Catalyst

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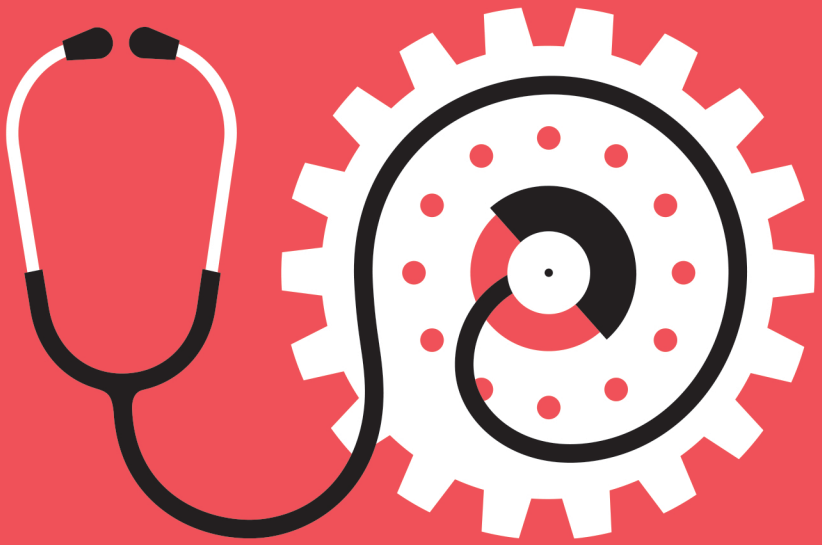

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EDITORS' NOTE

The first *Catalyst* offered an indication of the range of subjects the journal intends to deal with. It communicated, as well, our ambition to explain contemporary capitalism and examine how the capitalist system shapes political, social, and cultural life. Our second issue continues this agenda with a series of essays on the theory and practice of class today.

Mike Davis launches the new issue with a vigorous defense of the classical socialist view of the working class and its centrality as a political agent. This is an iconoclastic argument in today's intellectual climate, even within the Left, where the working class is too often viewed as a spent force and a bastion of conservatism and privilege. Davis defends both the possibility of working-class politics and also its necessity — endorsing the idea promoted by Marx and generations of others, that what is at stake in workers' struggle against capital is the fate of humanity itself.

Davis's defense of working-class agency is complemented by Kim Moody's study of changes in the structure of work and the nature of labor markets since the 1980s. Focusing on the United States, Moody argues that scholars have overstated the novelty of the current work regime, particularly the precariousness of employment and the reduction in workplace size. They have, as a result, exaggerated today's obstacles to organizing, which are formidable but by no means insurmountable. Moody insists that the emerging economic landscape is actually creating new vulnerabilities for capital and novel opportunities for labor organizing. We just need to figure out how to exploit them.

Both Davis and Moody work with the traditional Marxian conception of class, one that has been the subject of considerable attack from multiple viewpoints over the past few decades. Among the most influential of these alternative class theories is that fashioned by Pierre Bourdieu, considered by many to be the preeminent sociologist of this era. Bourdieu's viewpoint is notable for breaking with social science tradition by nesting its conception of class in an understanding of capital that goes beyond the economic so as to build cultural and social dimensions into its very definition. In response, Dylan Riley argues that the resulting framework for theorizing class fails, not only in comparison with its classical rivals, but even with respect to the particular social phenomena it defines as its core concern.

Riley is not content, however, to expose Bourdieu's logical inconsistences and to bring out his empirical inadequacies. He rounds out his critique by asking how a theory containing such glaring flaws and offering such meager intellectual returns could become so widely accepted among scholars. The answer, he provocatively insists, requires shifting the inquiry to the realm of ideology and sociology of knowledge — i.e., to understand its acceptance in terms of its fit within the general intellectual culture and self-image of left academics.

The vicissitudes of contemporary class politics are examined in two international contributions. Sam Ashman, Zachary Levenson, and Trevor Ngwane offer a sweeping analysis of South Africa since the infamous Marikana massacre of August 2012, when several dozen striking miners were cut down by South African police. Daniel Finn analyzes the dynamics of Irish politics since the turn of this century, but especially after the 2008 recession. In each

of the countries under examination, the authors draw out the ways popular movements have increasingly resisted the neoliberal turn and created major openings for radical politics. But they are quick to register the uneven success of left political organizations in taking advantage of these opportunities. The analysis of the current conjuncture is extended in an interview with Vanessa Williamson on the Trump phenomenon, which continues the line of inquiry opened by Mike Davis's essay in our first edition.

Catalyst prioritizes debate as a fundamental method for developing our theory. In this issue, Mike Parker offers a critique of the wide-ranging analysis of the rise and fall of the American auto industry presented by Joshua Murray and Michael Schwartz last issue. Murray and Schwartz argue that American auto manufacturers lost out to their Japanese rivals because of their unwillingness to continue with the flexible system of production that had originally been introduced by Henry Ford in Detroit and taken to new heights by Toyota. Parker contends that these authors offer an unduly rosy analysis of the Japanese system in arguing that it is a win-win arrangement, which cooperatively involves both employers and workers in production and thereby benefits both. He asserts, on the contrary, that the effectiveness of Toyotism lay ultimately in its ability to subordinate its workers to the needs of profitable production and that, *pace* Murray and Schwartz, American companies ultimately had no choice but to embrace the Toyota system as the only way to sustain their competitiveness. Murray and Schwartz will reply in our third volume.

Our review essay in this issue considers the spate of recent books that seek to describe and explain what they see as the retrograde politics of the white working class, especially in the South and Midwest. Chris Maisano notes how alien, even exotic, the working class has become to academics and journalists. For all their celebration of agency, they find it difficult to recognize workers', especially white workers', reasons for their choices, which are instead explained in terms of defects in working-class culture and psychology. Maisano insists that a meaningful analysis must begin from workers' actual interests and identify the limitations on their ability to realize those interests. Only when one understands the structure of constraints under which they are obliged to operate can the basic rationality of their decisions be appreciated.

As the status quo continues to dissolve into crisis, we need to see as a central challenge the aim of better understanding how the situations that we confront express the general workings of capitalism. We hope that by bringing the analysis of class to the fore, the essays in the second edition of *Catalyst* can contribute to that goal.

OLD GODS, NEW ENIGMAS

Notes on "Historical Agency"

MIKE DAVIS

In a 1995 interview shortly after the publication of *The Age of Extremes*, Eric Hobsbawm was asked about the future currency of socialist ideas. It depended, he answered, on whether a "historic force" would still exist to support the socialist project. "It seems to me the historic force rested not necessarily on the ideas but on a particular material situation … the major problem of the Left being that of agency." In the face of the declining ratio of variable capital in modern production and thus of the social weight of the industrial proletariat, he said,

> we may well find ourselves back in a different pattern to a society, like the one of the pre-capitalist society in which the largest number of people will not be wage workers — they will be something else, either, as you can see in the large part of the Third World, people who are operating in the gray area of the informal economy, who cannot be simply class as wage workers or in some other way. Now, under those circumstances, clearly the question is, how can this body of people be mobilized in order to realize the aims which unquestionably are still there and to some extent are now more urgent in form?[1]

1 "History in the 'Age of Extremes': A Conversation with Eric Hobsbawm (1995)," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 83 (March 2013), 19.

The decline of traditional working-class economic and political power — now including stricken BRICS like Brazil and South Africa — has been indeed epochal.[2] In Europe as well as the United States, the erosion of industrial employment through wage arbitrage, outsourcing, and automation has gone hand in hand with the increased precarity of service work, the digital industrialization of white-collar jobs, and the stagnation or decline of unionized public employment. The new social Darwinism, while inflaming working-class resentment against the new credential elites and the high-tech rich, has also narrowed and poisoned traditional cultures of solidarity, leading to the rise of anti-immigrant movements of the neo-right.[3] Even if the hurricane of neoliberalism were to pass — and there is yet little sign this will happen — the automation not just of production and routine management but, now, of professional expertise and scientific research threatens the last vestiges of job security in core economies.[4]

Hobsbawm, of course, didn't factor in the shift of global manufacturing to East Asia and the almost exponential growth of the Chinese factory working class over the last generation. But the replacement of human labor power by the next generation of artificial-intelligence systems and machines will not exempt industrial East Asia. Foxconn, the world's largest manufacturer, is currently replacing assembly workers at its huge Shenzhen complex and elsewhere with a million robots (they don't commit suicide in despair at working conditions).[5] In much of the Global South, meanwhile, structural trends since

2 Even in China, their twilight may be on the horizon. The overall growth of the Chinese working class, as the countryside has sent tens of millions of its daughters and sons to labor in the coastal export-processing zones, disguises the simultaneous decline of the state-owned industrial sector and the huge layoffs among veteran industrial workers. See Ju Li, "From 'Master' to 'Loser:' Changing Working-Class Cultural Identity in Contemporary China," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 88 (Fall 2015): 190–208.

3 Studies, for example, have contrasted the organized French working class's broadly inclusive sense of "us" in the 1970s with the current rage against Muslim immigrants and young unemployed people in general. "Them" now includes those "below" the traditional proletariat as well as those "above" it. See Michele Lamont and Nicolas Duvous, "How Has Neo-liberalism Transformed France's Symbolic Boundaries?," *Culture and Society* 32, no. 2 (Summer 2014) : 57–75; Olivier Schwartz, "Vivons-nous encore dans une society des classes?" *La Vie des Idées*, September 22, 2009.

4 The imminent threat of automation to the working class is an old story. First to bid the proletariat adieu were Stuart Chase and the Technocracy movement in the early 1930s, followed by Norbert Weiner, Ben Seligman and the Committee on the Triple Revolution in the 1960s, then André Gorz in 1980. All evidence, however, now points to the wolf actually being at the door.

5 Martin Ford, *Rise of the Robots: Technology and the Threat of a Jobless Future* (New York:

1980 have overthrown traditional ideas about "stages of economic growth" as urbanization has become decoupled from economic growth and subsistence from waged employment.[6] Even in countries with high recent rates of GDP growth, such as India and Nigeria, joblessness and poverty have soared instead of declining, which is why "jobless growth" joined income inequality at the top of agenda at the 2015 World Economic Forum.[7] Meanwhile, global rural poverty, especially in Africa, is being rapidly urbanized — or perhaps "warehoused" is the better term — with little prospect that migrants will ever be reincorporated into modern relations of production. Their destinations are the squalid refugee camps and the jobless peripheral slums, where their children can dream of becoming prostitutes or car bombers.

The summation of these transformations, in rich as well as poor regions, is an unprecedented crisis of proletarianization — or, if you prefer, of the "real subsumption" of labor, embodied by subjects whose consciousness and capacity to effect change are still enigmas. Neilson and Stubbs, using the terminology of chapter 25 of *Capital*, contend that "the uneven unfolding of capitalism's long-term contradictory labour-market dynamic is generating a massive relative surplus population, distributed in deeply unequal forms and sizes across the countries of the world. It is already larger than the active army, and is set to grow further in the medium-term future."[8] Whether as contingent or uncollectivized labor, as micro-entrepreneurs or subsistence criminals or simply as the permanently unemployed, the fate of this "surplus humanity" has become the core problem for twentieth-first-century Marxism. Do the old categories of common sentiment and shared destiny, asks Olivier Schwartz, still define an idea of "the popular classes"?[9] Socialism, as Hobsbawm warned,

Basic Books, 2015), 10.

6 There are, of course, many precedents for delinking the triad of urbanization, industrialization, and modernization. Trotsky, for instance, characterized Tsarist Russia as a case of "industrialization without modernization." (See the fascinating discussion in Baruch Knei-Paz, *The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, 94–107.)

7 Michael Goldman, "With the Declining Significance of Labor, Who Is Producing Our Global Cities?," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 87 (Spring 2015), 137–64 (on Bangalore); Olu Ajakaiye et al., "Understanding the Relationship between Growth and Employment in Nigeria," *Brookings Paper*, May 2016.

8 David Neilson and Thomas Stubbs, "Relative Surplus Population and Uneven Development in the Neoliberal Era: Theory and Empirical Application," *Capital and Class* 35, no. 3 (2011): 451.

9 Schwartz, ibid. His ethnographic studies of the impact over the last two generations of neoliberalism on the consciousness of miners, bus drivers, and machinists are essential to

will have little future unless large sections of this informal working class find sources of collective strength, levers of power, platforms for participating in an international class struggle.

It would be a gigantic mistake, however, to conclude, as the post-Marxists have, that the starting point for theoretical renewal must be a funeral for the "old working class," which, to put it crudely, has been demoted in agency, not fired from history. Machinists, nurses, truck drivers, and school teachers remain the organized social base defending the historical legacy of labor in Western Europe, North America, and Japan. Trade unions, however weakened or dispirited, continue to articulate a way of life "based around a coherent sense of the dignity of others and of a place in the world."[10] But the ranks of traditional workers and their unions are no longer growing, and the major increments to the global workforce are increasingly unwaged or jobless. As Christian Marazzi complained recently, it is no longer easy to use a category like "class composition" "to analyse a situation that is increasingly characterized by the fragmentation of the subjects constituted in the world of employment and non-employment."[11]

At a high level of abstraction, the current period of globalization is defined by a trilogy of ideal-typical economies: superindustrial (coastal East Asia), financial/tertiary (North Atlantic), and hyperurbanizing/extractive (West Africa). "Jobless growth" is incipient in the first, chronic in the second, and absolute in the third. We might add a fourth ideal-type of disintegrating society whose chief trend is the export of refugees and migrant labor. In any event, we can no longer rely on a single paradigmatic society or class to model the critical vectors of historical development. Imprudent coronations of abstractions like "the multitude" as historical subjects simply dramatize a poverty of empirical research. Contemporary Marxism must be able to scan the future from the simultaneous perspectives of Shenzhen, Los Angeles, and Lagos if it wants to solve the puzzle of how heterodox social categories might fit together in a single resistance to capitalism.

any understanding of Nicolas Sarkozy or Marine Le Pen.

10 Simon Charlesworth, *A Phenomenology of Working-Class Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2. This is an eviscerating account of the human cost of deindustrialization and the destruction of a traditional culture of labor.

11 Christian Marazzi, "Money and Financial Capital," *Theory, Culture, Society* 32 (2015): 7–8, 42.

THE PROLETARIAT'S JOB DESCRIPTION

Even the most preliminary tasks are daunting. A new theory of revolution, to begin with, begs benchmarks in the old, beginning with clarifying "proletarian agency" in classical socialist thought. Summarizing the general view, Ellen Wood defines agency as "the possession of strategic power and a capacity for collective action founded in the specific conditions of material life," but there is no canonical text that expounds Marx's matured viewpoint or directly links class capacity to the categories of *Capital*.[12] As Lukács lamented:

> Marx's chief work breaks off just as he is about to embark on the definition of class [chapter 52 of *Capital*]. This omission was to have serious consequences both for the theory and the practice of the proletariat. For on this vital point the later movement was forced to base itself on interpretations, on the collation of occasional utterances by Marx and Engels and on the independent extrapolation and application of their method.[13]

Since Lukács attempted to rectify this "omission" in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), a trove of Marx's unpublished works and drafts have been recovered, interpreted, and debated, but the itinerary of the key macro-concepts — class, historical agency, the state, modes of production, and so on — requires careful exploitation of three very different kinds of sources: explicit philosophical statements, mainly from before 1850; the politico-strategic conclusions drawn from partly empirical analyses; and fragments or allusions in the *Grundrisse*, *1861–63 Economic Manuscripts*, and *Capital* that extend or modify earlier ideas.

But such a reconstruction from fragmentary sources, no matter how faithful, should not be misunderstood as the "true Marx." It is simply a possible Marx. Marcello Musto has argued that Marx's failure to update and systematize his ideas was not just a result of illness and the constant

12 Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Retreat from Class: A New "True" Socialism* (London and New York: Verso, 1986), 5.

13 Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, [1923] 1971), 46.

revision of *Capital*, but an inevitable result of "his intrinsic aversion" to schematization. His "inextinguishable passion for knowledge, not altered by the passing of the years, leading him time and again to new studies; and, finally the awareness he attained in his later years of the difficulty of confining the complexity of history within a theoretical project; these made incompleteness [his] faithful companion."[14]

Bearing this in mind, the present essay makes no pretense to being a rigorous exercise in Marxology; rather, I make wide-ranging use of Lukácsian extrapolation in order to suggest a *historical sociology* congruent with the ideal-type of a revolutionary working class in the eras of the First and Second Internationals.[15] I synthesize diverse claims about the revolutionary role of the factory working class that were actually made by Marx, Engels, their successors in the Second International and the Lukács school, *or plausibly could be made in light of our current understanding of nineteenth and early twentieth-century labor history*. The result, illustrated with various examples, is a maximum argument for the traditional working class as the gravedigger of capitalism. Imagine, if you will, the proletariat being asked by the World Spirit for a resume of its qualifications for the job of Universal Emancipator.[16]

Such an enumeration of ascribed *capacities,* beginning with workers' ability to become conscious of themselves as a class, is a construct, assembled for comparative purposes, that makes no claim to empirical closure or theoretical coherence. However, it does assume with Marx that the sum of these capacities is a realistic potential for self-emancipation and revolution. Several disclaimers are in order. In focusing on *resources for self-organization and action*, *as well the interests that mobilize them and the historical tasks that demand them,* I sidestep philosophical debates about social ontology and consciousness, as well as recent agency/structure controversies among social theorists and historians (which Alex Callinicos addressed so commandingly in *Making History*.)[17]

14 *International Review of Social History* 52 (2007): 478.

15 Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 46.

16 These notes might be considered an adventurous expansion of the theses in "The Special Class," chapter 2 of Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution, Vol II: The Politics of Social Classes* (New York: Monthly Review, 1978), 33–48. Draper's trilogy, along with his two-volume *The Marx-Engels Cyclopedia*, are unsurpassed resources for navigating and understanding Marx's politico-theoretical legacy.

17 Alex Callinicos, *Making History: Agency, Structure, and Change in Social Theory* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, [1987] 2005.

The first is how classes, through conflicts structurally shaped by regimes of accumulation, actually make one another and influence one another's relative capabilities and self-consciousness. A celebrated example is the tenth chapter of *Capital*, where Marx recounts how the victory of the English workers in forcing legislation of a ten-hour workday was quickly countered by their employers' investment in a new generation of machines that increased the intensity of labor. (The premier theoretical text of Italian workerism, Mario Tronti's *Operai e Capitale* [1966], developed from this example a sweeping theory of the struggle between capital and labor as a dialectic of "class composition and recomposition.")[18]

The second dimension is the uneven and crisis-punctuated path of capital accumulation over time: the changing *economic topography* of class struggle. Marx saw in the spiral of the business cycle the periodic opening and closing of opportunities for proletarian advance: for example, the boom of the 1850s quieted labor conflict in Britain, while the depression of the 1870s reawakened the class struggle on an international scale.[19] *Capital* gave "objective conditions" a new and more powerful meaning as crisis theory. (Not until Lenin, however, would Marxists attempt to theorize war as a comparable or even more important forcing house of structural change.)[20]

Third, *capacity*, in my usage, is a developable potential for conscious and consequent activity, not a disposition that arises automatically and inevitably from social conditions. Nor in the case of the proletariat is capacity synonymous with *endowment,* such as the power to hire and fire that a capitalist receives from simple ownership of means of production. The conditions which confer capacity, moreover, can be either *structural* or *conjunctural.* The first arise from the proletariat's position in the mode of production: for example, the possibility of organizing mass strikes that shut down production in entire cities, industries, and even nations. The second is historically specific and ultimately transient: as, for example, the stubborn maintenance of informal

18 Sections of Tronti's famous work have appeared in English, but for the whole we await the completion of Verso's forthcoming translation. In the interim, his seminal essay "Lenin in England" offers an earlier version of this argument.

19 In one of his early London articles ("Review/May to October, 1850"), Marx first argued that the revolutions of 1848 were ignited by the economic crisis of 1847 and that the revolutionary moment ended with the return of prosperity at the end of 1849. He later incorporated this article as Part Four of *Class Struggles in France*.

20 The key text is V.I. Lenin, "The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It," *Collected Works*, Vol. 25 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, [1917] 1964), 323–69.

control over the labor process by late-Victorian engineering workers and shipbuilders. The conjunctural can also denote the intersection of unsynchronized histories, such as the persistence of absolutism in the middle period of industrialization, which led in Europe to the potent coincidence of suffrage struggles and industrial conflict — not the case in the United States and some other white-settler colonies.

