the techniques of Robin Hood in reverse: take from the poor to give to the rich. This collapse in earnings for the majority fuels social regression across the board. In 2016, life expectancy in the United States fell for the first time in nearly a quarter-century. And when it comes to security in old age, the figures are shocking: 100 corporate CEOs have as much in retirement savings as 116 million Americans.⁴

What we see in the United States is also true of the world as a whole – if anything, on an even more appalling scale. According to Oxfam, the eight richest men in the world have as much wealth as half of humankind (3.6 billion people). And the top one percent has more wealth than the remaining 99 per cent of people on the planet.⁵

This reality of precarious employment, declining incomes, and obscene social inequality has fuelled an anger toward political and economic elites that is now finding a delayed expression in electoral politics. There was of course a significant wave of protest that greeted the effects of the global crisis and the bank bailouts, from factory occupations and mass strikes to the mass uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa that toppled dictators in Tunisia and Egypt, to the Occupy movement.⁶ Nevertheless, particularly in the Global North, the political center tended to hold. It was as if large numbers of people desperately wanted to give their governments a chance to put things back together. But as it became clear that bankers and CEOs were benefiting while the vast majority found life harder, accumulated discontent started spilling over into mainstream politics. Recently, it has found expression in millions of people abandoning traditional party elites and searching, often confusedly, for new alternatives.

Every major era of social turmoil in capitalist society involves a crumbling of the political center – in other words, a shift away from the traditional political elites. We can see this in two recent election cycles, those of the United States and France.

In the U.S., it was political outsiders who electrified millions of people. First came Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont, campaigning as a socialist, who just about knocked off the establishment candidate of the Democratic Party (DP), Hillary Clinton – and might well have done so had it not been for a grab-bag of bureaucratic tricks and maneuvers by DP officials.⁷ But if Sanders was the candidate of the Left who inspired millions, Donald Trump was the right-wing outsider who actually captured the Republican Party's presidential candidacy despite the opposition of that party's establishment.⁸

Both Sanders and Trump gave expression – in very different forms – to the frustration millions of people feel with how their lives have been going since the 2009 financial crisis. Within the mainstream media, there is a tendency to treat these shifts in mass sentiment toward the Right and the Left as variants of the same species, something called populism.⁹ But as one French academic rightly noted, such analyses are utterly “simplistic,” since we are actually dealing with “two very different kinds of anti-system voting – the xenophobic one and the socialist one.”¹⁰ The socialist and the xenophobic (i.e., racist) responses to social crisis are sharply defined *alternatives*, not versions of the same thing. That is why what we are witnessing is actually a political polarization – toward the Right and the Left – as masses of people turn away from prevailing policies.

Now let us look at the first round of the recent presidential elections in France (April 30, 2017). The traditional parties of the political center – the right-wing Republicans and the centrist “Socialists” – were deserted by millions of voters. Having taken 55 percent of all votes in 2012, they managed just 25 percent in 2017.¹¹ Meanwhile, 7.7 million voters went to the candidates of the radical Left, particularly to Jean-Luc Mélenchon, while an equal number went to the extreme right neo-fascist party, the National Front. Once again, the sources of political discontent are not hard to locate: fully 25 per cent of French youth are unemployed and many older workers have been left behind in an era of factory closures and rising joblessness.

While Canada has not experienced the same phenomenon, the most recent federal election saw rejection of key neoliberal policies. The Liberal Party, initially running third in the polls, stormed to a majority government by campaigning for large-scale deficit spending by government (in order to boost the economy and job creation), and for significant increases in Canada's intake of refugees, especially from Syria. In outflanking the New Democrats to the left, the Liberals captured large numbers of NDP sup-

porters. But once the campaign was over, so were all progressive commitments, as is evidenced by Prime Minister Trudeau's post-election embrace of oil pipelines, privatization, closed-door fundraisers with bankers and CEOs, and callous disregard for the demands of indigenous peoples. But at the level of political attitudes, the election represented a shift from neo-liberal platitudes about balanced budgets and from an utterly ungenerous discourse about refugees.

A Moment of Danger . . . and of Socialist Possibility

Alongside a resurgence of the far-right we are also in the early stages of an opening to radical socialism of the sort we have not seen for two generations. Failure to grasp this means missing major possibilities for the rebirth of international socialism today.

THERE CAN BE LITTLE DOUBT THAT WE LIVE IN DANGEROUS times. To begin with, we confront dramatic human challenges due to climate change.¹² Then, in the political sphere and on the streets, the rise of far right forces poses terrible threats to all of us, and most notably to people of color, queer and trans folks, indigenous peoples, women, migrants, Muslims, and other oppressed groups. The white supremacists and anti-Muslim racists who have rallied around Trump in America and the National Front of Marine Le Pen in France represent mortal risks.¹³

If that were the whole story the situation would simply be depressing and frightening. But it is not the whole story – far from it. Alongside a resurgence of the far right we are also in the early stages of an opening to radical socialism of the sort we have not seen for two generations. Failure to grasp this means missing major possibilities for the rebirth of international socialism today. To get a picture of the opportunities for the Left, let's start with the two countries we have been looking at so far.

Last year, a Harvard University survey found that a majority of young people in the U.S. (ages 18-29) reject capitalism, with fully one-third of people in that age group stating they support socialism.¹⁴ Another survey showed that a clear majority of U.S. residents between 18 and 35 consider themselves to be “working class,” rather than middle class.¹⁵ In short, young people in the United States are highly class consciousness, have grave reservations about capitalism, and lean significantly toward socialism. It is these shifts in mass consciousness that drove the success of the Bernie Sanders campaign. And they are what explain the more than tripling of the membership of Democratic Socialists of America in 2016, to a figure now in excess of 20,000 members.¹⁶

Similar dynamics were on display in the French presidential campaign of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who ran under the banner of La France insoumise (France Untamed) and garnered seven million first round votes. Mélenchon campaigned openly and proudly as a left-wing socialist, attracting over 300,000 subscribers to his YouTube channel and over 900,000 Facebook followers. Both the socialist YouTube outlet, Osons Causer (Dare

to Discuss), whose founders are 30 years old and under, and the YouTube Marxist political commentator, Usul, endorsed Mélenchon. Discussing the significance of the campaign, Usul proclaimed, “A lot of young people are trying to discover Socialism. . . we’ve entered a phase when social movements will be more important, more structured, more radical. We’ll move from defense to attack.”¹⁷

Ruling classes have reason to fear that sentiment. Results of a huge 2017 survey found that a majority of European youth would “actively participate in a large-scale uprising” against those in power.¹⁸ And this growing spirit of revolt is by no means confined to Europe.

Looking beyond electoral politics, the United States has seen an inspiring growth of the Black Lives Matter movement against racist police violence, an upsurge of solidarity with the water protectors at Standing Rock, and mass feminist mobilizations against Trump that are carving out new spaces for a feminism that is working class, pro-queer, anti-racist and socialist.¹⁹

We see similar processes at work in the Canadian state.²⁰ From the Occupy protests, through the mass Québec student strikes of 2012 and 2015, from the Idle No More movement, led by indigenous women and youth,

Results of a huge 2017 survey found that a majority of European youth would “actively participate in a large-scale uprising” against those in power.



Greek poster



Black Lives Matter demonstrate in Toronto, July 2015

JALANI MORGAN

to the Black Lives Matter struggles in cities like Toronto, Halifax and Vancouver, which have garnered significant anti-racist successes, there is an insurgent spirit of radical resistance.

Let's take the case of Toronto, the city in which I am politically active. Over the past two years, Black Lives Matter Toronto has won victories to bar cops from the annual Pride parade, and to force school board officials to address discrimination toward black students. Similarly, the inauguration of Donald Trump as U.S. president was greeted by a women's march of 50,000, followed by a rally against White Supremacy and Islamophobia attended by 12,000. Early 2017 also saw important strike victories of predominantly female and racialized low-wage food service workers in Toronto, significantly supported by the Fight for \$15 and Fairness campaign, and driven by militant picket lines, solidarity rallies and demonstrations. Mobilizing in a more insurgent fashion than most unions have in recent years, these workers won their demand for a \$15 basic wage, along with other gains.²¹ Furthermore, these striking workers were obviously in synch with the sentiments of huge numbers of working class people in the city, as a survey around the same time showed that 70 percent of people in Toronto support raising the minimum wage to \$15.²²

The resurgence of mass resistance is also a phenomenon of the Global South. From the mass strikes in Guadeloupe and Martinique in 2009 to the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East in 2011, political upheavals in the South are often considerably more spirited and militant than those in the North. Three quite recent examples stand out in this regard.

In September 2016, India saw the largest general strike in history, with 180 million workers walking off the job. Led by public sector workers, the strike came after years of neoliberal restructuring, austerity, and the growth of far right movements. Equally significant, the mass strike drew in layers of workers who are not part of the public service, demonstrating a widespread desire to be part of a union-led protest against poverty. After years of retreats for labor and the Left, the Indian general strike represents an opening toward “a New New Left.”²³

More recently, Brazil has experienced its first general strike in over two decades. The strike erupted out of resistance to attacks on pensions and social security benefits. But underlying it was a deep-rooted hostility toward a political system mired in corruption – Brazil’s President, House Speaker, Senate President and nine government ministers are all being investigated for bribery and money laundering. Opposition to austerity and anger about a thoroughly corrupt political elite converged to produce an immense shut-down of schools, airports and roads.²⁴

Finally, let’s celebrate the terrific victory of the people of French Guiana, a former slave colony and still a colonial outpost of France. A militant campaign of strikes, blockades, and street rallies in early 2017 won a package of reforms that includes 3.2 billion Euros of social investment, an enormous sum in a country of 250,000 people. This inspiring struggle carried echoes of the equally victorious insurgency of the mass uprisings of 2009 in Guadeloupe and Martinique.²⁵

What kind of Left? What kind of Socialism?

