

The Utopian



'The Chief,' One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Ken Kesey

A Bulletin of Anarchist &
Libertarian Socialist Thought

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Note

This issue of the discussion bulletin has been re-titled, *The Utopian—A Bulletin of Anarchist & Libertarian Socialist Thought*. This reflects the decision to combine the former journal, *The Utopian*, with the recently launched discussion bulletin. We hope the new approach will continue to provide an ongoing forum for interactive discussion among readers and supporters of *The Utopian*, while also offering a vehicle for more frequent publication of journal articles.

Cover art

The drawing is from Ken Kesey's, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. The novel makes frequent references to the different authorities that control individuals through subtle and coercive methods. The novel's narrator, the Chief (pictured in the foreground), calls these authorities 'the Combine.' The Combine controls the inhabitants of the mental ward through a combination of rewards and subtle shame, and is personified by Nurse Ratched. Although Nurse Ratched does not normally resort to conventionally harsh discipline, her actions are more insidious than those of a conventional prison administrator because the subtlety of her actions prevents her prisoners from understanding that they are being controlled at all. The Chief also sees the Combine in the damming of the wild [Columbia River at Celilo Falls](#), where his Native American ancestors hunted, and in the broader conformity of post-war American [consumer society](#). (Summarized from *Wikipedia*)

Reports from activists

Standing Rock Sioux/North Dakota Access Pipeline

Mary H., New York City
10/29/16

The most significant work we've done recently (over the last couple months) involves our support for the Standing Rock Sioux in their struggle against the Dakota Access Pipeline and the attacks the capitalist system is waging against them. Militarized police are brutalizing those struggling to defend their land and water. An armed provocateur, seeking to pass himself off as a Native person, was seized by NoDAPL activists and by police. He had documentation linking him to Energy Transfer Partners, the company building the Dakota Access Pipeline. Mainstream media is reporting that NoDAPL protectors are blocking state highways in N. Dakota by setting vehicles on fire, which appears to be a complete lie and likely being done by paid provocateurs. It seems to me, and a number of others in BCJN, that we will continue to make this our major focus.

The Red Warrior Camp is calling on people from around the world to take action and join the Global Solidarity Campaign. They need people to stand on the front lines and/or to organize & participate in actions to stop the pipeline & support their struggle.

The Dakota Access Pipeline is scheduled to be working by January 1st, 2017. With that date quickly approaching, activists are calling for two months of sustained waves of action targeting the Army Corp of Engineers, investors, pipeline companies, security firms and elected officials who are behind the project.

A shortened summary of Standing Rock's statement:

We want people to recognize that this fight is much larger than Standing Rock. When the Dakota Access Pipeline is defeated, the fight is not over. There are communities around the world fighting against the exact same corporations and systems that we currently fight against in Standing Rock. This is about Indigenous rights, Human rights and the rights of Mother Earth being violated for corporations and their profit. This is about a capitalist system that allows for these violations to continue around the World... The Dakota Access Pipeline is in direct violation of the United Nation's Declaration of Universal Human Rights, most especially in regards to the right to security of person, the right to not be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Part of BCJN's statement:

The NoDAPL effort is not "merely" a fight against a specific pipeline. NoDAPL is about climate justice, about economic, racial, and social justice. It is about jobs and the labor movement. It is being waged on the front lines, by Native American tribes who have fought these battles longer, and with greater sacrifices, than any other group. There is a national media blackout, which would be rectified if we turned our attention, en masse, to this struggle. And NoDAPL has faced some of the most draconian, highly militarized, and quasi-fascistic responses from the N. Dakota government, police, and from private security forces that we have seen in over a generation -- akin to some of the worst treatment of civil rights "protectors" during the 1960s. National U.S. climate movement solidarity with Standing Rock would prove our solidarity with Indigenous and other front-line struggles around the world.

A further report on activities from Mary H:

On Sept. 9th we participated in the Washington Square rally in Manhattan in support of the Standing Rock resistance against the Dakota Access Pipeline. And on 9/15, we organized our own protest targeting the TD Bank at 230 St & Tibbett, across the street from the beginning of Marble Hill), drawing 30-40 people. One of our Native American members spoke at the rally, as did several others, including me. We then walked two blocks down to Broadway where many people wanted to learn more and joined with us.

On Sept. 22nd, a few of us attended a sunrise ceremony at Inwood Park with Native Americans, many of whom live in Inwood & Washington Heights. The NA woman who spoke at our protest played a leadership role at this event, and it was a beautiful walk through the park.

In early September I met with Carole Shoup who used to work with us decades ago. We used to drive together to the Ford plant in Mahwah when we both worked there. She's very interested in what we're doing, and we'll continue to stay connected.

In early October a few of us went to meeting of the Bronx Coalition for a Community Vision, an organization that is fighting against the displacement, exploitation, and harassment of folks in the South Bronx. The city wants to use 73 blocks along Jerome Ave. from 167th Street to 183rd Street to build residential housing that will not be affordable for poor folks. So we're expanding our connections.

On Oct 10th a few of us spent several hours at Ward Field on Randall's Island where Native Americans held an amazing celebration in support of the Standing Rock struggle & a celebration of their culture. The music and dancing was awesome! One of the leaders of this event is also part of BCJN.

And we've been navigating a relationship with Marble Hill folks, helping them organize a community organization, showing films together, etc.

Articles, videos and other links:

- BCJN's solidarity statement in support of the Standing Rock Sioux can be found on Bronx Climate Justice North's website
<https://bronxclimatejusticenorth.wordpress.com/>
- Article & pictures:
<http://www.motherjones.com/environment/2016/10/armed-man-dakota-access-pipeline-protest-dapl>
- Mother Jones has a powerful video that shows what looks like a war zone:
<http://www.motherjones.com/blue-marble/2016/10/video-dakota-access-pipeline-protest-absolutely-nuts-total-war-zone>
- "usuncut" has a video of a herd of buffalo coming to the where the struggle is occurring:
<http://usuncut.com/resistance/thousands-wild-buffalo-appear-nowhere-standing-rock/>
- Information about what is happening can often be found on "Democracy Now", and one of their reporters works with BCJN whenever he can... Here's a link about what recently happened: ["A Shameful Moment for this Country."](#)
- An interesting approach:
<http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/38165-how-to-talk-about-nodapl-a-native-perspective>
- An interesting film: At the Schomburg, "Not Yo Mama's Movement" delves into international racism, focusing on France in particular. The film was made by [Rokhaya Diallo](#), Afro-Parisienne journalist, antiracism activist, and award-winning filmmaker. Although France is confronted with similar problems to those in the US, the victims of French police brutality have not benefited from the same media attention that exists here.

Mumia Abu-Jamal

Bill B., New York City

Below is an update on Mumia's situation. Also, attached is a resolution that I got my union local to pass last year.

It's been a long time since I last wrote in the Utopian about the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal. I'm writing this because I trust that readers who haven't followed the case might want an update.

Since I last wrote, the state, after truly herculean efforts, finally gave up trying to execute Mumia in December 2011. Early in the next year he was moved off Death

Row and out of solitary to which he had been confined for over 25 years. Now in general population, Mumia is at a prison much closer to his friends and family in Philadelphia. For the first time he is able to see his wife and children without heavy glass separating them; and for the first time he is able actually to touch his grandchildren.

Also in 2012 Mumia was diagnosed positive for hepatitis C. Although he had no symptoms at the time, the disease has since become one front in a new campaign both to release Mumia and save his life.

The first front opened in August 2014. Mumia began itching, losing weight and feeling fatigued, finally collapsing in diabetic shock on 30 March 2015. Although the hep C diagnosis was on record, the prison doctors claimed they didn't know what was wrong with him. Nevertheless they refused to let Mumia bring in anyone from the outside do an evaluation.

Mumia finally was diagnosed with active hepatitis C in the summer of 2015, not by a prison doctor, but by Dr. Joseph Harris. Coming from a practice where he has treated hundreds of hep C patients, Dr. Harris made his finding with no physical examination, but simply by asking Mumia about his symptoms and looking at him in the prison visitor room.

At this point the prison doctors confirmed Dr. Harris' opinion. However, they refused to give Mumia the drugs that have been proven to cure the disease. Instead, the doctors used outdated treatments, which addressed mostly symptoms.

One must wonder what is the state's intention? Since it failed to silence Mumia by lethal injection, was it now trying to get rid of him by medical malpractice? Mumia is not alone. Over 5000 other prisoners in Pennsylvania also are afflicted with hepatitis C. Almost all of them also are being treated ineffectively. The standard of care drugs—the cure—are Harvoni and Solvaldi, which cost \$1000 per pill, or about \$84,000 for a complete course of them. Although it won't say so directly, Department of Corrections clearly doesn't want to bear the expense. (Parenthetical note: I have heard from a number of different sources that the same drugs are discounted in India at \$10 a pill and in Egypt at \$4). (Parenthetical note two: like many prison systems, the DoC has contracted out its medical services to a private company. This firm, Corizon, was fired by New York City's Corrections Department last year for gross malfeasance). (Parenthetical note three: I did some research. The corporation that makes Harvoni and Solvaldi, Gilead Sciences, didn't put a dime into the drugs' research and development, but bought the rights to them from another company. Further, instead of plowing the stratospheric profits from the drugs into real R&D, Gilead has instead gone on a spending spree buying back its own stock: \$15 billion last year and another \$5 billion the year before that. In this regard the company is on the same track as Mylan Labs of Epipen infamy. Both have been darlings of Wall Street).

In August 2015 Mumia's legal team filed suit in federal court: (1) asserting that by denying him the medically accepted standard of care, the Pennsylvania DoC was denying Mumia his Eighth Amendment rights against cruel and unusual punishment; and (2) demanding that Penn DoC immediately begin treating Mumia with the hep C cure. I was at the hearing on the petition in December. Among other things, I observed that Mumia already was suffering serious liver damage, Penn DoC had falsified records, and had ordered curative treatments only for prisoners who were near death and likely to die anyway from the irreversible damages the disease had wrought.

I sensed that the judge, Robert D. Mariani, seemed quite moved and impressed by the presentations by Mumia's lawyers and witnesses. Nevertheless, when he ruled last 31 August, he denied the request for immediate treatment although affirming that Penn DoC had indeed been violating Mumia's Eighth Amendment rights. Judge Mariani based his denial on the fact that Mumia's attorneys had failed to address their claim to the Penn DoC Hepatitis C Treatment Committee, which was only set up after their suit was filed. Since then the legal team has filed an amended action addressing this issue. A new ruling is awaited. Meanwhile, Mumia's health continues to decline.

The second front opened rather unexpectedly last June when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against the state in *Williams v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*. Williams had been sentenced to death and had his sentence affirmed on appeal by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. Sitting on the court at that time as Chief Justice was Ronald Castille, who had been DA at the time of Williams' trial and in that capacity had directed all death penalty cases. Williams had asked Castille to recuse himself from his appeal on the grounds of conflict of interest but Castille had refused. Backtrack to Mumia: Castille was DA at the time of Mumia's first appeal in 1986 and had reviewed and signed all the briefs filed against him. Later, when Mumia's second appeal came before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in 1998, he similarly refused to recuse himself despite motions filed by Mumia's lawyers and an extensive petition campaign of which I was part. Castille then went on to participate in the deliberations that resulted in the denial of Mumia's claim.

Therefore, on 7 August Mumia's lawyers filed a petition with the Court of Common Pleas in Philadelphia to overturn the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruling. Conceivably this could open the door to much new evidence of innocence and state misconduct that has surfaced since 1998.

Whatever. As Mumia and thousands of other political and social prisoners have learned, the law by itself can take strange and tortured paths. As a result there are renewed calls for renewed resolutions, demonstrations and job actions. The first mobilization is scheduled for this coming 9 December in Philadelphia, the 35th anniversary of Mumia's shooting and arrest. There may be another in the Bay Area. I ask everyone reading this to save the date.

(Below is a resolution that I got passed unanimously by my union local last year. The significance of it is that to my knowledge it is the first labor resolution to call for Mumia's release).

RESOLUTION IN SOLIDARITY WITH MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

WHEREAS New York Metro in 1998 and the national APWU in 2000 condemned the injustice done to Mumia Abu-Jamal by the police and courts and called for a new trial; and

WHEREAS since that time the state has used legal excuse after legal excuse to deny Mumia Abu-Jamal a new trial; and

WHEREAS Mumia Abu-Jamal has spent 34 years in prison with over 25 years in solitary confinement; and

WHEREAS since 2012 the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections has known that Mumia Abu-Jamal has been infected with Hepatitis C; and

WHEREAS for over a year Mumia Abu-Jamal has had active, life-threatening Hepatitis C with woefully inadequate diagnosis and treatment; and

WHEREAS New York Metro together with thousands of other people and unions around the world earlier this year demanded that the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections diagnose and treat Mumia Abu-Jamal's condition; and

WHEREAS the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections has inadequately treated Mumia Abu-Jamal's illness;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that New York Metro write to the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections and Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf demanding that these authorities cease the medical neglect of Mumia Abu-Jamal and begin immediately to treat his illness with all currently available drugs and according to the standards of the World Health Organization, the American Medical Association and the U.S. Department of Justice; and

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that New York Metro join with those who call for Mumia Abu-Jamal to be released to the care of doctors of his choice; and

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that because of the considerable amount of evidence supporting the obvious need for a new trial; and because he has already spent 34 years in prison and because of his medical condition, he is no threat to society; and because of the continuing failure of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections to diagnose and treat him, New York Metro calls for Mumia Abu-Jamal's immediate release; and

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that New York Metro establish a voluntary Mumia Abu-Jamal Oversight Committee to keep track of his health situation and

recommend whatever further support actions that may be necessary subject to the approval of the New York Metro membership.



Dialogues

The Election

The U.S. presidential election will (presumably) be over in a week. We look forward to carrying comments, questions and discussion on election-related issues in the December *Bulletin* and invite readers to submit these over the next month.

A Continuing Conversation on Global Warming

This conversation on global warming, the climate change movement and related issues began as a series of email exchanges among Jack, Rod and Ron (see October *Bulletin*). The discussion among the three continued during the month of October. Wayne joined the discussion late in October, commenting on a point raised by Jack from the October *Bulletin*. We begin with Wayne's comment and responses to it.

Wayne's comment and responses...

October 26

In the last issue, Jack makes the significant point. He writes:

"I think that the biggest proximate danger — and the likely course for many in the movement is not 'Socialism or Barbarism' but 'Bourgeois State, Do Whatever's Needed to Save The Planet.' Reformism is the dominant trend in the movement — it is the ideology of the labor bureaucracy, bolstered by 'experts' like Bill McKibben (who has called for the U.S. to go to a war footing a la the state mobilizations and control in WWI and WWII); and of the social democrats of the DSA, etc. And many of the 'socialists' active in the movement will call on the state to ramp up its intervention, falling in behind the labor bureaucrats. Climate change, then, will likely be used to stampede the masses into accepting hardship, deprivation, and massive growth of state surveillance, control, and denial of basic civil liberties. In my opinion, this is the likely danger...the main danger is indeed reformism acting as a Trojan horse for a massive increase in state control and revocation of what remains of civil liberties."

This is important, although it is also important to note that virtually every writer on the subject has *also* raised ideas about decentralization, cooperatives, and local self-management of industry. McKibben wrote a whole book on the importance of community development for countering ecological catastrophe. I discuss this in "**Eco-Socialism and Decentralism; The Re-Development of Anarchism in the Ecology/Climate Justice Movement**"

http://www.anarkismo.net/article/28974?search_text=Wayne+Price

I don't see how revolutionary anarchists can object to the idea of a total social mobilization to organize a transition to a renewable, ecologically organized, economy. But we should argue that a radical transition to a renewable society cannot be done by the existing state and corporations (except, perhaps, by totalitarian methods). Instead, we should argue, such a change could only be organized by an association of popular and worker councils, which would replace the state and capitalism. A balance of centralization and decentralization is implicit in the vision of a federation of communes and self-managed associations. Meanwhile we advocate independent mass organizing and movements to pressure the authorities in order to slow down, at least, ecological destruction.

Wayne

October 27

Wayne,

I was not addressing what "revolutionary anarchists" would do, but rather what I think is a likely course for reformists -- namely, to turn to the state to save them / us from the increasingly brutal effects of climate change, and to be willing to cede more oppressive powers to the state. It is not clear to me whether or not you agree with this point. I think that you do (you called it "important") but I'm not sure (based on your concluding paragraph.)

In any event, and just to be clear, I nowhere argued that an all-out social mobilization can only be done on a top-down, authoritarian basis. I do believe, however, that it is likely that the reformist leadership will opt for such a path -- except and unless under great pressure from a mass movement. And of course, it is key to build institutions for mass decentralized controls -- worker / community councils, etc. -- and to build them through the course of the struggle, not waiting post-revolution.

As far as Bill McKibben, here is what he has to say:

"We're under attack from climate change and our only hope is to mobilize like we did in WWII."

This is the banner quote in his recent New Republic article -- full article at this link: <https://newrepublic.com/article/135684/declare-war-climate-change-mobilize-wwii>

McKibben is not talking about control from below, but a World War II - style mobilization. That's the very opposite of control from below. As you probably know, McKibben also believes that increasing use of nuclear power may be needed as an interim measure to slow global warming. James Hansen, long an opponent of using

nuclear energy, now advocates it. Leaving aside the immense problem of storing nuclear waste, one can hardly argue that this is a step in the direction of decentralized control. As the crisis proceeds, I expect that left liberals and reformists will increasingly and in fright call for the state to step in and save them on any basis. The need to reorganize society thoroughly and in a revolutionary way they will -- at best -- leave to the far back burner.

Jack

October 29

Jack,

I assumed when you described what you thought reformist-environmentalists would do (rely on the state), you were saying that this should be opposed by revolutionary anarchists (revolutionary libertarian socialists, autonomous communists, whatever). My points are (1) I agree with you about the statist and authoritarian danger poised by reformists programs, although (2) there are decentralist, localist, and worker-managed aspects of their programs, also, and (3) the idea of a drastic mobilization of the whole society to change into a transition towards sustainable ecological balance is not something we should oppose. Rather we agree with it, but say that it can only be done from the bottom up, through a revolution.

I would add that the threat of climate change motivating a totalitarian response will get greater as the effects get worse. As the coasts are flooded and whole cities are inundated, droughts, fires, and floods limit the food supply, etc., there will be demands from the left and right for a powerful central government to control things.

Wayne

October 29

Wayne,

I am joining this part of the discussion only to say that I disagree with formulations such as the one you make in your October 29 email to Jack: “...it (a drastic mobilization to transition towards sustainable ecological balance—RM) *can only be done from the bottom up, through a revolution.*” This is similar to your October 27 comment: “*But we should argue that a radical transition to a renewable society cannot be done by the existing state and corporations (except, perhaps, by totalitarian methods).*” In both cases, I think you take the position that reformists cannot carry out their own reformist program—only revolutionaries can. I think this is mechanistic, and demonstrably false. It is akin to arguing that apartheid could only be ended via revolution, that the capitalist class could not get out of the Great

Depression, and, in the current context, that global warming, unless there is a revolution, dooms the planet. This takes us back to the 'socialism or barbarism' formulations you make that I disagree with. And underlying this, in my view, is your mistaken belief that capitalism is *inherently* doomed.

Rod

October 29

Wayne and Rod,

First: I agree with Rod's reply to Wayne. That is, I do not rule out the possibility that capitalism may eventually stumble through to environmental stability (and hence, ecological sustainability -- although I think it unlikely that this will happen before great damage has been done to people and the planet.) Absolutist formulations have been wrong over and over again -- in addition to those cited by Rod, there's "the epoch of imperialist decay" where supposedly no 'organic' economic growth was possible; Trotsky's insistence that the Stalinist bureaucracy could not survive World War II; that in colonial countries only the proletariat could lead the national revolution (disproven by China, Vietnam...). So while it seems likely to me that capitalism will resort to increasingly dictatorial, statist methods to deal with the environmental crisis, I don't absolutely rule out a less authoritarian outcome (for one thing, I don't have a crystal ball into what sorts of technological breakthroughs might occur, and how capital might be directed towards them; for another, I don't rule out a mass environmental movement forcing major concessions from capital which turn out to increase profitability and help stabilize and ease the crisis.)