Even though "structures empower agents differentially," one is almost tempted to apply Newton's Second Law to history, since structural conditions often produce tendencies and countertendencies at the same time. "The form of the factory," for example, "embodies and therefore teaches capitalist notions of property relations. But, as Marx points out, it can also teach the necessarily social and collective character of production and thereby undermine the capitalist notion of private property."[21] Likewise, in *Capital*, the increasing organic composition (capital intensity) of production is indeterminately offset in value terms by the cheapening of capital goods. Similarly, resources can be deployed for alternative, even opposite, ends. A thirst for technical and scientific knowledge, for example, is a presupposition for workers' control of production but also serves the ambitions of an aristocracy of labor that hopes one day to become managers or owners. Self-organized proletarian civil society, likewise, can reinforce class identity either in a subordinate, corporatist sense, as a *subculture* in orbit around bourgeois institutions, or in a hegemonic, anticipatory sense, as an antagonistic *counterculture*.

Finally, the "classical proletariat" is defined as the European and North American working classes of the Second Industrial Revolution, from 1848 to 1921. The notional bookends are the socialist insurrection of June 1848 in Paris (a debut) and the so-called March Action of 1921 in Saxony (a finale). The first opened the era of post-bourgeois revolution; the second ended the European Revolution of 1917 to 1921. With the German revolution defeated, Comintern Marxism turned toward historical subjects — anti-colonial movements, "surrogate" proletariats, peasants, unemployed, Muslims, even American farmers — not encompassed within the original theoretical vision of Marx and Engels.[22]

21 David Shaw, "Happy in Our Chains? Agency and Language in the Postmodern Age," *History and Theory* 40 (December 2001): 19, 21.

22 The epoch of partisan war and national liberation under Communist leadership is even

CHAINS AND NEEDS

1

The modern proletariat, in the words of the *1843 Introduction*, wears "radical chains." Its emancipation requires the abolition of private property and the eventual disappearance of classes.

In contrast to the obsolete artisan, the poor peasant, or even the slave, the industrial worker doesn't look backward through Jeffersonian or Proudhonist nostalgia to a utopian restoration of petty production, natural economy, and egalitarian competition. "The human instinct for control of oneself and one's immediate environment, which for previous classes meant essentially a drive towards perfecting private control of the means of personal subsistence and wealth creation, for the proletariat is converted into a desire for collective control and ownership of the means of production."[23] They accept that the massacre of small property by capital is irreversible and that economic democracy must be built upon the abolition of the wages system, rather than large-scale industry per se. Alone among all subalterns and exploited producers, the proletarian has no vestigial stake in the preservation of private ownership of the means of production or the reproduction of economic inequality.

However, it's essential to distinguish between the chains worn by Marx's "philosophical proletariat" in the 1843–45 writings and those that later fettered the workers in Volume One of *Capital*.[24] The first were defined by absolute

richer in analogies for thinking about contemporary class formation and revolutionary capacity, but first things first.

23 Marc Mulholland, "Marx, the Proletariat, and the 'Will to Socialism,'" *Critique* 37, no. 3 (2009): 339–40.

24 "The head of this emancipation is philosophy, its heart is the proletariat. Philosophy cannot be made a reality without the abolition of the proletariat, the proletariat cannot be abolished without philosophy being made a reality." V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 4 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1960), 187.

destitution, exploitation and exclusion: "a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society, an estate which is the dissolution of all estates, a sphere which has a universal character by its universal suffering." Its existence, according to the young Marx, was not only a "negation" of humanity but a condition whose own negation requires a "radical revolution," the overthrow of the "hitherto existing world order.[25]

In *Capital*, on the other hand, structural *position* becomes as important as existential *condition* in defining the essence of the proletariat. Marx demonstrates that the poverty of the proletarians, while less extreme than that of the starving countryside, is more *radical* in nature since it arises from their role as producers of unprecedented wealth. In Britain the Industrial Revolution had created a society "in which poverty is engendered in as great abundance as wealth," while in Germany the emergent proletariat was "not the *naturally arising* poor but the *artificially impoverished.*"[26] If poverty, as André Gorz claimed, is the "natural basis" of the struggle for socialism, it is this "unnatural poverty," which grows in lockstep with the productive powers of collective labor.[27]

Marx also makes a crucial distinction between factory-socialized and general or hand labor power. The "formal relations of production" (wage labor and capital) arising from the expropriation of small producers by agricultural and merchant capital shape the broad boundaries of a propertyless working class. Moreover, the "wages system," David Montgomery reminds us, "has historically *not* been coextensive with industrial society."[28] In mid-Victorian Britain, for example, domestic servants made up the largest single group within the waged population and hand labor continued to flourish alongside the factory system. The Great Exhibition of 1851 glorified the age of steam power, but the three hundred thousand panes of glass that covered the Crystal Palace were blown by hand.[29]

25 V.I. Lenin, "1844 Introduction," *Collected Works*, Vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1960), 186.

26 Ibid., 186–87; V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 6 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1961),176.

27 André Gorz, *Strategy for Labor* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 3.

28 David Montgomery, "Commentary and Response," *Labor History* 40, no. 1 (1999): 37.

29 Raphael Samuel, "Mechanization and Hand Labour in Industrializing Britain," in Lenard Berlanstein (ed.), *The Industrial Revolution and Work in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (London: Routledge, 1992), 38. From the standpoint of necessary, use-value-creating labor in society, however, the unpaid household work of working-class mothers and wives may have contributed the largest share. I haven't found any Victorian estimates, but for the US in the

In contrast, the socio-technical relations of production distinguish the factory proletariat, the collectivized core of the modern working class, according to Marx.[30] For the workers' movement to acquire a universal form, inclusive of all varieties of wage labor, it must accumulate power, first and above all, in the *advancing* industrial sectors: textiles, iron and steel, coal, shipbuilding, railroads, and so on. They alone, in the words of the *Manifesto*, possess "historical initiative."[31]

2

The ground condition for the proletarian project is the realm of freedom immanent in the advanced industrial economy itself. To achieve the principal goal of socialism — the transformation of surplus labor into equally distributed free time — radical chains must be translated into radical needs.

Revolutions of the poor in backward countries can reach for the stars, but only the proletariat in advanced countries can actually grasp the future. The integration of science into production, compelled by both intercapitalist competition and working-class militancy, reduces the *necessity* (if not the actuality) of alienated toil. Already in *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847) Marx had argued that "the organization of revolutionary elements as a class supposes the existence of all the productive forces which could be engendered in the bosom of the old society."[32] A decade later, in the *Grundrisse*, he predicted

1950s–60s, Nordhaus and Tobin estimated that unwaged domestic labor was equivalent to 50 percent of the GDP. See William Nordhaus and James Tobin, "Is Growth Obsolete?" in *Economic Research: Retrospect and Prospect*, vol. 5, edited by National Bureau of Economic Research (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1972).

30 For a sophisticated treatment of this distinction and its implications for class formation, see David Neilson, "Formal and Real Subordination and the Contemporary Proletariat: Re-coupling Marxist Class Theory and Labour-Process Analysis," *Capital and Class* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 89–123.

31 This is not to claim that industrial workers were initially the most class conscious or politically radical; the opposite was sometimes true, with semi-proletarianized artisans and small-shop craftsmen — tailors and printers above all — continuing to form a revolutionary milieu until the 1870s or even later.

32 In "Principles of Communism," a rough draft for the *Manifesto*, Engels proclaimed, "So long as it is not possible to produce so much that not only is there enough for all, but also a surplus for the increase of social capital and for the further development of the productive forces, so long must there always be a ruling class disposing of the productive forces of soci-

that "to the degree that large industry develops, the creation of real wealth comes to depend less on labour-time and on the amount of labor employed" than upon "the general state of science and on the progress of technology, or the application of this science to production." At this point "the *surplus labour of the mass* has ceased to be the condition for the development of general wealth, just as the *non-labour of the few*, for the development of the general powers of the human head." Then it will be both materially possible and historically necessarily for the workers themselves to appropriate their own surplus labor as free time for "the artistic, scientific etc. development of the individuals… measure of wealth is then not any longer, in any way, labour time, but rather disposable time."[33]

But such an appropriation can never occur if the goal is framed simply as redistributive justice, income equality, or shared prosperity.[34] These are preconditions for socialism, not its substance. The new world, rather, would define itself by the satisfaction of "radical needs" *generated by the struggle for socialism itself* and incompatible with the alienation of capitalist society. "They include the need for community, for human relationships, for labor as an end (life's prime want), for universality, for free time and free activity and for the development of personality. They are *qualitative* needs — in contrast to the needs for material products, which decline relatively in a society of associated producers (as the need to 'possess' disappears)."[35] It is not the development of consumption or capitalist "affluence" that creates radical needs for free time and liberated work, but rather the countervalues and dreams embodied in radical mass movements. To take root in daily life

ety, and a poor, oppressed class." Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 6 (New York: International Publishers, [1845–48] 1976), 349.

33 *Grundrisse*, 704–08. Conversely, the suppression of free time and its conversion into disciplined toil was seen by the bourgeoisie as the very foundation of industry, if not civilization. Marx quotes the early economist Cunningham (1770): "There is a very great consumption of luxuries among the laboring poor of this kingdom; particularly among the manufacturing populace, which they also consume their time, the most fatal of all their consumptions." Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 34 (New York: International Publishers, [1863–64] 1993), 294.

34 "The problem as he sees it is not a redistribution, more just or more equal of existing wealth. For Marx, communism is the creation of new wealth, of new needs and of the conditions for their satisfaction." Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 64.

35 Michael Lebowitz, "Review: Heller on Marx's Concept of Needs," *Science and Society* 43, no. 3 (Fall 1979): 349–50; Agnes Heller, *The Theory of Need in Marx* (London Allison & Busby, 1976).

such needs must be prefigured, above all in socialist attitudes toward friendship, sexuality, gender roles, women's suffrage, nationalism, racial and ethnic bigotry, and the care of children. Marx and Engels's well-known aversion to utopian blueprints and futuristic speculations demonstrated their scientific discipline, but was not meant to foreclose the socialist imagination, much less to discourage the profusion of alternative institutions, ranging from labor colleges to consumer cooperatives, hiking clubs to free psychoanalytic clinics, through which the workers' movement both addressed existing needs and envisioned new ones.[36]

3

The proletariat has a fundamental interest in the development of the forces of production to the extent that this equals less toil, more free time, and guaranteed economic security. But a virtuous cycle of de-alienation and a rising qualitative standard of living assumes a material foundation of abundance; in a situation of transitional scarcity, structural violence would still inhere in economic relations. This is why Marx called the stage between capitalism and socialism the "dictatorship of the proletariat."

On foundations of modern technology and within a union of advanced countries, a workers' government could sustain economic growth while making dramatic improvements in the quality of life, above all the reduction of the work day. Since workers themselves would participate in making both small- and large-scale decisions about investment, production targets, and work intensity; there would be ample motivation for continued technological innovation, making machines the slaves of workers rather than the other way around.[37]

At what level of economic development would a society be ripe for socialism? In 1870, despite impressive industrial progress in North America,

36 Marx and Engels distinguished between the Fourierist phalansteries and Owenite colonies, which set themselves apart from the class struggle, and cooperative institutions that were integral parts of the workers' movements.

37 Under capitalism "the labourer looks at the social nature of his labour, at its combination with the labour of others for a common purpose as he would at an alien power. …The situation is quite different in factories owned by the labourers themselves, as in Rochdale, for instance." Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. II (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1962), 85.

Germany, and France, Marx judged only England to have "the material conditions for the destruction of landlordism and capitalism."[38] Yet, at the same time, he continued to conceive of revolution as a global or at least multinational process. Lenin, if anything, was even more emphatic on the necessarily "European" character of a socialist victory, with a German revolution as the *sine qua non* of its possibility. Only after his death in early 1924, coinciding with the Dawes Plan that stabilized the bourgeois Weimar Republic, were the Bolsheviks forced to confront their future without the *deus ex machina* of a revolution in the West.

As Lenin and others, both supporters and opponents, had already foreseen, a workers' government in a backward country with a huge rural population, unmechanized agriculture, and low-value exports would face enormous difficulties in generating domestic industrial investment, especially targeted to infrastructure and fixed capital, without forcing the countryside to tithe most of its surplus to the modern sectors. *Before it could become a general emancipator, in other words, the working class, a small if highly organized minority in such societies, would have to act in lieu of the bourgeoisie as collective confiscator or exploiter.* This would risk the equivalent of a rural general strike, as wealthier peasants, the most efficient producers, lost any incentive to maintain output and began to hoard food for sale through the black market — exactly what had happened during the Civil War and again with the end of the New Economic Policy (NEP). In response, the state would either have to relent (Bukharin's "rightist" strategy) or resort to sheer coercion (Lenin's policy in 1918–19 and Stalin's from the end of the 1920s).

"Primitive socialist accumulation," as Yevgeni Preobrazhensky called it in 1925, was both a necessity and a tragedy for proletarian rule in a backward economy. But alternative strategies like the NEP risked rehabilitating capitalist property relations and, as many argued, a rural bourgeoisie that risked severing the "alliance between town and country."[39] The only way to cut this Gordian knot would be foreign investment and technical aid from more advanced socialist countries, thus returning the theory of revolution full circle to the premise of a socialist breakthrough in Europe's industrial heartland west of the Elbe.

38 Marx, "The General Council to the Federal Council of Romance Switzerland," Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 21 (New York: International Publishers, [1867–70] 1985), 86.

39 Leon Trotsky, *Platform of the Joint Opposition*, chs. 1 and 3, reprinted at marxists.org. https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1927/opposition/index.htm.

4

In contrast to capitalism, which wastes or represses cooperative thinking in the work process, the proletarian capacity for self-organization and creative collaboration will become a major force of production in a socialist society. Free association, cybernetically potentiated, will drive the advance of society.

In his scattered comments on the material preconditions for socialism, Marx failed to make a clear distinction between the development of the productive forces *per se* and the creation of counterpart social capacities for economic coordination and planning. This latter involves, on one hand, institutions of economic democracy and workers' control and, on the other, technologies that process massive economic data in real time and present it in formats that allow popular participation in decision-making. It can be argued that requisite informatics for democratic planning have only emerged recently in the form of computer information systems, business-process reengineering, managerial dashboards, smartphones, the internet of things, the collaborative commons, peer production, and the like. Likewise, the observational platforms and scientific paradigms for understanding the geoenvironmental impacts of the economy (especially upon the carbon and nutrient cycles), thus making planning for sustainability possible, are only now being put into place.

5

The factory system organizes the workforce as a synchronized collectivity that through struggle and conscious organization can become a community of solidarity. "As schools of war," Engels said, "the Unions are unexcelled."[40]

In the *Eighteenth Brumaire,* Marx famously compared the backward strata of the French peasantry to a "sack of potatoes." "Their mode of production," he wrote, "isolates them from one another, instead of bringing them into complex interactions."[41] As a result, Hobsbawm adds, peasant consciousness tends to

40 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. IV (New York: International Publishers, [1844–45] 1975), 511.

41 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. II (New York: International Publishers, [1851–53] 1980), 187.

be entirely localized or constituted in abstract opposition to the city, often in the language of millenarian religion. "The unit of their organized action is either the parish pump or the universe. There is nothing in between."[42] The industrial proletariat (in which Marx includes factory hands, building laborers, miners, workers in capitalist agriculture, and transport workers), on the other hand, is only constituted *en ensemble*, as integral collectivities within the social division of labor. The French socialist Constantin Pecqueur, in his 1839 book on the revolutionary nature of the steam age, had already extolled the factory for its "progressive socialization" of the labor force and its creation of a "proletarian public life."[43]

Mutuality, as noted earlier, is not directly endowed, and class consciousness, as David Montgomery reminds us, "is always a project." Workers in new industries or plants are initially atomized, a competitive situation that capitalists attempt to prolong through favoritism, piecework wages, and ethnic divisions of labor.[44] The most elementary forms of solidarity must be consciously constructed, beginning with the informal work groups, defined by common tasks or skills, that are the "families" out of which a plant society is built. Forging links of common interest between work groups and departments was a strenuous, patient labor that required negotiation, education, and confrontation; the rank-and-file leaders who undertook it risked dismissal, blacklisting, even imprisonment or death.[45] The first steps toward inclusive organization, moreover, were generally defensive in character: to protest, for instance, a reduction in wages, the introduction of dangerous machinery, or some other egregious grievance. But as Marx emphasizes in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, the union (or in some cases, the clandestine workplace organization) became a goal in itself, as irreducible to its purely instrumental functions as, say, a church or village. "This is so true that

42 Eric Hobsbawm, "Class Consciousness in History," in István Mészáros (ed.), *Aspects of History and Class Consciousness* (London: Routledge, 1971), 9.

43 Constantin Pecqueur, Economie sociale … sous l'influence des applications de la vapeur (Paris: Desessart, 1839), xii, 62–63. Pecqueur, the advocate of a rather sinister version of state socialism, has occasionally been celebrated — by French writers — as the "French Marx." (See Joseph Marie, *Le socialism de Pecqueur*, Paris 1906, 66–67, 108–10.)

44 For a famous study of a Hobbesian workplace maximally fragmented by race, gender, and skill, see Katherine Archibald, *Wartime Shipyard: A Study in Social Disunity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1947).

45 The classic twentieth-century account of local unionism as an elaborately forged alliance of shop cultures is Roger Friedlander's *The Emergence of a UAW Local, 1936–1939: A Study in Class and Culture*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977).

English economists are amazed to see the workers sacrifice a good part of their wages in favor of associations, which, in the eyes of these economists, are established solely in favor of wages."[46]

6

Whereas trade-union militancy may attain its highest development in the pit villages or factory towns, socialism is ultimately the child of the cities: the graveyards of paternalism and religious belief. In the cities, a proletarian public sphere can flourish.

In *The Condition of the Working Class in England,* the young Engels portrays a proletariat whose "making" is as much the result of urbanization as industrialization.

> If the centralization of population, stimulates and develops the property-holding class, it forces the development of the workers yet more rapidly .... The great cities are the birthplaces of labour movements; in them the workers first began to reflect upon their own condition, and to struggle against it; in them the opposition between proletariat and bourgeoisie first made itself manifest .... Without the great cities and their forcing influence upon the popular intelligence, the working class would be far less advanced than it is .... [The cities] have destroyed the last remnant of the patriarchal relation between working men and employers.[47]

Engels, who often complained about the suffocating piety of his own bourgeois background, was astonished by the casual and almost universal indifference of London laborers to organized religion and spiritual dogma. "All the writers of the bourgeoisie are unanimous on this point, that the workers are not religious, and do not attend church."[48] In Paris, meanwhile, where the Goddess of Reason had been briefly enthroned in Notre Dame in 1792, militant anticlericalism was deeply rooted in the republican petit-bourgeoisie as well as the socialist artisanate. But the most dramatic and

46 Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 6, 211.

47 Karl Marx, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England*, in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 4, 418.

48 Ibid., 421.

perhaps surprising example was Berlin, Europe's Chicago, where by 1912 the Socialists were winning 75 percent of the vote and the poorest districts were considered completely "dechristianized." Working-class Berlin, like Africa, was a missionary frontier.[49]

If secularism represented one mode of "negative integration" into capitalist society, another was the rise of alternative institutions that contested bourgeois values across virtually the entire spectrum of daily life. The ideas of socialism and anarcho-communism became embodied in literate and well-organized popular countercultures that projected the solidarities of the workplace and neighborhood into all spheres of recreation, education, and culture. By 1910 virtually every industrial city or town had an impressive central building for workers' meetings, union offices, party papers, and the like. The typical *maison du peuple* or *casa del pueblo* had a library, a theater or cinema, sports facilities, and sometimes a medical clinic. Some were visionary cathedrals of the people: La Maison du Peuple de Bruxelles, the Urania in Vienna, and the Volkshaus in Leipzig. (The Constructivists in the early Soviet Union took the next step and made workers' clubs — rendered in modernist masterpieces as the Zuev and the Rusakov in Moscow — the hubs of the new culture and its utopian hopes.)

The most celebrated example of a proletarian counterculture was the vast universe of cycling, hiking and singing clubs, sports teams, adult schools, theater societies, readers groups, youth clubs, naturalist groups, and the like that were sponsored by the SPD and the German unions. In the period of the antisocialist laws (1878 to 1890), these labor associations provided a crucial legal shelter for workers' gatherings and the training of activists. In his important 1985 book *The Alternative Culture*, Vernon Lidtke contested the claim of some historians that this "proletarian world of its own" eventually became too hermetic to constitute a radical threat to the Wilhelmine system. "This alternative may be called radical not because it proposed to overturn the *Kaiserreich* in one bold stroke, but because it embodied in its principles a conception of production, social relations, and political institutions that rejected existing structures, practices, and values at almost every point." Certainly the state saw socialist cultural activities as a subversive threat, especially to the nationalist indoctrination of youth. Thus "on the eve of the war, on July 2, 1914, the Kaiser approved a measure

49 Hugh McLeod, *Piety and Poverty: Working-Class Religion in Berlin, London and New York, 1870–1914* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1996), 11, chapter 1. In Wedding, for instance, barely 3 percent of the population were considered communicants.

to establish a compulsory national youth organization for all boys between the ages thirteen and seventeen," under the command of retired officers.[50]

The real weakness of the German counterculture, Lidtke says, was the SPD's emphasis on democratizing bourgeois high culture rather than exploring the "possibility that workers… might develop a unique culture of the labor movement, one that would draw its inspiration directly from the lives of workers themselves."[51] This was not a problem in Catalonia, where anarcho-syndicalism was culturally libertarian and there was hardly any bureaucratic or reformist stratum in the workers' movement. Nowhere in Europe were unions and neighborhoods so robustly united in struggle as in Barcelona where the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (which by 1918 had 250,000 members in the city and its factory environs) would one day organize a strike and the next day provide "armed escorts for groups of working-class women who requisitioned food from shops."[52] The majority of the factory proletariat — despised by the Catalan middle class — were immigrants from Murcia and Andalusia, and with the aid of rich communitarian traditions built their own antinationalist and Esperanto-speaking alternative society in Europe's most tubercular and violent slums.