IF IT IS TRUE THAT THERE ARE NEW OPENINGS FOR THE RADICAL Left of the sort we have not seen in decades, then this imposes enormous responsibilities on socialists today. It is our duty to create a New Left for the 21st century that can become a pole of attraction for thousands of people looking for an alternative to capitalism and austerity. Such a New Left will have to be democratic, mass-based, steeped in anti-oppression, and overflowing with creativity and imagination. It will need to retain crucial insights and lessons from past struggles while fearlessly engaging with unprecedented challenges that require new analyses and strategies. And it will have to develop the capacities to broaden out, lend coherence to, and politicize day to day struggles in communities and workplaces, while fostering dynamic and democratic organizations. This, of course, has not always been the norm in progressive politics.

In fact, if we look at the upsurge of the last New Left of the 1960s and 1970s, we can see both how quickly anti-capitalist politics can move forward and how costly unhealthy political traditions and practices can be.

It is our duty to create a New Left that can become a pole of attraction for thousands of people looking for an alternative to capitalism and austerity. Such a New Left will have to be democratic, mass-based, steeped in anti-oppression, and overflowing with creativity and imagination.

**The Black
Freedom
Movement was
the pace-setter
for this revival of
the Left.**

The political radicalization in the U.S. at the time was spearheaded by the Black Civil Rights movement, the campaign against the U.S. war in Vietnam, and the eruption of Black Power, Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation movements.²⁶ The Black Freedom Movement was the pace-setter for this revival of the Left, mobilizing hundreds of thousands through Civil Rights actions, and rocking the wider society as 300 urban rebellions in African-American communities exploded between 1964 and 1968. On the level of political ideas, the formation of the Black Panther Party in Oakland in 1966 brought black power, anti-imperialism and socialism together in a way that electrified a generation. Accompanying these social movements was an upsurge of workplace militancy and unofficial wildcat strikes by young workers and workers of color in particular.²⁷ Detroit's auto plants became a center-point of this working class rebellion with the emergence of the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) in the late 1960s alongside the city-wide League of Revolutionary Black Workers.²⁸

So powerful was this radicalization that by 1968 one million students in the U.S. described themselves as "part of the left," and over 350,000 "strongly agreed" on the "need for a mass revolutionary party." This was the context for the explosive growth of the radical Students for a Democratic Society between the fall of 1967 and November of the following year, when it grew from 30,000 to 100,000 members. Two years later, on May 10, 1970, four million students and 350,000 university teachers joined a national strike against the war in Vietnam. Meanwhile, revolutionary groups were growing rapidly among Puerto Ricans and Chicanos in the U.S. and among indigenous peoples, for whom the American Indian Movement (AIM) led the way. In this political environment, a 1970 survey found that four out of ten college and university students – a total of three million people – declared that a revolution was necessary in the United States.²⁹

Similar processes were afoot in the Canadian state. Throughout the 1960s, groups like the Student Union for Peace Action built an influential anti-war current, particularly on campuses. By 1969, a significant left stream (the "Waffle group") had emerged in the New Democratic Party, putting discussions of socialism and anti-imperialism back on the agenda. That year also saw the crystallization of a distinctive socialist-feminist current in the Canadian state with the publication of a seminal essay by Margaret Benston that influenced a whole generation of activists.³⁰ Meanwhile, the Red Power movement was gathering steam with caravans and occupations that galvanized indigenous discontent. Simultaneously, rapidly growing labor militancy in Québec gave rise in 1972 to the largest general strike in North America to that point, featuring workplace occupations, the seizure of radio stations and short-lived takeovers of whole towns.³¹ By that time, tens of thousands of activists across the Canadian state identified

themselves with revolutionary socialism.

In countries such as Pakistan, Italy and France, even larger new lefts, with greater influence among organized workers, had emerged – often on such a scale that they could play central roles in general strikes and explosive mass movements.³² And in Vietnam, a national liberation movement was capable by 1968 of seizing the U.S. embassy in Saigon in a struggle that would eventually drive out America’s occupying army.

By 1970, then, a New Left had emerged on a mass scale for the first time since the 1940s. Talk of anti-imperialism, socialism and revolution captivated hundreds of thousands of people. The New Left had already made a decisive impact on public attitudes concerning the Vietnam War – and it looked positioned to become a new force in political life. Thousands of its activists had years of experience organizing civil rights and anti-war struggles. They had extensive connections in communities, on campuses, and to a growing degree in workplaces and unions. They may not have yet been a mass force; but they were capable at times of a mass influence.

Five years later, the American New Left was in crisis, following the turn, particularly after 1970, of thousands of its activists toward “party building” campaigns informed by the pro-China doctrine often known as Maoism. Adherents of this perspective, frequently dubbed the “New Communist Movement” (NCM), sought to build tightly disciplined parties of revolution in the United States (a similar process, strongest in Québec, also took place in the Canadian state). Yet, for all their laudable commitment to changing the world, the politics of these groups were deeply authoritarian, their practices typically undemocratic, and their loyalty to China utterly disabling, in some ways more so than slavish devotion to Russia had been for an earlier generation.³³

Crises within the New Communist Movement started with the 1972 invitation from China’s leaders to have U.S. President Richard Nixon visit their country. Nixon received the red carpet treatment and professions of friendship from China’s officials at the very moment he was escalating American bombing in Indochina. In disgust, the first wave of defections from NCM groups took place. Four years later, a month after the death of Mao Zedong, his supporters within the Chinese state, known as “the Gang of Four,” were purged from power and eventually subjected to state trials. In their place stood leaders who had once been condemned as “capitalist roaders.” This was the beginning of China’s shift toward the “market reforms” and privatizing policies that have prevailed for the last four decades. In this context, “Maoists” – whose loyalties to China as the center of world revolution were frequently as devotional as those of Stalinists toward Russia in the 1930s and 1940s – were thrown into turmoil. Organizations fractured, members defected, and ugly internal struggles destroyed a number of groups.³⁴

By 1970, a New Left had emerged on a mass scale for the first time since the 1940s.

Socialist politics that are authoritarian, sectarian and undemocratic are not going to be able to build and sustain a vibrant and growing Left.

Among the most insightful commentators on the collapse of the New Communist groups is Max Elbaum, who was himself a Maoist militant. In his history of the NCM in the United States, Elbaum observes, “the movement did not prove capable of turning its initial momentum into long-term growth in numbers, influence and internal cohesion. . . . Instead, over time sectarianism, unrealistic strategies and tactics, and anti-democratic tactics sapped cadre morale, repelled potential supporters and allies, and produced numerous organizational splits.”³⁵

What the collapse of the New Left in the United States highlights is the importance of the quality of the socialist politics around which a New Left coheres. Socialist politics that are authoritarian, sectarian and undemocratic are not going to be able to build and sustain a vibrant and growing Left. For this reason, sorting out the distinction between socialism from below as opposed to socialism from above becomes crucial.

Socialism from Below: Principles and Practices

IN A SEMINAL ESSAY FIFTY YEARS AGO, HAL DRAPER ARGUED THAT the socialist movement has always had two main currents, one elitist, one emancipatory. The elitist tradition, or socialism from above, holds that socialism must be “handed down to the grateful masses . . . by a ruling elite which is not subject to their control.” Socialism from above focuses on professional politicians, state elites, and self-styled leaders as the agents that confer favors on an adoring people. Such politics tend to be bureaucratic to the core, looking to state officials, professional politicians and privileged, full-time labor leaders – not oppressed people themselves – as possessing the power to change society.

The emancipatory tradition of socialism from below, in contrast, argues that “socialism can only be achieved through the self-emancipation of activated masses in motion, reaching out for freedom with their own hands, mobilized ‘from below’ in a struggle to take charge of their own destiny.”³⁶ Draper’s definition derives directly from Marx’s famous statement of 1864 that “the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the workers themselves.”³⁷ This principle of workers’ self-emancipation is the foundational concept in Marx’s socialism. It is built on the conviction that revolutionary socialism must be democratic to its core: both in terms of the *means* of achieving socialism – mass mobilization of the oppressed taking power into their own hands – and in its *ends* – the construction of new forms of mass, participatory democracy that extend into communities, schools and places of work. Socialism and radical, participatory democracy are thus inseparable, two sides of the same coin. Socialism is not about state control of life, therefore, but about the expansion of human freedom.

Indeed, in his early writings, Marx was outspoken about the fact that authentic communism was not about the state or the community taking over all property and employing all workers at equal wages. Rather than getting rid of capitalism, this would merely change its form. Rather than workers being dominated by individual capitalists, now society or the state would “be conceived as an abstract capitalist,” or, as he put it some pages later, as the “universal capitalist.”³⁸ Marx thus rejected variants of “socialism” that pursued state control over the economy but left workers alienated, disempowered, and controlled from above. In contrast, his socialism from below pivoted on democracy and human freedom.

One of the clearest enunciations of this democratic and anti-statist socialism is found in the following 1847 passage from a journal founded by Marx and his lifelong collaborator, Frederick Engels:

*We are not among those communists who are out to destroy personal liberty, who would wish to turn the world into one huge barrack or a gigantic workhouse. There certainly are some communists who, with an easy conscience, refuse to countenance personal liberty and would like to shuffle it out of the world . . . We are convinced that in no social order will personal freedom be so assured as in a society of communal ownership.*³⁹

We know well today that there have been “socialist” states which set out to “destroy personal liberty.” One need only think of the police-state regimes of Joseph Stalin in Russia from the late 1920s onward, or of the hereditary dictatorship of North Korea today.⁴⁰ These are dictatorial and repressive one-party states that lack any elements of socialist workers



**There is no democracy without Socialism and No
Socialism without Democracy**

(Rosa Luxemburg)

democracy. They are characterized by political repression, secret police, concentration camps and the denial of fundamental freedoms, including independent unions and workers' right to strike. In Marx's terms – that is to say, in the terms of socialism from below – there is nothing socialist about them.