Second: I agree with Wayne's concluding point, that the danger of a totalitarian statist response will increase as the crisis worsens. I believe it was I who made that point at the August meeting in New York, and I believe that I made it again in the exchange with Rod and Ron in the October bulletin. Indeed, that is directly tied to the point I've made on the danger of reformism turning in panic to the state to solve the climate crisis by any means (I thought that was clear, but apparently not.)

Third, I agree with Wayne that there are decentralist, worker-managed proposals supported by many reformists. Without going through those one by one, I agree with some of these proposals and support working in united front coalitions to organize for them. [Today, for example, Bill McKibben had an op-ed piece in the NY Times calling for mass participation in local actions around the country to protest the armed state intervention to crush the Native American resistance to the Dakota Pipeline. This is the same Bill McKibben who calls for a "World War II-style" state-led mobilization to fight global warming. I support the call for mass local actions; I think that the call to put the U.S. on a WWII-style footing is very dangerous, including no-strike pledges; state-imposed rationing; etc.)

Finally, as I said in my last email, I am of course for mass social mobilization to limit the impact of climate change and to fight for ecological sustainability, and of course believe that this movement should be built from below. This should not be in question.

Jack

October 30

Rod,

It would take a lengthy piece to even begin to argue this point. It is not based on faith but on careful reasoning, which has satisfied me if not you. I try to argue some of this in a condensed fashion in my essay on the anarchist vision:

"This does not make socialism (anarchism, libertarian communism) inevitable. On the contrary, it means that capitalism has a dynamic that leads to greater and worse crises and catastrophes. As an economic system it is deeply flawed and irrational. It is highly unlikely (I will not say "impossible") that it can pull out of its current extended crash-landing and return to a period of stability and relative prosperity. The last time it did this, from the late 1940s to 1970—1975, it was at the cost of a Great Depression, a World War, post-war spending on nuclear arms, and the vast use of fossil fuels. To revive itself, even for a time, would require something similar. It seems unlikely that the system could survive either another world war or a deepened misappropriation of the natural world."

Wayne

October 30

Wayne,

Yes, it is an ongoing discussion that comes up in various forms. I read your anarchist vision essay, and my reaction was that you are trying to have it 'both ways,' i.e., conscious vision and will are 'good things' (and Marx and Engels should have emphasized them more), but, regardless, capitalism is marching 'of its own accord' toward collapse. This is expressed in the paragraph from you quoted above, most directly in the statement, "*capitalism has a dynamic which leads to greater and worse crises and catastrophes.*" I will grant that the industrialization/modernization of society (and the destructive capacity of technology that comes with it), results in crises that can be, and at time are, more devastating than ever before. (The killing in the U.S. Civil War vastly exceeded that of the Revolutionary War and, on world-scale, the death and destruction of World

War I exceeded anything prior to that.) But, the ever-increasing destructive capacity of technology (and its ever-increasing constructive capacity) is a variable that, while *connected* to capitalism, does not capitalism *per se*.

I also understand that you believe you are using empirical evidence (rather than 'dogmatic theory'), to arrive at your point of view. I find the empirical evidence wanting, largely because it is always piled a mile-high with qualifiers. By this I mean: WW I seemed like a descent into barbarism (people certainly felt that way at the time), but the world managed to stabilize. The stabilization, of course, included the growth of a new form of evil, fascism. It also lasted little more than a decade, collapsing into the deepest depression capitalism had ever experienced. Deep as it was, it wasn't 'the end'--the system managed to survive. Yes, it survived in part due the economic stimulus produced by WW II (which was, at least in part, the playing out of the unfinished business of WW I). WW II itself could be viewed as a collapse into barbarism, if we take the word to mean an expression of the newest horrors committed by systems/nations/peoples against each other. But it was not barbarism in the form of the end of civilization; not hardly. A significantly stabilized world emerged--with the USA ruling the roost--and a deep and sustained economic expansion took place for over three decades. Yes, it included the Cold War threat of nuclear weapons...but it didn't include nuclear war. And, uneven as it may be, it included advances against hunger, gains in democratic rights, etc., etc. I could go on and on (as could you), but I don't see where this gets you to where you claim it does. There is *not* a defined or known endpoint. I don't know if there will be a nuclear holocaust--and neither do you. I don't know how deep the climate change disasters will be before they are (or are not) addressed--and neither do you. Capitalism is unjust, and capitalism is unstable, and capitalism brings out the worst in people...but capitalism is not doomed (unless one is simply arguing that, sooner or later, most things change, and few things last forever).

Rod

October 30

Rod,

There seem to be two possible meanings to your agnosticism about capitalism's future.

(1) Industrial capitalism will most probably go into decades at least of bad times, economic stagnation and crises, ecological disasters, greater wars, and other terrible

developments. But--contrary to anyone who thinks that this is necessarily the end of world capitalism, one way or another--the system may pull out of this. After decades of terrible mass suffering, it may return to an extended period (at least) of stability, prosperity, and sustainability, something like the post-WWII period (assuming no revolution).

(2) Or, we cannot know how bad things will get. Maybe there will be a drastic downturn and extended crisis, but maybe the capitalist class and its leadership will carry out realistic countermeasures in time. These reforms may save capitalism from its worst tendencies--*in the near future*--and in the next couple of decades may stabilize and maintain relative prosperity, ecological balance, and democracy. Who knows?

I could accept (1), although I find it unlikely, but not impossible. It implies a revolutionary perspective. I believe that (2) is extremely unlikely. As I pointed out, the restoration of post-war prosperity took the Great Depression, defeat of workers' struggles, Nazism and Stalinism, and a second world war, not to mention the looting of the environment. I do not see anything like this happening *in the near future* (probably not even in the long-run future, but certainly not in the near future). If I thought that this was possible to a realistic extent, then I would reject a revolutionary approach. (2) implies a reformist perspective, if a militant one.

WP

November 1

Wayne,

Thanks for your further thoughts.

You say that there are two possible meanings to what you call my 'agnosticism' about capitalism's future. I will summarize your presentation of these two meanings and comment on them, in a moment. But, first, I want to make clear that I believe that our difference is not over speculations about what capitalism will or won't do in the future, but rather centers on three questions: 1) Is holding a revolutionary outlook dependent on there being a known direction or outcome for capitalism? 2) Is believing that there is such a known direction or outcome a remnant of Marxism? and, 3) Is such a worldview philosophically and practically totalitarian? I believe the answer to the first question is 'no,' and the answers to the second and third questions are 'yes.'

You ascribe these two meanings to what I wrote (I am summarizing your views):

Meaning #1: Capitalism will have crises, bad times, ecological disasters, wars, etc., but these crises do not necessarily spell the end of the system; capitalism has the

capacity to survive, and may do so. This part of your summary is a correct interpretation of my views. However, you also suggest that I predict "decades of terrible mass suffering, to be *followed* by extended stability. This is not so; I make no prediction regarding the overall (longer-term) *timing, duration, or sequence* of capitalist crisis and stability, expansion and contraction, peace and war. I believe that capitalism has and will experience all these things (sometimes simultaneously, depending on what sphere we are looking at). While it is true that we can (attempt to) make shorter-term prognostications, there is no 'grand' or 'determined' direction or outcome at work.

2) The second meaning you attribute to me is that 'we cannot know how bad things can get,' and that reforms and stabilization are possible, 'even over the next couple of decades.' This is a correct summary, as far as it goes. (It flows from the clarification I made to your first meaning--I am not predicting capitalism will follow any specified path.) However, I would add to this second meaning that I don't think meanings #1 and #2 are counter-posed; saying that reforms and stabilization are possible (for varying periods of times, in varying spheres of economic, political and social life, in varying parts of the world) does not mean that capitalism will not also experience crises of varying severity, and inflict inhuman suffering in myriad forms on millions and millions of people. It does so today, has done so throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, and is overwhelmingly likely to do so in the future.

You believe (and state) that meaning #1 'implies a revolutionary perspective.' In contrast, you believe (and state) that meaning #2 "implies a reformist perspective.' And you say, "If I thought that this (stabilization in the near future--RM) was possible to a realistic extent, then I would reject a revolutionary approach."

This is the crux of our disagreement. I don't think it is putting words in your mouth to say that you believe that only if capitalism is 'doomed,' only if it will (inevitably) destroy our entire civilization, should one be a revolutionary. In contrast, you argue that if capitalism is *not* headed for complete collapse (and if socialism is not its 'scientific successor')...one should be a reformist. This flows from the way you have parsed the two 'meanings' and the conclusions you have drawn about them, as stated in the paragraph above.

I can't prove it, but I think you are standing matters on their head, by which I mean it is not an empirical analysis of capitalism that leads you to your conclusions about its course, but rather your desire to maintain a revolutionary outlook that leads you to your analysis. It was comforting (in a somewhat perverse sense), when we were Marxists, to be able to believe that 'history' was on 'our side,' that capitalism almost certainly spelled 'final doom' for the world, that socialism was immanent within capitalism, and, therefore, a revolutionary perspective was... 'logical' ('true,' 'on the side of history,' etc.) Comforting or not, I have come to agree that this is a false perspective, and--worse--one with totalitarian implications and outcomes.

I believe that what the empirical evidence actually suggests is that capitalism will continue to have economic crises, environmental crises, wars, exploitation, inequality, degradation and more. I have no need to 'quantify' the horrors, just as I don't want to debate who was worse, Stalin or Hitler, or who is more exploited, this group or that. I also think that there is plenty of evidence to suggest that the entrenched power and privilege of the ruling elites, the oppressive and controlling role of the state, and the domination of countless levers of subtle and subtle control by the wealthy make reform of capitalism, particularly electoral reform, extremely unlikely (and all the more so, if one rejects a supposedly-benevolent Big-Brother state as liberating outcome.)

This leaves me believing that capitalism is evil, that people from time to time display a cooperative side that is suggestive of a vastly alternative set of values, operating principles, mechanisms and beliefs, and that it would be good if people decided some day to put an end to the current deal. Such a development would almost certainly have to arise in the context of deep, consciousness-raising and unifying struggles, and it would seem that we are a very long distance from being able to point to any markers that suggest such a course is either imminent or perhaps even likely.

This brings me back to the start of this discussion. I think that you are trying to cobble a *non-Marxist* (revolutionary anarchist/libertarian socialist) view that a future society such as we hope for can only come about through the conscious, independent, collective, local, 'free will' actions of the majority of people, to a *decidedly Marxist* view that such consciousness and action is 'necessary' (found within 'history' and scientifically true) because it is intrinsically contained within capitalism. I think this is: a) false; and, b) lets the wolf in the door.

Rod

Last month's global warming conversation continued...

September 30

Jack,

(I am picking up here from your comments that concluded our email exchange as it appeared in the October *Bulletin*.)

1. Socialism or barbarism

I understand what you are saying about socialism or barbarism 'not drawing the line.' To me, the *implication* of believing that capitalism 'must' take the world to barbarism (if it is not overthrown) is that there is an inherent 'inner logic' or 'dynamic' to capitalism. This is a determinist outlook, and has a relationship to

Marx's determinism. That said, I don't find anything substantive that we disagree about here. Specifically, I agree with your main point, that reformism (*not* Marxism) is the primary danger to the climate change movement (and to other social movements as well). I would add that some aspects of how the ruling class might enhance state power/usurp rights in response to various global warming crises might not fit with how I would normally use the word, 'reformism.' (NSA spying on citizens in response to the 'terror threat' does not constitute 'reformism,' per se.) I think your point, however, is that movements led/influenced by reformist politicians, labor bureaucrats, etc., may well wind up *supporting* the expansion of state power to address the crisis. I agree.

2. Urgency

I do have a sense of urgency about climate change. I said that it was important to build an independent, mass movement around the issue, and, among other things, seek to build alliances with other social movements. I also said that global warming was already causing significant harm to people, and that it is overwhelmingly likely that the scope of this harm will grow. And I identified the US ruling elite (even if it changes its stance over time) as the single greatest obstacle to corrective action to date. I don't know how to measure 'urgency.' Just because I don't believe that global warming is likely to be cataclysmic (world ending), doesn't mean my view should be viewed as complacent. I am not complacent about poverty, world hunger, war or dictatorships, even if I do not believe that we are descending into barbarism.

3. Data

I wasn't suggesting we needed more data to believe that climate change will have a significant, negative impact. I agree the data for that is there. I think the data are absent when we move to questions such as whether there is a window of opportunity to stave off vast, even world-ending disaster, or whether the USA elites will respond effectively (even if tardily) to global warming in the relatively near future. Here, we wind up speculating.

I hope this clarifies. Thanks for the continued discussion.

Rod

October 15

Jack and Rod,

I would like to continue our discussion on climate change and related issues. In particular, I would like to discuss Jack's point about reformism being the "main danger." (As far as I can remember, Jack did not specify "danger" to what or to whom. However, I think it is safe to assume that he meant danger to the working class [including in this category the unemployed and the incarcerated] and middle

class, and to the pro-environment anarchist/libertarian socialist movement we would like to create.)

First, I want to strongly agree with Jack's underlying point, that is, that reformism is a significant danger.

Before getting to this, however, I would like to indicate that I am not convinced that reformism is the "main" danger. I can think of several other social/political forces that are, or might quickly become, extremely dangerous, and to be frank, I am not ready to rank them in terms of their lethality. Although I do not wish to discuss these other forces in detail here, I think they are worth noting.

1. Trumpism, that is, right-wing populism. Whatever happens in the upcoming election, and with or without Donald Trump, this force will not be going away any time soon, even though, for now, its main social base involves demographic groups that are shrinking (older, white, semi-educated, culturally retrograde). While a substantial numbers of its supporters are (mostly white) workers, it is a profoundly anti-working class movement, as well as being anti-environment, xenophobic, white supremacist, misogynist, homophobic, and anti-Semitic. It is also extremely statist, as reflected in its call for "law and order" (beefing up and unleashing the police), in its protectionist trade policy, and in its hostility to immigrants.

2. Extreme libertarian conservatism. While there are more moderate libertarian conservatives with whom we might find ourselves in a bloc on some issues (Second Amendment rights, LGBT rights, free speech, open immigration and trade, support for small businesses, anti-statism, hostility to military intervention abroad), the logic of the right-wing libertarian program is to unleash the corporations, and particularly the largest and most powerful among them, on the working class, the middle class, and the environment, for example, by shredding the safety net and cutting back on pro-environment regulation, etc. Given the current crisis in the Republican Party (and the civil war that is likely to occur within it after the election), it is not clear what this group's future is. However, it is important to note its existence, since it may emerge as a serious alternative to Trumpism, on the one hand, and mainstream liberalism, on the other, at some point down the road.

3. Mainstream liberalism. This is the mildly reformist, technocratic forces currently led by Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and other left-centrist Democrats. Their strategy is to promise substantial change on a range of economic, social, and environmental issues, while ceding no more than the capitalist system can bear at any given point in time. In the context of Trump's candidacy (which has the support of only a tiny fraction of the capitalist class) and the crisis in the Republican Party, the Democratic Party liberals are currently the political/ideological leaders of the vast majority of the ruling elite. And because Bernie Sanders (and most left-wing groups) have collapsed into the Clinton campaign, the capitalist liberals have, ironically, emerged as the public face of left. Insofar as the liberals do support

reforms, including those meant to address global warming, these entail the significant expansion of the state.

4. Totalitarian Marxism/Stalinism. (Note: I am using these terms as a concession to my comrades who still have illusions in Marxism. As I wrote in my book, I believe Marxism, in its essence, is totalitarian.) Although the totalitarian Marxist organizations are small and have little public profile, they are out there, organizing and building their forces, and already have significant strength in various liberal-to-left organizations, including the Green Party and the Sanders campaign, and in academia. They are committed, in principle, to the drastic increase in the size and strength of the state, both the explicitly capitalist state, insofar as they fight for statist reforms, and the implicitly capitalist state they call "socialist," insofar as their ultimate goal is the virtually complete takeover of society by the state, that is, the establishment of state capitalism. If mass struggles break out on any significant scale in the future, these totalitarian forces can emerge rather quickly as a serious danger both to the working class and to the goal of building a truly libertarian socialist movement.

To return to the question of reformism: In the past, while supporting mass struggles for reforms (both democratic and economic), we mostly criticized reformists (and reformism more broadly) as "misleaders." That is, we opposed them because they hold out the false promise that capitalism can be substantially reformed, peacefully and through the capitalist "democratic process," without a popular revolution. The other side of this is that they also actively work to derail mass movements, to channel them (generally) into the Democratic Party, and if this is not feasible, to help the capitalist state destroy them. I still support this position, although with the proviso that, at least in certain areas, particularly issues of democratic rights (e.g., LGBT liberation), the system has been able to grant more than I once thought possible.

However, there is another reason I believe we should oppose reformists and reformism, and this is the point on which I particularly agree with Jack. Specifically, we should oppose reformism because it is strongly (and, I would argue, intrinsically) statist. That is, it militantly supports the expansion and strengthening of the capitalist state as the agent of the reforms it proposes. We can see this very clearly in the program Bernie Sanders put forward during the Democratic primary campaign. Virtually all of his proposals entailed the drastic expansion of both the size and the scope of the federal government. (They also entailed a significant increase in the tax burden on the majority of the members of society, including workers, and not just the rich, as Sanders implied). While many leftists might be, and were, tempted to support Sanders' program, which contained a lot of fine-sounding ideas, it is important to remember that the main function of the capitalist state is to defend the capitalist system and to channel or destroy movements that threaten it. It is too easy to believe that one can easily separate the various facets of the state, supporting the "good" ones and opposing the "bad" ones. The fact is that a bigger, more extensive state will be better at repression than a smaller, more

restricted one. So, while we might choose to support any given statist measure proposed by the reformists, we need to keep this in mind.

This relates directly to another point that Jack made, that the logic of the program, strategy, and tactics of many (if not most) of the reformist environmental leaders and organizations is to call on the capitalist state to implement their program. And this can lead to the possibility, if not the likelihood, of the state imposing most of the costs and other burdens of this program on the backs of the working and middle classes. This speaks to the need, which many anarchists have proposed, of devising, supporting, and promoting as many local and regional solutions, especially those that involve the initiative of independent individuals and groups, as possible. It also speaks to the importance of rethinking our previous tactic of urging the reformists to seize power, as a way to expose them, that is, to give them "critical support," under the assumption that they lacked the commitment to actually implement their program, and that this would make it possible for more revolutionary forces to seize the leadership of the working class movement. While we might, depending on the circumstances, choose to give reformists "critical support," we need to recognize that, contrary to our old assumptions, the (statist) reformists might just choose to implement their program, and that this might not lead to them being exposed as "misleaders" but to the establishment of various forms of state capitalism ("socialism"). To see what this might entail, look at the role of Chavismo in the recent history of Venezuela.

I have more to say on this and related issues, but in the interests of promoting discussion, I will stop here.