OVERDETERMINATIONS

7

The workers' movement can and must confront the power of capital in every aspect of social life, organizing resistance on the terrains of the economic, the political, the urban, the social-reproductive, and the associational. It is the fusion or synthesis of these struggles, rather than their simple addition, that invests the proletariat with historical agency.

Marx and Engels, for example, clearly believed that mass socialist consciousness would be a dialectical alloy of the economic and the political, of epic battles over rights as well as over wages and working hours, of bitter local

50 Vernon Lidtke, *The Alternative Culture: Socialist Labor in Imperial Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 7–8, 17. In his chapter on songs and Liederbucher, Lidtke gives wonderful examples of socialists satirizing war-making and mocking patriotism in the "burlesque" style that Brecht later transferred to the theater.

51 Ibid., 194.

52 Chris Ealham, *Class, Culture and Conflict in Barcelona, 1898–1937* (London: Routledge, 2005), 36.

fights and great international causes. Since the formation of the Communist League in 1847, they had argued that wage labor constituted the only serious social force able to represent and enact a consistently democratic program of suffrage and rights, and thus provide the hegemonic glue to bind together a broad coalitions of workers, poor peasants, national minorities, and *radicalized* strata of the middle class. While the mind of the liberal petit-bourgeoisie easily amputated political rights from economic grievances, workers' lives refuted any categorical distinction between oppression and exploitation. The "growing over" of political into economic democracy, and of economic class struggle into the question of state power — the process that Marx characterized as "permanent revolution" in the contexts of 1848 and Chartism — was the chief motif of a prerevolutionary crisis.

But because economic struggles and political conflicts are only episodically synchronized — usually during depression or war — there was also a strong tendency toward their bifurcation. The inverse but symmetrical illusions of economism/syndicalism (progress by economic organization alone) and parliamentary cretinism (reform without workplace power) have always required regular weeding of the red garden. Thus, for Rosa Luxemburg, the central lesson of the 1905 revolution in Russia was the need to understand the economic and the political as *moments* in a single revolutionary process:

> In a word: the economic struggle is the transmitter from one political center to another; the political struggle is the periodic fertilization of the soil for the economic struggle. Cause and effect here continually change places; and thus the economic and the political factor in the period of the mass strike, now widely removed, completely separated, or even mutually exclusive, as the theoretical plan would have them, merely form the two interlacing sides of the proletarian class struggle in Russia. And *their unity* is precisely the mass strike. If the sophisticated theory proposes to make a clever logical dissection of the mass strike for the purpose of getting at the "purely political mass strike," it will by this dissection, as with any other, not perceive the phenomenon in its living essence, but will kill it altogether.[53]

53 Rosa Luxemburg, "The Mass Strike," in *The Essential Rosa Luxemburg*, edited by Helen Scott (Chicago: Haymarket Books, [1906] 2008), 145. In a statistical study of strikes during the 1905 revolution Lenin empirically vindicated Luxemburg's analysis. (CW 16, 393–422.)

In his remarkable book on the making of the Korean working class, the most militant in Asia, Hagen Koo stresses the continuous dialogue between shop-floor struggles and populist resistance to the state: a modern example of the overdetermination of the economic by the political and vice versa — and, in this case, by cultural indigenism as well. With no inherited working-class tradition and faced with a repressive, pro-employer regime with a huge security apparatus, Korea's workers, especially young women in light manufacturing industries, drew unexpected strength from their alliance with the extraordinary *minjung* (masses) movement that arose in the mid-1970s:

> This broad populist movement was led by dissident intellectuals and students and aimed to forge a broad class alliance among workers, peasants, poor urban dwellers, and progressive intellectuals against the authoritarian regime. … It introduced new political language and cultural activities by reinterpreting Korean history and reappropriated Korea's indigenous culture from the *minjung* perspective. … Thus, culture and politics have critical roles in the formation of the South Korean working class, not in the usual roles ascribed to them in the literature on East Asian development — as factors of labor docility and quiescence — but as sources of labor resistance and growing consciousness.[54]

8

The spatial propinquity in the industrial city of production and reproduction, satanic mill and slum, reinforced autonomous class consciousness. Urban class struggles, especially those addressing emergencies of shelter, food, and fuel, were typically led by working-class mothers, the forgotten heroes of socialist history.

The original sin of the parties of the Second International was their lukewarm support for, or even opposition to, women's suffrage and economic equality. Yet, as David Montgomery reminds us, "married women caring for their children in bleak, congested neighborhoods and facing creditors, charity officials, and the ominous authority of the clergy were reminded of their class as regularly as were their husbands, daughters, and sons in the factories."[55] Mothers,

54 Hagen Koo, *Korean Workers: The Culture and Politics of Class Formation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 18–19.

55 David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 1.

moreover, were the typical organizers of rent strikes, demonstrations against fuel shortages, and bread riots, the oldest form of plebian protest. The Russian Revolution of 1917, we should recall, began on International Women's Day as "thousands of housewives and women workers enraged by the endless queues for bread poured into the streets of Petrograd, shouting, 'Down with high prices' and 'Down with hunger.'"[56] In his analytically acute history of European socialism, Geoff Eley gives the slum neighborhood equal weight with the factory in the formation of socialist consciousness. "No less vital were the complex ways neighborhoods spoke and fought back. If the workplace was one frontier of resistance, where collective agency could be imagined, the family — or more properly the neighborhood solidarities working-class women fashioned for its survival — was the other. … The challenge for the Left was to organize on *both* fronts of social dispossession."[57]

POWERS

9

Reading "ignited insurrections in the minds of workers."[58] The largely successful struggle for working-class literacy in the nineteenth century, accompanied by a technological revolution in the print media, brought the world — as news, literature, science, or simply sensation — into the daily routine of the proletariat. The rapid growth of the labor and socialist press in the last quarter of the century nourished the increasingly sophisticated political consciousness in the factories, slums, and mill villages.

In previous social formations, the direct producers had little access to or need for formal learning — usually a prerogative of the church or a scribe class — but the French Revolution generated an insatiable popular appetite for literacy and education. Industrial workers thus inherited a rich autodidactic tradition

56 Karen Hunt, "The Politics of Food and Women's Neighborhood Activism in First World War Britain," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 77 (Spring 2010): 8.

57 Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 58.

58 Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 8; Dennis Sweeney, "Cultural Practice and Utopian Desire in German Social Democracy: Reading Adolf Levenstein's *Arbeiterfrage* (1912)," *Social History* 28, no. 2 (2003): 174–99.

from the artisan-intellectuals in Paris and Lyon who were the pioneers of socialism, and from their English counterparts who adapted classical political economy to the agenda of Chartism. As Marx always acknowledged, the development of the Ricardian "labor theory of value" into a powerful critique of exploitation, usually attributed to him, was actually achieved by plebian intellectuals like the American-born printer John Bray, the Scottish factory worker John Gray, and the court-martialed sailor and rogue journalist Thomas Hodgskin. Likewise, several of the most important English scientists of the nineteenth century were self-educated plebeians, notably Michael Faraday (a bookbinder's apprentice), Alfred Russell Wallace (land surveyor), and the theorist of the Ice Ages, James Croll (university janitor).

By midcentury, moreover, large sections of the working class, especially in England and the United States, were as avidly abreast of news and current events as the middle classes were. Indeed, newspapers, Marx wrote in the *1861–63 Manuscripts*, now "form part of the necessary means of subsistence of the English urban worker."[59] In the early 1840s, Chartists alone published more than a hundred papers and reviews.[60] Marx himself, of course, was a journalist (as was Trotsky) — the only job he ever held — and the emergence of mass socialist parties toward the end of the nineteenth century would have been unimaginable without the dramatic growth of the workers' press and the counternarrative of contemporary history it presented.

In *Ten Days That Shook the World*, John Reed marveled at the war of print between classes and factions:

> In every city, in most towns, along the Front, each political faction had its newspaper — sometimes several. Hundreds of thousands of pamphlets were distributed by thousands of organisations, and poured into the armies, the villages, the factories, the streets. The thirst for education, so long thwarted, burst with the revolution into a frenzy of expression. From Smolny Institute alone, the first six months, went out every day tons, car-loads, train-loads of literature, saturating the land. Russia absorbed reading matter like hot sand drinks water, insatiable.[61]

59 Karl Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1861–63*, in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 34, 101 ("Relative Surplus Value").

60 Gregory Vargo, "'Outworks of the Citadel of Corruption': The Chartist Press Reports the Empire," *Victorian Studies* 54, no. 2 (Winter 2012): 231. See also Stephen Coltham, "English Working-Class Newspapers in 1867," *Victorian Studies* 13, no. 2 (December 1969).

61 John Reed, *Ten Days That Shook the World* (London: Penguin Classics, 2007) 24.

10

The proletariat, Wilhelm Liebknecht told the German socialists, was the "bearer of modern culture."[62] Its interest in science, in particular, foreshadowed the role of labor in a future commonwealth.

Likewise, Victorian workers flocked to reading rooms, mechanics' institutes, cheap libraries, athenaeums, and public lecture halls. The mechanics' institutes, inspired by Dr. George Birkbeck's famous 1800–04 lectures to Glasgow artisans, fed the popular hunger to understand the science of the new machines and prime movers. The first Institute was created in Glasgow in 1821; by the time Marx moved to Soho, there were more than seven hundred.[63]

By the 1850s, the scientifically literate sections of the working classes provided huge audiences for cutting-edge controversies, especially during the culture war that followed the publication of *The Origin of the Species*. The London mechanics and craftsmen who flocked to Thomas Huxley's "Lectures to Working Men" were, according to Huxley, "as attentive and as intelligent as the best audience I have ever lectured to. ... I have studiously avoided the impertinence of talking down to them."[64] Karl Liebknecht, the 1848 veteran and later founder of the SPD, fondly recalled attending six of these lectures with Karl Marx, then staying up all night excitedly discussing Darwin. The whole Marx household, in fact, was caught up in the great debates. (Mrs.) Jenny Marx boasted to a Swiss friend of the extraordinary popularity of the "Sunday Nights for the People." "With respect to religion, a great movement is currently developing in stuffy old England. The top men in science, Huxley (Darwin's disciple) at the head, with Tyndall, Sir Charles Lyell, Bowring, Carpenter, etc. give very enlightened, truly freethinking

62 Gerhard Ritter, "Workers' Culture in Imperial Germany," *Journal of Contemporary History* 13 (1978): 166.

63 Martyn Walker, "'Encouragement of Sound Education amongst the Industrial Classes': Mechanics' Institutes and Working-Class Membership, 1838–1881," *Educational Studies* 39, no. 2 (2013): 142. Walker debunks the claim that the institutes were dominated by the middle classes: instead, he argues, they represented a "convergence of class interests." "Working-class radicals aligned themselves with middle-class sympathisers in relation to politics and self-help" (145).

64 Quoted in Ed Block, "T.H. Huxley's Rhetoric and the Popularization of Victorian Scientific ideas: 1854–1874," *Victorian Studies* 29, no. 3 (Spring 1986): 369.

and bold lectures for the people in St. Martin's Hall (of glorious waltzing memory), and, what is more, on Sunday evenings, exactly at the time when the lambs are usually grazing on the Lord's pastures; the hall has been full to bursting and the people's enthusiasm so great that, on the first evening, when I went there with the girls, 2,000 could not get into the room, which was crammed full."[65]

11

The organized proletariat possesses unprecedented powers of economic and socio-spatial disruption. The general strike was the Victorian working class's "atomic bomb."

The factory system and the world market give rise to crucial geostrategic nodes such as railroad networks, manufacturing supply chains, power grids, tool-and-die centers, war industry complexes and so on whose seizure or shutdown by even relatively small groups of workers can paralyze entire economies. The mass strike, pioneered by half a million British miners and textile workers in 1842 (the Plug Riots), was rare in Marx's time but became increasingly common toward the end of the century, with the Belgian General Strike (for suffrage) in 1893 and the US Pullman Strike in 1894, just a few months before Engels's death. European and American radicals, however, splintered over the social dynamics and strategic implications of such revolts. For Bernstein and other "Revisionists" in the Second International, the advent of the general strike ratified belief in a peaceful road to revolution, with trade-union power mobilized to ensure that a future social-democratic majority could nonviolently implement its platform in Parliament. (Indeed, Marx himself had speculated on precisely such a possibility in England and perhaps the United States).

For anarcho-syndicalists, on the other hand, the general strike promised to unleash militant spontaneity and social imagination far beyond the capacity of socialist politicians and trade-union bosses to channel and control. At the extreme, Georges Sorel theorized the general strike as both the

65 Ralph Colp, "The Contacts Between Karl Marx and Charles Darwin," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35, no. 2 (1974): 329–38; and Jenny Marx, *Letter to Johann Becker* (January 29, 1866), Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 42 (New York: International Publishers, 1987), 568.

apocalyptic door to a new world and the necessary "myth in which Socialism is wholly comprised."[66]

Rosa Luxemburg, however, rejected both the Revisionist and syndicalist interpretations of the great strike waves of the early twentieth century. Analyzing the first Russian Revolution as well as the huge contemporary socialist demonstrations for suffrage in Central Europe, she wrote that the mass strike was "not an isolated act but a whole period of the class struggle" in which "the ceaseless reciprocal action of the political and economic struggles" created explosively unpredictable scenarios that elicited extraordinary rank-and-file ingenuity. She was one of the first socialists to pay attention to the microstructure of proletarian radicalization (what Trotsky would later call "the molecular work of revolutionary thought") and, far from building a cargo cult to spontaneity, as she was often accused, her crucial insights about proletarian self-organization were part of a withering critique of the SPD's self-image of its elected leaders as the general staff of an obedient army of trade unionists and socialist voters.[67] (Ironically, it was Lenin, not Luxemburg, who asserted in light of the 1905 insurrections that the workers were "instinctively, spontaneously Social Democratic.")[68]

12

Workers can run the factories. Until World War I, much of the applied science of production remained the quasi-property of metal workers and other craftsmen.

Given the specialization inherent in the industrial division of labor and the loss of complex skills that follows the mechanization of the work process, where will workers find the competence to run the economy in a socialist commonwealth? In *The Principles of Communism*, Engels is blunt. "The

66 Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1950), 145.

67 Luxemburg, "Mass Strike," 141, 147. For Trotsky's well-known critique of "spontaneity," see "Who Led the February Insurrection?" *The History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1937), 142–52. In addition to the revolution in the Russian empire, a million workers demonstrated in the Austrian realm and German (Saxony especially). "It was estimated that 250,000 demonstrated in Vienna alone." See Christoph Nonn, "Putting Radicalism to the Test: German Social Democracy and the 1905 Suffrage Demonstrations in Dresden," *International Review of Social History* 41 (1996): 186.

68 Lenin, "The Reorganization of the Party" *Collected Works*, Vol. 10 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, [1905] 1962), 32; Phil Goodstein, *The Theory of the General Strike from the French Revolution to Poland* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 153.

common management of production cannot be effected by people as they are today, each one being assigned to a single branch of production, shackled to it, exploited by it, each having developed only one of his abilities at the cost of all the others and knowing only one branch, or only a branch of a branch of the total production." His solution was a universal education system that develops individuals with many-sided competencies. "The communist organization of society will give its members the chance of an all-round exercise of abilities that have received all-round development."[69]

But how, then, would the gap be bridged between capitalism's deskilled workforce and a polyvalent socialist society? The answer, which Engels doesn't provide, was the Industrial Revolution's new elite of millwrights, pattern-makers, fitters, turners, and other precision metal workers. The progressive subordination of the majority of the workforce to machinery was accompanied by the increased knowledge and bargaining power of those workers who built, installed, and maintained the machines: a phenomenon David Montgomery has characterized as the "manager's brain under the workman's cap." Although their skills were new, their control of craft knowledge, much of it secretive, was patterned after the artisans they had superseded, with long apprenticeships, tribal rituals, and strictly maintained standards of a "fair day's work."[70] Until college-trained engineers became a crucial part of the industrial hierarchy in the 1910s and 1920s and scientific management substantially captured and decomposed craft knowledge, complete capitalist control of the labor process ("real appropriation," in Marx's terms) was impossible.[71]

The metal crafts occupied a critical but often ambiguous position in the labor movement as a whole. Nelson Lichtenstein notes: "Because of their self-confidence and their vital place in the production order, skilled craftsmen could be found both in the vanguard of those who posed a radical challenge to the existing industrial order and, almost simultaneously, among those workers who were most entrepreneurial and career-conscious in their outlook."[72] Before World War I they were often reluctant to join in the strug-

69 Marx and Engels, *Collected Works,* vol. 6, 354.

70 See Montgomery, *Fall of the House of Labor*, "Chapter 1: The Manager's Brain Under the Workman's Cap." Engineers and chemists, however, were integral organizers of the new industries of the twentieth century, particularly chemicals and electrical machinery.

71 The "disappearance of the polyvalent skilled worker," Gorz writes, "has also entailed the disappearance of the class able to take charge of the socialist project and translate it into reality. Fundamentally, the degeneration of socialist theory and practice has its origins here." See André Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class,* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 66.

72 Nelson Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit* (Urbana-Cham-

gles of the semi-skilled, but during the cataclysmic years of 1917 to 1919 — when women and youth were conscripted en masse to the war factories — the metallos provided leadership to the workers' council movements in Barcelona, Berlin, Glasgow, Seattle, and Vienna, as well as to the proto-communist parties that emerged from the general strikes and insurrections. In Petrograd from 1917, briefly in Turin in 1920, and again in Barcelona in 1936 and 1937, workers' committees and revolutionary shop stewards ran the factories to their own account, confirming the worst nightmares of the bosses.[73]

A CLASS FOR ITSELF

13

Because of its position in social production and the universality of its objective interests, the proletariat possesses a superior "epistemological capacity" to see the economy as a whole and unravel the mystery of capital's apparent self-movement (see Lukács's theses)

The bourgeoisie and the proletariat are the only "pure classes" in modern society, but they are not symmetrical in their internal formation or capacity for consciousness. Competition between firms and sectors is the iron law of capitalism, but competition between workers can be ameliorated by organization. Marx was explicit: "If all the members of the modern bourgeoisie have the same interests inasmuch as they form a class as against another class, they have opposite, antagonistic interests inasmuch as they stand face to face with one another."[74] Rational self-interest, argued Lukács, following Marx, means that individual owners of capital "cannot see and are necessarily indifferent

paign: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 20.

73 A more recent example. In 1974, as part of a general strike against Harold Wilson's attempt to bring moderate Catholic leaders into Ulster government, Loyalist workers shut down the Ballylumford Power Plant that generated most of Belfast's electricity. British Army engineers — totally baffled by the results of years of ad hoc tinkering by the power workers — were unable to start up the plant and Wilson was humiliatingly forced to abandon his reforms. A book about the strike reported subsequent panic in NATO as its planners realized that Communist workers in French and Italian utilities undoubtedly could do the same thing. See Don Anderson, *14 May Days* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1994).

74 Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 6, 176.

to all the social implications of their activities." The "veil drawn over the nature of bourgeois society" — that is to say, the denial of its own historicity — "is indispensable to the bourgeoisie itself. … From a very early stage the ideological history of the bourgeoisie was nothing but a desperate resistance to every insight into the true nature of the society it had created and thus to a real understanding of its class situation."[75] As soon as capital confronted a rising proletariat, moreover, it took off its republican toga and, at least on the Continent, ran into the arms of absolutism or embraced dictators like Napoleon III, and later Mussolini, Hitler, and Franco.