It is common to refer to regimes like that of North Korea as *Stalinist*, because the prototype of a repressive one-party state that calls itself “socialist” was established in Russia after the destruction of the workers' revolution of 1917 and the rise of Stalin's dictatorship.⁴¹ Under Stalin, the Soviet Union established a command economy controlled by unaccountable bureaucrats prepared to use ruthless state terror against workers, peasants and oppressed nationalities.⁴² The Stalinist regime also enforced patriarchal power over women, and virulently repressed LGBTQ people.

The identification of socialism with murderous police-state regimes has done terrible damage to the Left internationally. And such damage continues to be done today by those leftists who embrace dictators like Vladimir Putin in Russia and Bashar al-Assad in Syria.⁴³ Perhaps the most distressing recent case of “leftist” embrace of dictators is that of former-socialist James Petras who, after having supported both Putin and Assad, then endorsed a vote for the fascist candidate Marine Le Pen of the National Front in the 2017 French elections.

It is fair to say that movements which embrace Stalinist-style politics are highly unlikely to win over masses of working class people. If there is to be a future for socialism today, it will be one based on the democratic and emancipatory tradition of socialism from below. For that reason, it is worth saying a bit more about the political legacy of workers' self-emancipation. This involves, first, looking at its inheritances from the past and, secondly, grappling with its agenda for the future.

Karl Marx, noted Draper, “was the first socialist thinker and leader who came to socialism *through* the struggle for liberal democracy.”⁴⁴ The young Marx was a radical democrat who turned to socialism once he realized that true democracy – rule by the people – was not possible in a society in which wealth was massively concentrated in private hands and fenced off by law and police powers from democratic control by the people. If people have no right to govern the vast riches of society – land, factories, mines, farms, machines, research laboratories and so on – or to decide how they are to be used to make life better for all, and if they are denied all control over the work they do and the goods and services they produce, then genuine democracy is not possible.

In capitalist society, the vast majority – the working class – are dispossessed of wealth and of democratic power, deprived of control over the economic means of life and the state. Part of Marx's profound insight was

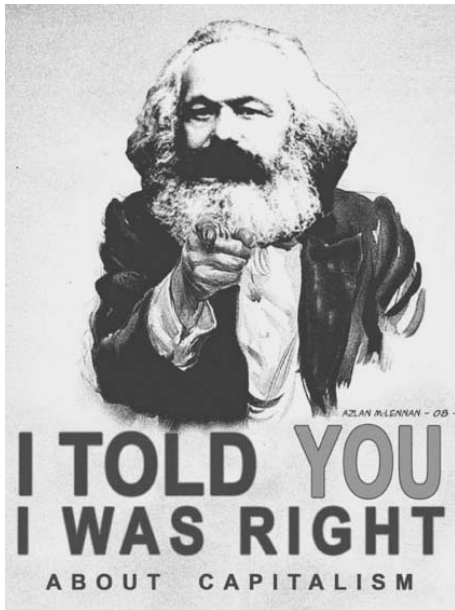


Paris Commune

ADAM GOPNIK/NEW YORKER

to recognize that both forms of disempowerment work together – and have to be overcome together. This is why he urged that genuinely radical grassroots democracy would only be possible in a society based on communal ownership of social wealth.

In 1871, Marx witnessed the first workers' government in world history, the short-lived Paris Commune. While he had doubts about the wisdom of workers in Paris trying to take over political power at that moment, Marx immediately rallied to their defense. More than this, he celebrated the forms of direct democracy the Communards had created, particularly the establishment of delegate democracy with the right of workers to recall their elected representatives, the stipulation that all delegates would earn the average workers' wage, and the abolition of the standing army (replaced by workers militias). Marx realized that the workers of Paris had created a kind of state that was not really a state, a "Commune state" in which decision-making power was being exercised on grassroots scales and, where larger scales were necessary, according to delegate democracy. The labor-



ing people of Paris had shown, he wrote, that workers would have to dismantle state bureaucracies, not take them over, if they were to emancipate themselves.⁴⁵ The direct democracy of the Commune, he suggested, represented “the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour.”⁴⁶

The emancipation of labor meant, of course, the liberation of the entire working class. For this reason, Marx insisted that unions could not afford to represent only one section of workers, be they male, English, or better-paid. Instead, they needed to rally around the lowest-paid and most oppressed workers to insure that the socialist movement would truly involve the emancipation of all. In this spirit, as delegates were preparing for a congress of the International Workingmen’s Association (IWA), Marx offered them the following crucial guidelines:

Apart from their original purposes, [unions] must now learn to act deliberately as organising centres of the working class in the broad interest of its complete emancipation. They must aid every social and political movement tending in that direction. Considering themselves and acting as the champions and representatives of the whole working class, they cannot fail to enlist the non-society people [i.e. the excluded – DM] into their ranks. They must look carefully after the interests of the worst paid trades, such as the agricultural labourers, rendered powerless by exceptional circumstances. They must convince the world at large that their efforts, far from being narrow and selfish, aim at the emancipation of the downtrodden millions.⁴⁷

In this vein, Marx supported the inclusion of women in unions and in the International itself, criticizing the IWA’s English and French sections for their “marked narrowness of spirit” in this regard.⁴⁸ Similarly, Marx’s daughter, Eleanor, was a central agitator and organizer for the strikes of low-paid women and Jewish and Irish workers in London’s East Side during the late 1880s.⁴⁹ The American section of the IWA came in for special praise from Marx for its active campaigning to abolish slavery in the U.S. as well as its enthusiasm for organizing women into the movement. Indicative of all this, in 1871, in a tribute to the martyrs of the Paris Commune, the American section of the IWA led a demonstration of 70,000 people in New York that included a black militia, women-led branches of the IWA, an Irish band, advocates of Cuba’s struggle for independence, and many other currents within the radical workers’ movement of the time.⁵⁰

Socialism from Below after Marx

IN THE DECADES AFTER MARX'S DEATH, EUROPEAN SOCIALISM lost much of this radical spirit. Gradually, it became dominated by professional politicians of labor parties and full-time trade union functionaries. It began to operate as a movement of reform within capitalism, rather than liberation from it. Today, we refer to such currents as social-democratic or reformist. These are also variants of socialism from above, though they rarely even use the term socialism any more.

Across these decades, however, a few compelling voices rang out against the watering down of socialism. Perhaps the most eloquent of these belonged to the Polish-German revolutionary, Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919). In the face of the growth of parliamentarism – the idea that the road to socialism lay through parliamentary elections – Luxemburg insisted on the crucial role of mass strikes in teaching the working class its own power to take over society.⁵¹ More powerfully than any of her contemporaries, Luxemburg held to Marx's principle of working class self-emancipation. And like Marx, she proclaimed that socialist democracy is the heart and soul of revolutionary socialism. In an urgent argument after the Russian Revolution of 1917, she wrote,

*... socialist democracy is not something which begins only in the promised land after the foundations of economy are created; it does not come as some sort of Christmas present for the worthy people who, in the interim, have loyally supported a handful of socialist dictators. Socialist democracy begins simultaneously with the destruction of class rule and of the construction of socialism.*⁵²

The first few years of the revolution in Russia embodied much of this spirit. It is often forgotten just how democratic the revolution was in its early years. The October Revolution brought together two sets of demands. First, it expressed the social demands for “Bread, Peace and Land”—elimination of hunger and poverty, an end to the world war, land to the peasant. Those demands came to converge with the political demand for “All Power to the Soviets,” that is, for a transfer of governmental power to the democratic councils of workers, soldiers, sailors and peasants (the Russia word soviet means “council”).⁵³ The political project of council power was anticipated in the famous booklet, *State and Revolution*, by the Russian revolutionary leader, Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924). In that work, published on the eve of the revolution, Lenin wrote, “To develop democracy to its *logical conclusion*, to find the *forms* for this development, to test them by practice and so forth – all of this is one of the fundamental tasks of the struggle for social revolution.”⁵⁴ The revolution of 1917 also made huge strides toward

More powerfully than any of her contemporaries, Luxemburg insisted on Marx's principle of working class self-emancipation. And like Marx, she proclaimed that socialist democracy is the heart and soul of revolutionary socialism.

freeing women, LGBTQ people and oppressed nationalities.⁵⁵

Tragically, the revolution in Russia was unable to sustain its initial promise. Civil war launched by the Tsar's generals, foreign invasions by 14 nations (including Canada), economic collapse – all of these terrible conditions undermined this experiment in working class democracy, and laid the basis for the rise of Stalin's dictatorship, under which a whole generation of revolutionary leaders were executed and workers' rights destroyed. From that time on, *anti-Stalinist* socialism assumed huge responsibilities for preserving the best traditions of the Marxist Left.

We will turn to discussing the anti-Stalinist Left shortly. Before doing so, it is crucial to highlight the hugely significant weaving together of contributions by Luxemburg and Lenin that took place on three key fronts. It is important to do so because the German synthesis of “Luxemburgism” and “Leninism” produced the first mass Communist Party outside Russia,



Rosa Luxemburg speaking at a rally.

one which claimed 350,000 members by the early 1920s. It is also vital because these positions are an indispensable inheritance for the Left today.

All of this transpired in the years immediately after the formation of the Communist Party of Germany at the beginning of January 1919. The young party went through a devastating trauma two weeks later when its outstanding leader, Rosa Luxemburg, was murdered along with her comrade, Karl Liebknecht, the great Marxist anti-war agitator. Luxemburg's legacy was taken up by her protégé, Paul Levi, and her decades-long friend, the Marxist-feminist, Clara Zetkin. They defended and developed three approaches that remain crucial for the radical Left today.