Ron

October 16

Ron and Jack,

Ron, thank you for your most recent comments on climate change and related issues. A few brief thoughts:

1. I think Jack was discussing reformism in the specific context of the climate change movement, but more importantly, in contrast to Marxism/Stalinism (your point #4 in terms of 'dangers'). Jack, I'm sure, will indicate his views.
2. I agree with you that Jack is right in emphasizing the danger of reformism.
3. I also agree that our prior approach to reformism/reformist leaders as 'misleaders' was and is correct, for the reasons you state. You note here, as a 'proviso' that the system has been able to grant democratic rights that you didn't expect (citing LBGT liberation as an example.) I, too, have been surprised by the rapidity that gay rights/gay marriage gained acceptance (and, for that matter, the

legalization of marijuana), just as I was surprised by the election of a Black president. I was also surprised that apartheid in South Africa could be ended without a revolution. Looking at these things more broadly, I conclude that democratic rights and single issues can be granted legally and formally by the system more easily than we might have thought, but the underlying content--continued discrimination, economic exploitation, hierarchical reality, class- and race-based brutality, etc., cannot and will not be addressed by the system as it is. I would add, that I am staking a lot on this belief, since I am deeply concerned about the dangers of revolution.

4. I agree with you that the danger/evil of reformism goes beyond 'they will betray,' but rather includes the reality that the reformist program is one of expanded state power and authority. However, in your second paragraph on this topic, I am confused by the following statement: "It also speaks to the importance of rethinking our previous tactic of urging the reformists to seize power, as a way to expose them, that is, to give them "critical support," under the assumption that they lacked the commitment to actually implement their program, and that this would make it possible for more revolutionary forces to seize the leadership of the working class movement." Reformists include the labor bureaucracy, the Democratic Party, and others. When and where have we encouraged them to 'seize power'? It is one thing to critically support specific movements for specific objectives, and another to support the seizure of power (by anyone). Could you clarify?

5. Marxists/Stalinists may be a significant danger in the future, but if I understand Jack correctly, his point was that reformists were a far greater danger, now. Also: Stalinists are Marxists, in my view--how else to explain the peaceful takeover of the revolutionary Bolshevik Party?

Rod

October 17

Rod and Jack,

I believe Rod misunderstands my comments re our old position on reformism and reformists. I do not think our previous approach was correct. While I believe we were correct to see the reformist leaders and organizations as "misleaders," that is, political forces that serve to derail mass struggles and head off socialist revolutions, I do not think that we were correct, as a rule, to give these forces/parties "critical support." This is because, unlike Lenin, I believe that there are circumstances in which some reformist forces will, upon winning elections and taking office (which gives them control of the police, the bureaucracy, and the army), attempt to implement their program. Yet, as we now understand, this program is not, in fact, any type of democratic socialism, but (various forms of) state capitalism.

Thus, my use of the word "seize" power was incorrect. I meant to say "take" power, as Lenin urged revolutionaries to give "critical support" to reformist/Social Democratic/Labour parties in elections. Lenin was essentially urging revolutionaries to dare the reformists to take office and attempt to implement their proclaimed program of "socialism," feeling that they, as reformists, did not have the commitment to do this. This was also because, as a Marxist, Lenin saw socialism in statist terms, that is, as meaning and requiring the complete centralization of the means of production in the hands of the state, although he deluded himself into believing that this state capitalist economy, under the control of a revolutionary Marxist party, was the "dictatorship of the proletariat"/socialism, and that, under it, the state would begin to "wither away." Based on the experiences of the Russian Revolution and other revolutions in which Marxists took power, we now know that this type of state does not "wither away" but gets ever stronger, as it attempts to control all aspects of society, including the way people think. Thus, Lenin believed that what he called socialism (and what today we can see to be state capitalism) was the logical extension of the reformists' "socialist" program, which the reformists advocated, but did not have the guts to carry out.

This Leninist view of reformism and the concomitant tactic of "critical support" is what I am referring to, and this is what I am suggesting we reject. Today, we can see that most reformists are at least partial statists, that some reformists (e.g., Bernie Sanders) are actually closet Stalinists (that is, totalitarian state capitalists), and that in some circumstances, they might actually try to implement their state capitalist program if they do get into office. Thus, in Venezuela, Hugo Chavez of the Venezuelan socialist party (whatever its precise name) was elected to office and proceeded to attempt to implement what he thought was a Castro-ite ("socialist") program piece-meal. The result has been the virtually complete destruction of the Venezuelan economy and a paralyzing political crisis, since Chavez's successor, Victor Maduro, has refused to accept the results of a parliamentary election, in which a majority of the Venezuelan voters decisively rejected "Chavismo," and step down. I believe something similar was what was going on in Chile under Salvador Allende, until the military coup aborted the process. Knowing that this is at least possible, that is, that some reformists might actually try to implement a state capitalist program, do we generally want to urge reformists to take office, that is, to give them "critical support." I don't think so.

Re the "main danger." I believe all the forces I listed are, in fact, dangers to the struggle to avert global warming (as well as to everything else we stand for). However, as I mentioned, I am not prepared to label any one of these is the "main" danger.

Ron

October 17

Ron and Jack,

Thanks, Ron, for your extended clarification of some of the views you expressed in your Oct. 15 email. I did misinterpret some of what you are saying, and appreciate the attempt to explain further. I still find a lack of clarity over some aspects of what you are saying, which may or may not represent political disagreement.

In your October 15 email, you wrote: *To return to the question of reformism. In the past, while supporting mass struggles for reforms (both democratic and economic), we mostly criticized reformists (and reformism more broadly) as "misleaders."* You added that you still support this position. So do I.

In your October 17 email you wrote: *While I believe we were correct to see the reformist leaders and organizations as "misleaders," that is, political forces that serve to derail mass struggles and head off socialist revolutions, I do not think that we were correct, as a rule, to give these forces/parties "critical support."* My interpretation of the tactics we used in the past (and generally referred to as the 'united front' and 'critical support') was that we were supporting *the struggle* (for limited/partial demands), even though that struggle: a) was partial; and, b) was being led by forces that we did not politically support (i.e., 'misleaders'). In this sense, we were in 'critical support' of the struggle. Our support was conditioned on the goals of the struggle being, a) valid (that is to say, advancing the interests of working and oppressed people in whatever limited ways); b) having dimensions that were both independent and struggle-oriented (i.e., not limited to electoral support for a capitalist political party); and, c) having the freedom to raise within the arena of struggle our own views. While each of these three conditions can, in practice, be less than clear-cut, they generally framed our approach. I have not changed my view on this; I am not sure whether you have.

It seems to me that implicit in supporting such struggle is the notion of 'critical support' (which we would also apply to national liberation struggles). We are supporting the struggle *even though* 'misleaders' are leading it. In supporting such struggles, there is inevitably some form of (critical) support for the leadership, because one is building the strike/demonstration/campaign that the (mis) leaders are leading. Perhaps because we relied more on Trotsky's language/approach with regard the united front/critical support, I do not remember us speaking in terms of calling on the (reformist) leaders to 'lead and take power' (a la Lenin), but rather, we called on the rank and file to expand/deepen the struggle in class conscious, anti-capitalist directions. Perhaps you would agree, and say that all of this is the *united front* and not *critical support*. If so, than this becomes more of terminological difference than a political difference. If not, there would seem to be something deeper to pursue here.

I note that the brief examples you use to describe your rejection of our former approach (and Lenin's) involve political parties/electoral politics, whereas the examples I used above involved strikes, demonstrations, or movements over a given set of demands. This may be where we are speaking past each other. Perhaps you could clarify.

To the degree you are speaking more narrowly about supporting (however critically) or not supporting a labor or social-democratic party in an election, I am not sure I agree. Such a blanket (change of) position seems to reject the notion of the united front in all circumstances. If I understand correctly, the following is the underpinning of your view: *Today, we can see that most reformists are at least partial statist, that some reformists (e.g., Bernie Sanders) are actually closet Stalinists (that is, totalitarian state capitalists), and that in some circumstances, they might actually try to implement their state capitalist program if they do get into office.... Knowing that this is at least possible, that is, that some reformists might actually try to implement a state capitalist program, do we generally want to urge reformists to take office, that is, to give them "critical support." I don't think so.* While I agree fully that there is an intersection between forces that have created or stood for radical state capitalism (Stalinism/Marxism) and forces that seek to reform traditional capitalism into socialism (social democracy, broadly speaking), I am not persuaded that this alters our approach to the united front/critical support, or to reformism more broadly. Although, as former Marxists/Leninists/Trotskyists, we did not recognize that Stalinism/state capitalism had its roots in Marxism itself, this didn't change the fact that we completely rejected Stalinism/state capitalism as nothing but a variant on other forms of capitalism. That is to say, we didn't think the forces supporting so-called socialism/Communism (state capitalism) were preferable to forces supporting traditional capitalism. But, we also never thought that reformist (ultimately pro-capitalist) forces were *preferable* to Stalinist/state capitalist forces. I therefore fail to see how recognition of 'statist intersection' between Marxist and reformist forces changes the equation. I look forward to hearing further from you on this.

Rod

October 17

Jack and Ron,

This article in today's *NYT* illustrates the degree to which significant and powerful sectors of the corporate elite are moving to combat climate change.

[How the Chemical Industry Joined the Fight Against Climate Change](#)

BY HIROKO TABUCHI AND DANNY HAKIM

In the move away from a profitable chemical used for air-conditioning, companies were driven less by idealism than by intense competition.

Rod

October 17

Rod and Ron,

I don't doubt that many corporations and capitalists want to try to slow global warming, and I am sure that over time more will. The questions are, first to what extent can they; second, in what time frame; and third, what damage is and will continue to be done by those who will persist in extracting and burning carbon.

Jack

October 17

Rod,

First. You are using the term "critical support" in a much broader sense than I am. If I understand you correctly, you are using it as another term for a broadly defined "united front approach." I am still (in general) for having such an orientation to struggles and movements that, while partial, limited, and led by reformists or totalitarian Marxists (those we used to call "Stalinists"), we support and, where we can, participate in. I am not proposing to abandon that approach. (I would point out that in cases of national liberation struggles and comparable situations, I prefer the term "military support" or "military/technical support," because in most of these situations, the leaderships explicitly aim to set up states.) When I used the term "critical support" in my discussion, I was referring specifically to cases in which reformists, Marxists, and similar statist forces that claim to be socialist and/or to represent the working class are running in capitalist elections, particularly on the national level. Thus, in the past, had we been in Chile and Venezuela during the periods when Allende and Chavez, respectively, were running for president as leaders of "socialist" parties, we would (almost automatically) have given them critical support. Today, in light of what we now know about such forces -- that they are not simply "reformist" but are, in fact, state capitalist, that is, that they may, when given the chance, try to impose state capitalism on their respective populations -- I would oppose giving such figures and parties any kind of critical support. Continuing this example, if we were in Venezuela today, I would not be for giving any kind of support to Maduro's Chavista government, which has ruined the Venezuelan economy and may actually be planning to carry out a military coup (in the name of "anti-imperialism" and "socialism," of course). In fact, I would probably be for joining, as a form of "military/technical support," the mass demonstrations *against* the Maduro regime, even though these demonstrations are currently being organized and led by explicitly bourgeois, even conservative, parties and forces. In my opinion, Maduro and his cronies are a bunch of Castro-ite gangsters and would-be dictators who need to be thrown out of office as soon as possible.

Second. Perhaps I am making too much out of one of your phrases, but you refer to reformist forces, what you describe as "social democracy, broadly speaking," as seeking "to transform traditional capitalism into socialism." I do not see "social democracy, broadly speaking" as aiming to create anything we would call socialism. As I see it, what they call "socialism" is what we call "state capitalism," that is, state ownership and control of the means of production and all of society. Therefore, I think there is much more than a "statist intersection" between Marxist and social democratic reformist forces. I believe that, at bottom, they represent the same thing, only that (some, but not all) Marxists think achieving their goal (state capitalism) requires a revolution, while social democratic reformists seek to achieve their goal (also state capitalism) peacefully. Your phrasing seems to imply that the main difference between reformist forces ("social democracy, broadly speaking") and ourselves is that they are reformists and we are revolutionary. In my view, our differences with "social democracy, broadly speaking" go much deeper than this. As I see it, our goals are diametrically opposed! The logic of their program, even if they often (but not always) lack the guts to carry it out, is not socialism but state capitalism. This does not mean that I am not for supporting concrete struggles led by reformists or Marxists. It means (even, and especially, while doing so) that we need to recognize what these forces, tendencies, parties actually stand for. While for many decades there was a deep divide between social democrats and Stalinists, social democrats supporting the US in the Cold War, Stalinists supporting the Soviet Union, today, this gap no longer exists. It began to be bridged in the late 60s/early 70s, when the "socialists" in and around the DSA (Democratic Socialists of America) started muting their criticisms of Cuba. With the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, the unification became virtually complete. For their part, the Communist Party today insists, "socialism is, and can only be, democratic." (In fact, for all practical purposes, the Communist Party, USA, has not been revolutionary since the so-called "Third Period" of the late 1920s/early 1930s. Its long-term and current strategy, the "Peoples' Anti-Monopoly Coalition," is reformist. If you read their literature, the party supports Bernie Sanders, Hillary Clinton and even, with some minor criticisms around foreign policy, the Obama administration.)

Ron

Ron,

October 17

Thanks for these further thoughts.

Point one:

You are right that I am using critical support more broadly than you appear to be. This is because united front situations involve an element of critical support. In this context, and based on what you say in this email, we appear to be in agreement, i.e.,

we continue to take a united front approach to many (partial/limited) struggles and movements, even where they are led by traditional reformists or what you call 'totalitarian Marxists' (which I would prefer to call 'state-capitalist Marxists,' for reasons I will get to). I also understand and agree with your preference to use the term 'military/technical support' in reference to national liberation struggles. Language matters, though I think this is ultimately still a united front approach that inherently involves limited and (highly) critical support.

You go on to say, *When I used the term "critical support" in my discussion, I was referring specifically to cases in which reformists, Marxists, and similar statist forces that claim to be socialist and/or to represent the working class are running in capitalist elections, particularly on the national level. Thus, in the past, had we been in Chile and Venezuela during the periods when Allende and Chavez, respectively, were running for president as leaders of "socialist" parties, we would (almost automatically) have given them critical support.* I'm not sure about my thinking on this. Would we/did we defend Castro or Allende against US imperialism? Certainly. Did we ever argue that Castroism, which we considered a variant of Stalinism/state capitalism, was 'better' than other, more traditional forms of capitalism? No, and in this sense, we gave no political support. Since Castro didn't come to power electorally (something that matters to me more than I think it matters to you in differentiating a variant of Marxism we used to call Stalinism from reformism) this doesn't fully address the scenarios in which you argue we would have 'automatically' given (critical) support to parties that purported to be socialist. I don't see such support as automatic, but rather as situational. I am more familiar with Weimar and Nazi Germany than Venezuela, so I will use this as an example. In the 1920s, Weimar Germany was governed by SPD (German Social-Democratic Party)-led coalitions. The SPD suppressed the Spartacists and blocked with the German military and right wing para-military groups to defeat left-wing worker uprisings. In elections during the 1920s, I don't think we would have called on workers and others to vote for the SPD. Another electoral choice would have been the KPD (German Communist Party), a thoroughly Stalinist political force. Would we, even absent an understanding of the link between Stalinism and Marxism, have called on workers and others to vote for the KPD? During this time, the Nazis were a small, but not insignificant force (through 1928, they never received as much as 10% of the vote). That said, there would have been many situations in which we would have joined forces (united front) with socialists and communists against Nazi attacks on farmer and worker organizations and struggles. Following the Depression, the Nazi vote skyrocketed in 1930-31. The SPD and KPD retained an electoral majority--and, due to the refusal of the Stalinist KPD to engage in united front, and due the SPD's craven record, the working class had no united defense against Nazism. Whatever we might have done in each election during this period, we would have advocated a united working class movement against fascism/Nazism. We would have understood that the SPD was, ultimately, pro-capitalist, we would have understood that the KPD was subservient to Stalinist state capitalism, *and we might not have understood where Marxism fit in this equation--but this would have altered our commitment to a united front against fascism one wit.* In my view.

You then write: *In fact, I would probably be for joining, as a form of "military/technical support," the mass demonstrations against the Maduro regime, even though these demonstrations are currently being organized and led by explicitly bourgeois, even conservative, parties and forces. In my opinion, Maduro and his cronies are a bunch of Castro-ite gangsters and would-be dictators who need to be thrown out of office as soon as possible.* I leave it to you to say whether you think calling this 'military/technical support' removes the implication that we should support 'bourgeois- democratic' capitalists over Marxist/Stalinist/state capitalist-capitalists.

Point two:

You write: *Perhaps I am making too much out of one of your phrases, but you refer to reformist forces, what you describe as "social democracy, broadly speaking," as seeking "to transform traditional capitalism into socialism." I do not see "social democracy, broadly speaking" as aiming to create anything we would call socialism.*

Yes, you are making too much of my phrase. I should have put 'socialism' in quotes. I do not believe for a moment that social democracy aims to create anything we would call socialism. I was referring to the fact that *they* call it socialism. Thus, I agree with many of the following points you make. To be explicit, I think that Marxist-inspired socialism, in its 'revolutionary' form, is state capitalist, not socialist. I think that Marxist-inspired socialism, in its reformist form, most likely results in a continuation of traditional capitalism, but if it *were* able to alter traditional capitalism significantly, it would result in....state capitalism. In either case, one has a state-dominated society. This is an 'intersection.'

You, mistakenly, conclude the following: *Your phrasing seems to imply that the main difference between reformist forces ("social democracy, broadly speaking") and ourselves is that they are reformists and we are revolutionary.* Nowhere did I write a single word contrasting social democracy (broadly or narrowly speaking) with our own views. In fact, in my discussions with you, I have continually emphasized that I see what we have previously called Stalinism as 'revolutionary' and what we have called reformism (*including Marxist reformism*) as...reformism. Thus, state capitalism in any full form has come about through 'revolutionary' (or extra-ordinary) circumstances, and social democracy has come about through the ballot box. Both are statist; hence; intersection. I get your points about SD's being 'soft on' or outright supporting soft-Stalinism. And, I get your point about Stalinists (being reformist in their practice. You put more weight on these points; I put more weight on when, where and how state capitalism has been created, and when, where and how, social democratic welfare states have been created.

Lastly, do you believe that since Marxism is totalitarian (as is fascism/Nazism), a more pluralist society (bourgeois capitalism) is preferable? I haven't reached this conclusion, but if we're going to discuss substantive issues, this seems like one.

Rod

October 18

Rod,

I'll try to brief (and let you have the last word), since I suspect that this has gone on a bit long for most people to follow.

1. I should make it clear that today, as an anarchist, I do not participate in the political process: I do not vote; I do not urge others to vote: I do not work for or support (even "critically") candidates in elections, even "socialists," etc. (This is the classical anarchist position.) The political process is an integral part of the statist, hierarchical system that is contemporary capitalism. The fundamental issue is hierarchy and the power this gives some individuals power over others. When one engages in bourgeois politics, one is participating in that hierarchical system; working within the political system reinforces that hierarchy and cannot serve as a lever to overthrow it. My point about reformists and Marxists was to try to demonstrate why/how one who is not an anarchist might come to the conclusion that giving critical support to these forces, especially in national elections, is/was a mistake, given that we now realize that, under some circumstances, such forces might, and probably will, use their power to move toward or create state capitalism.

2. We have different interpretations of what our military/technical support position entailed. As I see it, in opposing the United States' attempts to overthrow the Castro regime, we were not giving any kind of political support (even highly critical) to that regime. We were supporting the right of the Cuban people to make the decision as to what kind of regime they wanted. Remember, we always called on the Cubans to rise up and overthrow the Castro regime from inside. The military/tactical support is actually a tactical collaboration or coordination. It means that if we had forces inside Cuba at the time of the Bay of Pigs invasion, we would, in effect, propose to tactically coordinate our efforts with the Castro forces to defeat the Americans until the US forces were defeated. It is a temporary truce in the struggle against the regime and does not, as I see it, involve giving any kind of political support to it. Our position on Vietnam was similar. We were defending the right of the Vietnamese to self-determination, defending their right to choose which forces they wanted to govern them, while we tried (at least in theory) to convince them that the NLF/Vietnamese CP were not socialists, etc., and that they ought to overthrow them and carry out their own, truly socialist, revolution. When one is calling for the overthrow of a particular regime or would-be regime, this does not entail giving that regime any kind of political support, even "highly critical." I would make the same point today vis a vis Ukraine: we support the right of the Ukrainians to have an independent state. While we call on the Ukrainians to rise up and overthrow their current government and establish libertarian socialism/anarchism, we would attempt to coordinate our activities with those of the Ukrainian army and other Ukrainian forces (including Ukrainian nationalists) against the Russians and the Russian-sponsored separatists in the eastern part of the country.