The proletarian, poor and shirtless, has better vision. "As the bourgeoisie," says Lukács, "has the intellectual, organizational and every other advantage, the superiority of the proletariat must lie exclusively in its ability to see society from the center, as a coherent whole." In a famous but variously interpreted passage in *History and Class Consciousness*, he introduces the idea of "imputed class consciousness" — the objective and ripened possibilities that the proletariat must recognize and act upon in order to bring about the revolution. In pre-crisis periods, however, the working class tends to be dominated by the "petty bourgeois attitudes of most trade unionists" and mystified by the conceptual and real "separation of the various theaters of war." ("The proletariat finds the economic inhumanity to which it is subjected easier to understand than the political, and the political easier than the culture."[76]) The primary obstacle to class consciousness, moreover, is less bourgeois ideology (or the ponderous operation of Althusser's "state ideological apparatuses") than "the actual day-to-day workings of the economy and society. These have the effect of causing the internalization of commodity relations and the reification of human relations."[77] In depression and war, however, contradictions fissure this crystal palace of reified economic and political realities, and the deep meaning of the historical moment "becomes comprehensible in practice." It is finally "possible to read off from history the correct course of action to be followed." The reader? "The workers' council spells the political and economic defeat of reification."[78]

75 Lukács, 63 and 66. (His emphasis.)

76 Ibid, 69 and 76–77.

77 Stephen Perkins, *Marxism and the Proletariat: A Lukácsian Perspective,* Pluto, London 1993, 171.

78 Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, translated by Rodney Livingston (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972), 74, 80.

14

A revolutionary collective will is crystallized (and "correct courses of action" decided upon) primarily through rude direct democracy in periods of extreme mass activity. Class consciousness is not the party program, but rather the synthesis of proletarian experiences and lessons learned in protracted class war.

If unions and left parties constituted the quasi-permanent institutions of the proletarian public sphere, the class struggle episodically generated ad hoc forms such as general strike committees, workers' councils, and soviets that dramatically expanded popular participation in debate and decision-making to include the nonparty proletariat and unorganized workers as well as in certain instances the unemployed, students, working-class mothers, and soldiers and sailors. Whether in Bremen, Glasgow, Petrograd, or Winnipeg (with its 1919 general strike), "movement democracy" reproduced many of the classic features of 1792 and 1871: great contests of oratory, unruly audiences and strong voices from the floor, delegates reporting back to their factories or neighborhood branches, all-night meetings, a blizzard of pamphlets and manifestoes, the unceasing work of committees, the organization of flying pickets and worker guards, rumors and battles against rumors, and, of course, competition between parties and factions.

The predictable opposition of conservative trade-union bosses and moderate socialists to radical tactics like factory occupations and mass strikes, and especially to arming the workers, precipitated new leaderships, often from the anonymous shop floor. A paradigmatic example was the antiwar underground inside Berlin's huge armament factories. The nucleus (which, according to Pierre Broué, "never numbered more than fifty members") consisted of skilled turners, supporters of the far left, who built

> a unique kind of organization, neither a trade union nor a party, but a clandestine group in the trade unions and the Party [SPD] alike. … They could set in motion, with the help of some hundreds of men whom they directly influenced, tens and later hundreds of thousands of workers, by enabling them to make their own decisions about active initiatives. … Unknown in 1914, by the end of the War they were to be the accepted leaders of the

> workers of Berlin and, despite their relative youth, the cadres of the revolutionary socialist movement.[79]

Indeed, Broué considered them "the finest people in Social Democracy."Despite the legend of being an ultra-centralized party operating with perfect conspiratorial discipline, the Bolsheviks, with majority support in the big factories and the Baltic fleet, were the most consistent promoters of direct democracy in the larger revolutionary movement of 1917. For example, when liberals and moderate socialists proposed a Democratic State Conference to design a new parliamentary regime, Lenin (fresh from writing *State and Revolution*) urged an all-out mobilization to expand popular participation:

> Let us take it more to those down below, to the masses, to the office employees, to the workers, to the peasants, not only to our supporters, but particularly to those who follow the Socialist-Revolutionaries, to the non-party elements, to the ignorant. Let us lift them up so that they can pass an independent judgment, make their own decisions, send their own delegations to the Conference, to the Soviets, to the government and our work will not have been in vain, no matter what the outcome of the Conference.[80]

In his celebrated study of the revolutionary process in Petrograd, Alexander Rabinowitch stood the Bolshevik stereotype on its head. Explaining the party's attractiveness to a majority of the city's working class, he pointed to its "internally relatively democratic, tolerant, and decentralized structure and method of operation, as well as its essentially open and mass character … within the Bolshevik Petrograd organization at all levels in 1917 there was continuing free and lively discussion and debate over the most basic theoretical and tactical issues."[81] Indeed, this was exactly how Preobrazhensky looked back on October, when attempting to explain in 1920 the relationship between the recent erosion of party democracy and the "decline of spontaneity" in the proletariat:

79 Pierre Broué, *The German Revolution, 1917–1923* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, [1971] 2006), 68.
80 Lenin, "The Tasks of the Revolution," in *Collected* Works, Vol. 26 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, [1917] 1964), 60.
81 Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2004), 311–12.

> Comparing the party life of late 1917 and 1918 with party life in 1920, one is struck by the way it has died out precisely among the party-masses … Previously, rank-and-file Communists felt they were not just implementing party-decisions, but were also originating them, that they themselves were forming the Party's collective will. Now they implement party-decisions taken by committees that often do not bother to submit decisions to general meetings.[82]

15

Labor must rule, because the bourgeoisie is ultimately unable to fulfill the promises of progress. If the socialist project is defeated, the result will be the retrogression of civilization as a whole.

Labor, Marx argued, can wrest significant reforms from capital in boom periods, but each bust strips away gains and reveals rising base levels of unemployment and misery. Although he left confusing clues about the exact mechanisms of economic crisis, there can be no doubt that his theories of revolution and rising class consciousness assumed the increasing intensity, frequency, and geographical range of industrial downturns, perhaps even a "final economic crisis." This, of course, was a generally accurate forecast of the business cycle from the 1870s to 1940. No Marxist, however, predicted the long postwar boom — or, for that matter, the radical uprisings of students and workers in 1968 and 1969 amid relatively full employment in Europe and North America. The "affluent worker" briefly became a popular academic explanation for the deradicalization of labor movements in some advanced countries. But history has come full circle in the early twenty-first century; a world economy that cannot create jobs in pace with population growth, guarantee food security, or adapt our habitats to catastrophic climate change might reasonably be judged as a failure.

82 Preobrazhensky, quoted in A. Marshall's review of *The Preobrazhensky Papers* in *Critique* 43, no. 1 (2015): 92–93.

16

Thanks to the world market and mass emigration, the industrial proletariat is objectively constituted as an international class with common interests that cross national and ethnic boundaries. Great international campaigns, moreover, crystallize the proletariat's understanding of its world-historical vocation.

Concluding his speech to the inaugural supper of the Fraternal Democrats in London in September 1845, the Chartist George Julian Harney declared, "We repudiate the word 'foreigner' — it shall exist not in our democratic vocabulary!" Engels, who reported on the meeting (he called it "a communist festival") in the *Rheinische Jahrbücher*, noted that Harney's remark was greeted with "great cheers" by the delegates from nine nations. There were repeated toasts to Tom Paine, Robespierre, and the recently deported Chartists. "The great mass of proletarians," Engels wrote, "are, by their very nature, free from national prejudices and their whole disposition and movement is essentially humanitarian, anti-nationalist."[83] This sounds incredibly naive today but may have been a reasonably accurate observation on the eve of the "springtime of the peoples."

Indeed, the early workers' movement generally followed the well-worn tracks of revolutionary democracy, celebrating international fraternity in the confident belief that the social revolution would necessarily be a world revolution in the mold of 1789. Conspiratorial revolutionary groups like Louis Auguste Blanqui and Armand Barbès's Society of the Seasons were defiantly cosmopolitan in membership, and tramping artisans and migrant workers carried subversive ideas back and forth between major cities and industrial centers. German artisans, the largest pool of labor immigrants in the Europe of the Holy Alliance, established radical outposts in Britain, Switzerland, and North America, but the true capital of the first German proletariat in the 1840s was Paris, where some fifty thousand German-speaking "undocumented immigrants" toiled in garrets and sweatshops.[84]

83 George Julian Harney, speech reprinted in Engels, "The Festival of Nations in London," in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 6, 11.

84 Jacques Grandjonc, "Les étrangers a Paris sous la monarchie de Juillet et la seconde République," *Population* 29 (March 1974): 84 (French edition). Stanley Nadel, noting that

In his writings and speeches about the American Civil War and the founding of the First International, Marx argued that international solidarity is the crucial precipitant of class consciousness and that the mobilization of labor on a national scale is accelerated by the international organization of its most advanced detachments. But he also warned that no labor movement could ever emancipate itself as long as it participated politically or materially in the oppression of another nation or race. In some of his most fiery articles and speeches, he argued that black freedom was the precondition for an independent American working-class politics, as was Irish freedom for a radical British working class. On the Continent, the independence of Poland, of course, had long been the touchstone of democratic and then socialist internationalism.

In biology, one learns about a certain species of caterpillar that can only cross the threshold of metamorphosis by seeing its future butterfly. Proletarian subjectivity does not evolve by incremental steps but requires nonlinear leaps, especially by way of moral self-recognition through solidarity with the struggle of a distant people. Even when this contradicts short-term self-interest, as in the famous cases of Lancashire cotton workers' enthusiasm for Lincoln and later for Gandhi, such efforts not only anticipate a world beyond capitalism, they concretely advance the working class's march toward it.

Socialism, in other words, requires nonutilitarian actors, whose ultimate motivations and values arise from structures of feeling that others would deem spiritual. Marx rightly scourged romantic humanism in the abstract, but his personal pantheon — Prometheus and Spartacus, Homer, Cervantes, and Shakespeare — affirmed a heroic vision of human possibility. But can that possibility be realized in today's world, a world where the "old working class" has been demoted in agency? This article does not answer that question. I hope it will help stimulate an ongoing exchange that can point the way forward.

"the average journeyman stayed in Paris for only a limited period, perfecting his trade and then moving on," calculated "that somewhere between 100,000 and a half million veterans of the Paris workshops had returned to German before the end of the decade [1840s]." See Stanley Nadel, "From the Barricades of Paris to the Sidewalks of New York: German Artisans and the European Roots of American Labor Radicalism," *Labor History* 30, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 49–50.

THE NEW TERRAIN OF CLASS CONFLICT IN THE UNITED STATES

KIM MOODY

In the recent revival of popular movements in the United States, one group that has been conspicuously absent is organized labor. This absence is only one reminder of the astonishing decline of the American working class as a social force; even though it never achieved the power of its counterparts in Europe or even Canada, it was still a force to be reckoned with until the 1980s. For much of the Left, therefore, the million-dollar question is: Can the sleeping giant awaken? Can the labor movement once again be at the core of a progressive social coalition? Or have the changes in the political economy since the 1980s been so deep that a revival of labor's fortunes is out of reach — if not permanently, then at least for the foreseeable future?

Many analysts have settled on certain stylized facts as harbingers of a continued decline in labor's fortunes. The combined impact of subcontracting, casualization, increased insecurity, a shrunken manufacturing sector, and the threat of offshoring is taken to have created apparently insuperable barriers to organizing. Indeed, it is hard to deny that these factors are operative to *some* degree. What is less clear, however, is to *what* degree they bear on the conditions workers confront. Part of the effort to rebuild the US labor movement must be a cold, sober look at the changes that have set in since the 1980s to assess how much the terrain has actually changed and how much of the current pessimism is due to an unwarranted embrace of popular myths. Conversely, we need to be aware of emerging possibilities and openings that may be underappreciated by labor and its allies.

I suggest in this essay that while the challenges labor faces are indeed daunting, they are by no means insuperable. Indeed, many of them are not even new. Capital's offensive during the neoliberal era has indeed created a new landscape for the working class, but it is not quite along the lines of what much of the Left has come to believe. The popular tropes of a fragmented, atomized, casualized working class obscure the degree to which the last three decades have in fact created new zones of *centralized* production, new *vulnerabilities* for capital, and also underplay important elements of *continuity* in forms of employment. None of this is to deny that the terrain is still a hostile one, or to underplay the challenges. But I do suggest that significant new openings have emerged in recent years which, if seized upon, have the potential to trigger a revitalization of working-class power.

These changes are in the organization of production, of course, and in this regard they are fundamentally structural in nature. For them to become *politically* significant will require embracing a militant and ambitious campaign of organizing, one that is quite different from the kinds of strategies preferred by labor officialdom today. As it happens, in several sectors and in many states, there has been a turn to a more militant approach to organizing — one that seizes upon the structural openings created by the recent economic changes as well as the capacities and imaginations of individual workers. These campaigns offer positive evidence that a return to a more militant strategy is not only possible but also effective.

1

WORK AND CLASS TRANSFORMED

THE DECLINE OF MANUFACTURING EMPLOYMENT

On the labor Left, no subject animates debate more than the decline of manufacturing employment and its strategic implications. And no explanation for manufacturing decline is more widely accepted than the growth of globalization, particularly the effect of import competition on US producers.[1] Without denying the significance of imports and offshoring of production, this article will offer a different explanation for the loss of manufacturing jobs, one rooted in the outcomes of class conflict expressed in rising productivity.

The problem with explanations rooted in trade or the global shift of manufacturing generally is that US manufacturing output has not declined overall or even slowed down much since the early 1980s. Rather, it has increased at rates close to those of the post–World War II Keynesian epoch of growth. In real terms, measured by the Federal Reserve Board's industrial production index, manufacturing output increased by 131 percent from 1982 to 2007 (just before the impact of the "Great Recession") on average about 5 percent a year, compared to 6 percent annually during the 1960s.[2] This growth slowed in the 2000s as two recessions affected output. Thus, while imports did eliminate significant numbers of manufacturing jobs, they can at best be said to have slowed the rate of increase of total output, while capital and production shifted to other industries and locations within the United States.

TABLE 1. **PRODUCTION JOBS LOST DURING RECESSIONS**

YEARS*	TOTAL PRIVATE	MANUFACTURING
1979 – 82	2,300,000	2,751,000
1990–91	1,290,000	663,000
2001–03	2,835,000	2,198,000
2008–10	6,186,000	1,797,000

*FROM JANUARY OF FIRST YEAR TO DECEMBER OF LAST.

1 Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), "Employment, Hours, and Earnings from the Current Employment Statistics Survey (National)," *Databases, Tables & Calculators by Subject*, 2015.

2 Council of Economic Advisors, *Economic Report of the President 2011* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2011), 206, 250.

The rhythm of manufacturing job loss is important in understanding the decline in employment. The combination of deep recessions and productivity increases that were sufficient to hold down employment during the postrecession recoveries explains most of the loss of manufacturing jobs. As Table I shows, the big losses occurred, as might be expected, when large amounts of capital were destroyed during recessions and firms sought to downsize or reorganize — and when imports also tended to drop. Between such slumps employment levels remained more or less steady (at the lower level) until 2000, while manufacturing output rose by 6 percent a year between 1982 and 1990 and again between 1992 and 2000. From 2002 to 2007, output rose by a more modest 2.4 percent a year, until the Great Recession took hold. When imports fell during the recessions, so did the number of jobs, whereas when imports soared between recessions the number of jobs remained basically flat or increased only slightly, even with increased output. If it had been imports of either final products or intermediate inputs that took these manufacturing jobs, overall output could hardly have been so robust in the years between recessions. The major culprit behind the deep decline in manufacturing jobs was capital's turn to the new lean production methods introduced in the 1980s.

CLASS STRUGGLE, LEAN PRODUCTION, AND PRODUCTIVITY

Occupationally, economically, and in its ethnoracial composition, the working class that has emerged from thirty years of neoliberalism and lean production is substantially different than that which participated in the labor upsurge of the 1960s and 1970s. While many in this class experienced dislocations and changes in the nature of their employment, they remain, nonetheless, a working class — dependent on wages and subordinate to capital. Furthermore, these workers face capital on a terrain that has changed dramatically, in ways that offer new opportunities to turn what has often been characterized as a one-sided class war into a two-sided struggle for power and a better life.

The relative reduction of the manufacturing workforce is, in fact, an inherent tendency in capitalism. The process of accumulation, as Marx argued, itself leads to "the diminution of the mass of labor in proportion to the mass of means of production moved by it" due to increasing productivity.[3] As we

3 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I (London: Penguin, 1990), 773–74.

will see below, the mass of capital in relation to labor did indeed increase over this period. The degree to which increased productivity is extracted and labor thereby relatively diminished, however, is to a large extent determined by class struggle within the labor process, as well as by the competition between capitals. While the struggle over wages is always a piece of class conflict, for most of the postwar era, US capital was mainly focused on extracting "relative surplus value" — i.e., generating profits by relying on increased productivity. The key inflection points for us are in the late 1960s through the 1970s, a period of intense industrial conflict in the United States, largely in resistance to capital's enormous speedup of production. This was the era of rank-and-file rebellion, in which blue-collar workers went on the offensive against their bosses (and often their union leaders as well) in a fight against deteriorating working conditions, while millions of public-sector workers joined unions for the first time.[4] Partly as a result of these high levels of conflict, productivity growth during the late 1970s virtually collapsed, leading to a decline in profit rates. The rebellion came to an end with the recession induced by Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volcker's sudden increase in interest rates in 1979, which announced the start of the neoliberal era.[5]

In the three or so years of this recession, 2.5 million manufacturing jobs were lost, the rebellious unions lost more than 2 million members, the number of all private-sector union members dropped by 26 percent, and strikes all but disappeared. This became an opportunity for capital to launch its new offensive to undermine collective bargaining arrangements, compress real wages, reduce benefits, and — most importantly — extract continuous increases in productivity that would further eliminate millions of additional manufacturing jobs. The major weapon in capital's struggle to increase the extraction of surplus value in this period was lean production, often accompanied by new technology.[6]

Introduced from Japan into the United States in the 1980s, the stated object of lean production was always to eliminate "waste," meaning buffers that slowed production, high inventory levels, imperfect parts, and "idle"

4 Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner, and Cal Winslow, *Rebel Rank and File*: *Labor Militancy and Revolt from Below During the Long 1970s* (London: Verso, 2010).

5 Alice M. Rivlin, *The Productivity Slowdown*: *Causes and Policy Responses* (Congressional Budget Office, June 1, 1981), 8, 28–33; David McNally, *Global Slump* (Oakland: PM Press, 2011), 33–37; Anwar Shaikh, "The First Great Depression of the 21st Century," *Socialist Register* 47 (2011): 52.

6 Kim Moody, "Contextualizing Organized Labour in Expansion and Crisis: The Case of the US," *Historical Materialism* 20, no. 1 (2012): 3–30.

labor time in the production process. Appropriately dubbed "management-by-stress" by Mike Parker and Jane Slaughter of *Labor Notes*, lean methods constantly stressed the production system to locate and eliminate all non-value-producing labor. As Toyota's lean pioneer Taiichi Ohno put it, "Manpower reduction means raising the ratio of value-added work."[7] Here, "lean production" will be used as shorthand for the multitude of programs introduced during this long period to impose measurable and standardized work processes ("metrics") and further reduce labor input in relation to output, such as Total Quality Management, Statistical Process Control (SPC), Six Sigma, Human Resource Management, Supply Chain Management, etc. Virtually all these methods of control came into practice in the 1980s as new disciplines and are now global in their application. While the various lean methods were often applied selectively or partially, most, like Six Sigma, have "come to be integrated with lean principles," as one recent study of the auto industry noted. Although the auto industry led in applying lean-production norms, innovations sometimes came from elsewhere. "Data-driven" Six Sigma was developed by Motorola in the mid-1980s and was soon adopted by General Electric, followed by many others. Today it is used "all over the world, in organizations as diverse as local government departments, prisons, hospitals, the armed forces, banks, and multinational corporations."[8]

While, in its classic form, lean production was characterized by features such as the Andon Board, *Kaizen* or continuous improvement teams, job rotations, just-in-time delivery of parts, etc., at its heart was the fight over time. The just-in-time (JIT) standard for the auto industry, and by implication most manufacturing, went from a three-day delivery window to "a thirty-minute time frame."[9] This obviously put enormous pressure on suppliers and their workers. This emphasis on time was not merely the lengthening of hours for some and shortening them for others, in the new "flexibility" demanded by capital, but the time worked actually producing value within each day, hour,

7 Mike Parker and Jane Slaughter, *Working Smart*: *A Union Guide to Participation Programs and Reengineering* (Detroit: Labor Notes, 1994); Pietro Basso, *Modern Times, Ancient Hours*: *Working Lives in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Verso, 2003), 60–64 .

8 Joel Cuther-Gershenfeld, Dan Brooks, and Martin Mulloy, *The Decline and Resurgence of the U.S. Auto Industry* (Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, 2015), 22; *Businessballs*, "Six Sigma," n.d., www.businessballs.com/sixsigma.htm.