One of these has to do with consistent anti-colonial, anti-imperial politics. Lenin and Luxemburg had powerfully converged over questions of colonialism and imperialism, particularly in the years prior to and during the First World War. Luxemburg's 1913 book, *The Accumulation of Capital* developed an anti-imperialist analysis grounded in opposition to the expansionist logic of capitalism. Two years later, Lenin wrote *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Notwithstanding theoretical differences in the analyses presented, the two revolutionaries found considerable common ground in a resolute opposition to imperialism, something which sharply distinguished them from the dominant reformist socialism of the day. This perspective was acutely formulated in positions taken by the Communist International (the world body linking Communist parties from different countries) in the early 1920s. In 1922, for instance, that body declared, "The Communist International . . . gives its support to any national revolutionary movement against imperialism." Advocating "an anti-imperialist united front," it further urged the Left in countries like Canada, the United States and Australia to "conduct a vigorous campaign against restrictive immigration laws."⁵⁶ In this spirit, the International organized its famous 1920 Congress of the Peoples of the East, at which 2,000 delegates largely from movements of workers and peasants in Central and East Asia came together to declare war on colonialism and imperialism.⁵⁷ This internationalist and anti-imperialist perspective is a vital legacy for the Left today.

Secondly, under the influence of Zetkin and Levi, Bolshevik leaders in Russia, particularly Lenin and Leon Trotsky, were persuaded to support the call for working class united fronts – joint campaigns and movements of all progressive unions and parties – as crucial to demonstrating to workers in practice that a revolutionary struggle against capitalism is necessary. Starting from Marx's credo that the workers must emancipate themselves in their "immense majority," the united front approach highlighted the necessity for the oppressed to come to revolutionary conclusions through their own issues and experiences.⁵⁸ And this means starting from the immediate concerns of oppressed peoples – for a \$15 minimum wage, for an end to

Clara Zetkin, as Luxemburg's closest friend and comrade, pioneered a distinctively Marxist approach to women's liberation. It was Zetkin who first proposed that the socialist movement should celebrate March 8th as International Women's Day.

police carding of black youth, for serious policies against sexual assault, for rent control, and so on – and joining the struggles for those reforms, while also showing how these struggles point to the need for systemic change. Reflecting on this approach in the current moment, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor remarks, “The point isn’t to bury our arguments, but to learn how to make them in political arenas that are not just our own.”⁵⁹

Finally, Clara Zetkin, as Luxemburg's closest friend and comrade, pioneered a distinctively Marxist approach to women's liberation. It was Zetkin who first proposed that the socialist movement should celebrate March 8 as International Women's Day and she played an indispensable role in mobilizing working class women against the First World War.⁶⁰ After the Russian Revolution, Zetkin headed the International Women's Secretariat of the Communist International, calling for its parties to form “special bodies” for organizing women and their struggles, and insisting that “Communist work among women must not be women's business,” but instead the work of the whole organization.⁶¹ To Zetkin's work in this area we must add the inspiring practice of Bolshevik women like Inessa Armand and Alexandra Kollontai, who sought to make women's liberation an essential part of the Russian revolutionary movement.⁶²

Before turning to the anti-Stalinist Left of the Second World War and after, let me offer a few words on the enduring contributions of two enormous figures in the history of the socialist Left: Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) and Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). A few sentences will have to suffice for present purposes.

Trotsky is among the most controversial figures in the history of socialism, in large measure because of the campaign of denunciation waged against him by Stalin, one of whose agents murdered Trotsky in Mexico in 1940. Yet, after Lenin, Trotsky was the most exceptional leader of the 1917 revolution in Russia. In 1905, twelve years before the great revolution, the workers of St. Petersburg had elected him chairman of their short-lived soviet, a position to which he was again elected in 1917. Trotsky was also a key architect of the theory of permanent revolution, which delineated how a minority working class might take power in a country like Russia so long as it sought to extend the revolution beyond its borders.⁶³ Trotsky's opposition to Stalin, notwithstanding some real shortcomings, was immensely valuable in drawing a sharp line between Stalinism, on the one hand, and the legacies of Marx and Lenin, on the other. And his outpouring of writings analyzing German fascism and the need for a united front of workers' organizations against Hitler remains indispensable to this day. Unfortunately, many of his ostensible “heirs” turned Trotsky's writings into a timeless dogma, too often producing sterile politics – and the kinds of splits and divisions that go with them – incapable of understanding changed cir-

cumstances. But this should not tarnish Trotsky's historical significance.⁶⁴

Today there is no more widely cited Marxist writer than Antonio Gramsci. This has something to do with the sheer brilliance of his writings. Recognizing that the Russian pattern of a short cycle of struggle (February to October 1917) leading to a workers' seizure of power was unlikely to be repeated in the West, Gramsci developed the concept of "the war of maneuver." In the terms of this concept, revolutionary movements would have to prepare for years, even decades, of accumulating organizational capacities and cultural and political influence within the existing society. Gramsci still believed that a revolutionary overthrow of capitalist power would be necessary. Indeed, his experience with the factory council movement in Turin (1919-21) installed workers' self-emancipation at the heart of his political vision. But Gramsci also believed that mass socialist parties could only be built if they developed a long-term capacity to "maneuver" (and accumulate forces) across the complex political and cultural terrain of western capitalism. He further believed that this meant nurturing a rooted network of "organic intellectuals" among the working class – sometimes described as "democratic philosophers" – who could assist their fellow workers in developing an oppositional worldview.⁶⁵ The revolutionary party would thus be a laboratory of "mass intellectuality" – a site for the cultivation of an oppositional worldview constructed out of a dialogue between workers' experience and revolutionary ideas.⁶⁶



Clara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg.

Unforgiving Years: Socialism from Below before the New Left of the 1960s

Within the story
of this battered
anti-Stalinist Left,
one exceptional
figure who stands
out is the great
Trinidadian
Marxist, C.L.R.
James.

GRAMSCI DIED SHORTLY AFTER HIS RELEASE FROM A FASCIST prison in 1937. Trotsky was murdered by an agent of Stalin three years later. This was a frighteningly bleak period for revolutionary socialism. The dream of workers' democracy had died in the Soviet Union, and fascism was annihilating workers and the socialist Left across Europe. The great anti-colonial upsurges of the late 1940s and 1950s, which contributed mightily to the emergence of the New Left of the 1960s, were still many years in the future. In this context, activists committed to socialism from below were isolated and beleaguered. For lonely groups and individuals in such circumstances to have preserved basic Marxist ideas of socialist democracy and revolution from below was an inestimable achievement. Social marginalization often produced unhealthy habits in many small anti-Stalinist groups. But their activists performed the great service of sustaining vital elements of socialism's liberatory traditions.

Within the story of this battered anti-Stalinist Left, one figure who especially stands out is the great Trinidadian Marxist, C.L.R. James (1901-1989). James came to socialism and Marxism in the 1930s while living in England and quickly moved into the leadership of the Marxist Group, a Trotskyist circle. Equally crucial, James rallied at the same time to fervent anti-colonial politics. With a number of other radical black intellectuals, he founded a group in 1935 that soon evolved into the International African Service Bureau, which agitated against imperialist incursions in Africa, including fascist Italy's invasion of Ethiopia.⁶⁷

James' first major political work was *World Revolution, 1917-1936*, which traced the story of the upsurge of the international Left that rallied around the Russian Revolution and its almost complete destruction by Stalinism. But he was soon feverishly at work on the most influential of all his books, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938). Here, James offered a Marxist interpretation of the great slave revolution in Haiti (1791-1804) which abolished slavery and established an independent black republic in the Americas. This monumental work reinstated self-liberating slaves as agents of revolution. It challenged the idea that Europe alone was the center of revolutionary action. And, as a kind of commentary on the world of the 20th century, it showed how utterly interconnected were struggles of the oppressed in Europe and the colonial world at the time. James followed this work with a pioneering essay on black revolts in the modern age, republished today as *A History of Pan-African Revolt*. This emphasis on the revolutionary capacities of African peoples carried over into his work within the Trotskyist movement in the

United States (where he lived from 1938 until his deportation to England in 1953). Inside that movement, James fought to assert the absolute centrality of the black freedom struggle to the movement for socialism in America. In one powerful article from 1948, he argued,

We say, number one, that the Negro struggle, the independent Negro struggle, has a vitality and a validity of its own . . .

We say, number two, that this independent Negro movement is able to intervene with terrific force upon the general social and political life of the nation, despite the fact that it is waged under the banner of democratic rights, and is not led necessarily either by the organized labor movement or the Marxist party.

We say, number three, and this is the most important, that it is able to exercise a powerful influence upon the revolutionary proletariat, that it has got a great contribution to make to the development of the proletariat in the United States, and that it is in itself a constituent part of the struggle for socialism.

In this way we challenge directly any attempt to subordinate or to push to the rear the social and political significance of the independent Negro struggle for democratic rights.⁶⁸

James' potent legacy of anti-racist Marxism was a vital resource for New Left activists in the 1970s, particularly in the Caribbean, North America and Britain. James' work affected the Trotskyists who collaborated with Malcolm X during the last year of his life (1964-65). And he directly influenced major political figures like the anti-imperialist historian Walter Rodney who went on to form the Working Peoples Alliance in Guyana. James' Marxism also had a distinctively cultural and artistic bent; he wrote extensively on everything from Shakespeare to cricket. This expressed his conviction that socialism must speak to every facet of human life if it is to be an authentic mass movement for freedom. The people of a liberated society will create something more human than ever before. But they will be assisted in this by reclaiming cultural creations from the past in order to make a better, more humane future.

Like every revolutionary figure, James made errors of judgement and analysis. But there can be no doubt that his politics remained fundamentally rooted in the tradition of socialism from below. To begin with, he was among a pioneering group of anti-Stalinist Marxists who developed the idea that the Soviet Union under Stalin represented a form of *state capitalism*.⁶⁹ This allowed them to carve out a revolutionary politics independent of both Washington and Moscow. More than this, James habitually highlighted the democratic core of genuine socialism. We see this in his wonderful pam-



CLR James

STEVE PYKE

James' Marxism also had a distinctively cultural and artistic bent; he wrote extensively on everything from Shakespeare to cricket.

phlet on ancient Greek democracy, *Every Cook Can Govern* (1956), and in his declaration from the same period that, “The struggle for socialism is the struggle for proletarian democracy. Proletarian democracy is not the crown of socialism. Socialism is the result of proletarian democracy.”⁷⁰

Socialism from Below Today: New Directions

(P)olitical memory is necessary, and it is all the more necessary for the oppressed, who do not have the same institutions to perpetuate memory as the ruling classes do.