3. In Germany, I would have been against giving the SPD and the KPD critical support, but would have been in favor of attempting to coordinate anarchist forces with the SPD, the KPD, and other left and liberal organizations in joint struggles against Nazi storm troopers, in defense of strikes, unions, and other workers' and leftist organizations, in defense of Jews (including Jewish-owned businesses), and in defense of LGBT people, Poles, and other groups targeted by the Nazis.

4. I have no question that it is preferable to live under a pluralistic capitalist government than under a state capitalist regime. I also understand why, at any given time, some people might have illusions in a given state capitalist regime (e.g., Cuba) or "socialist" government (e.g., Venezuela), and choose to support them. However, when people in such circumstances rise up or otherwise act decisively against such regimes/governments, I would support such struggles, as we supported the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, the Czechoslovaks against the Russians in 1968, and as I support the anti-Chavista struggle in Venezuela today, even though these struggles were/are supported, and some of the forces involved were/are financed, by the United States.

5. We continue to disagree about social democrats and Marxists. What unites them is that they all believe that the solution to today's economic and social problems is to expand the government/state and have it take care of them. As an anarchist, I see this as the fundamental question: they are all militant statist. In the United States today, these forces are all intertwined, e.g., the Green Party is organizationally dominated by Marxists of various stripes.

As I said above, I will let you have the last word.

Ron

October 18

Ron,

Thank you for your 'last words.' They help to clarify some aspects of the discussion for me. I will also try to be brief. Perhaps we will both have more to say down the road.

1. Electoral politics/political process.

In my previous email, I had thought about raising whether opposition to participation in *any* electoral politics lay behind your views, but thought it might confuse the discussion. You have now raised this. For me, this makes your position consistent and logical, even if I am not sure I agree with it.

a) I continue to feel that if you take this out of the discussion (as you put it, if you are speaking with someone who doesn't have an anarchist view of the electoral/political process), the recognition that Marxism may lead to state

capitalism (in its more radical forms) doesn't change the prior equation. Virtually all forces we might have engaged in united fronts with, or given some form of critical support to, were either reformists who would likely wind up supporting (traditional) capitalism, or Stalinists who, if they acted in a radical enough fashion, would create state capitalism.

b) Abstention from 'bourgeois politics' and the 'political process' may be too sweeping a stance for me. I am not sure. Everything is connected to everything else. I look forward to discussing this in the future.

2. Military/technical support

I accept your definition. I do not believe that we should have given political support to Castro or the NLF in Vietnam, nor should be giving political support to the Ukrainian government. Believing everything is connected to everything, I was merely trying to say that a tactical bloc (against US or Russian imperialism) objectively provides some form of support to the regime/force one is in a bloc with. The point is not worth pursuing; I agree that the phrase 'military/technical support' is useful in drawing a line between coordinated action against an immediate common enemy and political support for capitalist/state capitalist forces.

3. Germany in the 1920s/1930s.

We are in agreement, except on whether we should abstain, in all circumstances, from any and all involvement in the electoral/political process. As I said, this latter point may be too sweeping for me.

4. Pluralistic capitalism vs. state capitalism

Does a broad statement (such as you make) that the former is preferable to the latter have implications beyond the fact that we have and will oppose state capitalist regimes, have and will support struggles to overthrow the state capitalist regimes and, at the same time, have and will defend colonial state capitalist countries against imperialist aggression/domination?

5. Social democrats and Marxists

I agree that they are united by the view that an expanded government/state is the 'solution.' This view is not only in contrast to anarchism/libertarian socialism, but also to aspects of conservatism/laissez-faire capitalism. We have no disagreement here. I have only sought to say that I think Marxism and social democracy are also differentiated, to some degree, by a *tendency* for social democracy to be reformist (and to create, at most, welfare capitalism), and a *tendency* for at least a wing of Marxism to be radical/revolutionary (and to create a form of capitalism that expropriates the prior bourgeoisie--state capitalism).

Happy trails...

Rod

Rod and Ron,

<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/10/24/world/asia/100000004724863.app.html? r=0>

Drought is expanding China's deserts into populated areas.

Jack

An exchange over Ron Tabor's "*The Tyranny of Theory—A Contribution to the Anarchist Critique of Marxism*" *

October 11

Jack,

I recently re-read your review of Ron's book (*The Utopian*, December 2015), and wanted to share some thoughts with you. Overall, I think your review is excellent. Your summary of Ron's thesis and core analysis is clear, concise and cogent (not easy, given the complex subject matter), and your comments and questions are apt. Your first observation is that an outlook that sees only the possibilities of successful proletarian revolution (through the spreading of the revolution to the more economically developed countries of Western Europe) or capitalist restoration is blind to the development of state capitalism and, in the case of the Soviet Union, is the outlook that guided the actions that created this very outcome. You question whether this course inherently flows from Marxism (a question I raised in my review), but acknowledge that Ron is right to point to this very real danger. I agree.

Your second observation is that Marx and Engels believed that their views were 'scientific,' (based on 19th century infatuation with the 'truth' of science), and that Ron correctly argues they this view is demonstrably false. I agree. In my review, I conceded that this view is philosophically totalitarian, but questioned whether this made the entirety of Marxism totalitarian. My case rested on emphasizing other aspects of Marx and Engels' writings, most importantly the essential role of consciousness, self-activity of masses of people, and the replacement of rule by a minority by the governing of an overwhelming majority. I am increasingly coming to see that the Marxist emphasis on the state as the tool for worker emancipation tips the scale toward the logic of philosophic totalitarianism, rather than to the democratic, libertarian sentiments of Marxism, sincere as I believe those sentiments are. While the 'essence' of Marxism might remain an open question for both of us, you conclude that Ron is right to warn that "...the state apparatus itself can and repeatedly has been molded into a class ruling over the working class." I agree.

You begin your third observation by making the point that Ron has introduced his own form of 'inevitability' into his arguments regarding the inherent logic of Marxism. I don't think I agree with this. I see Ron as arguing that there are deep flaws in Marxism (its philosophic assumptions, its economic analysis, its attitude toward the state, etc.) that, taken as a whole, lead toward totalitarian outlooks and outcomes. I think that one can posit that this is the 'fundamental thrust' or 'inherent logic' of Marxism without needing to take the position that any single or given outcome is 'inevitable.' Words matter, but I wonder if this more a matter of language than core content.

You then move forward to what I think is the substance of your third observation: can we dispense with the notion of a workers' state, and, at a deeper level, can the working class actually rule? In your discussion, you raise points that I raised as well in my review: Can we dismiss Marx's emphasis that the dictatorship of the proletariat would be the rule of the vast majority? Can we ignore various qualifications about this state, including those arising from the experience of the Paris Commune? This leads to your question, if not a workers' state, how should society be structured and organized to deal with the daunting tasks it would face? At the most general level, this question has been addressed by *The Utopian* via an emphasis on a society organized on a non-hierarchical, cooperative, participatory, local basis, a concept sharply counter-posed to any form of centralized state. I share your concern that this leaves unaddressed questions regarding what aspects of organizing and administering would need to 'flow upwards' (local, regional, national coordination), in relation to the production and distribution of goods, issues of the environment, conflict (internal or external). And it does not address your question about why we should believe workers could run a factory or city if they are unable to control a state (though advancing the view that the state has certain inherent oppressive tendencies would be one line of argument here). I would like to see more discussion of these issues (and much more discussion in general). I, too, am not satisfied with the 'there is no blueprint' answer to questions about how a libertarian socialist/anarchist society might operate.

Lastly on this point: I have a concern that the very act/process of revolution itself, due to its chaos, the breaking down of 'order' (overwhelmingly, but not solely oppressive), and the opportunities thereby created for demagogues to insert themselves, opens the door to anti-democratic, authoritarian tendencies. This is reason enough in my mind to stand strongly for local structures (which limit power) versus national structures (which expand power). I would rather deal with the unanswered questions here than deal with a powerful state in the hands of some force. Perhaps not a satisfying resolution, but mine at the moment.

Your fourth observation discusses the significance of reformist/patriotic social democracy, pointing out that this is the largest expression of Marxism to emerge in the late- 19th/early-20th century. You make excellent points. (I believe that Ron has said that he regrets that he did not include this aspect of Marxism in his book.) One of the insights I have gained via correspondence with Ron is that there is strong symmetry between 'revolutionary' state capitalism (Stalinism) and reformist state

capitalism (social democracy), with the common denominator being a state that 'solves' all issues via its expanded power (plus 'correct leadership'). I think this is a compelling way to see things, and bolsters the (anarchist) anti-state view.

Your final observation centers on what we might term the 'two souls of Marxism.' I agree with your view that Marxism seems to have a powerful democratic, liberationist thrust that coexists with its ultimately bourgeois notions of 'progress.' I also agree with you that this is at the heart of why Marxism is attractive to so many. I wrote my review of Ron's book precisely because the contradiction between these 'two souls' raised questions for me about whether Marxism should be rejected in its entirety. In the review, I conceded that Marx's claims that he (and Engels) had discovered 'scientific socialism', and that the historical evolution to socialism was 'inevitable,' the march of history 'predictable,' represent philosophically totalitarian ideas. I conceded that societies claiming to be based on Marxism were anything but 'free.' I conceded that the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is, at a minimum, one of the most unfortunate phrases every adopted. That said, I raised the possibility that Lenin and the Bolsheviks could be viewed as 'hijackers' of Marxism, thoroughly distorting it to an extent that makes Bolshevism something other than Marxism. Frankly, I now think these are slender reeds. (Quantity becomes quality; quacking/walking ducks actually are ducks, etc.)

I wrote my 'Conversation about Marxism' in part to explore my own views, and in the hope that a rich, discussion could be of benefit. I am responding to your review in the hopes that we can further that discussion.

Rod

October 12

Rod,

I'm not sure that you and I disagree on much. Perhaps on whether Ron has introduced inevitability into his argument for his viewpoint. As you suggest, that might be more a matter of language than of fundamental difference. I'll look at that.

I have something to say about the relationship between reformism and Stalinism, and on the question of "revolutionary Stalinism", and more generally the relation of all of these to "statism" and authoritarianism. I hope to write at more length about this in the future. For now, I'll just say, briefly: I think that both reformism and Stalinism are variants of a 'statist' approach, with society, economics, politics, and in the end daily life dominated by a powerful state apparatus. Indeed, on domestic policy, the Communist Parties in the west pursued reformist policies for almost the entire period post-1923 (with the possible exception of the 1929-33 'Third Period'). I think that the question that you raise about the chaotic nature of the post-revolutionary period opening the door to anti-democratic centralization is very

important. I tried to discuss this in my review, citing the divisions that widened after the October revolution in conditions of civil war, imperialist invasion, extreme scarcity and deprivation, ideological divisions in the working class, etc.

I also agree that it is important to try to develop and strengthen local institutions and initiative as much as possible. However, as I raise in my review, there will be many questions that require rapid — even immediate — regional, national, or even international decisions. I gave some examples in my review. In my opinion, these are inevitable — and it's why authoritarianism finds the door especially open in such a period. But these questions can't be avoided, and it's best to understand the danger and have some idea of how to approach it — in advance. I think that the maximum local / decentralization that's feasibly possible should be implemented, but that mechanisms for immediate decision-making will be needed (and these will have to be done, somehow, from some sort of center.)

Jack

October 12

Jack,

Thanks for writing. I share your view that the issues we are discussing do not involve disagreement between us as much as a search for a better/deeper understanding of difficult to answer questions. For this reason, I appreciate the dialogue very much.

Regarding your comments on Stalinism, reformism and 'statism.' I think you are right to emphasize the connections. It seems to me that we (our tendency, if you will) has long recognized Stalinism as 'statist,' both because in Russia and elsewhere it ruled politically through a highly dictatorial state, but also because we recognized that Stalinism was a continuation of capitalism, in a new form, 'state' capitalism. I think we tended to view 'regular capitalism' as more pluralistic (I.e., was defined by a significant private sector, that was independent of, and to a degree competed with, the state.) Our move away from Marxism, and the adoption of a more anarchist (or libertarian socialist) view of the oppressive nature of the state in general, has led to a greater recognition of the symmetry between social democracy (reformism) and Stalinism. I look forward to getting your thoughts on where 'revolutionary Stalinism' fits in this picture. I will say that I find the point about the reformist path of the western CP's, post-1923, unsatisfying. The USSR signed the Rapallo Treaty with Germany in 1923, and from that point on, the Comintern directed CP's to follow policies subservient to the national (non-revolutionary, and therefore reformist) interests of the USSR.

While there is symmetry between reformism and Stalinism, to some degree this is abstract. Practically speaking, reformism as a pronounced tendency flourishes in wealthier societies. There is fat--hence reformism. What you might term

'revolutionary Stalinism,' and also right wing dictatorships of various stripes, flourish in less developed societies. I am not sure of the implications of this, and welcome your thoughts.

I am glad you share my concern about the authoritarian tendencies attendant to the act of revolution. I look forward to hearing your further thoughts on this.

On local institutions and initiatives versus centralized ones: I have no acceptable answer to your point that issues will arise that demand quick and centralized responses, with all that follows from that. My heretical answer is that we are whistling Dixie. My mealy mouth answer is that we emphasize local, and oppose a centralized state, and hope for the best How different this is from Michelle Obama's response to Trump--'when they go low, we go high,' is not entirely clear to me.

Rod

Articles and blogs

Frank Wilderson has said that it will take the end of the world for Black suffering and death to be over. Economic reasons alone cannot explain the situation of Black people. That non-whites get joy/ pleasure in inflicting such violence on Black bodies.

He believes that non-whites are united against Black people. That Black people have been thrown out of the scope of humanity. Lastly, that multi-racial solidarity is impossible.

His arguments are some of the most serious challenges to multi-racial organizing and economic based explanations of race/ racism.

<http://www.incognegro.org/pdf/Biko%20and%20the%20Problematic%20of%20Presence.pdf>

Shemon

FARM WORKERS WIN A WATERSHED ELECTION IN WASHINGTON STATE

By David Bacon
The Nation, 10/3/16

<http://davidbaconrealitycheck.blogspot.de/2016/10/farm-workers-win-watershed-election-in.html>
<https://www.thenation.com/article/why-these-farm-workers-went-on-strike-and-why-it-matters/>

I'd like to share the amazing victory of the Sakuma farmworkers with the group.

Sandy Y.

Burlington, WA-There is not much love lost between the owners of Sakuma Brothers Farms and Ramon Torres, the president of Familias Unidas por la Justicia. Sakuma Brothers is one of the largest berry growers in Washington state, and Familias Unidas is a grassroots union organized by the company's workers. Torres used to work in the Sakuma fields. He was fired after the strikes by pickers in 2013 in which the union was formed.

This month, on September 12, the workers finally voted in an election to demonstrate what really needed no proof - that they supported the union they formed three years ago. This election is a watershed: Familias Unidas por la Justicia

is the first union organized by farm workers in the United States in many years. The balloting took place over four hours at the company office, two hours north of Seattle, surrounded by Sakuma's blueberry fields. After all the votes had been cast, Torres and a small group of workers and supporters drove over to the polling place to watch the count. A company manager balked, however. The ever. The count couldn't take place as long as Torres was on the property, he said.

After a lot of arguing, the workers retired to a local schoolyard, together with Richard Ahearn, former regional director of the National Labor Relations Board. There, on the tailgate of a pickup belonging to State Senator John McCoy, Ahearn counted the ballots. The result: 195 for the union, and 58 against.

Jeff Johnson, who heads the Washington State Labor Federation, AFL-CIO, was part of the workers' group. "The irony of where the votes were tallied was hard to miss," he said later. "The majority of students at that elementary school are Latino, Senator McCoy has been a fierce advocate for these workers, and this is as much a public victory as a union victory."

The union is a grassroots organization formed by the pickers themselves, and is led by indigenous Mixtec and Triqui migrants from the southern Mexico states of Oaxaca, Guerrero and Chiapas. A union contract at Sakuma Brothers could give this union the stability and resources needed to make substantial changes in the economic conditions of its own members, and of farm workers across western Washington.

Strikes and organizing among agricultural laborers, especially indigenous migrants, has been on the rise all along the Pacific coast over the last several years. The election in Burlington and a new contract will further raise the expectations of thousands of people working in the fields, from northern Mexico to the Canadian border. "This is a new dawn," Torres said. "When we were celebrating afterwards, people began saying, 'From now on we know what the future of our children is going to be.'"

The union in Burlington won the loyalty of the Sakuma workforce through three picking seasons of strikes and direct action. Almost all of the work stoppages challenged the company over low wages and its methods for calculating the piece rate, in which workers are paid according to the quantity of fruit they pick. Before he was fired in 2013, Torres was chosen by workers as their spokesperson while attempting to set what they considered fair rate: one that would guarantee \$14 per hour.

"Last year they were paying \$10 an hour, which they say is a lot," said Familias Unidas vice-president Felimon Pineda, a Mixtec picker and former Sakuma employee. "But they demanded fifty pounds per hour to get \$10. For five pounds more there was a bonus of \$1.50, or \$11.50 an hour. Only the workers who work

fast could get that, though." When workers walked out to protest, supervisors called the police to expel Pineda from the field.

When the season began this year in June, workers walked out over a piece rate of 24 cents per pound for picking strawberries. In August, FUJ members in Sakuma blueberry fields walked out again. A day earlier, workers explained, management was paying 60 cents per pound, and then lowered the price to 56 cents.

During all the walkouts, workers also demanded Sakuma sign a union contract.

"People are tired of low pay," Torres said, "but that's not all of it. Many come up from California for the harvest, getting here broke with no guarantee they'll get a room in the labor camp, and the conditions are bad there anyway. People feel humiliated, and denied basic respect."

A 35-member union committee of workers in the field organized the walk-outs. In addition, the union has another 25-member committee shaping anger over conditions into proposals for a union contract.

In 2013, Sakuma's owners seemed willing to negotiate with the workers, but when those talks failed to raise piece rates, the new union launched a boycott of the company's berries. The boycott initially focused on local sales under Sakuma Brothers' own label. But soon the workers discovered that Sakuma was selling berries through one of the largest agricultural marketers in the country, Driscoll Strawberry Associates, or Driscoll's.

Driscoll's is the largest berry distributor in the world. It does not grow its own berries, but controls berry production by contracted farmers. It has contracted growers in several countries, and has received loans guaranteeing foreign investment from the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, a U.S. government agency.

Marketing berries has become highly monopolized. Four shippers control one-third of all blueberry shipments in the United States. During the peak season, Driscoll's moves 3.8 million pounds of fruit daily, and up to 80 percent of the fruit is shipped on the same day it's received from growers. Sakuma Brothers has been supplying berries to Driscoll's for 25 years.

An extremely positive company profile on the front page of the business section of The New York Times the day before the Sakuma election (and which did not mention the boycott, the election, labor strife, or even the farm workers themselves who produce Driscoll's berries) announced Driscoll's new national marketing campaign. While the company wouldn't tell the Times how much it was spending, the article estimated that similar campaigns spend \$10-20 million on advertising.

"The public will get an introduction to the people Driscoll's calls its Joy Makers-agronomists, breeders, sensory analysts, plant pathologists and entomologists who will explain how the company creates its berries," the article enthused.