9 Susan Helper and Morris Kleiner, "When Management Strategies Change: Employee Well-Being at an Auto Supplier," in *Low-Wage America*: *How Employers Are Reshaping Opportunity in the Workplace,* ed. Eileen Appelbaum, Annette Bernhardt, and Richard J. Murnane (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2003), 447–48.

and minute. It is, in short, about the intensification of work.[10] This is one reason why the introduction of programs designed to measure performance, such as SPC and Six Sigma, have become so important. Ostensibly meant to reduce errors and variations in outcomes, they aid in standardizing, measuring, and intensifying the labor process.

Hence the "lax" American standard of forty-five to fifty-two seconds of actual work per minute in automobile assembly was to be replaced by Toyota's fifty-seven-second minute, thereby "filling up the pores of the working day."[11] What began in the auto industry rapidly spread to other manufacturers and beyond. A recent study of work intensification in the United States, based on time-use diaries of more than 43,000 people employed mostly in routine "middling" goods- and service-producing jobs, found that from the 1980s to the 2000s the total break time went from 13 percent of the work day to 8 percent, which is to say that, within the average eight-hour day, capital gained approximately twenty-four minutes — almost half an hour of extra work at no extra cost in wages, benefits, or employment taxes! The push to "fill up the pores" continues. The 2015 contract agreement between Ford and the United Auto Workers grants the company one minute less in break time for each hour worked each day by each of Ford's 53,000 unionized workers. That amounts to more than 7,000 extra hours work per day for the entire workforce, the equivalent of almost four years for the company at no extra cost.[12]

More recently, supplementing or even supplanting the various innovations in lean production have come electronic forms of surveillance, work measurement, and monitoring, such as radio frequency identification (RFID), global positioning systems (GPS), and biometric measurements that drive JIT norms within production processes and along supply chains, maintaining "management-by-stress" all along the line.[13] It is precisely this sort of monitor-

10 Parker and Slaughter, *Working Smart*, 24–38.

11 Basso, *Modern Times*, 63–64; Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, 534.

12 Jose Ignacio Gimenez-Nadal and Almudena Sevilla-Sanz, "Job Polarization and the Intensification of Work in the United Kingdom and the United States over the Last Decades: Evidence from Time Diary Data," paper delivered at the Fourth Society of Labor Educators/European Association of Labour Economists Global Meeting, June 26–28, 2015, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, http://www.parthen-impact.com/parthen-uploads/78/2015/add_1_258840_lLPu40UWUf.pdf; Dianne Feeley, 'Big Three Contracts: Who Won?' *Against the Current* 180 (January/February 2016): 5.

13 Kristie Ball, "Workplace Surveillance: An Overview," *Labor History* 31, no. 1 (February 2010): 87–106; Kevin P. Pauli and Tammy Y. Arthur, "Computer Monitoring: The Hidden War of Control," *International Journal of Management and Information Systems* 15, no. 1 (2011): 49–58; John Mangan, Chandra Lalwani, Tim Butcher, and Roya Javadpour, *Global Logistics*

ing that allows employers to seek and measure a reduction of rest time per minute beyond even the shrinking of official break time, and to calculate the impact on the productivity of the workday.

These changes, taken together, have led to one of the biggest job-destroying intensifications of labor in the history of capitalism. There can be little doubt that "management-by-stress," work reorganization, measuring and monitoring, new technology, and of course the undermining of unions, all fostered by lean methods, had a major impact on productivity. In the early phase of lean production, during the 1980s, manufacturing productivity grew by 5 percent a year on average. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) estimates manufacturing productivity gains of 4.1 percent for 1990 to 2000 and 4.7 percent for 2000 to 2007. It stands to reason, therefore, that more than doubling productivity from the early 1980s to the Great Recession can well explain much of the 50 percent drop in manufacturing-production-worker jobs over that long period. The payoff for capital was enormous, as unit labor costs in manufacturing fell consistently from 1990 through 2010. After this, however, productivity slowed to a crawl and unit labor costs rose somewhat.[14]

The decline in manufacturing work in this period was to some extent offset by rises in transportation, distribution, and other employment related to the reorganization of production itself. The big gains, however, came with the longstanding increase of jobs in a broad range of "service" industries and occupations. This is one of the trends that has led many to conclude that the working class is becoming less concentrated and weaker as a social class. As we will see, this is by no means the case.

SERVICE JOBS: SHORT HOURS, THE SOCIAL REPRODUCTION OF LABOR POWER, AND DIRT

The rise of employment in occupations and industries labeled as "services" is not new. Service employment surpassed that of goods production by midcentury in the United States. Those service jobs that grew over the years were largely the creation of the internal dynamics of capital accumulation and two of its ongoing cost problems, resulting from the postwar growth of the US economy: the social reproduction of labor power and the maintenance of

and Supply Chain Management (Chicester, UK: Wiley & Sons, 2012), 237–40.

14 BLS, *International Comparisons of Manufacturing Productivity and Unit Labor Cost Trends, USDL-12-2365, December 6, 2012* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012), 5; *Monthly Labor Review,* June 2013, "Current Labor Statistics," Table 47 (Washington, DC: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013): 87.

expanding fixed facilities. One reason why service jobs outstripped those in goods production so rapidly is the difference in hours worked and productivity. Workers in manufacturing, construction, transportation and warehousing, and utilities work an average of forty hours a week, while those in administration, waste, health and social services, food services, and accommodations average about thirty hours — hence the growing number of part-time workers. While some services have achieved high rates of productivity under lean conditions, others such as food services and accommodations (0.8 percent) and janitorial services (1.9 percent) fall well behind the 5 percent annual rate for manufacturing output.[15] As a consequence of shorter hours and low productivity, an increase in output in services requires proportionately more workers than in manufacturing or transportation.

Looking at those private-sector "services" most likely to employ working-class people (excluding FIRE and professional services), service jobs grew by 14.2 million from 1990 to 2010. Some 8 million of those jobs, or 57 percent of growth, were in employment associated with the labor of social reproduction, such as health and social care and food services. This is due in large part to the increased participation of women in wage labor, including women with children, beginning in the 1950s. As the economy expanded following World War II, capital drew on those engaged in social reproduction in the home, vastly increasing the number of hours they worked for wages — from a median of 925 hours per year in 1979 to 1,664 in 2012. For women with children the increase was even greater, more than doubling from 600 hours per year to 1,560 over this period.[16] The resulting relative shortage of unpaid female reproductive labor in the home opened the door to the commodification of such labor outside of family, in the market.

In the United States, to a greater degree than other developed economies, many of the services involved in the social reproduction of labor power fell to the private sector. Capital, ever ready to extend the hand of exploitation and, as Marx put it, "always seeking out new areas of investment," moved to fill the gap.[17] As a result, a growing proportion of the labor of reproduction — child and elder care, health maintenance, food preparation, etc. — once done in the home had to be purchased on the market. For example, in 1960 Americans spent a quarter of their food expenditures eating out, while by 2010

15 US Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States,* 2011, 406, 416–17.

16 Janelle Jones, John Schmitt, and Nicole Woo, *Women, Working Families, and Unions* (Washington, DC: Center for Economic and Policy Research, 2014), 3.

17 Marx, *Capital,* Volume I, 578.

this was up to nearly half.[18] The workforce delivering most of these services outside of the home, however, remained disproportionately female.

At the same time, the growth in jobs needed to maintain capitalism's facilities and buildings (part of its growing fixed nonresidential stock of structures and equipment), fulfill its ancillary functions via temporary employees, and clean up its growing mess increased by an additional 5 million jobs from 1990 to 2010.[19] Many of these jobs were those outsourced or subcontracted from manufacturing and other industries in the last thirty years — though they had formerly appeared in the BLS's "manufacturing" column. Thus, aside from managerial and professional jobs, altogether 90 percent of the growth in major private-sector service-producing job categories from 1990 to 2010 came from the reproduction and "maintenance" of capitalism's workforce and fixed capital, the result of capitalist accumulation itself, and all now done by profit-making (or -taking) firms — even when, as in health care, they are partly publicly funded.

Marx was clear that a "service" does not have to be a material object to be a commodity. What determines whether workers produce surplus value is whether, as Shaikh and Tonak argue, they "are capitalistically organized"; that is, paid out of capital as variable capital.[20] What we see here is that more and more social activity is, indeed, "capitalistically organized." Thus, these jobs have come to face the same lean reorganization as their high-tech enablers. As Joan Greenbaum wrote of "reengineered" office work at the dawn of the twenty-first century, "The restructured world of work held in place through computer and communications networks, as well as other now familiar varieties of office technology . . . like schemes for reorganizing work, were designed to get more work out of remaining workers."[21] By 2010 Sameer Kumar could write approvingly of America's specialist hospitals, "they have adapted Lean Manufacturing, Six Sigma and supply chain strategies in order to become more efficient as well as improving patient care and satisfaction."[22] These "service" workers are being stressed to the max.

Thus, the lean norms that began in manufacturing spread throughout

18 USDA ERS, *Retail Trends*, "Food Expenditures," Table 1, 2016, https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-markets-prices/retailing-wholesaling/retail-trends.

19 US Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract*, 2011, 410.

20 Anwar Shaikh and E. Ahmet Tonak, *Measuring the Wealth of Nations*: *The Political Economy of National Accounts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 20–32.

21 Joan Greenbaum, *Windows on the World*: *Technology, Jobs, and the Organization of Office Work* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 81.

22 Sameer Kumar, "Specialty Hospitals Emulating Focused Factories: A Case Study," *International Journal of Health Care Quality Assurance* 23, no. 1 (2010): 95.

the economy as capital sought, in the face of competition and endangered profit rates, to reduce labor time and costs everywhere. This meant, among other things, that working conditions in industries and occupations previously assumed to be very different were, in fact, becoming more similar. Monitoring and measuring was reducing all labor, even highly skilled labor such as that of nurses, to abstract labor. Work was changing in ways that were often disorienting to workers and their organizations, where they existed.

PRECARIOUS WORK: GROWTH, BUT LESS THAN YOU THOUGHT

As any number of commentators have noted, the era of lean production saw an increase in workforce "flexibility" and "nontraditional" employment. On examining the growth and extent of contingent and insecure work in the United States, however, it is well to keep in mind what one international study of precarious jobs cautioned: "The assumption that the principal norms regulating work are those of full-time permanency has never reflected the full variety of working relationships present in industrial economies."[23] In other words, there has always been a strong element of contingency in working-class reality. What is under consideration is the *degree* of change.

One of the results of the ongoing accumulation process and the increased flexibility of the workforce demanded by lean production and the growth of extended supply chains in both services and goods production has been the increase in precarious or contingent employment such as temporary agency work, short-term contracts, on-call work, independent contracting (i.e., bogus self-employment), involuntary part-time work (economic reasons, usually work full-time), etc. The 2005 BLS estimates, shown in Table II, adjusted for some undercounts of temporary and involuntary part-time workers and overlap of categories show an increase of nearly 3 million precarious jobs over a decade. Yet, surprisingly, the *proportion* of precarious workers in total employment hardly rose at all, from 15.2 percent in 1995 to 15.5 percent in 2005, the last BLS count. The biggest jump in precariousness came early on, in the 1980s, as a result of the initial introduction of lean production, after which it seems to have stabilized. Table III brings together the data available after 2005, and again we see that temporary work — whether through temp agencies or as independent contractors —

23 Sonia McKay, Steve Jefferys, Anna Paraksevopoulou, and Janoj Keles, *Study on Precarious Work and Social Rights* (London: London Metropolitan University, 2012), 17–18.

has not experienced a big increase. Around 85 percent of the workforce is still employed in "traditional" jobs.

TABLE II. **CONTINGENT & ALTERNATIVE WORK, 1995, 2005**[24]

TYPE OF WORK	1995	2005
Part-Time Economic Reasons (Usually Full-Time)	1,468	1,556
Contingent	3,975	3,852
Independent Contractors	8,309	10,342
On-Call	2,078	2,454
Temporary Agency	2,189	2,549
Provided by Contract Firm	652	813
Total Contingent & Alternative	**18,671**	**21,566**
Total Employed	**123,208**	**138,952**
Precarious as Percent of Total	**15.2%**	**15.5%**

TABLE III. **PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT, 2005–2015**[25]

TYPE OF WORK	2005–06	2009–10	2015
Temp Agency	2,539,000	1,823,000	2,886,300
Unincorporated (Self-Employed)	10,464,000	9,831,000	8,551,000

24 BLS, *New Data on Contingent and Alternative Employment Examined by BLS*, USDL 95-318, Tables 1, 5, 12, August 17, 1995; *Contingent and Alternative Employment Arrangements, February 2005*, USDL 05-1433, Tables 1, 5, 12, July 27, 2005; US Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1996* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office), 403; US Census Bureau *Statistical Abstract of the United States 2005* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office), 391.

25 US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States 2007 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2006), 383, 386; US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States 2012 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2011), 388, 391; BLS, Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, "Household Data, Seasonally Adjusted," Table A-7, 2016, www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpseea07.htm; BLS, "Household Data, Annual Averages," Table 22, www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat22.pdf.

This limited growth in precarious work is further supported by the fact that job tenure has not changed much in the United States since the introduction of lean production norms and neoliberalism in general. While those aged thirty-five to fifty-four stating they had held the same job for more than ten years fell by 5 percent from 1973 to 2006, it rose again by over 5 percent from 2006 to 2016. The average length of job tenure continued to be measured in years, falling only slightly. For those aged twenty-five to thirty-four the average length of job tenure fell from 3.8 years in 1979 to 3.5 in 2006, while those in the thirty-five to forty-four age range saw it fall from 7.1 years to 6.6, and those ages forty-five to fifty-four from 11.3 to 10.3.[26] These figures, of course, don't include the crucial eighteen-to-twenty-four cohort, precisely when new entrants to the workforce experience the most precarity and shifting of work in hopes of finding something better.

None of this is to deny that more and more jobs are "dead end," in that they don't offer a clear path to higher earnings as wages remain low over time and benefits become rarer. Nevertheless, on average, workers still hold jobs for a number of years — and the longer one is in wage labor, the longer the job lasts on average. The idea that workers change jobs all the time, making organizing impossible, is misleading.

THE END (OF GOOD JOBS) IS NIGH!

In a sense, the debate over just how much employment is or isn't precarious misses the bigger change in working-class life over the past three decades or more — the decline in living standards and working conditions experienced by the vast majority of this class. As we saw above, work intensification has become the norm, while the standardization of work has if anything increased the deskilling and degradation of work analyzed years ago by Harry Braverman.[27] The compression of working-class incomes is the other side of the coin of increased profitability and the enormous increase in the incomes and wealth of the capitalist class and their immediate associates. One measure of declining living standards is the fall in both hourly and weekly real wages, which — despite some ups and downs — remain below their 1973 levels. By 2011, 28 percent of all workers earned less than the official poverty-level wages

26 Lawrence Michel, Jared Bernstein, and Heidi Shierholz, *The State of Working America, 2008–09* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 257, 259; BLS, *Employee Tenure in 2016*, USDL-16-1867, September 22, 2016 (Washington, DC: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016): Table 2.

27 Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, anniversary ed. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998).

of $11.06 an hour. So stagnant has been the income of the working-class majority that 30 percent of the workforce now relies on public assistance to get by.[28]

Income inequality has increased dramatically. From 1982 to 2012, the share of total income that went to the top 10 percent increased from 35 percent to 51 percent, while that of the top 1 percent rose from 10 percent to 23 percent. Furthermore, labor's share of income in GDP has declined in relation to capital, whose piece of the pie climbed from 18.8 percent in 1979 to 26.2 percent in 2010. Capital has done very well indeed. Underlying growing inequality is the increased rate of exploitation represented in Table IV below.[29] If the BLS employment projections for 2014 to 2024 are any guide, 70 percent of *all* the gains in nonmanagerial and nonprofessional jobs will fall into the official low-income range, which is at or below $32,390 a year, and over a third of those in the very-low range below $21,590.[30] If employment tenure is not much less than twenty years ago, economic precariousness certainly is much greater for the vast majority of those who must work for a living. The end of good working-class jobs is nigh!

TABLE IV. **REAL PROFIT / WAGE RATIO SELECTED YEARS, 1975–2011**

YEAR	REAL NOS	REAL EC	NOS/EC
1975	227.5	1069.7	21.3
1985	341.2	1391.7	24.5
1995	480.1	1648.0	29.1
2005	658.4	2036.0	32.3
2011	711.0	1988.8	35.8
GROWTH	**213%**	**86%**	**68%**

Real NOS=Net Operating Surplus adjusted by PPI Real EC=Employee Compensation adjusted by CPI-U2

28 Council of Economic Advisors, *Economic Report*, 402; David Cooper, "A Majority of Low-Wage Workers Earn So Little that They Must Rely on Public Assistance to Make Ends Meet," *Economic Snapshot*: *Wages, Income, and Wealth*, Economic Policy Institute, February 9, 2016, www.epi.org/publication/a-majority-of-low-wage-workers; BLS, "Consumer Price Index-All Urban Consumers," *Databases, Tables & Calculators by Subject*. February 23, 2017, https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/CUUR0000SA0; BLS, "Employment, Hours, and Earnings from the Current Employment Statistics survey (National)," *Databases, Tables & Calculators by Subject*, February 23, 2017.

29 Lawrence Michel, Josh Bivens, Elsie Gould, and Heidi Shierholz, *State of Working America*, 12th ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 102; Anwar Shaikh, *Capitalism*: *Competition, Conflict, Crises* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 755.

30 BLS, "Employment Projections — 2014–24," press release, USDL-15-2327, December 8, 2015, Table 4; BLS, 'Occupations with the Most Growth," *Employment Projections*, Table 1.4, *www.bls.gov/emp/ep_table_104.htm*; US Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract*, 2011, 398.

Both the ethnoracial and gender composition of the employed working class has changed dramatically over the last three decades or so. In particular, the entry into the workforce of immigrants (the global reserve army of labor) in the last thirty years or so, like its absorption of women with children in the 1950s, is a consequence of the process of expanded reproduction or accumulation in the United States and abroad, on the one hand, and the consequent dispossession abroad on the other.[31] Here most immigrant workers join many African American, native-born Latinos, and many women workers in the lower-paid ranks of the workforce taking on a disproportionate share of the growing poverty.

These racial and ethnic groups now make up a large and growing proportion of working-class occupations. Blacks, Latinos, and Asians, including immigrants, who composed 15 to 16 percent of the workers in production, transportation, and material-moving occupations as well as in service occupations in 1981, now make up 40 percent of each of these broad occupational groups. Furthermore, these groups are spread throughout these occupational categories to a much larger degree than in the past. In construction trades, for example, workers of color composed 37 percent of the workforce in 2010 compared to 15 to 16 percent in 1981. Blacks, Asians, and Latinos together composed about 35 percent of the employed working class, compared to 22 percent of the middle class and 11 percent of the capitalist class.[32] These groups of workers are disproportionately concentrated in urban areas. They are central to the logistics clusters, with African Americans and Latinos making up a large proportion of the warehouse workforce in the Chicago area and Latinos in the Los Angeles and New York–New Jersey clusters discussed below.

What stands out in this survey is that the terrain for labor has changed in the United States, but not in ways suggested by the popular media narratives, or even those of the Left. The most dramatic change has not been a shift toward precarious employment, though that is certainly a real phenomenon. More important has been the brutal intensification of work, slow growth in employment, and the massive expansion of low-wage jobs as the primary site of employment growth. Most workers in the United States still work in stable jobs — they just get paid very little and find that the pace and intensity have

31 David McNally and Susan Ferguson, "Precarious Migrants: Gender, Race and the Social Reproduction of a Global Working Class," in *Socialist Register 2015*, ed. Leo Panitch and Greg Albo (London: Merlin Press, 2014), 9–11; McNally, *Global Slump*, 113–45.

32 US Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1982–83* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1983), 388–90; US Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 2012*, 393–96.

risen dramatically. This new working class in formation has increasingly been brought together by a far-reaching reorganization of capital itself. This has transformed not only the nature of work and employment but the relations between different sections of the working class, as the production and movement of goods and services become more interdependent and closely linked. It is to these changes we now turn.

2

CAPITAL REORGANIZED

CONCENTRATION AND CENTRALIZATION OF CAPITAL IN THE UNITED STATES

The engine driving all the changes in labor described above was an intensified campaign by capital to cut costs and increase efficiency. Since the early 1980s, capital in almost every sector of the economy has sought to strengthen its position not only in the workplace but by becoming larger in specific product markets and more tightly linked across time and space. But the flipside of this increase in size and efficiency is that capital has also become more susceptible to organizing and working-class action.