Daniel Bensaid

KNOWING OUR BEST TRADITIONS FROM THE PAST IS AN ESSENTIAL part of building a movement for the future. As Daniel Bensaid once put it, “political memory is necessary, and it is all the more necessary for the oppressed, who do not have the same institutions to perpetuate memory as the ruling classes do.”⁷¹ The dominant classes readily use government institutions, schools, public broadcasting, national holidays, flags, money, and the names of cities, towns, streets and monuments to transmit their stories. They create a national narrative that revolves around heads of state and colonizers – rather than indigenous leaders, anti-slavery agitators, or women union activists. One purpose of traditions of the oppressed is to “brush history against the grain,” as Walter Benjamin put it, so that we can see a counter-story of struggle and resistance from below. This pamphlet is meant as a contribution to that task.

But, as Alan Sears has noted, as much as it needs to avoid amnesia, the socialist Left must also steer clear of nostalgia, of romanticizing great struggles from the past (or the activists who embody them) to the point of imagining all we need is to repeat what they did – as if our struggles under very different circumstances today can be mechanically guided by a handbook of lessons from the past. We *do* need to preserve lessons from the past. But these must be part of a living tradition that develops in dynamic interaction with the exploration of new theories and practices that speak to the challenges of today and tomorrow. In that spirit, Sears writes,

*The world of the twenty-first century is neither identical to that of the 1940s and 1960s, nor completely new; it is still defined by the fundamental social relations of capitalism, and our mapping of it can still benefit from insights into the historical dynamics of the system, vitally including an integrative analysis of racialization, gender, colonialism, sexualities and ecological destruction.*⁷²

The last part of this passage gestures to an important part of our agenda for the future. There are major changes in neoliberalism capitalism – in work, domestic life, racialization, technologies of communication, gender and sexuality, forms of cultural experience, and so on – that need to be grasped, especially in terms of their implications for organizing and movement-building. Central to many of these issues are the historically evolving

forms of social oppression that shape and define capitalism today.

By social oppression, I refer to specific relations of domination – based on gender, race, sexuality, ability, national identity – that are interconnected with the relations of class exploitation that affect all workers. Rather than something separate from class, relations of sexuality, race, gender and ability are historically constitutive of class relations – they are part of its internal makeup. As Himani Bannerji puts it, “‘race’ cannot be disarticulated from ‘class’ any more than milk can be separated from coffee once they are mixed, or the body divorced from consciousness in a living person.”⁷³

It follows that racism – like sexism, homophobia, ableism or transphobia – is a social relation of power and oppression. Understood as social relations, these oppressions are not only about individual attitudes. They are also (and fundamentally) about *systemic* injustices and discriminations – in employment, income, education, housing, treatment by police and the state, physical safety, and in overall quality of life (and frequently quantity too). Of course, there is a kind of “internal violence” that comes with such oppressive relations – the cultivation of a sense of inferiority that too often accompanies social degradation. But these “subjective” dimensions are not separable from the socially systemic relations of subordination.

Some socialisms – particularly socialisms from above – have been dismissive of struggles around issues of specific oppressions. Those subscrib-



ing to a class reductionist stance, which reduces everything to a narrowly economic notion of class exploitation, have in fact frequently been hostile to feminist, queer, disability and anti-racist movements as “divisive” since they don’t speak to the immediate concerns of *all* workers. This, however, is to forget Marx’s injunction that the workers’ organizations “must now learn to act deliberately as organising centres of the working class in the broad interest of its complete emancipation. They must aid every social and political movement tending in that direction. Considering themselves and acting as the champions and representatives of the whole working class, they cannot fail to enlist the non-society people [i.e. the excluded – DM] into their ranks.” From this principle it follows that support for “every social and political movement” against the specific oppressions of the most precarious workers is the responsibility of all workers.

Indeed, we have already seen Clara Zetkin argue that revolutionary parties must mobilize all their members against women’s oppression, rather than treating this as merely “women’s business.” And we have observed C.L.R. James criticize any tendency for socialist groups “to subordinate or to push to the rear” the independent struggle of African-Americans for their liberation.

To these important legacies we need to add compelling lessons from the New Left of the 1960s and 1970s. This New Left was decisively shaped by anti-colonial struggles, particularly in Cuba and Vietnam, and by the black freedom movement in the United States. Figures like Malcolm X and Fannie Lou Hamer, and groups like the Black Panther Party and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers had a massive impact on the formation of radicals at the time. Similarly, the emergence of the American Indian Movement and the original Gay Liberation Front put indigenous self-determination and queer liberation on leftist agendas. This period also saw the appearance of a new Marxist feminism which ran alongside a black working class feminism, both of whose contributions were considerable.

Many of these legacies were eclipsed during the period of neoliberalism, as radical and socialist movements disintegrated and militant mass struggle receded. The re-emergence of mass movements today provides a moment of return to the best work from these earlier periods. Black feminist work is being re-read and reclaimed today as movements like Black Lives Matter make their mark.⁷⁴ Especially welcome in this regard is the recovery of “A Black Feminist Statement” issued by the Boston-based Combahee River Collective in 1977. Setting out a program for socialist politics grounded in anti-oppression struggles, the Collective members wrote, “We are socialists . . . We are not convinced, however, that a socialist revolution that is not also a feminist and anti-racist revolution will guarantee our liberation.”⁷⁵ In the same spirit, we can celebrate the reclaiming of Angela Davis’ *Women*,

Race and Class, a classic of anti-racist, feminist Marxism. Equally inspiring is the re-learning of anti-colonial traditions of the Left as a new and exciting Marxist-Indigenous dialogue emerges, something which is especially pertinent for socialists in a colonial-settler state like Canada.⁷⁶ Alongside these developments, novel historical materialist analyses of sexual oppression under capitalism are also contributing hugely to a “queering” of Marxism that can advance an anti-capitalist politics of sexual liberation.⁷⁷

Finally, it is crucial to acknowledge the trailblazing work being done to produce a “Green Marxism” and an eco-socialist politics. Eco-socialists have rightly shown how ecological sustainability is not compatible with capitalism’s drive for endless accumulation. The latter results in treating the natural environment, just like the vast majority of people, as mere things to be exploited for private profit. So long as production is organized for corporate profit, rather than human needs, including the need for a healthy, sustainable environment, our planet will continue to experience destruction of the “web of life.”⁷⁸

A genuine socialism from below must be capable of incorporating and deepening the best analyses and practices of struggle from the quarters described above. Socialism from below today must be anti-racist, pro-queer, feminist and eco-socialist to its core.

Identity, Diversity and Justice

AND HERE WE NEED TO TOUCH ON THE THORNY ISSUE OF IDENTITY politics. In the mainstream media and beyond, “identity politics” is frequently a catch-all phrase meant to discredit any and all opposition to specific forms of oppression. For this reason, radical socialists often have an obligation to defend activists who are being denounced for their politics of identity. At the same time, there is another dimension to identity politics about which we need to be critical.

This has to do with the idea, developed during the neoliberal era of the past four decades, that social oppression is primarily subjective, deriving from attitudes of those outside the oppressed group. As Sandew Hira has written, when applied to racial injustice this sort of approach produces a subjectivist account of white privilege that “individualizes racism.” This type of analysis ignores or downplays the *socially systemic* features of racial oppression by turning “white privilege” into a set of assets that white people use for their benefit. The consequence is a theory of privilege focussed “on the level of superficial interaction between individuals,” and which has nothing to say “in the field of institutional racism.” Hira continues, “What happens if you turn racism and injustice . . . into a privilege of white people? Now the struggle is about an appeal to the morality and consciousness of

**Eco-socialists
have rightly
shown how
ecological
sustainability is
not compatible
with capitalism’s
drive for endless
accumulation.
profit.**

white people to please give up their privilege rather than an appeal to fight institutional racism.”⁷⁹

This is not to suggest that people from groups that have higher social status should not critically reflect on the way their social location has been formed, or learn how to listen to voices from groups that have been historically marginalized. This kind of work is in fact crucial to effective solidarity. However, as Salar Mohandesi has argued, we need to be highly wary of the tendency of subjectivist kinds of identity politics to make guilt-tripping into a political practice and strategy. Rather than challenging members of higher status groups to critically understand their social history and what they have to gain in a struggle against all forms of oppression – and building movements in that spirit – this approach has “effectively reduced activism to self-flagellation, politics to moralism.” And, like Hira, he notes that white radicals who promote these politics have taken the history of racism and “recentered the story on themselves.”⁸⁰

In fact, an individualized sort of identity politics has proved easily co-optable by elites.⁸¹ Those at the top of corporations, universities, government departments, banks and so on have proved adept at devising policies of *diversity* management as an alternative to attacking systemic forms of discrimination. This practice involves producing pro-diversity statements and promoting a few women or people of color into higher positions while leaving systemic injustice intact. As Angela Davis insists, “diversity is difference that makes no difference at all.” And she adds, “I have a hard time accepting diversity as a synonym for justice.”⁸² A bit of diversity management, after all, does nothing to raise the racialized poor out of poverty. It does not improve their housing and provide better schools for children from oppressed groups. In the same vein, Chicago labor organizer R. L. Stephens explains,

For millions of poor Black people, racism is the corrosive water pipes poisoning their bodies. School closures, crumbling and unstable housing, and all the intimately practical things necessary for everyday life are the measure of racism. These racist realities are not separable from questions of class. In fact, they are expressions of class politics.

For this reason,

*Solidarity from below, between cafeteria workers, truck drivers, secretaries, and any number of everyday people is worth magnitudes more than special acknowledgement from elites.*⁸³

Of course, all of this means breaking with the idea that industrial white male workers are the working class. The working class is multi-racial, gender diverse, and multi-national. And it is global, with the largest working

classes today being found throughout the Global South. Its emancipation must involve mass struggles against every form of oppression that demeans and degrades any group of workers anywhere. Socialism from below means the self-emancipation of all the oppressed, fuelled by the uprisings of those at the bottom. There is no other road to human freedom.