Rosalinda Guillen, director of Community2Community, a farm worker cooperative and advocacy organization in Bellingham, says Driscoll's image burnishing actually made it more vulnerable to a boycott. "It made the company more exposed, because of the way it markets itself," she explained. Guillen started helping farm workers organize unions in Washington over two decades ago, and spent several years with the United Farm Workers in California. When the strikes first erupted at Sakuma Brothers in 2013, workers called her in to help plan strategy and organize support.

Starting in the area between Seattle and Burlington, the workers urged students and progressive community activists to set up boycott committees and begin picketing supermarkets, and asked shoppers not to buy Driscoll's berries. As that activity increased, Torres and several workers and supporters made a trip down the west coast this spring, setting up more committees as they went.

"I wouldn't say (the boycott) is threatening the survival of the farm. I would say it's an annoyance," Sakuma spokesman Roger van Oosten claimed earlier this year. Maybe so, but the company started to feel the effects of labor pressure. It had to give \$87,160 in retroactive pay to pickers who worked in 2014, after a court ruled piece-rate workers must be paid separately for ten-minute rest breaks. And in a 2013 class-action lawsuit brought by two Sakuma workers alleging pay violations, Sakuma settled out of court by paying 408 workers \$500,000 and their lawyers \$350,000.

Driscoll's image also took a hit after a strike organized by pickers in the San Quintin Valley of Baja California in 2015, when as many as 60,000 farm workers stopped work and confronted heavy police repression. Last year these workers also decided to organize an independent union, and announced their support for a Driscoll's boycott. The area's largest grower, BerryMex, is owned by the Reiter family, which also owns Driscoll's.

Sakuma Farms and BerryMex aren't just connected by a common distributor, Driscoll's, but by the workforce that picks the berries. Agricultural labor in virtually all the berry fields on the Pacific Coast comes from the stream of indigenous migrants from southern Mexico.

"We are all part of a movement of indigenous people," Pineda says. "In San Quentin the majority of people are indigenous, and speak Mixteco, Zapoteco, Triqui, and Nahuatl. Their strike movement is indigenous. Everyone involved in our union in Washington is indigenous also."

As a result, the movement of workers is as much a protest against anti-indigenous racism as it is about low wages. "No matter if you're from Guatemala or Honduras, Chiapas or Guerrero - the right to be human is for everyone," Pineda added. "But

sometimes people see us as being very low. They think we have no rights. They're wrong. The right to be human is the same. There should be respect for all."

In Guillen's view, "indigenous culture plays a huge role, especially people's collective decision-making process. The strong bonds of culture and language create an ability for the union to grow stronger." Workers were also hardened, she believes, by the strikes. "The strikes were the only way to present the company with their grievances," she explained, "and gave farm workers the sense that by acting together with community support they could actually win something. New workers joined in every time. A few people got fired, but they didn't fall away, and kept supporting the organization."

In May this upsurge among indigenous farm workers erupted in California as well. Over 400 farm workers in McFarland, in the San Joaquin Valley, walked out of the fields at another grower protesting low wages and company abuse. The farm's owner, the Klein Management Company, produces clamshell boxes of blueberries sold under the Gourmet Trading Company label.

"The majority of the people here are from Oaxaca-Mixtecos and Zapotecos," explained Paulino Morelos, who comes from Putla, a town in Oaxaca. At the beginning of the blueberry-picking season in April, the company was paying pickers 95 cents per pound. By mid-May, the price had dropped to 70 cents, and then 65 cents. Finally, the company announced it was dropping it again, to 60 cents. Workers refused to go in to pick. After leaving the fields, workers approached the United Farm Workers, which filed a petition for a union election. The union won by a vote of 347 to 68.

Winning an election is one thing, but negotiating a contract is another. Familias Unidas por la Justicia called off their boycott when Sakuma Brothers agreed to an election followed by negotiations. But the boycott threat is still a powerful motive for reaching agreement.

The union and Sakuma also settled on a mechanism for making a contract even more likely. According to the AFL-CIO's Jeff Johnson, "the memorandum of agreement negotiated by labor attorney Kathy Barnard has a date certain for the conclusion of bargaining, after which if an agreement isn't reached, the offers will be submitted to arbitration, with the arbiter choosing one proposal to prevail."

California has a law, called mandatory mediation, with virtually the same arrangement. Signed into law in 2002, it has been used by the UFW to get contracts at several large companies. This law, however, is now on appeal before the state's Supreme Court, challenged by Gerawan Farms in Fresno, one of the world's largest peach growers.

"But the first place we had any arrangement like that was here in Washington, even before California," Guillen says. She and other organizers came up with it to help

workers win a contract at Washington's largest wine company, Chateau St. Michelle. That contract was signed in 1995, and is still in force today.

The AFL-CIO's Jeff Johnson welcomed Familias Unidas into the Washington State Labor Federation last year, which helped gain the cooperation of Richard Ahearn in administering the election. As a retired director of the National Labor Relations Board, his participation highlighted another irony. Farm workers (along with domestic workers) were excluded from the National Labor Relations Act in 1937, which set up the union election process for other workers. California is still the only state with a law establishing such a process for farm worker unions (and recently passed a law ending the exclusion of farm workers from the overtime rights other workers have as well).

Torres, Pineda, Guillen and the FUJ workers all expect that their movement will move beyond Sakuma Brothers. "We already have members in other ranches," Torres said, "who want the same things we do."

At the same time, however, growers are increasingly searching for a low wage workforce impervious to unionization, through the expansion of guest worker programs. Sakuma Brothers itself tried this tactic in 2013 and 2014. In 2013 the company brought about 70 migrants to the U.S. under H2-A work visas. This Federal program allows growers to recruit workers outside the country for periods of less than a year, after which the workers must return to their country of origin.

Guest workers who lose their jobs by offending their employer or not working fast enough have to leave the country. That makes joining a union or protesting conditions extremely risky for them. Growers can only use the program, however, if they can claim they can't find local workers.

After the 2013 strikes, Sakuma sent strikers form letters saying they'd been fired for not working, and then told the U.S. Department of Labor it couldn't find any local workers. It applied for H2A work visas for 468 guest workers, enough to replace its entire workforce. Strikers all signed letters to DoL saying they were willing to work, and the company eventually had to withdraw its application.

While Sakuma Farms gave up its guest worker plan, at least for the moment, other agricultural employers in Washington have increased the number of H2A workers drastically. The Washington Farm Labor Association, according to Alex Galarza of the Northwest Justice Project, brought in about 2000 workers in 2006. In 2013, the year FUJ was formed, the number rose to 4000. Last year it exploded to 11,000, and may reach 16,000 for 2016.

Almost all the migrant workers who make up Familias Unidas have been living in the U.S. for many years, however. They cannot go back to Mexico, or cross the border to return to the U.S. They are at the northern end of a migrant journey that took many, like Pineda, through San Quintin or the other agricultural valleys of

northern Mexico years ago. About half live in California, and come to Washington for the harvest every year. But Pineda and an increasing number are settling in Washington for good.

Organizing the union at Sakuma Brothers is part of putting down roots in northern Washington. "This is the end of the road for them," Guillen explains. "There's no place else to go. Workers won this election because they know what they want. They have families here, and are looking for a better future for their kids. It's not a temporary job for them. They're part of this community."

EN LOS CAMPOS DEL NORTE: Farm worker photographs on the U.S./Mexico border wall

<http://igc.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=fc67a76dbb9c31aee896aff7&id=70d5bbf1a6&e=4f7ee49b2><http://us7.campaign-archive2.com/?u=fc67a76dbb9c31aee896aff7&id=0644c65ae5&e=dde0321ee7>

Movie reviews

A review of *13th*, and a comment on *Moonlight*

Sandy Y.

...saw two films that this week that add rich and important expression of the Black American experience. One a documentary, the other a love story, the films seem very different. But taken together the films offer what feels to me like a true and insightful look at US reality. Both deal with the Black male existence in the US and since I'm neither Black nor male, perhaps it is presumption to discuss them. But both films spoke to me in a very human and compelling way, so I am recommending them to you, comrades.

13th is the new documentary from director/activist Ana DuVernay. The title of the film comes from the 1865 passage of the constitutional amendment abolishing slavery. It centers on the critical "except for" clause of that amendment, which exempted "criminals" from the slavery prohibition. As the documentary clearly lays out, that loophole was immediately seized upon by the southern ruling class which jailed thousands of ex-slaves on minor offenses to produce the forced prison labor used to rebuild the South after the Civil War. Jim Crow legislation was the formalization of this political process, which gradually morphed into segregation and "separate but equal" rationalization of the same institutionalized racism. *13th* spends some time and energy on the 1915 DW Griffith film "*Birth of a Nation*", and its role in promoting the Ku Klux Klan. I saw this film in college and understood intellectually what it represented in American popular culture. But seeing those images again today—of the sweet white girl swinging innocently until the maniacal Black man comes to ravage her-- hit me with a level of disgust and loathing I had not experienced in a long time.

The sixties and seventies are dispatched as quickly and efficiently as the rest of the film. Yes, important gains were made in the Civil Rights movement, but thanks in part to the systematic destruction by the FBI of Malcolm X's movement and the Black Panther Party, leadership did not exist in the Black community to defend those gains. And the film does not try to hide the degree to which the Black community itself accepted the "criminal" mentality.

The "War on Drugs" initiated by Ronald Reagan but amped and turned into the multi-billion dollar prison-industrial complex in the Clinton administration is laid out as the latest incarnation of the enslavement of Blacks in the US. The US presently hosts 25% of the world's prison population with less than 5% of the world's people. And, we are warned, current rhetoric about "criminal justice system reform" represents nothing more than the latest iteration of the criminalizing of Black America. George Zimmerman can be recorded stating just before he shot

Trayvon Martin “he’s got his hand in his waistband. And he’s a Black male...” and be acquitted as “standing his ground”. The collage of the hundreds of recent deaths of young black men at the hands of the police should be a call to action for anyone seeing this film.

13th does not place its condemnation of two centuries of institutional racism in a broader condemnation of capitalism, nor does it offer much in the way of a strategy forward, other than mild praise for the Black Lives Matter movement. But the information it does present is done so in a crisp, concise and compelling way. The music is pretty awesome, too, by the way.

Unfortunately, hitting press deadline and no time to review ***Moonlight***. Just go see it. What an amazing story of survival and the triumph of love in the face of hatred.

Essays

Universal Basic Income: Transitional Program or Capitalist Stopgap against Social Revolution?

Michael Stauch

I wanted to share some thoughts I've been having recently about the idea of a "Universal Basic Income" or UBI that has become an important topic of discussion in the US recently.

This January, a Silicon Valley venture capitalist firm called Y Combinator issued a "Request for Research" to explore the idea of a guaranteed income. [1] In the proposal, the firm requests applications from researchers interested in examining what happens when you give a set of people a basic income for a five-year period. The underlying assumption is that they want to know if people will blow free money on heroin, basically.

Paul Graham, founder of Y Combinator and its "philosopher king" according to the Awl, summarized his interest in the problem of income inequality in an essay called "Economic Inequality": "when I hear people saying that economic inequality is bad and should be eliminated, I feel rather like a wild animal overhearing a conversation between hunters." [2] After facing criticism for saying this, Graham removed this language in an updated version of the text. [3] The essay is a gripping read. Graham begins by acknowledging himself as a "manufacturer of income inequality" and "an expert on how to increase income inequality." Graham strikes me as an important, articulate figure explaining how contemporary robber barons in the early 21st century understand the capitalist system.

So UBI is an idea that's floating around and it's no surprise that it's coming from an economic sector, venture capitalists, who make money by investing in companies which are exploring ways to eliminate jobs on an enormous scale. The idea is emerging at the outset of what bourgeois economists are calling "Industry 4.0." [5] This fourth industrial revolution (after mechanization, water/steam power; mass production, the assembly line, and electricity, and computers and automation) will involve cyber-physical systems, the "Internet of things" and cloud computing, according to its contemporary prophets. But in addition to the enormous profits capitalists hope to make from this transformation in the foundations of the contemporary economy, they are also recognizing the political problems it might produce, in particular the very real possibility of substantial increases in unemployment as new technology enables companies to eliminate jobs once previously considered untouchable.

Truck driving is an important example of how this transformation might take place. Auto companies, as I'm sure everyone knows, are actively pursuing partnerships with Silicon Valley in order to bring computers into cars. In spite of all evidence of the problems of global warming from carbon-based fuel consumption, these companies are actively pursuing self-driving cars. [6,7,8,9]

The problem with this technology, which relates to truck driving, is that driverless technology is actually extremely expensive. Recently, a company called Otto launched with a view toward migrating the technology for driverless cars to trucks. In an interview I heard on the radio, one of its founders noted the expense associated with driverless technology, something like \$50,000. For a consumer vehicle, such technology would effectively more than double the cost of a car. But for a semi-truck, that might only add an additional 33% to a truck that would otherwise cost \$150,000 or so. The article cites the public health risk that trucks pose - they account for 5.6 percent of miles driven while causing 9.5 percent of the country's accidents. The article also notes that driverless technology could allow drivers to nap, allowing the trucks to stop less frequently. But the article also notes that there are over 4 million trucks on the road, transporting over 70 percent of the country's cargo. Let's face it: there is a real chance that some ambitious trucking companies will seek to eliminate jobs by implementing this technology. Even that modification - sleeping and never stopping - would eliminate jobs. Initially developed as a palliative to long, lone commutes by individual workers, driverless technology can be almost seamlessly converted into an engine of massive job loss. [10,11]

So what is at stake with a Universal Basic Income is that capitalists are recognizing the potential to automate through "Industry 4.0" and want to pursue it. But they also recognize the enormous social dislocations automation on this scale would unleash. And, as Graham says, they would like to not be hunted in the streets and eaten.

The left, as ever, is divided into thousands of competing camps on this issue. One *Jacobin* article distinguishes between a "livable basic income" (LBI) and a "non-livable basic income" (NLBI), arguing that a UBI would need to be established on a level "high enough to eliminate the need to work for a wage." [12.] I'm not convinced by this, and it also seems, in the context of this article, to support the *Jacobin's* interest in reviving not so much a basic income but *full employment*. The Endnotes collective has criticized this approach as the "primary contradiction" of the labor movement, that is, "that the generalization of one form of domination was seen as the key to overcoming all domination." [13] Or, more pithily, "Everyone is being proletarianized, and so, to achieve communism, we must proletarianize everyone!" This approach, Endnotes claims, understands the factory "as the foundation of socialism, not as the material embodiment of abstract domination." Endnotes demurs on providing strategic guidelines, however, and that vacuum ends up being filled by thinkers like Nick Snick and Alex Williams, authors of *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* and the #Accelerate manifesto. The latter argues for unleashing "latent productive forces" in technology that a capitalism economic system holds in check. [14] The manifesto

suggests that technology has no politics, basically, and the authors want to explore its expansion as a way of creating an alternative to capitalism. I'm not entirely convinced, however, that this technological accelerationism won't ultimately result in a Matrix-style scenario in which the working class basically functions as batteries fueling a "clean" or environmental future for a few capitalists.

Anyway, I hope this provides some basis for future discussion on another important aspect of contemporary transformations in capitalism, alongside our discussion of the emerging "green" economy.

NOTES

1. <https://blog.ycombinator.com/basic-income>
 2. <https://theawl.com/an-income-for-basics-9bedfb9b5ced#.5c1vh23e9>
 3. <http://paulgraham.com/ineqold.html> ; <http://paulgraham.com/ineq.html>
 4. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/bernardmarr/2016/06/20/what-everyone-must-know-about-industry-4-0/#3dba3c764e3b>
 5. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industry_4.0
 6. <http://www.freep.com/story/money/cars/2016/05/15/enemies-partners-automakers-and-silicon-valley/84205144/>
 7. <http://fortune.com/self-driving-cars-silicon-valley-detroit/>
 8. <http://www.seattletimes.com/business/technology/detroits-car-giants-turn-to-silicon-valley-for-future-of-autos/>
 9. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/why-detroit-could-be-the-next-silicon-valley-and-vice-versa/>
 10. <http://www.cnbc.com/2016/05/17/otto-a-start-up-by-ex-googlers-to-make-trucks-driverless-has-launched.html>
 11. <https://medium.com/basic-income/self-driving-trucks-are-going-to-hit-us-like-a-human-driven-truck-b8507d9c5961#.r2qptqcv>
 12. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/01/universal-basic-income-switzerland-finland-milton-friedman-kathi-weeks/>
 13. <https://endnotes.org.uk/issues/4/en/endnotes-afterword>
 14. <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/05/14/accelerate-manifesto-for-an-accelerationist-politics/>
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Random Thoughts on a Chaotic World

Ron Tabor

July 2016

The Current Conjuncture – an outline

1. The world (the global socio-economic-political system) is a mess.
 - a. Anemic economic growth. [1] (See Comments after main text below.)
 - b. Growing income inequality (in advanced economies).

- c. Continuing decline of US imperialism/rise of regional powers: Russia, China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Germany, Brazil.
 - d. Rising inter-state tensions/nationalism.
 - e. Environmental destruction.
 - f. Increased sectarian/racial/gender (anti-woman, anti-LGBT) violence. Rise of ISIS, other fundamentalist organizations and ideologies.
 - g. Failed/failing states – Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Venezuela.
 - h. Intra-state political polarization. Leftward drift of some sections of the population; rise of right-wing nationalist politicians/movements/parties and increased protectionist sentiment.
 - i. Fraying of neo-liberal consensus. (Capitalism, the market, world trade/globalization, liberal democracy = the only game in town.)
 - j. Possibility of substantial political realignments, e.g., crisis in, possible break-up or redefinition of, the Republican Party in the US
 - k. Lack of a united working class response. (There is no “class-for-itself.”) Working class is fractured, sections following different factions/rogue elements of elites, including reformist left parties/factions (e.g., Labour Party [UK], Podemos [Spain], Syriza [Greece], Sanders wing of the Democratic Party [US]; and right-wing nationalist formations (e.g., National Front [France], Donald Trump wing of the Republican Party [US]).
 - l. Revolutionary left almost non-existent.
2. Things are not likely to get significantly better anytime soon.
3. They might get a lot worse (or anything in between). [2]
- a. Global recession/depression.
 - b. War – Russia vs. Europe/US; China vs. US, Japan, Philippines, Vietnam; wider conflagration in the Middle East.
 - c. Fragmentation of Europe/unraveling of EU.
 - d. Nationalist/authoritarian regimes in Eastern Europe and elsewhere.
 - e. Environmental disaster(s): flooding, desiccation, wildfires, destruction of fresh water and food sources, on land and in the sea.
 - f. Intensification of racism/sexism/xenophobia/religious fundamentalism; violent assaults on oppressed groups and immigrants.
 - g. Migration disaster.
 - h. Epoch of Imperialist Decay or (temporary) period of slow growth? [3]
2. Current conjuncture poses the possibility of positive developments:
- a. Increase in economic and other progressive (anti-racist, anti-sexist, pro-environmental) struggles, particularly (in the US), the struggle against police shootings/racism.
 - b. Increased interest in radical (right and left) ideologies.
 - c. Revival of the far left.
 - d. The emergence of a truly revolutionary, libertarian (anti-statist) left.