The same forces that triggered the intensification of work and the attack on wages — globalization, increased competition, and the restoration of profit margins — unleashed one of the most extraordinary waves of business consolidation via mergers and acquisitions (M&As) in the history of US capitalism. Merger movements tend to come in waves. They are part of the ongoing reorganization of capital under the pressures of competition; their rhythms are determined partly by falling and then rising rates of profit. In the United States there have been six major waves of M&As in which business has been reshaped: 1897–1904, 1916–29, 1965–69, 1984–89, 1992–2000, and 2003 to the present.[33] Each of these merger movements has attempted

33 Patrick Gaughan, *Mergers, Acquisitions, and Corporate Restructuring*, 6th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons, 2015), 41–74.

to resolve problems associated with falling rates of profits and to take advantage of the resumption of profitability to increase efficiency and market share through mergers.

The process of the concentration and centralization of capital during the neoliberal period follows the course Marx suggested in his brief discussion in *Capital* of these tendencies and the contradictory course they follow.[34] As capitals grow, "offshoots split off from the original capitals and start to function as new and independent capitals . . . therefore the number of capitals grows to a greater or lesser extent." This shows up to some extent in those M&A deals that are in fact divestitures, as well as in new business formations. These capitals, however, must grow or merge. "It is concentration of capitals already formed, destruction of their individual independence, expropriation of capitalist by capitalist, transformation of many small into few large capitals."[35] This process does not eliminate competition. As Howard Botwinick explains, "Within the context of large-scale enterprise, the relentless drive to expand capital value is necessarily accompanied by a growing struggle over market shares. As capital accumulates and greater sales are required to recover costs, 'the old struggle must begin again, and it is all the more violent the more powerful the means of production already invested are,' writes Marx."[36]

Hence, as the mergers grew in intensity and volume during the 1980s and 1990s, so did the competitive pressures of the market. In 1980 M&As numbered 1,560 at a value of $32.9 billion, after which they rose to 4,239 worth $205.6 billion in 1990, and then in the fifth wave to 11,169 valued at $3.4 trillion in 2000, the highest level ever. After 2001 M&As levelled off at about 7,000 a year, still well above pre-1990s levels, until the crash of 2008, and then rose again after 2012. By late 2015, it was estimated that the number of M&As would reach 10,000 for that year, at a value of about $2 trillion.[37]

34 Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, 775–78.

35 Ibid.

36 Howard Botwinick, *Persistent Inequalities*: *Wage Disparity under Capitalist Competition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 129–36; Karl Marx, *Wage-Labour and Capital* (New York: International Publishers, 1933), 43.

37 Devra L. Golbe and Lawrence J. White, "A Time-Series Analysis of Mergers and Acquisitions in the U.S. Economy," in *Corporate Takeovers*: *Causes and Consequences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 270–71; US Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1990* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1990), 534; US Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 2001* (Washington, DC: US Government Print-

One of the distinctive features of the current wave of mergers is that, unlike the wave of the late 1960s, it has been directed toward strengthening firms' "core competencies" — that is, their basic lines of products — increasing both the concentration and centralization of capital in many industries. Indeed, leading up to the most recent wave, the years from the early 1980s into the 1990s were, as Doug Henwood writes, a "period during which many of the conglomerates were broken apart, and combinations between firms in the same or related industries predominated."[38] In addition, this merger wave was far less dependent on debt.[39]

GREATER CAPITAL INTENSITY

Not only are millions more workers employed by bigger, mostly urban-based national concentrations of capital, but on average today's workers toil under increased capital/labor ratios. After all, in the Marxist view of competition, the continual advance in technology and, hence, accumulated capital is central, as each firm attempts to either become or compete with the most efficient firm in its industry, what Botwinick calls the "regulating capital."[40] In the case of M&As this is compounded. As firms buy up other firms to expand market share through expanded production, they necessarily combine units with varying degrees of capital intensity, efficiency, and profit rates. Since competition pushes a firm to attempt to achieve the highest level of efficiency in the industry, the newly combined company must bring the least efficient units up to the highest standard possible. Some of this can be done by closing or selling off less efficient units, but since the purpose of the merger or acquisition is to increase productive capacity and market share, there is clearly a limit to this strategy. Instead, firms will attempt to improve the efficiency of all units through the application of the latest technology, thus increasing capital intensity. Indeed, this is just what

ing Office, 2001), 492–93; US Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 2006,* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2006), 520; Renae Merle, "U.S. Regulators Strike at Two Big Consolidation Deals," *Washington Post,* December 7, 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/us-regulators-strike-at-two-big-consolidation-deals.

38 Gaughan, *Mergers,* 62–74; Doug Henwood, *Wall Street*: *How It Works and for Whom* (London: Verso, 1997), 279.

39 Gaughan, *Mergers,* 67–68.

40 Botwinick, *Persistent Inequalities,* 150–56.

many firms have done, resulting in increasing the amount of capital per worker. Table V shows the growth of capital stock per workers for the years 1992 to 2012.

TABLE V.

INCREASE IN CAPITAL INTENSITY
PER PRODUCTION WORKER, 1992–2012[41]

INDUSTRY	%
Real net private capital stock	**INCREASE PER WORKER**
Private Economy **66.3**	
Manufacturing **151**	
Information **82**	
Hospitals **92**	

Although investment, like GDP, grew more slowly than during US capitalism's post–World War II heyday, annual fixed nonresidential investment has actually formed a larger percentage of GDP during nonrecession years of the neoliberal era than in the 1960s: averaging 11.7 percent from 1982 until 2015, compared to 10 percent during the 1960s. Indicative of this increase generally, both the industrial capacity index and the capital/labor ratio grew from the mid-1980s, then took off during the 1990s just as the wave of M&As also accelerated. These increases point to the fact that mergers alone were not sufficient to meet competition and that capital investment also increased, as noted above. After 2000, the capital/labor ratio leveled off due to the recessions of 2000 and 2008, then began to grow again around 2012. Competition was engendering not only mergers, but increased capital accumulation and technology.

41 BEA, "Current-Cost Net Stock of Private Assets by Industry," Table 3.1 ESI, (Washington, DC: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2015); Council of Economic Advisors, *Economic Report of the President 2013* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2013), 399; BLS, "Employment, Hours and Earnings from the Current Employment Statistics Survey (National)." *Databases, Tables & Calculators by Subject*.

Nor, on average, are the nation's workplaces getting smaller, measured by the average number of workers. While the average manufacturing workplace employs fewer workers than in the past, employment concentration has gone up for the economy as a whole. In 2008, altogether 24.7 million workers were employed in workplaces of five hundred or more, or 20 percent of the workforce, compared to 16.5 million (also 20 percent) in 1986. Those employed in workplaces of a thousand or more rose to 16.5 million, or 14 percent of the total workforce in 2008 from 10.7 million or 13 percent in 1986. What these figures reveal is that, first of all, the majority of workers in the United States have always worked in relatively small workplaces — a fact that did not prevent working-class upsurges in the past. More importantly, more than 8 million more workers are employed in relatively large workplaces than was the case when lean production and globalization took off.

"It follows therefore that in proportion as capital accumulates, the situation of the worker, be his payment high or low, must grow worse," wrote Marx in *Capital*. And so it is that the capital that employs many of these workers is bigger, the capital/labor ratio greater, and the condition of the majority grown worse. The enormous gap between productivity growth and wage stagnation is both the symbol of this relative impoverishment and "the secret of the great boom that began in the 1980s." At the same time, it is a major source of the increased inequality that affects the entire working class and those on its periphery in the United States — indeed, throughout the developed industrial economies. So, competition, consolidation or centralization, and the push for greater productivity are all of a piece in the reality of contemporary capital accumulation.

PROS AND CONS FOR LABOR

The drive to consolidation via mergers is crucial because different configurations promote different balances of class power. In general, as Botwinick notes, "a number of writers have argued that the increasing conglomeration of US corporations in the 1960s and 1970s played a major role in tipping the balance against labor in industries such as coal, meat-packing, printing, and steel." Conglomerates are better placed to resist strikes or even union-

ization in any one line of production because of their resources in other subsidiaries. Here is what labor economist Charles Craypo wrote about the advantages to management of conglomerates just as conglomeration reached its apex:

> The conglomerate employer is, by definition, a multi-industry enterprise. This results in greater employer operating mobility than that of a union whose bargaining structure and representation rights rarely cross industry lines, greater financial leverage than that of a union whose members depend on a single business operation for their livelihood, and greater administrative range than a union whose decision-making options are limited to a single plant or industry. These administrative, financial, and mobility advantages enable the conglomerate to frustrate the collective bargaining process and impair the bargaining strength of the unions.[42]

The significance of the massive wave of M&As is that it signals a shift away from conglomeration and toward a focus on a single industry or line of production, thereby also creating the potential for greater disruption from job actions — provided, of course, the unions organize the workforce and take full advantage of this opening. So far, this has only begun in a few industries, such as hotels, hospitals, and to a lesser extent meatpacking.

There are also clear downsides for workers in consolidation through M&As. For one, merged companies typically close some plants or facilities, which can lead to workforce reductions. In addition, experience shows that the new owners will try to undermine existing conditions and pay and to squeeze even more work out of the remaining workforce. Industry consolidation is not a free ride for labor. Nevertheless, the outcome is necessarily an industry in which fewer but larger firms compete, the combined workforce of more and more firms is relatively larger, and the new production methods and links are more vulnerable. In the long run, this is a situation that makes the industry more susceptible to unionization, as was the case in the 1930s after the 1916–29 merger wave that produced corporate giants such as General Motors, John Deere, and Union Carbide.

42 Charles Craypo, *The Economics of Collective Bargaining: Case Studies in the Private Sector* (Washington DC: The Bureau of National Affairs, Inc.), 200.

TABLE VI. **CONSOLIDATION OUTCOMES IN MAJOR INDUSTRIES**

* 2008/09 top ten auto suppliers control one-third of original equipment market.
* Four meatpacking companies (Tyson, Cargill, JBS, and National Beef) controlled 75 percent of production by 2011.
* 1998 Mittal Steel buys Inland Steel, 2006 merges with Arcelor, controls 23 percent of market.
* 2001 USX divests Marathon Oil to become US Steel again.
* Five rail freight carriers employ 80 percent of that workforce.
* UPS and FedEx employ about 40 percent of trucking and express delivery workers.
* Four airlines (Delta, American, United, and Southwest) control 80 percent of air passenger traffic.
* Telecommunications firms, including wired and wireless, "re-consolidated their industry in the past ten years to four players, who together control 90 percent of the market."
* Three-quarters of the country's formerly independent community hospitals are in large urban-based corporate systems or chains.
* The top five retail grocery corporations accounted for 60 percent of sales nationally by 2009.
* "Consolidation among broad-line food distributors (those shipping a wide variety of products) is particularly noteworthy . . . the share of the top three (Sysco, Alliant, and US Food) grew from 32 percent in 1995 to 43 percent in 2000."[43]

43 US Department of Commerce, *On the Road*, 15, 33; Emilene Ostlind, "The Big Four Meatpackers," *High Country News*, March 21, 2011, www.hcn.org/issues/43.5; US Steel, *2007 Annual Report and Form 10-K* (Pittsburgh: United States Steel Corporation, 2007), 4; US Steel, "History of US Steel," https://www.ussteel.com/uss/portal/home/aboutus/history; Arcelor/Mittal, *Driving Solutions*: *United States +Integrated Report* (Chicago: Arcelor/Mittal, 2015), 7; Arcelor/Mittal, *Transforming Tomorrow*, "Our History," http://corporate.arcelormittal.com/who-we-are/our-history; US Steel, *2014 Annual Report and Form 10-K* (Pittsburgh: United States Steel Corporation, 2014), 9; Association of American Railroad, *Railroad Jobs*, , *Railroads 101*, https://www.aar.org/Pages/Railroad-101.aspx ; *Transport Topics*, "Top 100 For Hire Carriers", 2014; US Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract 2012*, 409; Keven Farrell, "This Is How Dozens of Major Airlines Got Swallowed by the Big 3'," *Road Warrior Vices*, November 9, 2015, http://roadwarriervoices.com/2015/11/09/this-is-how-dozens-of-major-airlines; Ben Mutzbaugh, "Era of Airline Merger Mania Comes to a Close with the Last UA Airways Flight," *USA Today*, October 16, 2015, www.usatoday.com/story/travel/flights/todayinthesky; Capgemini Consulting, *Communications Industry*: *On the Verge of Massive Consolidation* (London: Capgemini Consulting, 2014), 4; Steven Wood, "Revisiting the US Food Retail Consolidation Wave: Regulation, Market Power and Spatial Outcomes," *Journal of Economic Geography* 13, no. 2 (March 2013): 243; Julia Lane, Philip Moss, Harold Salzman, and Chris

LOGISTICS: CAPITAL'S SUPPLY CHAIN GANG

There is no better example of the changes in the organization of capital and the opening that this provides to labor than the emergence of transportation and logistics as the nerve center of contemporary capitalism. One of the outstanding features of the restructuring of the production of goods and services in the era of lean production and new technology has been the reorganization of supply chains — the so-called "logistics revolution." Supply chains have long been part of the production of goods and services. The rise of global value or supply chains and the geographic relocation of domestic production and suppliers first experienced as fragmentation, however, like consolidation in business organization, have brought about their opposite in a dramatic geographic and technological reorganization of supply chains, a "revolution" in "the means of communication and transport," as Marx put it.

One of the most important changes in the reorganization of supply chains is their geography, the concentration of workers in key "nodes" or "clusters," along with their technological drivers and linkages. If suppliers have relocated to lower-cost areas within the United States or even offshore, bringing about a degree of vertical "dis-integration," the sinews of transportation that move both intermediate and final products (including imports) within the United States have been reconfigured into enormous "logistics clusters" of transportation hubs, massive warehouses and distribution centers, "aerotropolises," seaports, and sophisticated technology that bring tens of thousands of workers into finite geographic concentrations, mostly in or adjacent to large urban areas. While there are about sixty such clusters in the United States, the biggest of these are found around Chicago, Los Angeles, and along the New Jersey Turnpike in the New York–New Jersey port area, each concentrating at least a hundred thousand workers. Chicago's metropolitan area is said to have 150,000 to 200,000 warehouse workers alone; according to one study, warehouse workers compose only about 20 percent of the total logistics industry in the United States. The giant UPS "Worldport" superhub in Louisville "provides 55,000

Tilly, "Too Many Cooks? Tracking Internal Labor Market Dynamics in Food Services with Case Studies and Quantitative Data," in *Low-Wage America*: *How Employers Are Reshaping Opportunity in the Workplace* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2003), 237; American Hospital Association, *AHA Hospital Statistics 2009* (Chicago: Health Forum, 2009), 4; American Hospital Association, *AHA Hospital Statistics 2010* (Chicago: Health Forum, 2010), 12.

jobs." That of FedEx in Memphis employs 15,000 workers directly, so far, while the Memphis airport in which it is based is the "largest cargo airport in the world," as well as a rail and trucking hub employing 220,000 workers.[44] Describing the workforce in the most modern of these clusters, the so-called "distribution cities," one group of scholars notes that they contain "a small percentage of professional, managerial, and technical occupations and a high proportion of working-class occupations."[45]

Altogether, the logistics industry in the United States employs 3.2 million workers, 85 percent of them located within metropolitan areas.[46] This count failed to include the 166,000 railroad workers employed by the major freight carriers.[47] Nor does this figure include all those involved in moving goods from cluster to cluster, so that the total figure might well be closer to 4 million. All the urban sites of the major logistics clusters are homes to large "ghettos" and *barrios* housing huge numbers of unemployed and underemployed working-class people, who are to a large extent "enclosed," both spatially and occupationally, by racial segregation and discrimination, the disappearance or drastic shrinking of previous employment possibilities in manufacturing or the public sector, and the diminution of state benefits — they are the quintessential reserve army of labor. As such, the workers who maintain the internal infrastructure, fill the warehouses, and move things around within the cluster are paid poorly and treated as dispensable. This is the unspoken locational "metric" that makes the Los Angeles, Chicago, Memphis, and the New York – New Jersey metropolitan areas, with their millions of low-income black and Latino people and relatively high unemployment rates, the biggest logistics clusters of all.[48]

44 Yossi Sheffi, *Logistics Clusters*: *Delivering Value and Driving Growth* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 77, 238, 265–67; Yossi Sheffi, "Logistics-Intensive Clusters: Global Competitiveness and Regional Growth." in *Handbook of Global Logistics,* ed. James Bookbinder (New York: Spring, 2013), 472; Frank P. Van den Heuval, Liliana Rivera, Karel H. van Donselaar, Ad de Jong, Yossi Sheffi, Peter W. De Langen, and Jan C. Fransoo, *Relationship between Freight Accessibility and Logistics Employment in US Counties,* Beta Working Paper 401(Einhoven: Beta Research School for Occupations, Management, and Logistics, 2013), 21; Warehouse Workers for Justice, *Bad Jobs in Goods Movement*: *Warehouse Work in Will County, Illinois* (Chicago: Warehouse Workers for Justice, 2010).

45 Deborah Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics*: *Mapping Violence in Global Trade* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 183.

46 Van den Heuval et al., *Relationship,* 21.

47 Association of American Railroads, *Railroad Jobs, Railroads 101,* https://www.aar.org/Pages/Railroad-101.aspx .

48 US Census, *Statistical Abstract 2012,* 31, 383.

Marx was clear that transportation workers who move commodities produce surplus value. Since commodities must change location both during production and to reach the market he wrote in the *Grundrisse,* "Economically considered, the spatial condition, the bringing the product to the market belongs to the production process itself."[49] In Volume II of *Capital*, he concluded, "The productive capital invested in this industry [transportation] thus adds value to the products transported," partly through the value carried over from the means of transport, partly through the value added by the work of transport.[50]

Like today's logistics gurus, Marx considered storage as dead time that only added costs and produced no value. Today, however, as one warehouse management textbook put it, "companies are continually looking to minimize the amount of stock held and speed up throughput." Almost a third of warehouse companies in the United States practice "cross-docking," in which "same-day receipt and dispatch is the target"; this is expected to rise to 45 percent by 2018. Even in more conventional warehouses, where stock may remain in place for a while, the object is to move it as quickly as possible. A growing number of warehouses also perform final steps in manufacturing, often to "customize" a product, including many imports.[51]

In other words, most warehouse labor today involves the movement, relocation, and additional manufacture of goods and is more akin to transportation or even manufacturing labor than mere storage. Indeed, following Marx's definition of transportation as part of the overall production process, most of the workers in these giant clusters are engaged in goods production, despite being classified as something else by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Furthermore, contemporary warehouses, like other production facilities, are high-tech operations. While in real terms for warehousing net assets in structures grew by 45 percent from 1982 to 2009, the value of equipment increased by 187 percent, compared to only 56 percent in

49 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*: *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1973), 534.

50 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume II (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1978), 226–27.

51 Gwynne Richards, *Warehouse Management*: *A Complete Guide to Improving Efficiency and Minimizing Costs in the Modern Warehouse* (London: Kogan Page, 2014), 6, 10; Motorola, *From Cost Center to Growth Center*: *Warehousing 2018* (Oakdale, MN: Motorola Supply Chain Services, 2013), 8; Sheffi, *Logistics*, 121–46.

manufacturing.[52] Thus, the nearly 4 million workers in logistics, many once considered "service" producers, are in fact a central part of the industrial "core" of the working class. The supply chain, from raw materials to the very doors of Walmart, is, in the Marxist view, a production assembly line — one that is tightly controlled by JIT systems operating through logistics. Logistics clusters are, therefore, *value-producing agglomerations* at the center of today's broader production processes, much as the clusters of auto-assembly plants in Detroit or the steel mills in Gary of yesteryear were at the center of their supply chains of parts, raw materials, and so on.

At the same time, competition, both domestic and international, has become increasingly "time-based." As one expert put it succinctly, when it comes to product delivery, "Time has become a far more critical element in the competitive process."[53] Marx made the broader point that in the circuits of capital, as capital moves from its money form to commodities and then to market to become money again, "even spatial distance reduces itself to time; the important thing, e.g., is not the market's distance in space, but the speed — the amount of time — with which it can be reached."[54] Since the actual speed at which trucks, trains, planes, and ships move things has not changed much in the last thirty years, the object of the "logistics revolution" has been, along with bigger ships and longer trains and truck trailers that carry more, to move more things as fast as possible with minimal "storage" time — both at the points where products change modes of transport (through the warehouse or distribution center) and all along the supply chain to the final market. They must aspire to, as Marx famously put it, "the annihilation of space by time."[55]

This requires advanced information technology. As one expert puts it, "An information supply chain parallels every physical supply chain."[56] Information technologies such as radio-frequency identification (RFID), global positioning systems (GPS), barcoding, electronic data interchange, and so on are

52 BEA, *Relation of Private Fixed Investment in Structures (By Type) in the Fixed Assets Accounts to the Corresponding Items in the National Income and Product Account*, September 7, 2016, www.bea.gov/national/FA2004/ST_types.pdf.

53 Martin Christopher, *Logistics and Supply Chain Management*, Fourth Edition (Harlow, UK: Pearson, 2011), 28.

54 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 538.