Organizing for Socialism Today

THERE IS NO EFFECTIVE SOCIALIST POLITICS WITHOUT organization. Even the transmission of ideas requires collective efforts of discussing, writing, publishing and disseminating. Without such work, we cannot achieve the clarity of ideas – the collective memory of analysis and history – essential to any revolutionary movement.⁸⁴ But ideas are merely one side of the coin; they become something living only in their contact with real struggle and action. And if history has taught us anything it is that, for the oppressed, effective struggle must be collective, which requires



Paris protest against racism and police violence.

While small socialist groups can play a constructive role, as some have throughout history, they must work to immunize themselves against fanatical and sectarian habits and practices.

organized activity of groups, eventually masses, of people.

Today, of course, the politics of socialism from below are not embodied in mass movements in most of the world. As a result, radical socialists are confronted with three key challenges: 1) to clarify and circulate revolutionary ideas that offer an alternative vision of society and ways of fighting in the here and now; 2) to find actual struggles in which to participate, both in order to introduce socialist politics to wider layers of people and, equally vital, to learn the art of being part of real movements – which means listening to others and learning from them; and 3) to pursue every meaningful opening for bringing wider layers of the Left into common actions and organizing efforts.

And here we must acknowledge an unhappy fact: many of the efforts of small socialist groups have a painfully self-important and sectarian character to them. It is all too easy for isolated groups to develop an inflated sense of who they are and what they represent, and to treat others on the Left as dangerous competitors, misleading or betraying the working class. Almost 50 years ago, British socialist Duncan Hallas warned against this. “It is idiotic,” he wrote, “to imagine that all that is necessary is to ‘build a new leadership’ around some sect or other and then offer it as an alternative to the waiting workers.”⁸⁵ While small socialist groups can play a constructive role, as some have throughout history, they must work to immunize themselves against fanatical and sectarian habits and practices. They must understand that no one political current has a monopoly on political truth, and that the mass socialist party of the future will involve a synthesis of multiple radical traditions.

If we look, for instance, at how Communist parties were formed in many parts of the world after the Russian Revolution, we find that they were typically a convergence of anarcho-syndicalists (from groups like the Industrial Workers of the World and the One Big Union), of left-wing Marxists from pre-World War One socialist parties, of left-wing feminists and anti-racists, of militant shop stewards, and others. Each current brought unique strengths (and weaknesses) to the project of building a revolutionary party. What the new political context after 1917 did was to create the urgent conditions for new syntheses of radical traditions in tune with the revolutionary spirit of 1917.

Today, however, most of the radical Left lacks the base in working class movements that pre-1917 radicals often had. That makes the serious work of learning to work in unions, social movements, community organizations, and so on especially important today. And *working* in is not the same thing as merely *showing up* at events with



leaflets and newspapers. Of course, socialist groups should publicize their ideas and analysis. But this can readily become self-enclosed if they are not in good faith becoming a real part of existing movements and campaigns.

With all these cautions in mind, we still need socialist organizations, particularly groups committed to a renewed (and renewing) socialism from below. And experience suggests that a group with this vision would be well served to embrace the following commitments.

First, it should stand proudly in the tradition of socialism from below revitalized through its immersion in anti-racism, feminism, LGBTQ liberation, anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism, and eco-socialism.

Second, it ought to build a culture of collective learning – creating vibrant and democratic spaces for political education and the development of ideas, analysis and strategies. In this way it can aspire to be a laboratory for the production of revolutionary knowledge.

Third, within its limited capacities, it ought to join movements and campaigns in which it can work in a sincere, non-sectarian fashion as dedicated movement-builders in order for members and supporters to learn the arts of grassroots organizing. Only in this way can it become an organization of organizers.

Fourth, it should seek out ways of sharing and debating ideas and experiences, via meetings, publications, videos and so on. Ideally, this will involve a dynamic two-way process, in which all involved learn from the way radical media and ideas are engaged with, contested, and supplemented by others.

Fifth, it ought to do everything it can to develop a vibrant culture of democratic discussion and debate. As Hallas wrote, “The self-education of militants is impossible in an atmosphere of sterile orthodoxy. Self-reliance and confidence in one’s ideas are developed in the course of that genuine debate that takes place in an atmosphere where differences are freely and openly argued. The ‘monolithic party’ is a Stalinist concept. Uniformity and democracy are mutually incompatible.”⁸⁶ Today, this commitment to an open and dynamic radical culture requires concerted attention to which voices are being heard in socialist discussions and debates so that we work to counter the power relations we have inherited from the society around us.

Sixth, supporters of socialism from below ought to practice constructive engagement with other forces on the Left. This does not mean papering over real and important differences. Toronto New Socialists, for instance, support the Syrian people in their struggles against the Assad dictatorship and we refuse to join in the pro-Assad (and pro-Putin) chorus that has disgraced parts of the Left. But, having said that, we work conscientiously with people with whom we disagree about Syria, whether it is in anti-racist organizing, in Palestine solidarity activism, or other areas. And wherever

**We still need
socialist
organizations,
particularly
groups
committed
to a renewed
(and renewing)
socialism from
below.**

A radical socialist group should try to embody the great slogan from the worker-student uprising in France in 1968, *All Power to the Imagination!*

possible, we promote regroupment of non-sectarian forces on the radical Left so that socialist politics might become a more effective presence in our society. The mass socialist movements of the future, as I have indicated, will involve a convergence of groups and activists from different radical currents – and this is something to be encouraged and celebrated.

Finally, a radical socialist group should try to embody the great slogan from the worker-student uprising in France in 1968, *All Power to the Imagination!* Too often today, socialist voices are full of clichés and antiquated slogans which have no resonance with the experience of most people. Without compromising basic principles we need to find fresh vocabularies, and artistic and cultural forms. We need to use new technologies, and to be unafraid of experimentation. Of course, novelty can become empty and faddish. But doing things the way they were done 50 or 100 years ago simply because that is what our predecessors did is contrary to our very understanding of history. If capitalism is a dynamic social system, and if its transformations induce major changes in work and life, then the socialist Left must regularly re-examine past practices to see if they suit changed conditions. And this puts a premium on creativity and imagination – none of which is possible without the encouragement of spirited discussion and debate I have urged above.

These seven suggestions are mere guidelines derived from experiences, both positive and negative, of socialist organizing. Guidelines are not a blueprint. They simply allow us to steer left toward a future yet to be written, and one that is sure to be full of surprises. They do not answer all questions, not even most questions. They are meant to embody elements of the historical memory we need to ask some of the right questions in a spirit of revolutionary inquiry and activity. They assist us in finding ways of organizing and building socialist forces today in anticipation of bigger events tomorrow.

And it is that which is ultimately vital – that we orient ourselves today on the mightier struggles ahead. As Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor puts it in discussing the U.S. case, “There are millions of people in this country who are now questioning everything. We need to open up our organizations, planning meetings, marches and much more to them. We need to read together, learn together and stand up to this assault together.”⁸⁷

If we can do this in the spirit of socialism from below, we might just make the Left a relevant social force again. And that would be no small thing. For in an age of austerity and war, the oppressed really do have a world to win.

Endnotes

- 1 Big thanks to Sue Ferguson and Parastou Saberi for their comments on an earlier draft of this pamphlet. In the notes below, I try to give readers suggestions as to some of the best literature available on many of the topics covered.
- 2 See my book, *Global Slump: The Economics and Politics of Crisis and Resistance* (Oakland: PM Press, 2011), Ch. 1. The quote is from former U.S. Federal Reserve chair, Alan Greenspan, as quoted in *Global Slump*, p. 13.
- 3 Thomas Piketty blog, “WID world: new data series on inequality and the collapse of bottom incomes,” *Le monde*, January 11, 2017, available at: <http://piketty.blog.lemonde.fr/2017/01/11/wid-world-a-new-approach-to-inequality/>. Note that incomes figures do not fully reflect the dimensions of inequality since they exclude the assets people own (“wealth”). The top one percent globally owns more wealth than the remaining 99 per cent of humankind.
- 4 Lenny Bernstein, “U.S. life expectancy declines for the first time since 1993,” *Washington Post*, December 8, 2016; Andrea Germanos, “100 CEOs Have as Much Retirement Savings as 116 Million Americans,” *Common Dreams*, December 16, 2016.
- 5 Pan Pylas, “Eight Men as Rich as Half the World, Anti-Poverty Group Oxfam Says,” *Associated Press*, January 16, 2017; Oxfam, “An Economy for the 1 %,” January 18, 2016, available at https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/bp210-economy-one-percent-tax-havens-180116-en_0.pdf
- 6 On the wave of protest after 2009, see my *Global Slump*, Ch. 6.
- 7 In the tradition of socialism from below, which I discuss in a later section of this pamphlet, Sanders is most accurately described as a social-democrat, a reformer, rather than a radical, who wishes not to overturn capitalism but to tinker with it while leaving its core intact. Nevertheless, Sanders’ campaign was hugely significant for putting the idea of socialism back into the vocabulary of political life in the U.S. and for attracting millions of people, particularly young people, to the idea.
- 8 See Charles Post, “We Got Trumped,” *International Socialist Review* 104 (Spring 2017).
- 9 Within the socialist left, populism has historically had a precise meaning, referring to movements of intermediate social groups like peasants and farmers who are discontented with big business and “big labor.” But this is not what we are seeing in left-wing campaigns like that of Bernie Sanders in the U.S., Jeremy Corbyn in Britain, or Jean-Luc Mélenchon in France.
- 10 Thomas Guénolé, “After Macron’s Win, France is Divided in Four,” *Globe and Mail*, May 8, 2017. The term xenophobia, literally fear of outsiders or foreigners, really refers to the politics of right-wing groups peddling anti-immigrant, white supremacist and Islamophobic policies.
- 11 The Socialist Party of France is a party of neoliberalism. This is the result of a long evolution towards an unqualified pro-capitalism that has been true of social democratic parties everywhere. For background on this, see Ian Birchall, *Bailing out the System: Reformist Socialism in Western Europe, 1944-1985* (London: Bookmarks, 1986).
- 12 Those interested in the issue of capitalist destruction of the environment and the eco-socialist alternative are advised to start with “An Eco-Socialist Manifesto,” available here: <http://green.left.sweb.cz/frame/Manifesto.html>, and Chris Williams, *Ecology and Socialism*.
- 13 Le Pen’s National Front was trounced in the second round of France’s 2017 presidential election. But the NF still received 11 million votes and remains a profound danger. For a succinct argument that we need a fighting anti-racist left, not reliance on liberals, to defeat the far right in France see David Broder, “Let’s Now Make Sure the Fight Continues,” *Verso Blog*, May 7, 2017, available at: <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3208-let-s-now-make-sure-the-fight-continues>
- 14 Max Ehrenfreund, “A majority of millennials now reject capitalism,” *Washington Post*, April 26, 2017.
- 15 Shiv Malik, Caelainn Barr and Amanda Holpuch, “US millennials feel more working class than any other generation,” *Guardian*, March 15, 2016.