Notes on Program and Strategy

1. Although global capitalism has significant achievements to its credit, its liabilities are threatening to outweigh its assets. More narrowly, while it has demonstrated that it can deliver some reforms, particularly in the areas of democratic demands (national independence and identity politics) and lifting people out of poverty globally, it has shown very little ability to address the issue economic inequality, that is, the question of class. Whatever its achievements in earlier times, the system, at least for now, seems to have run out of gas.
2. On these and other grounds (e.g., establishing peace, healing the environment, overcoming racism and sexism), the system needs to be eliminated and replaced by a new one.
3. What we advocate is libertarian socialism/anarchism, a democratic, cooperative, and egalitarian social arrangement based on local and regional control and federating upward to some form of democratic national and international coordination. In other words, we are for a radical dispersal of power, which, to be real, requires a radical redistribution of wealth.
4. We distinguish this system from authoritarian and totalitarian (statist) conceptions of socialism that involve building up the power of the state, either gradually (through increasing the size and reach of the [explicitly] capitalist state a la Bernie Sanders), or through the establishment of a centralized (supposedly socialist but in fact capitalist) revolutionary state (a la the Marxists).
5. The system we wish to establish can only be created through mass popular revolutions, in which people (workers and others) rise up in general strikes and insurrections and seize direct, democratic, and cooperative control of economic and social institutions.
6. Strategically, we aim to build a mass movement based on direct action (strikes, occupations, demonstrations, sit-ins, picket lines, the formation of independent grass-roots organizations) outside and against the capitalist political system, particularly outside and against the main capitalist parties, the Republicans and the Democrats (US).
7. As part of this, we wish to build a truly revolutionary libertarian wing of the left. Among other things, this entails clearly differentiating ourselves from other left-wing currents, particularly in the areas of revolution vs. reform; anti-statism vs. statism; opposition to supporting, working within, or attempting to transform the Democratic Party; and support to struggles for national independence (without politically supporting and/or spreading illusions in the pro-capitalist, pro-state leaderships of these struggles).

8. The question of opposing the state is crucial, insofar as the vast majority of the left is pro-state, that is, believes that the solution to the problems of contemporary society lies in expanding the power of the state, both the size and economic/social role of the explicitly capitalist state, and even more so, the establishment of a revolutionary (“socialist”) state that would take over and manage the economy and society as a whole. This is not socialism; it is state capitalism. We reject the idea that a classless and stateless society can be created through the establishment of a state, especially one that is even more centralized and more powerful than the current capitalist one.
9. This means several things (among others):
 - a. It is crucial that, in all our activities, we stress raising what used to be called the “maximal program,” that is, explaining that our goal is libertarian socialism/anarchism (and what that means), which can only be created through popular revolutions. We reject all strategies and tactics that aim to trick or fool people into struggling (unconsciously) for socialism, such as “getting the masses in motion” by mobilizing them around partial, minimal, and “transitional” demands, without raising and carefully explaining our ultimate goal. The only result of such dishonest, manipulative tactics is either the continuation of the current system or the establishment of state capitalism.
 - b. As this suggests, in our work and in our theoretical conceptions, we emphasize the importance of changing people’s consciousness, not only in reference to our vision of an alternate, revolutionary socio-economic system, but also in reference to the way people think about and relate to each other, not only in the future, but here and now. Looked at another way, our goal is a revolution in consciousness and feeling, at bottom, a spiritual revolution. We need to reject the separation of means and ends that has been a characteristic of a good part of the left, including the revolutionary left, throughout its history. Dishonest, bureaucratic, and brutal tactics will never get us to our goal. We aim to work honestly and fairly with all people, groups, and organizations with whom and which we find ourselves in common struggle. Morality matters.
 - c. What is crucial to us is not form but substance. The nationalization of the means of production in the hands of the state and the establishment of central planning does not equal socialism. The forms - communism, collectivism, communalism, municipalism - are secondary. Substance is primary. Socialism is, first and foremost, how people think and feel about, and relate to, each other.
 - d. As much as possible, our approach involves leading by (positive) example, not by imposition, both in day-to-day struggles and also in fighting for our revolutionary goal. What we call socialism cannot be imposed on the

majority, or even a significant number, of people. Imposed “socialism” is state capitalism.

- e. Consistent with this, we reject all notions that our goal is ontologically privileged, that is, that socialism is “necessary”, “inevitable”, the logical outcome of the “laws of motion” of capitalism or the “laws of history.” Socialism is an ethical choice, both for individuals and for humanity as a whole. We are not God. We do not own the Truth. We have no absolute knowledge of the cosmos.

- f. We need to clearly differentiate our positions from those of the liberal politicians and the statist left. The majority of the left has constituted itself, consciously or not, as the left wing of bourgeois (Keynesian) liberalism. Whereas the liberals’ solution to social problems is for the government (mostly federal) to solve it, the left proposes that the government (state) do even more. Their thinking is: if some government intervention is a good thing, then more government intervention is better, and total government intervention – “socialism” – is best. We reject this. (Speaking personally, while I believe the liberals are “better” than the conservatives on many important issues [for example, the environment, voter ID laws, minority/women’s/LGBT rights, defense of the unions, teaching of evolution, the death penalty], I think they are “worse” on others [e.g., gun control, over-regulation of small businesses, aggressive Political Correctness/threat to free speech on college campuses and elsewhere, ideological commitment to increasing government intervention in the economy and society, state regulation of lifestyle in the name of public health.]) Where we disagree with the liberals, we should confidently say so and not accede to the argument (actually, a bait) that in supporting such positions, we are “objectively” helping the right. For this reason and because of the overall statist/authoritarian nature of the left, I currently describe my political identity as “on, but not of, the left”, that is, on the (far) left of the political spectrum but not a part of what is today understood to be the left. The substantial growth of a left that advocates the massive expansion of the role of the state in society would not be progressive; its victory would be a disaster (e.g., Venezuela).

Summary

Economic stagnation and recent political events (e.g., the Sanders and Trump campaigns in the United States, the Brexit vote in Great Britain, the rise of right-wing nationalist parties in the EU) suggest that the neo-liberal consensus currently held by the global elite and supported or passively accepted by the majority of the people of the world may be eroding. This may create the opening for the programmatic and strategic initiative we are proposing.

Comment No. 1

The anemic economic growth the global economy has been experiencing has been dubbed the “new normal.” While some growth has occurred, it has been minimal, and virtually all the gains in wealth have accrued to the upper and upper-middle classes, while the incomes of all other social layers have either stagnated or declined. In addition, while (in the US) official unemployment is low (below 5%), this does not take into account the fact that many people are working at poor-paying jobs or working two or more part-time jobs, and that many have given up looking for work altogether. It also obscures the fact that for some sectors of the population, such as young Black and Latino men, unemployment is at outrageous levels (roughly 50%) while huge numbers of them are incarcerated. All this is reflected in the low “labor participation rate,” which is at record lows. It is also not clear how much of the wealth currently being generated is real and how much fictitious, due, for example, to the run-up in asset (particularly equities/stock) prices.

There is no agreement among economists or anyone else about what is causing this slow growth, how long it will last, and what might be done to overcome it. It is consistent with (and therefore can be “explained” by) a variety economic theories.

John Maynard Keynes felt that stagnation was the normal state of mature capitalist economies, resulting from the fact that as people get wealthier, they spend a declining proportion of their incomes. His solution was for the government to increase its spending, through borrowing rather than raising taxes, to stimulate effective demand. As we know, this has been done since World War II, one result being that government indebtedness is now at exorbitant levels and the government runs huge annual deficits. (The “unfunded liabilities” of the federal government are currently at \$200 trillion.) Demands of contemporary Keynesians economists and liberal politicians to stimulate growth by drastically increasing government spending have been resisted by neo-classical (“free market”) economists and conservative politicians, who worry about the large budget deficits and the ballooning government debt. (Like virtually everything else in economics, the question is in dispute.)

In contrast to Keynes’ view is the analysis of many neo-classical economists that contemporary anemic growth is caused by too much government intervention: businesses are over-regulated, taxes, especially on the corporations and the wealthy, are too high, and social programs, although well-meaning, are blocking the efficient working of the market. Logically, they argue that the solution is to cut back on government regulation and social programs, lower taxes, and let the market do its work, but this is opposed by the Keynesians and the supporters of the social programs. The result is a stalemate.

Stagnation can also be explained by various Marxian theories. One, very close to that of the Keynesians, is that it is caused by the limited consumption power of the

workers, since the capitalists are driven by the dynamics of the system to pay their employees as little as possible. It is also consistent with the Marxist analysis of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, which would imply that a point would be reached in capitalist development at which the rate of profit would be too low to induce the capitalists to invest in expanding and renovating the process of production.

Yet other theories have been proposed. One, by the Marxist, Thomas Piketty, amounts to the view that slow economic growth is actually the norm under capitalism and that what needs to be explained are the exceptions, that is, the periods of relatively rapid economic growth, such as occurred after World War II. A similar position has been broached by Robert J. Gordon, who argues that the last two centuries of (overall) rapid economic growth were based a technological revolution - a tsunami of innovation, involving not only industrial processes (fossil fuels, electricity, steel, plastics, chemicals) but also consumer goods (automobiles and household appliances: telephone, radio and television, washing machines) - that is not likely to be repeated again soon, if ever. He also predicts that the digital revolution will not produce equivalent levels of either technological change or rates of economic growth.

And then there are various explanations that point to broader societal changes, such as the very slow growth of population in the most advanced economies. In such societies, population growth has slowed so much that it is below what is termed the "replacement rate", that is, the number of births needed to maintain current levels of population, which is 2.1 babies per couple. Compounding the problem is the large number of older people ("baby boomers") currently retiring or retired, compared to those still in the workforce and thus paying taxes, as well as the fact that retirees are receiving "entitlement" benefits (Social Security and Medicare) that are not, as the programs are currently structured, sustainable. A related view argues that the government enacted too many social programs (entitlements and others) during the 1960s, under the assumption that the prosperity of that period would continue indefinitely, which it has not. Ultimately, this view argues, the social programs have become such a burden on the economy that they have produced, or are at least aggravating, the stagnation we are witnessing today.

And there is also the possibility that the current stagnation is mostly caused by psychological factors, particularly the shock of the Great Recession. In this view, people were so rattled by the crisis that they are hesitant to act aggressively: corporate leaders are afraid to undertake substantial investment in modernizing and expanding production, bankers are wary of extending credit, venture capitalists are hesitant to invest in new businesses, and consumers, worried about over extending themselves financially (and millions of people have zero assets), are being more frugal in their spending.

Comment No. 2

One of the things the current scene suggests is that errors of judgment of various kinds can have a significant impact on national and international conditions and, looked at more broadly, history. What seems likely to be a momentous decision - the vote by the people of Great Britain to leave the Europe Union – appears to have been the result of a number of miscalculations, one, on the part of (former) British Prime Minister David Cameron, who called the referendum on the assumption that the majority would vote to remain in the EU, another, on the part of millions voters, who also assumed the “remain” side would win and voted to leave purely as a form of protest.

We see a similar development in the United States, where the conservative section of the ruling elite, organized in the Republican Party, allowed an upstart, Donald Trump, to hijack disaffected members of the party’s base, take over the party, and fundamentally alter its character, largely because they assumed the strength he showed early in the primaries was temporary and that he would eventually (and conveniently) fade away. By the time they figured out they were wrong, it was too late. It remains to be seen what will happen, to Trump, to the Republican Party, to the conservative movement, to the country, and to the world.

Comment No. 3

In his “Transitional Program,” written in 1938, Leon Trotsky termed the period the world was going through at the time, “The Epoch of Imperialist Decay.” This was based on the (at the time) not unreasonable assumption that the Great Depression, the rise of fascism, the emergence of Stalinism, and the looming threat of another world war meant that capitalism was in its death throes and would relatively soon be overthrown by an international proletarian revolution and replaced by a global socialist system.

Trotsky’s analysis was based primarily on two Marxist texts. One was Lenin’s book, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. The other was Marx’s preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. In the latter work, as part of an explanation of his theory of history, Marx describes how, at a certain point in the development of a given mode of production, the relations of production turn, from having promoted the growth of the forces of production, into “fetters,” that is, obstacles to the further development of the productive forces. This, according to Marx, is the material basis for the social revolutions that bring about the replacement of one mode of production by a more productive/progressive one. By extension, then, Trotsky argued that, vis a vis the development of capitalism, that point had been reached roughly at the time of the outbreak of the First World War. Ever since, according to Trotsky, capitalism has been ripe (and even somewhat rotten, as he put it) for its overthrow and replacement by socialism.

While I once agreed with Trotsky's conception and believed it was applicable to the post-World War II world, I do not do so today. (This is largely, although not exclusively, because I no longer accept Marx's theory of history or his analysis of capitalism.) I do not accept that we are currently in the "epoch of imperialist decay" or, in fact, that such an epoch ever existed. Instead, I think that capitalism can best be understood as an evolving, essentially chaotic (in the technical sense of the term), system that oscillates around a (theoretically conceivable but practically undiscoverable) ever-changing equilibrium, in other words, one that goes through periods of greater or lesser economic growth, greater or lesser social and political stability. Some historical circumstances (involving economic, social, political, cultural conditions) seem to be conducive to economic growth and social/political stability, while others are not. These circumstances (both positive and negative) are not fully discernible or predictable and are, for the most part, not subject to conscious control. The result is that our economic/social/ political/cultural system develops unevenly, in a roughly pulsating pattern (claims to have discovered a predictable pattern, such as Kondratieff's "long waves," with a period of roughly 60 years, are not, in my view, sustainable). I believe that the system is currently in a period of slow growth and increasing instability (roughly the equivalent of the late 1930s). How long this period will last I don't know. But I suspect that it is temporary, that is, that sooner or later (it might be a few years in the future, or even decades), unless the system is overthrown and replaced by another one, conditions more conducive to economic growth and social/political stability are likely to reemerge. In fact, as I have discussed elsewhere, I can envisage circumstances under which the global economy would be transformed through the broad adoption of "green" technology - that is, the phasing out of our current fossil fuel-based technology and its replacement by technology based on renewable energy sources. This would provide the basis for a long-term capital spending boom, which, in turn, would create the circumstances conducive to a period of economic expansion and prosperity. I am not making a prediction; I merely state that it is possible. Moreover, this possibility does not preclude the likelihood that the planet will experience considerable, even extreme, environmental destruction as the transition occurs.

More important, I believe it is crucial that we, and as much of the left as we can convince, stop basing our arguments for socialism on the threat of some sort of terminal disaster (final crisis or collapse), economic, social, or environmental. For over 150 years, the left, or at least the Marxist left, has argued that unless capitalism is overthrown and replaced by socialism, humanity would experience a catastrophe. Marx talked about the "common ruin of the contending classes" in the event that a progressive social transformation did not occur. Rosa Luxemburg, prior to World War I, predicted "socialism or barbarism." In the 1930s, Marxists warned about "socialism or fascism" or "socialism or global economic collapse." During the Cold War, the slogan became, essentially, "socialism or nuclear annihilation." Today, we are hearing the same thing - "socialism or global depression" or "socialism or complete environmental destruction." Yet, none of these total disasters has occurred; the left has been wrong every single time. Somehow, in complete disregard to the left's doomsday predictions, doomsday has not arrived. Of course, it

is possible that it will, but I don't think so. Somehow, the global ruling elite has managed to "muddle through." Every time the left makes its predictions of global catastrophe and the catastrophe does not occur, the left loses credibility. Why should anybody listen to us when we've been so wrong?

In fact, such predictions are (rather feeble) attempts to salvage Marxism's claim of ontological privilege, that is, the insistence that socialism (as Marxists conceive of it and to be established in the manner they prescribe) is not merely desirable, but also historically inevitable. This view, as I've argued elsewhere, is not tenable. More significantly, it is the core of the totalitarianism that exists at the heart of Marxism.

From Shachtmanite Trotskyism to Anarchism— Exploring the Relationship of a Marxist Tendency to Anarchism

Wayne Price

In recent years there has been an increase in articles, books, and special journal issues on the relationship between anarchism and Marxism. (For example, Pittman, Dale, & Holt 2015; Prichard & Worth 2016.) One difficulty with such discussions is that both "anarchism" and "Marxism" are rather broad terms, similar to discussing "Christianity" or "democracy." Anarchism stretches from, say, gradualist individualist anarchism to revolutionary syndicalism. Marxism, in turn, stretches from versions that are almost anarchist to mass-murdering totalitarianism.

One way to get around the problem with Marxism is to focus on the original Marxism of Marx and Engels. I have tended to do this when comparing anarchism with Marxism (as in Price 2013). However, the main impact of Marxism on the world took place after Marx and Engels, so it really is necessary to discuss post-Marx Marxism. As for anarchism, I am writing from the tradition with which I most identify (without denying that there is value in other schools of anarchism). This is revolutionary class-struggle anarchist-socialism (or anarchist-communism, with a lower-case "c").

In this essay I will contrast such revolutionary anarchism with a particular U.S. strand of Marxist thought. That is the approach of Max Shachtman and his comrades in the Trotskyist movement. They split from Trotsky and the mainstream of Trotskyism at the beginning of War II. Their organization was first called the Workers' Party and then the Independent Socialist League (WP/ISL). Whether this tendency should still be regarded as a variety of Trotskyism—it had split from Trotsky and some of his key beliefs, but continued to support other parts of his

theory and program—is not my concern. (For a bibliography about Shachtmanism, see the Appendix.)

I can imagine some objections about focusing on this tendency. The WP/ISL could not be considered among the ultra-left, autonomous, or libertarian Marxists (such as the council communists) whose politics were close to anarchism. Also, after decades of defeat and demoralization, Shachtman and some of his people abandoned revolutionary socialism. They became close to the bureaucrats of the AFL-CIO, advocated working within the Democratic Party, and supported U.S. Imperialism by defending the Vietnam War. (This is why I am particularly interested in the “left Shachtmanite” tradition, of those who continued to identify as revolutionary socialists, such as Hal Draper.) Also, Draper was a vitriolic opponent of anarchism, from his Marxist perspective.

Some anarchists will argue the irrelevance of historic Trotskyist splits which centered on the nature of the Soviet Union. Dead people once argued over a dead social system—so what? However, what is important is not the historical evaluation of what Stalinist Russia once was, but our present-day opinion of what we mean by the goal of “socialism.” Does socialism mean a statified, centralized, economy or does it mean a self-managed, radically democratic, classless and stateless society? Does a socialist movement need to guard against a middle-class managerial elite trying to ride the masses into power? Should socialism be consciously based on the self-emancipation of the working class? These are big issues indeed, and very current. They were at issue in this debate among Trotskyists.

As the editor of Radical Archives remarked, “Little attention has been paid to the intersection between post-Trotskyist Shachtmanite Marxism and anarchism.” (2010). This is a beginning attempt to remedy that lack of attention.

The Split in the Trotskyists

Through 1939 to 1940, a faction fight roiled the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) of the U.S., the largest Trotskyist party in the world at the time. There were a number of issues, particularly what the Shachtmanites regarded as the undemocratic and authoritarian structure of the SWP, dominated by James P. Cannon. However, the major issue was whether to “defend the Soviet Union”—supposedly a “workers’ state”—in its aggressive wars. This was the period of the Hitler-Stalin pact, when the two totalitarian regimes made a deal not to go to war and to divide up Poland. Should the Soviet Union’s seizure of a third of Poland be defended against any Polish resistance? Then the USSR invaded Finland and other eastern European nations, seizing even more territory.

Granted that the Trotskyists did not approve of Stalin’s aggressive actions, and advocated that the Russian workers should overthrow the Stalinist bureaucracy. Should they nevertheless support the Russian army against the Finnish guerrillas

and army forces? Should they accept Stalin's taking over small nations and crushing their labor movements? It may seem strange to have such a big argument over these concerns, since none of the U.S. Trotskyists were going to join the military forces of either side (which would have shot them). But the Trotskyists had formed in opposition the bureaucratism of the regular Communist Party, which they saw as caused by the degeneration of the Soviet Union. Therefore their attitude toward Stalin's Russia was a central issue to them.

The issue intensified after the split, when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in 1941. Now it became a military ally of the Western imperialists. Given that the Trotskyists did not support to the British, French, or U.S. governments in the inter-imperialist war, should they "defend the Soviet Union"? (Whether they approached the overall war correctly, see Price 2015b.)