55 Ibid., 524.

56 Sheffi, *Logistics*, 159.

employed to keep JIT delivery as tight as possible at each and every point. This constant push for speed, like "management-by-stress" in the immediate production process, puts enormous external pressure on workers all along the supply chain. With increased competition, advanced technology, and the "logistics revolution" more and more workers have found themselves locked into what amounts to a global supply chain gang. These chains, however, can be broken. Their very time-bound tension makes them extremely vulnerable to worker action.

This vulnerability is increased by the fact that, for the most part, their reorganization and tightening has meant that, on average, each supply chain employed in the production of a final commodity has seen a reduction in the number of suppliers, making the task of organizing them somewhat simpler and the impact of direct action in any one "node" in the chain more effective. In the US automobile industry this development has been spectacular, with the number of firms supplying the major assemblers, both US and foreign-owned, dropping from an average of one thousand to six hundred over the last two decades.[57] As one logistics guru summarizes, "A further prevailing trend over the last decade or so has been the dramatic reduction in the number of suppliers from which organizations typically will procure materials, components, services, etc."[58] These "organizations" include service-producing firms as well as manufacturers. The reduction in the number of suppliers across much of the economy is in part a consequence of the general consolidation of firms in industry after industry. That is, suppliers, like any capitalists, must compete by increasing technology and the scale of production.

Finally, all these changes in the concentration and centralization of capital and the rise of huge logistics clusters represent an enormous amount of fixed and sunk capital. It's all very fine that, due to "financialization," capital in its money form flies around the earth at the speed of light, spreading investment wherever it touches down, but once it "lands" and is transformed into roads, rails, ports, warehouses, factories, communications systems, equipment, and so on, these investments don't just get up and walk away. As Marx argued in Volume III of *Capital*, "The transfer of capital from one sector to another presents significant difficulties, particularly on account of the fixed

57 US Department of Commerce, *On the Road: U.S. Automotive Parts Industry Annual Assessment* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, 2011), 7.

58 Christopher, *Logistics*, 193.

capital involved."[59] The same is true in terms of geographic shifts, whether at home or abroad. As David Harvey puts it succinctly, "The spatial mobility of commodities depends upon the creation of a transport network that is immobile in space."[60] Trucks must have roads, trains rails, planes airports, and even the biggest container ships or supertankers ports. The imbedded contours of industry, logistics, communications, services, and commerce that have taken shape in the last couple of decades are not likely to decompose or relocate much for some time — and their centers in major metropolitan population concentrations make much of this complex a more or less stationary target for unionization and collective action.

3

LABOR ON NEW TERRAIN

"DON'T MOURN, ORGANIZE!"

The new and emerging shape of US capitalism offers opportunities, not certainties. As always, the other dimension of class formation or reformation lies in the self-activity of the working class itself. It is through their own activity that working-class people begin to see the real nature of their relationship to capital and to develop the "militant minority" that is always the backbone of the waves of insurgency that characterize the rhythms of intense class conflict.[61] Because the period of consolidation was also one of continuous disruption of old patterns of work and organization, as well as of the workforce itself, however, workers and their unions have been disoriented and often as a result defeated. Pulling out of this tailspin has proved difficult, with union membership in the private sector down to 6.6 percent in 2014 and up only 1 percentage point in 2015, despite a small gain of 195,000;

59 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume III (London: Penguin, 1991), 310–11.
60 David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 386.
61 Eric Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men*: *Studies in the History of Labour* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), 126–57; Beverly J. Silver, *Forces of Labor*: *Workers' Movements and Globalization since 1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 124–31.

union membership in the public sector has fallen to 35.2 percent; strikes are still at all-time lows.[62] The reconfiguration of capital and the workforce, however, points to some broad strategic directions and opportunities. There are three dimensions that offer some promise: the larger size of national or regional corporations in many industries; the huge concentrations of workers, particularly blacks and Latinos, in urban areas; and the fragility of the whole JIT logistics supply-chain system.

The very structure of today's logistically integrated, consolidated industries suggests organizing strategies that reach from factory or port, across truck and rail routes, to warehouses, and on to Walmarts, hospital complexes, supermarkets, and so on. In most of the industries described above, one or more unions already have a foothold. Worker-to-worker organizing in those industries, along the lines of the national corporations or chains, can use the stronger union presence in urban concentrations, much like socialist Teamster Farrell Dobbs approached organizing Midwestern truckers and dock workers in the 1930s. Dobbs and the Teamsters used truckers in the urban union stronghold of Minneapolis to "reach outward" to over-the-road truckers, warehouse workers, and local drivers in the Midwest.[63]

Today, this can mean using the urban base to reach out to the adjacent huge logistics clusters and manufacturing "out on the interstate," as well as local services. A routinely underused source of power in this regard is the large concentration of union members in the nation's most populous metropolitan areas. Once a year in some cities, union leaders and activists manage to gather thousands of union members for a symbolic parade on Labor Day — and usually that's it. Yet the Chicago metro area had more than 618,000 union members in 2014, Detroit still had 261,000 members, San Francisco – Oakland 259,000, and New York City's five boroughs 877,000, while in the New York–Northern New Jersey metro area there are 1.7 million, and so on.[64] If even a fraction of these union members can be recruited to worker-to-worker organizing in their area, to rebuild workplace

62 BLS, "Union Members—2015," press release, USDL-16-0158, Table 3; FMCS, *2014 Annual Report* Washington, DC: Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, 2014), 5.

63 Farrell Dobbs, *Teamster Power* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973), 145–55.

64 Barry T. Hirsch and David A. Macpherson, *Union Membership and Coverage from CPS*, 2014, www.unionstats.com; Ruth Milkman and Stephanie Luce, *The State of the Unions 2015: A Profile of Organized Labor in New York City, New York State, and the United States* (New York: Joseph S. Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies, 2015), 1.

organization — the "stewards' army"-*cum*-"militant minority," that is, the backbone of the labor movement — and mobilized as mass "street heat" to back up organizing, strikes, and other workplace actions, the conditions of the working class and their presence as a movement can make this part of the answer to gaping inequality and provide a visible alternative pole of attraction to right-wing "populism."

If this is to work, it cannot be yet another attempt at bureaucratic top-down "mobilization" that can be demobilized at the will of union officials. Leadership is important, but it must involve the activist layer, tomorrow's "militant minority," seeking coordination across union lines. A serious chicken-and-egg question remains as to whether today's level of organizing and resistance can break through the decades of bureaucratic inertia, or whether the unions must change to make these kinds of actions possible. Fortunately, there are thousands of union activists already attempting to change their unions into democratic organizations committed to strong workplace organization, member involvement, racial and gender inclusion, the rejection of labor-management cooperation in its many forms, and direct action when possible — in short, a rejection of the norms of bureaucratic business unionism.

To a greater extent than in the rank-and-file upsurge of the 1960s and 1970s, today's movements for change in the unions share these ideas and goals as something of a common program. This is a wave of rebellion that has taken hold among teachers, Teamsters, transit workers, nurses, telecommunications workers, public employees, machinists, and railroad workers, to mention a few. For the most part, these rank-and-file movements are more than mere electoral slates. Most began by fighting around the issues that affect their work and lives, only to discover that their incumbent leaders were incapable of waging such a fight. *Labor Notes* director Mark Brenner estimates that there are perhaps half a million or more union members in locals and national unions where the rebels have taken charge — with many more pushing at the doors. The activists that lead and fill the ranks of these movements are the potential material for the sort of "militant minority" that has always led change, growth, and confrontations with capital. More than two thousand activists from these rank-and-file movements, along with those from immigrants' rights groups, workers' centers, and other representatives

of "alt-labor," gathered in Chicago in April 2016 at the eighteenth biannual *Labor Notes* conference to exchange ideas, get inspiration, and perhaps create a shared identity.

The growth of labor organizations comes in waves or leaps in class struggle, not through gradual additions, as Silver, Haimson and Tilly, and Hobsbawm have shown. Hobsbawm rejects the commonly held idea that labor upsurges are correlated with capitalism's business cycles, and speaks of "leaps" and "explosions" in conflict and organization. In particular, he points to periods of labor intensification as providing the "compression" underlying such "leaps." While the causes of such upsurges are a matter of controversy among academics, there appear to be certain elements on which there is agreement on what underlies these waves of strikes and union growth. Among these are imbalances in class power, particularly when the powers that be, employers, the state, and so on refuse to recognize the legitimacy of the workers' grievances, on the one hand, and when "the leadership of established working-class organizations [have] proved increasingly incapable of organizing effectively these workers' patterns of collective action," on the other.[65]

The conditions faced by the US working class during the neoliberal period certainly amount to serious "compression," while capital and the state today routinely reject the legitimacy of workers' demands and most labor leaders seem incapable of organizing effective collective action. The point, of course is not to wait for an "explosion" we cannot predict, but to take advantage of today's conditions and the altered terrain of class conflict to hasten the day and magnify the power of the next upsurge.

"YE ARE MANY, THEY ARE FEW"

As in the past, capital has reshaped the wage-earning majority of society. If those who work in towering steel mills and multistory auto plants no longer characterize the majority of the core of this class, those who labor in the multistory warehouses, the huge concentrations that process and move the nation's goods, the giant health care complexes that reproduce

65 Beverly Silver, *Forces;* Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men,* 126–57; Leopold H. Haimson and Eric Brain, "Introduction," in *Strikes, Wars, and Revolutions in International Perspective*: *Strike Waves in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century,* ed. Leopold H. Haimson and Charles Tilly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 35–46.

labor, the "cities" of hotels around the nation's largest airports, the big-box retailers, the gangs that clean capital's growing fixed assets, the armies that move urban transit systems, the crews that still construct the nation's built environment, and scores of other concentrations of wage-earning labor, do — and do so in their millions. To fragment this class analytically into neologisms such as *precariat*, *salariat*, *gigsters*, etc., not only trivializes the transformations that have taken place but further disarms a working class already divided by race, gender, income, and more. A better understanding of recent class formation is called for — one that looks at fundamentals.

The central function of labor in a capitalist society to produce the value upon which the wealth of nations and capital itself are based. What made the old industrial proletariat powerful was not the specific products it produced but the wealth it created and the concentrated, oppressive conditions in which it labored. "It follows therefore that in proportion as capital accumulates, the situation of the worker, be his payment high or low, must grow worse," wrote Marx in *Capital*.[66] Unintentionally, to be sure, capital, domestic and foreign, has reproduced itself in the concentrated, oppressive image Marx outlined — even if the details are different.

While many have long seen globalization as a force of fragmentation, like many aspects of capitalism, it has generated the opposite. Under the pressure of intensified competition, capital has undone its clumsy conglomerate configuration and reorganized along older, familiar, more industrially rational lines, and in vastly larger concentrations of capital and labor that rival those even during its heyday a half-century ago. It has sought to annihilate the space created in extended supply chains by time in networks of tech-driven transportation and movement centered in huge agglomerations of labor. Despite its global reach, US capital, along with a good deal of international capital, has done this within North America as well as across the globe. As a result, to cripple a major "node" in this new configuration of capitalism is to halt the production of surplus value at home, across the continent, or over an ocean.

Closing down a multiunit production or distribution system by striking a key point in the supply chain isn't a new tactic. Even before the sit-down strikers at General Motors in Flint, Michigan, most famously used this

66 Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, 799.

approach in 1937, Chevrolet workers in 1935 closed many other GM plants by striking its Toledo transmission plant. Remember, too, the twenty or so strikes at GM plants in the mid-1990s, each of which closed plants in GM's JIT-linked US-Canada-Mexico system. Think of the more recent hiatus in oceanic trade, when far out into the Pacific Ocean "container ships lay stagnant in the water for ten days" and Boeing, Dell, Ford, and others felt a shortage of parts brought on by the slowdown and subsequent lockout of West Coast longshore workers in 2002.[67] Today, this type of power is vastly magnified. A strike by warehouse workers, truckers, rail workers, or even building cleaners can halt the creation of value far beyond the immediate site of initial action. Similar actions by those who labor in today's concentrated, interconnected sites of human reproduction can also disrupt "business-as-usual." The multiplication of such actions can cripple capital's relentless struggle against labor and alter political discourse — once workers and their organizations learn, or relearn, to deploy the tactic.

And then there are the numbers. There are the numbers concentrated in urban centers and logistics clusters, those positioned in supply chains "along the interstate" that run from factory to retailer to giant service centers in healthcare and daily provision, as well as the concentrated numbers linked by company technology and increasingly by their own use of social media — in short, the far greater numbers of people who make, move, and deliver the nation's goods and services. These are the millions, the vast majority, who can organize, strike, sit in, take to the streets, and even go to the polls in a new way. On February 16, 2017, tens of thousands of immigrant workers provided one example when they struck across the country on a "Day Without Immigrants" against Trump's anti-immigrant offensive, closing restaurants, constructions sites, warehouses, poultry plants, and other businesses.[68]

Today's weakness lies not in the new shape of the working class or the

67 Sol Dollinger and Genora Johnson Dollinger, *Not Automatic*: *Women and the Left in the Forging of the Auto Workers' Union* (New York: Monthly Review Press), 16–24, 129–42; Kim Moody, *Workers in a Lean World*: *Unions in the International Economy* (London: Verso, 1997), 30–31; Devin Kelly and Jon Agnone, "ILWU Contract Negotiations: The Confluence of Politics, Economic and Labor" (Seattle: Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies, 2009), 2–3; Cowen, *Deadly Life,* 115–16.

68 Dan DiMaggio and Sonia Singh, "Tens of Thousands Strike on Day without Immigrants," *Labor Notes,* February 23, 2017.

commodities it produces, but in its fragmented consciousness, ethnoracial divisions, and poor organization. These are problems to be addressed by self-activity, interaction, and deeper, broader, more inclusive organization. But the power is there — in both the greater numbers of today's actually existing working class and its strategic position at the heart of this highly integrated economy. Labor now fights on a new terrain that magnifies these sources of power.

SOUTH AFRICA'S ANC

The Beginning of the End?

SAM ASHMAN, ZACHARY LEVENSON & TREVOR NGWANE

Thuli Madonsela might be the most popular politician never to have been elected in South Africa.[1] After her work for unions and as an anti-apartheid activist in the 1980s, Nelson Mandela asked her to run for Parliament in the country's first democratic election in 1994. She declined. She played a key role in drafting the post-apartheid Constitution two years later and has continued to play an active role in legal reform since, but has never actually served as an elected official. Two decades after the democratic transition, she was again nominated to run for an African National Congress (ANC) position. Again she declined.

After Jacob Zuma was elected president in 2009, he appointed Madonsela to the Office of the Public Protector, where she was tasked with investigating corruption allegations by public administrators — Zuma included. When in 2014 she found[2] that he had "benefited unduly" from the use of 246 million

1 We wish to thank Robert Brenner, Vivek Chibber, and Niall Reddy for critical feedback that shaped the writing of this article.

2 The full results of the Public Protector's investigation were published in a report on the office's website under the title "Secure in Comfort" (http://www.pprotect.org/library/investigation_report/2013-14/Final%20Report%2019%20March%202014%20.pdf). A subsequent report called

rand (about US $23 million at the time) in taxpayer money for home renovations in the name of security, she was attacked by national ANC leaders.

Through these revelations of corruption, she became something of a hero for the left wing of the ANC and its aligned unions in the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). After the textbook neoliberalism of Thabo Mbeki, there was a feeling in many quarters of the South African Left that COSATU and South African Communist Party (SACP) backing for Zuma, his archrival and former deputy president, would initiate a war of position to reclaim the soul of the ANC. The better part of a decade later, the left wing of COSATU finds itself on the opposite end of the spectrum from Zuma's camp. This is the problem with empty coalitional politics articulated to populist leadership: it has no necessary direction beyond criticism of the status quo. The king may be dead, but the coalition throws its weight behind a new king, then acts stunned when he invariably refuses to respond to its demands.

As the populist coalition behind Zuma begins to unravel, a desperate search for left alternatives to the flailing ANC has begun. Three major options have emerged. First and foremost, the expulsion of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) from COSATU has allowed it the freedom to constitute its self-proclaimed United Front (UF) as a viable alternative to the capitulatory rule of the Tripartite Alliance (ANC, COSATU, and SACP). Yet, as we argue here, the UF's misguided organizational strategies have reduced it to a public-relations organ without roots in shop stewards' networks, let alone the township-based organizations that were at the heart of the freedom struggle in the 1980s.

Second, there is South Africa's fastest growing party, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), launched in 2013, which purports to blend some version of Marxism-Leninism with the thought of Frantz Fanon. The EFF was largely the brainchild of charismatic former ANC Youth League leader Julius Malema. In an ironic use of post-apartheid hate-speech restrictions, Malema was convicted of publicly singing the old anti-apartheid song "Kill the Boer" (a reference to the Afrikaans word for "farmer" serving as a synecdoche for all whites). At the same time, Malema faced allegations that he had accepted multiple cars, diamond-encrusted watches, and even a mansion in Limpopo

"State of Capture" (http://www.pprotect.org/library/ investigation_report/ 2016-17/State_Capture_14October2016.pdf) illustrates the clientelistic nature of the post-apartheid state over more than 350 pages. Most significantly, it reveals the extent to which the entire ANC party apparatus is both implicated in this arrangement and incapable of challenging the increasing centralization of state power.

during his time in office. Malema approvingly cites Robert Mugabe's program of militant land reform, but one of his first recruits to his upstart EFF party was businessman Kenny Kunene, known as the "Sushi King" for hosting parties in which guests eat sushi off the bodies of naked women.

The EFF's repeated references to Fanon and Mugabe and donning red berets (inspired by Hugo Chávez and Thomas Sankara) as its chief symbol brought in militant black nationalist groups, but it likewise drew in businesspeople and celebrity gangsters. Unable to make sense of this populist alliance, constant EFF references to party control over tenders distribution led critics on both the Right and Left to label Malema a "fascist." In this article, we resolutely reject this characterization. Malema is more accurately described as a populist whose base is in the emergent black petit-bourgeoisie and the unemployed proletariat. The EFF's populism is remarkably successful, with deep roots in townships across the country. Whereas NUMSA's United Front has limited organization at what we might call the point of reproduction, it is in the townships that the EFF flourishes. It is currently the third-largest party in Parliament.

Third, in addition to the UF and EFF, a mass student movement has emerged on most South African campuses over the past two years, described in shorthand as #FeesMustFall. In some cases this has even pitted radical leaders of the ANC–affiliated groups South African Students Congress (SASCO) and the Progressive Youth Alliance against their elected ANC leaders. But the hashtag moniker is deceptive, representing these movements as solely concerned with battling austerity. In fact, a major rallying cry of the student movement has been for the decolonization of higher education in South Africa. Race-versus-class debates on the student Left have resurfaced on a scale not seen since the early 1980s, and the movement has fractured into a handful of seemingly irreconcilable tendencies.

These emergent left forces are operating in a political context shaped by a rapid and very deep decline of the ANC's hegemony. Even ten years ago, it seemed as if the ANC might remain unchallenged for the foreseeable future. But today the government of President Jacob Zuma is synonymous with the crony capitalism at the heart of the state — and therefore at the heart of the ANC. Yet, even while local elections in August 2016 saw the ANC suffer significant setbacks, this has not been a boon for the Left or even the working class. Instead, the conservative Democratic Alliance (DA) has emerged

as the main opposition to the ruling party, increasing its share of votes from less than 2 percent in the 1994 national elections to more than 22 percent in 2014. While the ANC has rapidly morphed into a neoliberal party, the DA can lay claim to being the most authentically market-oriented party in the country, with the strongest ties to the traditional ruling class. The ANC runs on a market-oriented platform and implements neoliberal policies, to be sure, but it has also overseen the expansion of a peculiar configuration of state and capital, not to mention the consistent augmentation of the welfare apparatus, from social grant distribution to housing provision. The DA, meanwhile, is far closer to traditional understandings of neoliberalism, though it also supports some version of the ANC's social grants. On this platform, the DA won Cape Town from the ANC in 2006. More recently, in the August 2016 municipal elections, it did well in or won Johannesburg, Tshwane (Pretoria), and Nelson Mandela Bay (Port Elizabeth), meaning it now governs four of the six largest municipalities in South Africa. This is the organization that seems best positioned to step in as the ruling party's luster wanes. In what follows, we examine the dynamics of the post-liberation political economy to understand the component elements of the ANC's spiraling crisis, as well as the Left's inability to capitalize on this opening.

THE ECONOMY CHANGED BUT UNTRANSFORMED

The roots of the ANC's political crisis lie in its failure to address the massive regional and racial divisions that persist a full generation after liberation. South African income inequality, as measured by the Gini coefficient, is the highest in the world. While money continues to flow into the pockets of the wealthy, the official unemployment rate remains well above 25 percent, with the real rate much higher. Many of those who are formally employed do not receive a living wage, and their labor is increasingly subcontracted, casualized, and precarious.