- 16 Matt Pearce, "Seeing red: Membership triples for the Democratic Socialists of America," *LA Times*, March 13, 2017. I should note that the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) are a mixed bag. Sections of the older membership are mainstream social democrats who have supported U.S. imperial wars. But many of the younger members are much more left-leaning and are on the wavelength of the DSA Left Caucus, whose views are closer to the politics expressed by key figures associated with *Jacobin* magazine. This makes the DSA's growth highly significant.
- 17 As quoted in Rachel Donadio, "French Campaign Waged Online Adds Wild Card Ahead of Vote," *New York Times*, April 23, 2017.
- 18 Aamna Mohdin, "Europe's youth don't care to vote – but they're ready to join a mass revolt," *Quartz*, April 28, 2017.
- 19 See for instance the program of the March 8, 2017 women's strike in the U.S., available here: <https://www.womenstrikeus.org/>. On Black Lives Matter, see especially Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor, *#BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016).
- 20 I use the term "Canadian state," rather than "Canada" to acknowledge that there are multiple indigenous nations as well as a distinct national community of Québécois/Québécoise that are included within the territory of the Canadian state.
- 21 For an excellent overview of the successful food service workers strike at York University, Toronto, see Alia Karim and David Bush, "Striking food service workers win \$15 and Fairness," rankandfile.ca, March 9, 2017, available here: <http://rankandfile.ca/2017/03/09/striking-york-food-service-workers-win-15-and-fairness/>
- 22 Codi Wilson, "Poll: Majority of Torontonians support \$15 minimum wage," CTV news, April 12, 2017, available here: <http://toronto.ctvnews.ca/poll-majority-of-torontonians-support-15-minimum-wage-1.3365263>
- 23 This is a term used by Kunal Chattopadhyay and Soma Marik in their excellent analysis, "India on Strike," *Jacobin*, October 4, 2016, available here: <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/10/indian-workers-general-strike/>
- 24 See Glenn Greenwald, "Brazil Paralyzed by Nationwide Strike, Driven by a Familiar Global Dynamic of Elite Corruption and Impunity," *The Intercept*, April 21, 2017.
- 25 See Aurelien Breeden, "Strikes Shut Down French Guiana, With Effects Resonating in Paris," *New York Times*, March 27, 2017, and Jean-Marc Burgaud, "French Guiana: Victory as Agreement is Signed," *International Viewpoint Online*, April 29, 2017. On the 2009 uprisings in Guadeloupe and Martinique, see my *Global Slump*, Ch. 6.
- 26 I use the term "gay liberation" here for its historical accuracy: it is how the movement born out of the Stonewall Riots of 1969 in New York described itself. For a recent attempt to delineate the basis of a Queer Anti-Capitalism, see Peter Drucker, *Warped: Gay Normality and Anti-Capitalism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015), Part 3.
- 27 See Jefferson R. Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010), and Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner and Cal Winslow, ed., *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from Below in the Long 1970s* (New York: Verso Books, 2010).
- 28 See Dan Georgakas's 1975 account, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*, republished recently by Haymarket Books.
- 29 George Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968* (Boston: South End Press, 1968), p. 124.
- 30 Margaret Benston, "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation," *Monthly Review*, September 1969.
- 31 A superb account of the background to these events is provided by Bryan Palmer, *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era*.
- 32 See Tariq Ali and Susan Watkins, *1968: Marching in the Streets*.
- 33 As Parastou Saberi has pointed out to me, the Maoist model was also based on a mass peasantry rather than a largely urban working class in neoliberal conditions, and a failure to appreciate significantly different social-historical contexts is another disabling feature of contemporary Maoism.

- 34 In making this point, I do not want to suggest that the state-centered policies of Mao and his group were more progressive. In fact, Mao held to the cult of Stalin when Russia's leaders were abandoning it and he used police-state tactics of repression on a mass scale. See Nigel Harris, *The Mandate of Heaven: Marx and Mao in Modern China*.
- 35 Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (New York: Verso Books, 2002), p. 5. I should note here that even a much healthier Left would have lost significant ground during the neoliberal era amid the defeats imposed on unions and social movements. However, the sharp decline of the NCM started before the concerted rise of neoliberalism (generally agreed to have emerged around 1979-80) and needs to be explained in part due to its internal weaknesses. Moreover, a healthier Left might have held together stronger socialist forces throughout the neoliberal era – something which would then have been a significant resource for a new generation of radicals today.
- 36 Hal Draper, *The Two Souls of Socialism*, revised edition (Detroit: Sherrico Printing, 1970), p.4. This essay was first published in *New Politics* in 1966 and is now available here: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/draper/1966/twosouls/>
- 37 Karl Marx, “Provisional Rules” of the *International Workingmen’s Association* (1864), from the first sentence: “that the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves.”
- 38 Karl Marx, “Alienated Labour” and “Private Property and Labour” in *Marx, Early Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), pp. 333, 347.
- 39 From an editorial in the September 1847 edition of *Kommunistische Zeitschrift*, journal of the Communist League, of which Marx and Engels were founders, as quoted by Draper, p. 10. Thanks to Phil Gaspar for sorting out the original source. As Peter Hudis points out in Marx’s Concept of the Alternative to Capitalism, Marx and Engels used the terms socialism and communism more or less interchangeably.
- 40 I refer to North Korea as a hereditary dictatorship because the current head of state, Kim Jong-un, inherited power from his father, Kim Jong-il, who in turn inherited it from his father, Kim Il-sung. There are no genuine popular elections and no structures of mass democracy through which these leaders come to power. Of course, socialists oppose threats and war maneuvers by the United States and other powers against North Korea. But this has nothing to do with politically supporting regimes of this sort.
- 41 One of the best introductions to the Russian Revolution of 1917 is John Reed’s eye-witness account, *Ten Days that Shook the World*. For those prepared to dig in further, Leon Trotsky’s *History of the Russian Revolution* remains a vital socialist classic. China Miéville’s new work, *October: The Story of the Russian Revolution* is sure to be a standout. Among the best of contemporary scholarly works on the revolution from below in 1917 are David Mandel, *The Petrograd Workers and the Fall of the Old Regime*, and Mandel, *The Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power*, S.A. Smith, *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories 1917-18.*; Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power*, and Kevin Murphy, *Revolution and Counterrevolution: Class Struggle in a Moscow Metal Factory*. There is a long history of powerful Marxist critiques of Stalinism and its rise, including, among many others, Victor Serge, *From Lenin to Stalin*, Leon Trotsky *The Revolution Betrayed*, and C.L.R. James, *World Revolution 1917-1937*.
- 42 Frequently, Stalinist policies involved a return to the Tsar’s program of “Russification” of non-Russian peoples in the Russian empire.
- 43 Of course, one can oppose western intervention in a country like Syria, as I do, without pretending that its government is in anyway progressive, democratic, or socialist. For great insight into the struggle in Syria today see Robin Yassin-Kassab and Leila al-Shami, *Burning Country: Syrians in War and Revolution*.
- 44 Draper, *Socialism from Below*, p. 9. This is also the central theme of Draper’s book, *Karl Marx’s Theory of Revolution, volume 1*.
- 45 Karl Marx, “The Civil War in France” in Marx and Engels, *Writings on the Paris Commune*, ed. Hal Draper (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 70.