Trotsky had believed (and he was fully backed by James P. Cannon, the leader of the Socialist Workers Party) that the Soviet Union—created by the Russian revolution of 1917—remained a "workers' state", although a "degenerated workers' state." Therefore, it should be supported in any war with a capitalist state, no matter how unfairly or aggressively the Stalinist bureaucracy acted. That is, the Russian working class was still the ruling class, the state remained a "dictatorship of the proletariat." This was even though the workers had lost all state power to the Stalinist bureaucracy, were super-exploited and oppressed, and so was everyone else. The Russian state was, Trotsky wrote, "symmetrical" to the state of Nazi Germany.

According to Trotsky and his follower Cannon, what made the Soviet Union still a "workers' state" was the survival of nationalized property. That the government still owned and managed the economy, tried to plan all production, and controlled all foreign trade—these, and these alone, made the U.S.S.R. still a state of the working class as opposed to a state of the capitalists or anyone else. To Trotsky, statified industry was somehow inherently a "proletarian property form," something which only the working class could create and which no other class could use to rule. If it turned out that another class, such as the bureaucratic layer, could in fact rule using nationalized property, then, Trotsky declared, the whole Marxist perspective of working class revolution and liberation would have to be rejected!

He was sure that the collectivized bureaucracy could not maintain nationalized property for very long. Soon—very soon—the bureaucrats would either be overthrown by the workers (in which case the nationalized property would be in the hands of the workers) or would themselves break up the collectivized property into share-holding, stocks-and-bonds, traditional capitalism. Either way, he insisted, collectively-owning bureaucratic rule would definitely be over by the end of World War II, at the very latest.

Trotsky and his immediate followers pointed out that capitalism is capable of existing under various governmental forms. It can exist under relatively democratic

constitutions, but also under monarchies, police states, limited republics, and under totalitarian fascism. The capitalists themselves had only minimal direct influence on the government in some of these set-ups, but they still had a capitalist economy, which made these all capitalist (bourgeois) states. The same applied to working-class (proletarian) states, it was said. They might be ultra-democratic states-in-the-process-of-withering-away, similar to the Paris Commune or the early soviets. Or the state might be the dictatorship of one revolutionary proletarian party, as under Lenin and Trotsky. Or it might be under the gangster rule of Stalin and his bureaucrats. Yet it remained a “proletarian state.” So it was argued. Therefore it needed to be defended by the international working class against capitalist states.

Over time, Trotsky somewhat altered his arguments, until his assassination in 1940. Matgamna (1998) claims that Trotsky was gradually moving to reject the theory of Russia as a “degenerated workers’ state.” After the war, Trotsky’s widow, Natalia Sedova, did come to reject that theory in favor of “state capitalism”—and quit the “Fourth International.” But I am not going to go into the nuances of Trotsky’s shifting arguments or speculate what opinions he might have developed had he lived longer. We only know that he held onto his belief that the Soviet Union was a “workers’ state” until the end of his life, even while a minority of his followers and co-thinkers came to reject it.

Not only did Trotsky and the Trotskyists expect the collapse of the Soviet Union’s bureaucratic class, but they insisted that the Stalinist system could not expand in any big way. The Stalinized Communist Parties were “reformist” and “counter-revolutionary.” Given a chance to take power, they would turn away and keep the old bourgeoisie in power, just as would the reformist social democrats. This perspective turned out to be completely false.

After the Second World War, Stalinist Russia seized half of Europe, turning its satellites into copies of its nationalized economy. These were “revolutions from above,” and not at all what Trotsky had expected. Further, in several nations there were actual revolutions, using peasant-based armies led by Stalinist elites, which also created copies of the Stalinist economy—in China, Yugoslavia, and later in Cuba, among others. How could all these countries be “workers’ states” without either workers’ revolutions or working class rule? (Eventually almost all these bureaucracies did end collective property and return to traditional capitalism, due to economic failure and mass pressure, in 1989—1991. This was decades later and still does not support Trotsky’s theories.)

But if these post-war societies (which had not had workers’ revolutions) were not “workers’ states,” then what was the Soviet Union, which was just like them? After thrashing about, the “orthodox” Trotskyists decided that these new Stalinist states were all “deformed workers’ states.” With Trotsky dead, the Trotskyists became the leftwing of Stalinism. The “orthodox” Trotskyists announced that the Stalinist states should be supported against the West—but some day they should be overthrown by

their workers (except, they said, for Cuba, which was already a “healthy workers’ state”).

The Shachtmanite Argument and Anarchism

Over time, the group around Max Shachtman developed a theoretical response to the view of Trotsky and the majority of the Trotskyist movement. It was true, they said, that the state “owned” the means of production in the U.S.S.R. But who “owned” the state? That is, leaving aside paper “ownership,” who really controlled and used the means of production for their own purposes and interests? (This is what “ownership” really means.) Clearly, not the working class, nor the peasants. Neither did any leftover bourgeoisie. Only the bureaucracy, collectively. In a supposedly planned economy, it was the bureaucrats who did the planning. It was they who squeezed a surplus out of the working class and peasantry, and divided it among themselves through their official positions. (They could not directly pass on their positions to their children, but their heirs stayed in the bureaucracy through education and family contacts.) They had “private property,” in the sense that the bureaucrats held the national property separately (“privately”) from the working class. Arguments that the collective bureaucracy could not become a new ruling class were dogmatic and unscientific. Clearly it could and it had, under these exceptional circumstances (a workers’ revolution which had been defeated from within, the international defeat of the working class combined with the weakness of the bourgeoisie, etc.).

The working class was unlike the bourgeoisie in an important way. It did not own property in the means of production. It worked collectively and cooperatively in industry. If the bourgeoisie lost its immediate state power to a dictatorship, it still had its property, which produced its wealth through the exploitation of the workers and exchange on the market. But if the workers lost all political power in a collectivized economy, then they had nothing. They remained on the bottom of the economy, working for unaccountable bosses, with surplus labor being pumped out of them. To call them a “ruling class” in a “workers’ state” was a bitter jest. It was the error of “substitutionism,” the idea that some other force could stand in for the working class on the way to socialism. The working class could only rule in a democratic way, or not at all. This is what Marx and Engels meant by “the emancipation of the working class can only be conquered by the working class itself.”

The Workers Party/Independent Socialist League adopted a perspective of opposing both the imperialist-capitalist West and Stalinism. This perspective it called the “Third Camp,” opposing both the capitalists and the bureaucratic ruling class, looking instead to the international working class, in alliance with the oppressed of the world.

Anarchists could agree with this overall perspective. But they did not accept the Shachtmanites' continuing identification of the one-party police state of Lenin and Trotsky as a "workers' state." To anarchists, even though this regime had not yet become Stalin's mass-murdering totalitarianism, it was already the substitution of a minority party for the actual working class. It laid the basis for Stalinism, even if Trotsky was to eventually turn against the bureaucratic tyranny. To anarchists, the very idea of a "workers' state" was a contradiction in terms. A state was a bureaucratic-military socially-alienated machine over the rest of society. It could not be the rule of the working class. The workers could only lead the way to creating a classless society through a non-state federation of workplace assemblies and neighborhood councils—the self-organization of the workers and oppressed.

The Shachtmanites' concept of socialist democracy seemed to be a centralized and nationalized economy, directed from above by an elected government (instead of by capitalists or bureaucrats). Typical of Marxists, they did not see the importance of local, face-to-face, direct democracy, in the factory, in the office, in the neighborhood, in the village, in the regiment, etc.—so that democracy was a way of life. These would be embedded in federations and networks, but such federations would always be rooted in immediate grassroots participatory democracy.

While accepting the analysis of a collective bureaucratic ruling class, many anarchists rejected the notion that the Soviet Union was a new type of class society, "bureaucratic collectivism," neither socialist nor capitalist. They noted that the workers still sold their ability to work (the commodity labor power) to a boss class, still worked for wages, still were pressured to work as hard as possible while being paid as little as possible, still produced commodities which were sold on a market, and otherwise were exploited essentially as they were under traditional capitalism. Meanwhile, the bureaucrats competed on both an internal market and the world market. They were driven to grow and accumulate, just as under traditional capitalism. Therefore these anarchists accepted an analysis of the Soviet Union (mainly worked out by dissident Marxists) as "state capitalist." (See Hobson & Tabor 1988.)

Haber Kern & Lipow (2008) and Draper claimed that capitalism itself tends to evolve into bureaucratic collectivism. "The tendency toward the collectivization of capitalism...means the bureaucratic collectivization of capitalism." (Draper 1992; 27) Draper emphasizes the growing managerial layer within traditional capitalist corporations. This observation is accurate and important, but it does not demonstrate that capitalism grows into a new social system. On the contrary, it is what Marx had long predicted as a development of capitalism, due to its tendencies toward concentration and centralization, monopolization and financialization. It is a basis for modern reformism as well as for Stalinism, but it is consistent with a state capitalist analysis.

In itself, there did not seem to be any necessary difference in political implications between the state capitalist and bureaucratic collectivist theories. However, the

bureaucratic collectivist theory was remarkably slippery and shapeless. The Shachtmanites never did develop an analysis of its dynamics, its method of exploitation, or its projected pattern of development. At first Shachtman regarded bureaucratic collectivism as more progressive than capitalism, even to be supported against capitalism. Later it was regarded as worse than capitalism, precisely because of its supposed lack of dynamics. Once a society fell under the rule of Stalinism, it was argued, then it would be impossible, or at least extremely difficult, to ever open it up again. Therefore capitalism, which was consistent with limited democracy, was better, since it permitted the existence of labor unions and a socialist movement. The ISL's theorists saw the Soviet Union's system as expansive and growing (which was true but temporary), while Western capitalism was (falsely) seen as weakening relative to "Communism".

This logic led to Shachtman's eventual support of Western imperialism as better than Russian totalitarianism. Even now, Matgamna regards capitalism as more "progressive" than Stalinist "bureaucratic collectivism." "In every respect advanced capitalism is more progressive than the USSR." (Matgamna 1998; 101) From a state capitalist analysis, these are all varieties of capitalism, local aspects of world capitalism, and none is more progressive than another. They are all facing the international crisis of capitalism and they are all threatening the destruction of humanity.

What Did the Shachtmanites Have in Common with Anarchism?

Trotskyists and near-Trotskyists have become anarchists and semi-anarchists (libertarian socialists). (See Price 2010.) Daniel Guerin of France is a well-known example. Castoriadis, the Greek-French theorist, led the Socialisme au Barbarie group from dissident Trotskyism to "libertarian socialism." He influenced British co-thinkers, in the Solidarity group, led by Maurice Brinton. There are other examples.

To the best of my knowledge, only a couple of people are recorded as having gone from early Shachtmanism to anarchism. Dwight Macdonald left the Workers' Party not long after going through its split from the Cannonites. During World War II, he established an anti-imperialist journal, *Politics*, and became an anarchist-pacifist. (Wald 1987; Whitfield 1984) Leslie Fielder was an organizer for the Socialist Workers Party, and briefly a member of the Workers' Party when it was formed. Then he drifted away for personal reasons. "Yet...in the 1960s, he embraced anarchism" (Wald 1987; 279)

The Johnson-Forrest tendency (C.L.R. James, Raya Dunayevskaya, and Grace Lee [later Boggs]) developed inside the Workers' Party. There, they worked out their own libertarian Marxism, whose program was quite close to anarchism. They developed an important theory of the Soviet Union as state capitalist, as well as an insightful program for Black liberation. (McLemee & Le Blanc 1994)

Stan Weir was a member of the WP/ISL and a long-time labor activist, who became active in the early I.S. Also influenced by the Johnson-Forrest tendency, he eventually came to reject the “Leninist vanguard party” and top-down unionism, adopting libertarian socialist opinions. (Weir 2004)

(The influential anarchist Murray Bookchin was a Trotskyist as a young man and was present during the faction fight and split in the Trotskyists. But he stayed with the Cannonite majority. After the war, he joined a group around Joseph Weber, which worked briefly with the Workers’ Party, before eventually developing his eco-anarchist views. Whether or how Bookchin was influenced by the Shachtmanites is not known.) (Biehl 2015)

In the post-war period, the WP/ISL sought to limit its isolation by making alliances with other “third camp” political tendencies. They had joint conferences with radical pacifists (who usually included anarchists) and others. For example, according to Radical Archives (2010), the anarchist Libertarian League of New York City reported in 1956 a joint “May Day Meeting.” It featured speakers from the Industrial Workers of the World and the anarchist Libertarian League, and also the radical pacifist War Resisters League—as well as from the Independent Socialist League and its youth organization. These were all radical groups that opposed both sides in the Cold War. The anarchists’ newsletter wrote that they regarded the ISL’s newspaper as “...one of the best radical publications in the country. Our friends in the Independent Socialist League have come far in their ethical and social thinking since breaking officially with Trotskyism in 1939....In some respects these comrades are evolving in a generally libertarian direction.” (They were using the term “libertarian” as a synonym for socialist-anarchism, not as the recent label for free-market capitalism.) However, they remarked that the ISL had not fully broken from its Leninist tradition.

Under the pressures of anti-communist hysteria, the Cold War, post-war prosperity, and the conservatizing of the U.S. unions, the ISL moved to the right. Eventually it merged with the Socialist Party, Shachtman swinging to its right wing. He developed ties to union bureaucrats and maneuvered in the Democratic Party, while supporting U.S. imperialism in the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba and the Vietnam war. Michael Harrington was just to his left, also working in the Democratic Party but wanting to participate in the anti-war movement. Harrington founded what became the Democratic Socialists of America. (These developments are used by “orthodox” Trotskyists to claim that they prove that they had been right all along. However, these descendants of the Cannonites had themselves capitulated to the Soviet Union’s imperialism and Castroite state capitalism.)

A minority of former Shachtmanites and youth influenced by them continued to regard themselves as revolutionary socialists. This included Hal and Anne Draper, and Julius and Phyllis Jacobson. Hal Draper was significant in founding the Independent Socialist Clubs, which evolved into the International Socialists. The Jacobsons founded the journal *New Politics*.

Draper and his co-thinkers totally rejected any support for or participation in the Democratic Party. However, they continued to advocate electoral action, advocating a U.S. labor party based on the unions. Since this was not on the agenda, they pushed for a broad-based, essentially middle-class, left-liberal, party, which would be open to radicals. This was a central aspect of their program, along with working inside unions, supporting the anti-war movement, and supporting the Black liberation struggle. For the 1968 election, they made a major effort to found the national "Peace and Freedom Party," which failed dismally. The U.S. did not need another capitalist party. (The ideological descendants of the Shachtmanites today still advocate a similar approach—supporting Nader, the Green Party, etc..)

From Shachtmanism to Anarchism in the '60s

Anarchists and radicals who would become anarchists were turned off by the International Socialists' liberal electoralism. But a number of radicals were impressed by Hal Draper's pamphlet, "Two Souls of Socialism" (in Draper 1992), which distinguished between elitist "socialism-from-above" and popular-democratic "socialism-from-below." This attracted libertarian-minded revolutionaries, in the middle of a left, which at the time was overwhelmingly dominated by supporters of Mao, Castro, Ho Chi Minh, or who were "orthodox" Trotskyists. (Price 2002)

There were anarchists active in the left, at the time (as I mentioned, quite a number among the radical pacifists). However they were marginalized and outnumbered by those radicals who were influenced by radical Stalinism or Trotskyism. The most prominent anarchist of the '60s was probably Paul Goodman. While he was correct in criticizing the Maoists and Castroites for their authoritarianism, he was wrong in his pacifism, his gradualist incrementalism, and his opposition to revolution. (Price 2006) Murray Bookchin organized an anarchist grouping, which correctly denounced the Marxist-Leninists but which also denounced any working class perspective. (Price 2015a) Therefore many libertarian-democratic proletarian-minded radicals were attracted, not to anarchism, but to the wing of Trotskyism that advocated "socialism-from-below."

For example, I was greatly impressed by Draper's perspective of "socialism-from-below." Somewhat unusually, I had been an anarchist-pacifist, influenced by Paul Goodman and Dwight Macdonald. Having been persuaded by an orthodox Trotskyist that some sort of revolutionary politics was necessary, I still could not accept his authoritarian version of Trotskyism. But I was inspired by Draper's pamphlet, and joined the Independent Socialist Club in New York City. Even now, as a revolutionary anarchist, I believe in socialism-from-below.

There were radicals inside and around Students for a Democratic Society who rejected both capitalist liberalism/social democracy and radical Stalinism. They had questions about the history of the Shachtmanite trend, including its recent electoral Peace and Freedom Party adventure. But faced with the Maoist and other Stalinist

tendencies, they were willing to join the Independent Socialist Clubs of America. This reorganized itself to form the International Socialists (I.S.) in 1969. Many of these revolutionaries also were attracted by the advocacy of socialism-from-below and revolutionary workers' democracy. After a period within the I.S., most (not all) of them (now including me) felt that the I.S. was not really revolutionary in theory or action. They split to form the Revolutionary Socialist League (RSL) in 1973. Some of the RSLers eventually evolved into anarchism. (I too returned to anarchism, not of the anarchist-pacifist school but of revolutionary anarchist-socialism.)

Why Did the RSL Evolve Toward Anarchism?

Why did many of the RSLers eventually turn toward anarchism? (I am giving my own conclusions, but I have also re-read Hobson & Tabor 1988, and Taber 1988. The authors, prominent RSLers, wrote these texts during their evolution from Trotskyism to anarchism. At the time, they found useful aspects in Marxism—such as its political economy—and did not yet fully identify with anarchism, writing instead of their “revolutionary libertarian socialism.”) When we had joined the I.S. and then the RSL, we believed that Trotskyism (as we interpreted it at least) represented the libertarian, democratic, humanistic, and proletarian aspects of Marxism: international revolution against the capitalist and bureaucratic states, replacing them with associations of multi-party workers' and popular councils, workers' self-management in industry, self-determination for all the oppressed, through revolution-from-below to create a classless, stateless, and non-oppressing world. We were further motivated by the radical wings of the women's liberation movement and the Gay liberation (LGBT) movement—not only theoretically but especially through the extremely libertarian spirit which they expressed.

Virtually all of the rest of the far Left—those calling themselves Trotskyists, Leninists, or Marxists—had a totally different interpretation. They saw these theories and program as really statist, centralist, dictatorial, and authoritarian—and accepted this vision. They were Maoists, Castroites, and orthodox Trotskyists. The latter had abandoned, in practice, Trotsky's program of overthrowing the Stalinist bureaucracies, especially for Cuba and Vietnam. (As mentioned, even the wing of Trotskyism which rejected Trotsky's theory of Russia as a “degenerated workers' state,” believed that it had been a “workers' state” under the one-party police state of Lenin and Trotsky—accepting “substitutionism” in principle. And they mostly held a centralized view of a democratic “workers' state.”)

Could everyone be out of step except us? Was everyone else wrong about Marxism except us (and a few libertarian Marxists)? Historically, we noted, the first wave of Marxism ended in pro-imperialist/statist social democracy, and the second wave, initiated by Lenin and others, ended in Stalinist totalitarianism. After Stalinism, there arose the Trotskyist movement, whose limitations I have raised. No doubt

“objective factors” played a part, but surely there must have been some aspects of Marxism that contributed to these repeated bad developments?

We had followed the method of “giving Marx (Lenin, Trotsky) the benefit of the doubt.” Whenever we came to an authoritarian or even ambiguous writing or historical episode of any of them, we did all we could to interpret it in a libertarian-democratic way. Suppose we stopped giving Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky the “benefit of the doubt,” stopped looking for excuses, and looked for authoritarian aspects of their theories and activities? In fact, it became quite possible to find all sorts of authoritarian aspects of their work. Lenin and Trotsky had not been the same as Stalin, but they created the framework for Stalinism. Even as Trotsky finally rebelled against Stalinism, he never understood what he and Lenin had done wrong and never stopped regarding Stalin’s rule as still a “workers’ state.” Even Marx, who would have been horrified by totalitarian state-capitalism, had authoritarian aspects of his theory, which contributed to it. This included his centralism, his statism, his electoralism, his maneuvering in the workers’ movement, and his determinism and objectivism, which were often interpreted as a belief that “socialism is inevitable” and that Marxists, in effect, know the Absolute Truth.

In their re-evaluation of Trotskyism, Hobson & Tabor (1988) concluded with a thoughtful re-evaluation of Draper’s left-Shachtmanite “Two Souls of Socialism”: socialism-from-above vs. socialism-from-below. “While such a division of socialism into mass-democratic and elitist trends is useful, Draper’s classification of individuals and the schools of thought associated with them is simplistic.” (382) Putting Lenin and Trotsky in the “from-below” category was misleading (and even Marx’s placement was at best ambiguous), as was Draper’s putting the anarchists in the “from-above” category.

This view led many of us to look toward this historical alternative to Marxism— anarchism. In the 80s and later, there was an expansion of the anarchist movement, or at least milieu. To a great extent, Marxism had been discredited with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the changes in China. The radical impulse among youth had been re-directed in part to anarchism (variously interpreted). We former Trotskyists found ourselves more comfortable among the anarchists than among other Trotskyists. In 1989 the RSL dissolved, many dropping out of radical politics altogether, but some of us joined the Love and Rage Anarchist Federation, and then continued on in the anarchist movement in one way or another.

A Personal Evaluation

Ron Tabor was the national leader of the Revolutionary Socialist League. Now he is in the editorial collective that produces *The Utopian: A Journal of Anarchism and Libertarian Socialism*. He has written a book critical of Marxism from an anarchist perspective (Tabor 2013). Asked about his experiences, which led from left

Shachtmanism to anarchism, Ron Tabor wrote (personal communication March 2016):

“As far as my own political development was concerned, left Shachtmanism (Draperism, the ISC/IS) was extremely important and played a positive role, serving as a bridge to the RSL/Trotskyism and then to anarchism.

“I would describe the I.S.’s positive contributions to my evolution to be a series of interrelated points:

“1. The ‘Third Camp.’ One didn’t have to choose a side during the Cold War; one could, and should, oppose both sides (US imperialism, Russian imperialism/Stalinism).

“2. ‘Socialism from below.’ The kind of socialism we ought to be for required, as two of its essential characteristics: (1) that it be democratically controlled by the working class and other oppressed classes; this meant ‘workers’ control/democracy’ (workers’ councils, factory committees), as opposed to a one-party dictatorship; (2) that it could only be created by a working class revolution, not one party seizing control through military conquest (Eastern Europe), a party seizing power through the manipulation of a nationalistic/anti-imperialist peasant movement (China), or a guerrilla war led by déclassé’ intellectuals (Cuba).

“3. A series of tactics that addressed these issues: the united front, critical support, military/tactical support. [In this area, the Shachtmanite tradition continued Trotskyist ideas of principled flexibility, unlike most of the more sectarian ‘ultra-left’ libertarian Marxists—WP]

“4. The ambiguity (the two-fold meaning) of the notion of socialism, e.g., the Two Souls of Socialism (although I would now divide the forces/individuals - from below vs. from above - much differently than Draper did).”

Tabor also gives his criticisms of the Draper/left Shachtman tendency, as we experienced it in the I.S.:

“My criticisms of the ISC/IS were:

“1. It was not very radical. Although it claimed to be revolutionary, Marxist, and Leninist, its practice and organizational structure were closer to Social Democracy. Trotsky’s conception of ‘centrism’ is apt. [Political trends in the “center” between revolutionary and reformist socialism; talking ‘revolutionary’ but acting reformist—WP] It seemed to make an issue about its conservatism/opportunism by denouncing the SDS and all New Leftists as ultra-leftists. This was apparent in its ‘one step to the left’ strategic orientation, which justified/justifies a de facto reformism, an orientation to lower lever and ‘progressive’ trade union bureaucrats and opposed/opposes efforts to build explicitly revolutionary socialist forces. The

other side of this was/is to try to bureaucratically exclude/silence explicitly revolutionary organizations and viewpoints, while orienting to forces to its right. Its entire approach struck me as dishonest and manipulative in the extreme.

“2. More specifically (as you may remember), I never supported the Peace and Freedom Party, which struck me as reformist and an excuse not to emphasize revolutionary or even anti-imperialist propaganda. I was close to being entirely anti-electoral, although I countenanced support for explicitly socialist electoral campaigns (the SWP/SLP) insofar as they focused on anti-capitalist/socialist propaganda. (Later, I was uncomfortable with the Labor Party slogan and only supported it because Trotsky advocated it.)

“3. It was hesitant to come out fully in support of Stalinist-led national liberation movements (Vietnam) and, instead, looked for reformist forces (the Buddhists in Vietnam) in a kind of ‘anybody but the Stalinists’ standpoint (a hint or legacy of Shachtman's evolution).

“4. Consistent with all this, it never educated its members and encouraged them to view explicitly revolutionary forces (the Spartacist League, the Workers League) with disdain, as ‘ultra-left sectarians’.

“Looking back, I now see Draper as a (closeted) Social Democrat rather than a centrist. Remember, in his ‘Reorient the IS’ document, he attacked the IS for being too left wing (!!!).”

Overall, Tabor concludes,

“As far as my political evolution was concerned, I would describe the ISC/IS influence as positive. Whether that's true vis a vis the broader left is another question, insofar as it may have served as a vehicle to trap leftward moving young radicals and prevent them from evolving to something more revolutionary, including anarchism.”

Conclusion

Hal Draper also became known for his fierce attacks on anarchism. While arguing that Karl Marx was a radical democrat, he denounced anarchists—especially Proudhon and Bakunin—as nothing but elitists and authoritarians. (Draper 1990) As I have previously written: “Draper really hates anarchism: ‘Of all ideologies, anarchism is the one most fundamentally antidemocratic in ideology....’ More anti-democratic than Nazism or Stalinism? The very extremism of the statement shows that political prejudice is operative here.” (Price 2002; 81) He did have valid insights into the authoritarian sides of anarchism (Proudhon's pathological misogyny, Bakunin's attraction to secret conspiracies, Kropotkin's support of the Allies in World War I, the Spanish anarchists joining the capitalist government in the

30s civil war, etc.). But he showed his bias by downplaying any authoritarian aspects of Marx's Marxism, while he was blind to the very real libertarian-democratic aspects of anarchism. This antagonized many anarchists. The political trend of left Shachtmanism, as embodied in the I.S., went through a series of splits and mergers. From the beginning of the I.S., it was also influenced by the British International Socialist Tendency, with which it had much in common. In its shuffling of personnel through splitting and unifying, it also attracted some of the more flexible "orthodox" Trotskyists. After various shakeups, the trend resulted in today's International Socialist Organization (perhaps the largest far-left U.S. grouping) and the organization Solidarity.

Since the dissolution of the RSL, I have run across a number of individuals who had been in or around the International Socialist Organization but had left to become anarchists (not surprising given the relative size of the I.S.O. in the Left). However, to this point, the RSL remains the last known grouping that evolved from left Shachtmanism to revolutionary anarchism.

This essay has briefly reviewed the relationship between one strand of Marxism, namely Shachtmanism, and revolutionary anarchism. While there is a great deal of difference between them, there is also a certain degree of overlap and even cross-influence, as some have gone from the first to the latter. For many, the concepts of socialism-from-below and the focus on the self-emancipation of the workers and all oppressed people have served as bridges to anarchism.

Appendix: Bibliography on Shachtmanism

The most recent collection of "lost texts" from the origins of the Shachtmanite tendency in their split from the Trotskyist mainstream is Matgamna (2015), an excellent selection. It adds to the earlier Matgamna (1998). Both books contain texts from Shachtman's side of the dispute as well as some from the Trotsky-Cannon side. They both have lengthy and thoughtful introductions by Sean Matgamna of the Alliance for Workers Liberty (UK). These introductions are almost books in themselves. A similar collection was made by Haberkern & Lipow (2008), with a slightly different slant. Drucker (1999) has written a biography of Shachtman. As the book's title indicates, it covers the history of his political tendency. The personalities and history of the Trotskyist split are also discussed in Wald (1987). There is a collection of Hal Draper's writings in Draper (1992). Draper has published a series of fat books on "Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution," beginning with Draper (1977). The Center for Socialist History (www.socialisthistory.org) has other books by Draper, including collections of his writings. An overview of theories of "bureaucratic collectivism," proposed by Shachtman and others, may be found in van der Linden (2009), along with reviews of other theories of the nature of the Soviet Union, such as the "degenerated workers' state" and "state capitalism,"

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In Memoriam

Bob McGlynn

Bob McGlynn, linked Tompkins protests and glasnost

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Bob McGlynn holding a copy of local underground newspaper The Shadow at the memorial for anarchist gardener Adam Purple at La Plaza Cultural community garden last September.

Photo by Chris Flash / The Shadow

BY BILL WEINBERG | Bob McGlynn, a longtime figure in New York City's anarchist scene who linked the Tompkins Square Park protests of the 1980s to pro-democracy movements in Eastern Europe, died of a heart attack on Aug. 23 at his home in Yonkers. He was 60.

With his long hair, army boots, sleeveless denim jacket and prizefighter's build, McGlynn could be taken for a biker. But he was motivated by an intense idealism. McGlynn's activist career began in the early 1980s with Brooklyn Anti-Nuclear Group (BANG), which was organizing to shut down the Indian Point nuclear power plant. His artistically crude but politically sophisticated cartoons gave the BANG newsletter a punk aesthetic.

In this same period, he began working as a bicycle messenger — which also thrust him into political activity. Faced with police harassment and city government attempts to oppressively regulate cyclists, in 1982 he organized the first bike messengers' union in New York, the Independent Couriers Association. In 1987, when Mayor Ed Koch issued an order banning bicycles from three Midtown avenues during working hours, the messengers repeatedly rode in a large group in defiance. McGlynn was on the frontlines of this successful struggle — the ban was overturned as unenforceable. McGlynn proudly called himself the “King of All Bicycle Messengers.”

McGlynn was again facing off with police in the streets when the city attempted to impose a curfew on Tompkins Square Park in 1988. That set off three years of conflict on the gentrifying Lower East Side, with squatters, anarchists and the homeless fighting the cops in an endless series of angry protests and riots. McGlynn, although living in Brooklyn, biked across the river to join in the action.

But McGlynn's special passion was building ties of solidarity with anti-nuclear, anti-militarist and ecological activists in the Eastern Bloc — challenging work in the paranoid and polarized atmosphere of the Reagan Cold War.

This work began when McGlynn and friends formed a New York sister organization to the Moscow Trust Group in 1983. The Trust Group, with its unassuming name, had been formed by Moscow activists as an “acceptable” cover to advocate for nuclear disarmament. Now linked with a New York group, the Moscow activists had greater visibility, and were less vulnerable to being imprisoned or “disappeared” by Soviet authorities.

In 1986, in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster, McGlynn and his NY Trust Group collaborator Ann-Marie Hendrickson joined with two activists from the U.K. to travel to Moscow — smuggling in Russian-language fliers about the dangers of radiation and a banner reading, “No More Hiroshimas, No More Chernobyls — Peace and Environmental Safety for All.” The action took place in early August, timed for the Hiroshima anniversary. They promptly headed to Moscow's Gorky Park, where they unfurled the banner, began distributing the leaflets — and were of course

quickly arrested by the K.G.B. After a few days in custody, they were deported. The action won international media coverage.

Back in New York after this escapade, McGlynn helped transform the local Trust Group into Neither East Nor West (NENW) — dedicated to supporting anti-authoritarian forces throughout Eastern Europe. As the Cold War entered its endgame, such groups were fast gaining ground, and NENW organized campaigns and demonstrations to support Eastern Bloc activists faced with imprisonment or persecution.

NENW gave special emphasis to linking activist struggles in the Eastern Bloc and the U.S. — for instance, getting activists in Moscow, Minsk and Warsaw to protest at their local U.S. embassies to demand freedom for Kenny Toglia, a New York activist facing charges in the Tompkins Square riots.

During this period, McGlynn saved up his money that he worked hard for as a bike messenger to travel to Eastern Europe, meeting and networking with activists in Poland and Slovenia, the latter then part of Yugoslavia.

NENW's newsletter was an important networking tool in those pre-Internet days. It was called On Gogol Boulevard, for Moscow's artistic and alternative scene hangout, and was mailed to contacts around the world. It later morphed into an insert that appeared anarchist publications including The Shadow, organ of the Tompkins Square Uprising.



In the '80s and into the '90s, NENW shared an office with sibling anarchist groups at the famous, and recently closed, "Peace Pentagon" at 339 Lafayette St., run by the pacifist War Resisters' League and its affiliated AJ Muste Foundation. McGlynn put in countless hours stuffing envelopes there.

The Cold War came to an end, but NENW remained active for several more years — especially doing support work for antiwar activists in all the ex-Yugoslav republics.

In the late '90s, McGlynn retreated from Brooklyn to his childhood home of Yonkers and withdrew from the activist scene to deal with health problems. He had long been on painkillers after throwing out his back as a messenger. Accustomed to an extremely active lifestyle, adjusting to physical limitations also posed psychological challenges for McGlynn.

However, he had recently begun to emerge from his period of withdrawal. In February 2015, a NENW reunion party was held in Manhattan, and McGlynn spoke enthusiastically of reviving the group in light of the war in Ukraine and renewed U.S.-Russia rivalry. The group later that year issued its first public statement in years — in support of Syria's revolutionary Kurds.

McGlynn is survived by his longtime partner, Joanna Pizzo. He will be remembered for his boundless love of freedom, and intransigent hostility to all dictatorships and superpowers.

Editorial note: Some of us who are currently involved in the Utopian have fond memories of working with Bob: in the Brooklyn Anti-Nuclear Group, in the production of On Gogol Boulevard, the publication of Neither East Nor West (produced in the offices of the Revolutionary Socialist League), in work with Russian refugees in New York, in two human rights conferences sponsored by Wolnosc I Prokoj (Freedom and Peace), and more recently, in the Utopian milieu itself. We will miss him.

Who We Are

(Originally printed in *Utopian 2*, 2001. Revised 2016.)

To look for Utopia means providing a vision for the future – of a world worth living in, of a life beyond what people settle for as experience clouds their hopes. It means insisting that hope is real, counting on human potential and dreams.

Utopians do not accept “what is” as “what must be.” We see potential for freedom even in the hardest of apparent reality. Within our oppressive society are forces for hope, freedom, and human solidarity, possibilities pressing toward a self-managed, cooperative commonwealth. We don’t know if these forces will win out; we see them as hopes, as moral norms by which to judge society today, as challenges to all of us to act in such a way as to realize a fully human community.

We can describe some of these possibilities: worldwide opposition to the imperialist domination of the global economy; struggles against dictatorship in China, Syria, Egypt, and Venezuela; fights for national liberation in Ukraine, Kurdistan, and Palestine; cultural movements for the defense and recovery of indigenous languages and histories; changes in society’s acceptance of homosexuality, trans-gender freedom, and women’s equality, campaigns to defend the rights of immigrants and racial and religious minorities. The organized labor movement and the Black movement in the United States have – we hope – new utopian phases ahead. But beyond these specifics, we are talking about something familiar to everyone, although difficult to get a handle on. In small ways, every day, people live by cooperation, not competition. Filling in for a co-worker, caring for an old woman upstairs, helping out at AA meetings, donating and working for disaster relief – people know how to live cooperatively on a small scale. What we don’t know, and no one has found a blueprint for, is how to live cooperatively on a national and international scale – even on the scale of a mass political movement. Nobody has described how the society we want will look, or how to get it, though we know what it will be – a society where people are free to be good.

This is a good time to be publishing a journal dedicated to utopianism, revolutionary socialism, and anarchism. The left is no longer in retreat. The struggles of organized labor, the Black and Latino communities, women, lesbian/bisexual/gay/transgender people, indigenists, and environmentalists are gaining strength. Within the world of the organized left, the influence of anarchists and libertarian socialists has greatly increased.

But these are perilous times as well. The fabric of the post-World War II world system—a “democratic ideal” for Europe and the United States masking elite control and international domination—is fraying. In the U.S. and Europe we see ideals of openness and inclusion in collision with xenophobia and race resentment. The parties of reform – the Democrats in the U.S., the Social Democrats in Europe, the Christian Democrats in Latin America, the old nationalist parties in Africa and Asia (where they still exist) – have abandoned the idea of social reform and freedom

from international capital; yet, at least in the U.S., the Democratic Party has lost none of its ability to absorb, blunt, and demoralize radical efforts at change from within. While the collapse of the Soviet bloc and China's adoption of a capitalist economic system under a Communist political dictatorship have tarnished Marxism's idealist image, they have also discredited, for many, the very idea of changing society fundamentally. As never since the early nineteenth century, many believe that market capitalism is the only path to human progress.

A highly problematic new phenomenon in recent years has been the rise of Islamicist or Jihadist religious fanaticism, which exploits radical hopes for escape from western domination as mass support for a tyrannical, socially regressive, and exceptionally brutal war against non-Muslims and the great majority of Muslims. This development is a response partly to the collapse of secular anti-imperialism in Africa, the Arab world, and Asia since fifty years ago, and partly to continuing European domination in these areas, now made worse by the anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim backlash in Europe itself. The road forward, clearly, lies in rebuilding a democratic, radical anti-imperialism, but how this may occur we don't know. Moreover, with a few exceptions, revolutionary anarchist and libertarian socialist groups remain small and their influence limited. Various kinds of reformism and Marxism still attract radical-minded people. Both these ideologies and their corresponding movements accept the state, capital-labor relations, conventional technology, and political authoritarianism.

But these are reasons why it is important to continue to work for freedom and speak of utopia. This racist, sexist, and authoritarian society has not developed any new charms. It remains exploitive and unstable, threatening economic collapse and environmental destruction. It wages war around the globe, while nuclear weapons still exist and even spread. Even at its best -- most stable and peaceful -- it provides a way of life that should be intolerable: a life of often meaningless work and overwork; hatred and oppression within the family, violence from the authorities; the continuing risk of sudden violent death for LGBT people, women, and Black people; the threat of deportation of undocumented immigrants. The very major reforms of the last period of social struggle, in the 1960s, while changing so much, left African Americans and other minority populations in the U.S. and around the world facing exclusion and daily police (state) violence, literally without effective rights to life. The videos we see every day (in which new technology makes visible what has always been going on) reveal, like sheet lightning, the reality of the system we live under. For this society, from its inception, to call itself "democracy" is a slap in the face of language.

This paradoxical situation -- a society in obvious decay but without a mass movement to challenge it fundamentally -- is, we hope, coming to an end. As new movements develop, liberal-reform and Marxist ideas will show new life, but so have utopian and libertarian ideas. We work with this in mind. We have to do what was not done during the last period of really radical social struggles in the 1960s and 1970s. Among other things, revolutionary anarchist and libertarian socialist

theory very much needs further development, including its critique of Marxism, and its ideas about how to relate to mass struggles, democratic and socialist theory, and popular culture. And we need to reinvigorate the ideals of anarchism/libertarian socialism and the threads in today's world that may, if we can find them and follow them, lead to a future worth dying for and living in.

This future, we state clearly, is an ideal, not a certainty. The lure of Marxism, for many, has been its seeming promise that a new world is objectively determined and inevitable. This idea is not only wrong but elitist and brutal: if the new society is inevitable then those who are for it are free to shoot or imprison everyone who stands in the way. That is the key to Marxism's development from utopia to dictatorship, which everyone except Marxists is aware of. Nor do we believe in an inevitable collapse of the present system—capitalism can push its way from crisis to crisis at its usual cost in broken lives and destroyed hopes. We believe people have to make ethical choices about whether to accept life as it is or to struggle for a new society, and then about whether the society they are for will be democratic or authoritarian. The only key to the future is a moral determination to get there, a dream of a world in which those who were obscure to one another will one day walk together. We do not know where this key may be found, but we know the only way to find it is to search for it.

That is who we are.