- 46 Marx, "Civil War in France," p. 76.
- 47 Karl Marx, "Instructions for Delegates to the Geneva Congress" (1866), translation adjusted. Available at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1866/08/instructions.htm>.
- 48 As quoted by Heather Brown, *Marx on Gender and the Family* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013), pp. 117-18. Brown's study provides an excellent overview of Marx's developing thinking about gender and the family. Marx was, of course, constrained by being a product of his own (Victorian) times, and contemporary Marxist-feminism has gone far beyond his own insights. Nonetheless, his views were generally among the most progressive of his age.
- 49 Eleanor Marx also wrote a pamphlet called *The Woman Question: From a Socialist Point of View*. For a short introduction to her political life, see Rachel Holmes, "How Eleanor Marx Changed the World," *New Statesman*, November 26, 2014. Holmes has written an extremely good biography of Eleanor Marx. Yvonne Kapp's two-volume biography from the 1970s is also highly recommended.
- 50 Robin Blackburn, *An Unfinished Revolution: Karl Marx and Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Verso Books, 2011), p. 77.
- 51 Rosa Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike, The Political Party and the Trade Unions* (1906).
- 52 Rosa Luxemburg, "The Russian Revolution" in *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, ed. Mary-Alice Waters (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), pp. 393-94. Luxemburg issued these cautions from a standpoint of overwhelming support for the 1917 revolution in Russia.
- 53 See the sources cited in Note 36 above.
- 54 V. I. Lenin, *State and Revolution*, Ch. 4, section 5. Today Lenin is treated either as devil or god. He was neither. Lenin should be understood as an exceptionally dedicated Russian revolutionary who helped fashion a mass party that led a victorious workers' uprising. However, the years prior to 1917 sometimes saw Lenin's party, the Bolsheviks, develop sectarian tendencies. Part of Lenin's greatness was to have struggled against those tendencies when moments of revolution arrived. For a balanced and insightful treatment see Marcel Liebman, *Leninism Under Lenin*.
- 55 See for instance, Dan Hartley, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia*.
- 56 "Theses on the Eastern Question," Fourth Congress of the Communist International (1922), as reproduced in *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestoes of the First Four Congresses of the Third International* (London: Ink Links, 1980), pp. 411, 415, 417.
- 57 See John Riddell, ed., *To See the Dawn: Baku, 1920 – First Congress of the Peoples of the East*.
- 58 The evolution of this approach and the crucial role of Paul Levi in developing it are documented in *In the Steps of Rosa Luxemburg: Selected Writings of Paul Levi*, ed. David Fernbach (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), and by Daniel Gaido, "Paul Levi and the Origins of the United Front Policy in the Communist International," (plus documents) *Historical Materialism v. 25, n. 1* (2017), pp. 131-184.
- 59 Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, "Don't shame the first steps of a resistance," *Socialist Worker (US)*, January 24, 2017, republished as a pamphlet by Toronto New Socialists, February 2017.
- 60 One of the few serious treatments of Luxemburg and Zetkin in this area is offered by Raya Dunayevskaya in her work, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution*.
- 61 Clara Zetkin, "Communist Work among Women" in *Toward the United Front: Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, 1922*, ed. John Riddell (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), p. 838.
- 62 See for instance, Alexandra Kollontai, *Communism and the Family*.
- 63 The theory of permanent revolution in fact descends from writings by Marx after the failed German revolution of 1848. Many writers within the socialist tradition, Trotsky among them, subsequently took up the concept and developed it in different ways. See Richard B. Day and Daniel Gaido, ed., *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution: The Documentary Record*.
- 64 There remains no better survey of Trotsky's life than Isaac Deutscher's three volume biography. A shorter biography is Victor Serge and Natalia Sedova Trotsky, *The Life and Death of Leon Trotsky*. For an insightful overview of Trotsky's political legacy see Duncan Hallas, *Trotsky's Marxism*. An interesting and more critical appreciation is offered by John Molyneux, *Leon Trotsky's Theory of Revolution*. Some Trotskyist currents were less susceptible to sectarianism and did important politi-

- cal work, including in the areas of women's liberation, anti-racism, and LGBTQ struggles – work that was light-years ahead of what emanated from Maoist and Stalinist quarters. Many of the groups based around the United Secretariat of the Fourth International and others originating in the international Socialist Tendency fall into this camp, though the latter typically lagged behind, sometimes badly so, on gender, racial and sexual politics. Among the most creative of modern Trotskyist theorists is the late Daniel Bensaid. See Bensaid, *Marx for Our Times*, and the excellent symposium on his life and work in *Historical Materialism*, v. 24, n. 4 (2016).
- 65 The writings on Gramsci are now voluminous. A helpful overview is provided by Alastair Davidson, *Antonio Gramsci: Towards an Intellectual Biography*. The formative period of Gramsci's involvement with factory councils is at the heart of Gwyn A. Williams, *Proletarian Order: Antonio Gramsci, Factory Councils and the Origins of Communism in Italy 1911-1921*. A highly recommended, but philosophically dense, discussion of Gramsci is provided by Peter Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment*.
- 66 See Panagiotis Sotiris, "Hegemony and Mass Critical Intellectuality," *International Socialism 137* (2013), available here: <http://isj.org.uk/hegemony-and-mass-critical-intellectuality/>
- 67 On James' life and work see Kent Worcester, *C.L.R. James: A Political Biography*; Farrukh Dhondy, *C.L.R. James: A Life.*; and Anthony Bogues, *Caliban's Freedom: The Early Political Thought of C.L.R. James*.
- 68 C.L.R. James, "The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro problem in the United States," *Fourth International*, December 1948. Available here: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/1948/revolutionary-answer.htm>
- 69 James did this particularly in concert with Raya Dunayevskaya, author of *Marxism and Freedom*, among other works. James and Dunayevskaya headed the "Johnson-Forest tendency" in the American Socialist Workers Party during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Dunayevskaya wrote several articles in the *New Internationalist* in the 1940s advancing the state-capitalist analysis of Russia. Tony Cliff subsequently offered a version of this position in *Russia: A Marxist Analysis*, later called *State Capitalism in Russia*, though without acknowledgement of his predecessors in the anti-Stalinist Left.
- 70 C. L. R. James (with Raya Dunayevskaya and Grace Lee Boggs), "The Invading Socialist Society," in Noel Ignatiev, ed., *A New Notion: Two Works by C. L. R. James* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010), p. 28.
- 71 Daniel Bensaid, "The Party and the Period," p.2, available here: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/bensaid/2005/11/party-period.htm>
- 72 Alan Sears, *The Next New Left: A History of the Future* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2014), pp. 113-14.
- 73 Himani Bannerji, "Building from Marx: Reflections on Class and Race," *Social Justice*, v. 32, n. 4 (2005), p. 149. In this approach – which I consider to be a dialectical one – these multiple social relations do not "intersect," as some theorists have it because they are always already inside one another, i.e. they are co-constituting. For discussions of this see Susan Ferguson, "Intersectionality and Social Reproduction Feminisms: Towards an Integrative Ontology," *Historical Materialism*, v. 24, n. 2 (2016), pp. 38-60; and my piece, "Intersections and Dialectics: Critical Reconstructions in Social Reproduction Theory," in Tithi Bhattacharya, ed., *Social Reproduction: Remapping Class, Recentring Oppression* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).
- 74 Quite important here has been the excellent collection, *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall (New York: New Press, 1995).
- 75 "A Black Feminist Statement" in *Words of Fire*, p. 235.
- 76 Much of this dialogue has roots in the work of the Peruvian Marxist, José Carlos Mariátegui. In the Canadian state, the work of the late Métis socialist, Howard Adams, is hugely important. See his *Prison of Grass and Tortured People: The Politics of Colonization*. See in this regard, Deborah Lee Simmons, "In Tribute to Howard Adams," *Studies in Political Economy*, 68 (Summer 2002). Among writers today who are contributing to this dialogue, Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, Glen Coulthard and Jeffery R. Webber have been quite important. For a few examples see Dunbar Ortiz, "Indigenous

- Peoples and the Left in Latin America,” *Monthly Review*, v. 59, n. 3 (July–August 2007); Coulthard, *Red Skins, White Masks*; and Webber, “Left Indigenous Struggles in Latin America,” *Monthly Review*, v. 57, n.4 (September 2005). See also the contributions by all three of these authors (and others) to the symposium on Coulthard’s book in *Historical Materialism*, v. 24, n. 3 (2016).
- 77 The literature here is growing rapidly. For valuable recent contributions see Peter Drucker, *Warped: Gay Normality and Queer Anti-Capitalism*; Rosemary Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*; Kevin Floyd, *The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism*; Holly Lewis, *The Politics of Everybody: Feminism, Queer Theory and Marxism at the Intersection*. See also Alan Sears, “Queer Anti-Capitalism: What’s Left of Lesbian and Gay Liberation?” *Science and Society*, v. 69, n. 1 (January 2005). For an earlier intervention see Gary Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire*.
- 78 Those interested in the issue of capitalist destruction of the environment and the eco-socialist alternative are advised to start with “An Eco-Socialist Manifesto, available here: <http://green.left.web.cz/frame/Manifesto.html>, and Chris Williams, *Ecology and Socialism*. An extremely important, but more challenging, text is Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*.
- 79 Sandew Hira, “The theory of white privilege – why racism is not a privilege, but an injustice,” Decolonial International Network, May 3, 2017, available at <https://www.din.today/the-theory-of-white-privilege-why-racism-is-not-a-privilege/>
- 80 Salar Mohandesi, “Identity Crisis,” *Viewpoint*, March 16, 2017, available at <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2017/03/16/identity-crisis/>
- 81 As Himani Bannerji has argued, these kinds of identities operate with essentialized notions of cultural difference of the sort that ruling classes deploy, rather than with politically constructed identities of opposition and resistance. See Bannerji, *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism, and Anti-Racism*.
- 82 Remaya Campbell, “Dr. Davis and Diversity,” Daily Trojan, February 25, 2015, available at <http://dailytrojan.com/2015/02/25/dr-davis-and-diversity/>
- 83 R. L. Stephens, “The Birthmark of Damnation: Ta-Nehisi Coates and the Black Body,” *Viewpoint*, May 17, 2017, available at <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2017/05/17/the-birthmark-of-damnation-ta-nehisi-coates-and-the-black-body/>
- 84 As Vladimir Lenin put it, “without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary practice.”
- 85 Duncan Hallas, “Toward a Revolutionary Socialist Party” (1971), available her: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/hallas/works/1971/xx/party.htm>
- 86 Hallas, “Toward a Revolutionary Socialist Party.”
- 87 Taylor, “Don’t shame the first steps of a resistance.”



Alongside a resurgence of the far-right we are also in the early stages of an opening to radical socialism of the sort we have not seen for two generations. Failure to grasp this means missing major possibilities for the rebirth of international socialism today.

It is our duty to create a New Left that can become a pole of attraction for thousands of people looking for an alternative to capitalism and austerity. Such a New Left will have to be democratic, mass-based, steeped in anti-oppression, and overflowing with creativity and imagination.

RADICAL
INTERVENTIONS

Published by **TORONTO** ★
NEW SOCIALISTS

Check out our website: newsocialist.org

Find us on Facebook at New Socialists

Email us at: torontonewsocialists@gmail.com