There have certainly been considerable changes in the class structure, most notably the emergence of a sizable black bourgeoisie and the substantial expansion of black middle classes. At the same time, however, household debt continues to grow, a product of the widespread availability of credit and debt-driven, consumption-led growth. This is also fueled by the low wages of

those who are actually employed. The unemployed — some 40 percent of the population in real terms — remain dependent upon income transfers from the employed. The consequence is that in addition to facing low pay and high levels of debt, workers are saddled with pressure to support many others. Far from tackling these problems head-on, the ANC has in fact exacerbated them. Indeed, through its program of deregulation, liberalization of capital controls, and labor flexibilization, the government has managed to deepen the economic patterns that characterized apartheid.

Capitalism in South Africa is often described as organized around a minerals-energy complex[3] (MEC). The economy was fundamentally transformed by the discovery of minerals in the 1870s. Six powerful mining houses established a migrant-labor system in which workers drawn from across Southern Africa spent long periods in the mines and were housed in adjacent compounds. While workers often moved to the mines from rural villages, they retained ties to these rural homesteads. By sending food, clothes, and other supplies, unpaid women in these labor-sending areas essentially subsidized the wages of workers, cheapening the cost for the big mining houses.

English-speaking interests dominated the powerful mining-finance houses that developed. Mining industry needs were supplemented by state policy, particularly the provision of a cheap supply of coal-generated electricity for the mines provided by state utility Eskom (established in 1923). Today Eskom remains the largest producer of electricity in Africa. The state-owned Iron and Steel Corporation (ISCOR), formed in 1928, processed South African iron ore with the aim of providing cheap steel for industrial development. White workers at ISCOR were highly trained and received subsidized housing, generous pensions, and health insurance. Black workers, meanwhile, were accommodated in cramped and dirty hostels adjacent to the plants. They were separated from their families and so repeated the patterns of the mining migrant-labor system. ISCOR was privatized in 1980 and became part of ArcelorMittal, the world's largest steel producer. SASOL, formed in 1950, pioneered the production of liquid fuels — oil and gas — from coal and was privatized in 1979. It remains a major energy and chemical company.

This MEC trajectory produced an economy dominated by a tightly knit group of capital-intensive, heavy industries with highly concentrated ownership. English and Afrikaner capital slowly merged to form powerful

3 Ben Fine and Zavareh Rustomjee, *The Political Economy of South Africa: From Minerals-Energy Complex to Industrialization* (Boulder: Westview, 1996).

conglomerates rooted in the mining-finance houses. These subsequently diversified into more broad-based industries. By the 1980s, they essentially controlled the entire South African economy, uniting mining, finance, and manufacturing interests.

When the ANC came into power in 1994, it inherited stewardship of the MEC-centered economy. The dismantling of white minority rule and the introduction of adult suffrage was, of course, an enormous victory for the liberation movement and all those who had supported it. There was widespread hope and expectation of positive change for the majority. The ANC had promised the sort of program for change elaborated in the Freedom Charter, which had demanded that the people shall govern, that they shall share in the country's wealth, that the land shall be shared among those who work it, and so on. Even if the ANC inherited the skewed pattern of economic development outlined above, much of the electorate assumed that the MEC could be restructured to support a more developmental and redistributive model of capitalism, certainly one that would generate greater employment for the majority. But instead of implementing the Freedom Charter, the ANC abandoned any semblance of social-democratic politics. Within two years of its assumption of power, there was an extraordinary volte-face with the ruthless and abrupt imposition of the Growth, Equity, and Redistribution (GEAR) program. Even the early policy programs contained in the ANC-funded Macroeconomic Research Group (MERG) Report and its first major policy platform, the broadly social-democratic Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP), were abandoned with the turn to GEAR.

Its proponents represented GEAR as in the tradition of the RDP and promised a competitive, rapidly expanding economy that would create sufficient employment for all job seekers; the progressive redistribution of income and opportunities in favor of the poor; a social system in which sound health care, education, and other services would be available to all; and an environment in which homes would be secure and workplaces would be productive. In reality, however, GEAR was the ANC falling in line with the Washington Consensus, and it contained ideal-typical neoliberal policy recommendations including deficit reduction, accelerated tariff reduction, wage moderation, labor-market flexibilization, tax reforms aimed at "international competitiveness" and "minimizing the distorting effects of taxation on economic behavior," trade and industrial policies to promote an industrial economy "fully responsive to

market trends and opportunities," and a program of "asset restructuring" for state-owned enterprises. If any government in the world had an opportunity to reject the neoliberal norm, given both the abhorrent history of apartheid and the global stature of Nelson Mandela, it was the newly elected ANC government. But the ANC capitulated before it even assumed office. Disarticulating itself from the popular movements that had propelled it into office, it actively worked to demobilize these movements, bolting instead into the cold embrace of capital. It is hard not to be reminded of the words of union leader Joe Foster, in a celebrated "workerist" speech in 1982: "Political movements are often controlled by the 'petty bourgeoisie' who fear genuine worker-controlled trade unions. They strive to dissolve worker-controlled movements into a mass political movement dominated not by workers, but by the petty bourgeoisie. According to them, the workers are only useful as a kind of battering ram they themselves seek to lead."[4] And this is precisely what happened with the rise of the ANC.

The political settlement of 1994 had already protected white capital, despite the more radical demands of large parts of the anti-apartheid movement. GEAR then presided over and facilitated the dramatic restructuring of the white corporate world, but not in the manner so many had envisaged. Instead, the ANC has overseen the structural transformation of the corporate sector, aiding it in its moves to streamline its operations rather than bringing it to heel, and rejecting nationalization out of hand. Since 1996, the ANC has reduced capital and exchange controls and allowed conglomerates to move their primary listings abroad, which they have combined with intensive unbundling at home. This has involved selling some of their less productive assets to the aspirant black bourgeoisie, who were regarded by many as a buffer against popular attacks on capital.[5] The foreign listings and unbundling of the big productive capitals have meant a domestic focus on their productive mining core and an emphasis on internationalizing and financializing their operations.

As the financialization of the economy has intensified, this unbundling has led to the simultaneous emergence of distinctively financial corporate groupings with an increasing amount of domestic power. As big capital has

4 Joe Foster, "The Worker's Struggle: Where Does FOSATU Stand?" Speech to Second COSATU Congress, Hammanskraal, South Africa, April 10, 1982, www.abahlali.org/taxonomy/term/joe-foster/joe-foster.

5 Sam Ashman and Ben Fine, "The Meaning of Marikana," *Global Labour Column* (2013): 128.

internationalized and financialized, it has systematically offshored much of its surplus — partly to finance international operations, partly as a means of protection should radical demands emerge from the former anti-apartheid movement. This offshoring has taken place through both legal and illegal means, including widespread transfer pricing and tax evasion. Meanwhile, the demands of "shareholder value" have seen large payouts to overseas investors, facilitated by dual listings or primary listings abroad, particularly during the years of the commodity boom. As this transpired, greater mineral beneficiation, increasing rewards to labor, and general economic diversification were left unaddressed.

Tables 1 and 2 show the historic importance of the mining and finance houses to the South African economy, as well as their relative decline. Table 2 shows that from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, the five largest conglomerate groupings controlled more than 80 percent of the capitalization of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE). Four of these five are mining and finance groups. By the 2000s, these top five controlled 64 percent of capitalization on the JSE, but five years later this had declined to just over 35 percent. By 2010 it had fallen further to 26 percent, and two years later fell another 4 percent (Table 1). A large share of this "decline" is attributable to the substantial corporate restructuring tied to GEAR, as well as to the increased internationalization of the largest South African corporations. Four of the companies that were in the top five (in terms of market capitalization on the JSE) have moved their primary listings abroad, or else decided to list jointly in South Africa and elsewhere.

Yet control of these groups had not changed as much as the drop in their share of market capitalization implies. Economists Neo Chabane, Andrea Goldstein, and Simon Roberts find, "In the top 10 companies in 2002, only three — SASOL, originally a state-owned enterprise, and two foreign-controlled firms created by conglomerate restructuring (Billiton and South African Breweries, SAB) — were independent of the main conglomerates. Although listed separately, three of the top 10 (Anglo-American, Angloplat, and Anglogold) are still effectively part of the Anglo group. The other top ten firms — Richemont, Old Mutual, Goldfields, and Impalaplats — are all tied into conglomerate holding structures."[6]

6 Neo Chabane, Andrea Goldstein and Simon Roberts, "The Changing Face and Strategies of Big Business in South Africa: More than a Decade of Political Democracy," *Industrial and Corporate Change* 15, No. 3 (2006):549-577.

Table 1 also shows that the percentage of foreign control of the JSE has increased from 1.9 percent in 1991 to 10.1 percent in 2002 and to 30 percent in 2012 (having peaked at 33 percent in 2009). There have certainly been some acquisitions of local companies by foreign firms, but most of the change in foreign ownership is the result of the change in the structure of South African firms now listed overseas. Increased speculative short-term foreign-portfolio investment inflows also contributed to the growing levels of foreign institutional ownership. As a result, South African listed corporations are subject to both the volatility associated with shifting global portfolio capital flows and the demands for greater payouts to shareholders.

TABLE 1: **SUMMARY OF CONTROL OF JSE MARKET CAPITALIZATION**

% of total

	2012	2011	2010	2009	2007	2005	2000	1995	1991
FOREIGN	30	29.8	27.9	33.1	20.7	14.2	3.9	4.1	1.9
INSTITUTIONS	19.4	17	17.6	14.4	12.6	13.7	6.7	1.7	4.9
DIRECTORS	9.2	8.9	8.3	7.7	9.4	8.2	8.9	11.4	5.4
SABMILLER	9.2	7.5	6.5	5.9	5.5	4.9	2.8		
ANGLO-AMERICAN CORP	8.9	11.8	13	10.6	20.8	17.3	23.6	37.1	42.4
REMBRANDT	7.2	5.2	5.1	3.8	6.7	7.8	11	7.8	15.2
BLACK GROUPS	3.9	4.6	5.4	7	5.5	5.8	5.7		
RMB/FIRSTRAND	3.9	3.1	2.8	2.5	3.1	5	2.9	1	
SAMUTUAL	3.3	2.9	2.8	2.8	4	4.5	11	11.2	10.4
SANLAM	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.6	13.2	12.7	13.2
LIBERTYLIFE / STANDARDBANK	1.1	2.4	3.9	4.3	3.4	4.3	5.2	7.3	3.7
BIDVESTGROUP	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.9	1.1	1		
INVESTEC	0.7	0.6	0.8	0.8	0.9	1	1.9	0.9	
PSG	0.6								
STATE	0.1	0.2	0.3	1.5	1.8	2.5			
ALTECH	0.1	0.1							
ABSA						2.5			
SASOL	3.9	3.5	4.6	3.5	4.6	4.2	2.6	1.7	
ANGLOVAAL							0.7	2.9	2.9
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

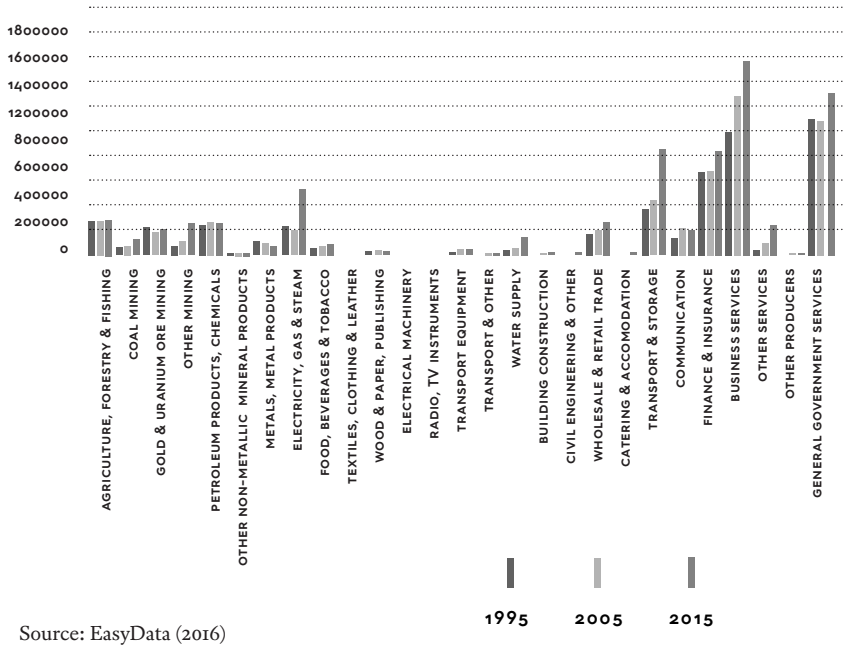
Source: *Who Owns Whom* from Ashman, Newman, and Mohamed (2013)

TABLE 2: **THE HISTORIC "TOP FIVE" CONTROL OF THE JSE**

	2012	2011	2010	2009	2007	2005	2000	1995	1991
FOREIGN	30	29.8	27.9	33.1	20.7	14.2	3.9	4.1	1.9
ANGLO-AMERICAN CORP	8.9	11.8	13	10.6	20.8	17.3	23.6	37.1	42.4
REMBRANDT	7.2	5.2	5.1	3.8	6.7	7.8	11	7.8	15.2
SA MUTUAL	3.3	2.9	2.8	2.8	4	4.5	11	11.2	10.4
SANLAM	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.6	13.2	12.7	13.2
LIBERTYLIFE / STANDARD BANK	1.1	2.4	3.9	4.3	3.4	4.3	5.2	7.3	3.7
TOP FIVE GROUPS COLLECTIVELY	21.9	23.5	26	22.7	36.1	35.5	64	76.1	84.9

Source: *Who Owns Whom* from Ashman, Newman, and Mohamed (2013)

FIGURE 1: **DISTRIBUTION OF CAPITAL STOCK ACROSS SECTORS IN SOUTH AFRICA IN 1995, 2005, AND 2015**



Source: EasyData (2016)

Nationally, much of South African manufacturing remains tied to the capital-intensive MEC core of the economy, with manufacturing outside the MEC core relatively weak. This is demonstrated in Figure 1, which shows capital stock across the different sectors for 1995, 2005, and 2015. Figure 1 also shows the significance of finance, business services, and government services, with the latter driving job creation since the financial crisis, as we discuss in the following section. While there have certainly been important changes in the economy since 1994, including the expansion of the retail and telecommunications sectors, the ANC has not seized the opportunity to diversify. Macroeconomic policy, now firmly neoliberal, has facilitated the restructuring of large South African corporates and the offshoring of surplus as described above, despite its harmful impact on both investment and employment. Indeed, capital flight and the offshoring of surplus must be understood as components of corporate profitability strategy since the defeat of apartheid, and therefore as weapons in the class struggle from above.

Despite extensive changes in corporate ownership, the post-apartheid economy remains highly concentrated. The apartheid-era state-owned enterprises tell a story in themselves. Steel, currently in crisis, has — under ArcelorMittal — hit downstream industry hard by charging import parity prices and so abandoning the apartheid-era policy of cheap steel for industry. But at the same time, ArcelorMittal continues to use revenue from South Africa to subsidize its global operations. SASOL, privatized, as we saw above, was fined by the Competition Commission for charging excessive prices for plastic inputs into basic manufactured goods. The apartheid-era state-owned enterprises have grown up to be abusive private monopolies! Likewise, a 2007 energy crisis that resulted in rolling blackouts revealed how Eskom, under the threat of ANC privatization, had been completely unable to plan energy provision. Trade liberalization, which the ANC embraced, also hit much domestic manufacturing, resulting in the deindustrialization of important employment-generating sectors.

If the ANC has reinforced the contradictions of the apartheid period, the international situation is only intensifying them. Most significantly, the crash in global commodity prices has produced a deep crisis for mining, as well as for the stronger sections of manufacturing. This is because much of the demand

for metals and metal-fabricated products comes from mining. This collapse has seen further restructuring and mass layoffs by the mining houses. Steel is similarly in crisis, a direct result of China's "repositioning." As China's capacity utilization has dropped, there has been heavy dumping in world markets. Highveld Steel in South Africa's coal belt closed in 2016 as a result, with only a whimper of opposition, and the state has been left desperately trying to save the industry from complete collapse.

And so one flawed model has replaced another. The classic state-directed MEC that benefited capital and white workers has been succeeded by the financialized MEC: dominated by internationalized private corporations, disciplined by international capital markets, and exerting tremendous power over the state. As we demonstrate in the following section, this project of restructuring the MEC has also extended to organized labor, with the taming of the previously militant labor confederation. The ANC's alliance with capital meant overseeing the restructuring and streamlining of the conglomerate grouping that had dominated the economy under apartheid, as well as trying to change the color of capital without scaring off its older fractions. Central to this project was facilitating the rise of a black bourgeoisie and a new layer of black professionals and business owners for whom the ANC and the SACP have been veritable launching pads, giving rise to increasing levels of corruption.

Many members of this nascent black elite, particularly state managers and the corporate bourgeoisie, have benefited substantially from ANC policies, not to mention from their proximity to the party and the state. Indeed, as sociologist Roger Southall argues, ANC policies have promoted the development of a black middle class that is "centred on an increasingly powerful 'party-state bourgeoisie.'"[7] The party has achieved this through a number of policy innovations. Foremost among these are Black Economic Empowerment — a tokenistic form of affirmative action — and cadre deployment, in which ANC affiliates fill key state positions at both provincial and national levels. The latter quickly became a source of cronyism (and thus factionalism) inside the ANC and led to the promotion of unqualified party members. Despite official recognition of limits of this patronage system, the ANC continues the practice.

7 Roger Southall, "The ANC: Party Vanguard of the Black Middle Class?" in *One Hundred Years of the ANC: Debating Liberation Histories Today*, edited by Arianna Lissoni, Jon Soske, Natasha Erlank, Noor Nieftagodien and Omar Badsha (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2012), 325–46.

In addition, the restructuring of both public services and public institutions via employment equity has also functioned to bolster the growth of a black bourgeoisie. Under apartheid, the public sector was predominantly staffed by whites, especially at the higher levels. Since 1994, the ANC has, quite rightly, abolished the separate administrations that existed in apartheid's "homelands" and sought to make the public sector more closely reflect the racial demographics of the country. More specifically, it established targets for the number of black and female employees in management. But given the clientelistic tendencies of ANC rule, with the party effectively running a party-state, this has yielded a small number of "tenderpreneurs" and others who have managed to accumulate high incomes and "rents" through the appropriation of state contracts and resources, which are then in turn distributed to friends and family.

The nepotistic way this project of black embourgeoisement has been executed is at the root of the recent spate of allegations of corruption at high-level state-owned enterprises and public institutions. Large numbers of public officials facing corruption charges can avoid them by getting redeployed by the party elsewhere in the country. These features are now integral to the ANC's clientelistic model of accumulation, encouraging many erstwhile critics of the ANC's naked neoliberalism to pine nostalgically for free markets devoid of corruption, with even elements of the Left defending the Treasury as a bastion of moral purity. Yet even the Treasury has not proved immune, with Zuma facing official allegations from the Public Protector's office that he engaged in a project of "state capture." These charges arose when he effectively allowed members of the billionaire Gupta family, his close allies in the private sector, to make Treasury appointments against all prevailing wisdom. While Zuma is frequently represented as a uniquely corrupt figure, these sorts of arrangements are likely to continue under his successor, as they are effectively built into the party-state system of patronage and are closely linked to different economic interests.

In all of this, labor is to be managed rather than brought on as a partner. Designs for any kind of cooperative arrangement between labor and capital have long been shelved. The corporate restructuring described in this section has yielded the massive fragmentation of the working class, not least through outsourcing, as well as wage depression, increasingly brutal workplace regimes, and skyrocketing levels of unemployment. Where does this trajec-

tory leave the working class politically? In the following sections, we provide the lay of the land, describing what we argue are two major phases of post-Marikana radicalization. Despite a political economy that is hardly favorable to struggles of workers and the poor, a number of conjunctural possibilities have emerged. The roughly contemporaneous emergence of NUMSA's United Front and Malema's EFF comprised the first phase, following waves of wildcats across the platinum belt and Western Cape farmlands. As this began to peter out, a second phase emerged, this time led by student-worker coalitions on university campuses across the country.

STATE OF STRUGGLE

This is, then, where the working class finds itself after two decades of failed transformations and the erosion of ANC hegemony without any substantial left alternative. If much of this class once viewed the ANC as the party of its own liberation, it is increasingly having to struggle against it. This struggle is particularly notable in light of a weak response by traditional labor organizations; in some cases, workers have even contested the purported leadership of these organizations in defense of their own interests. It is in this context that we must understand historic developments such as the wildcat waves following the Marikana massacre, the formation of the EFF, NUMSA's United Front, and the rise of a militant university student movement in universities across the country. These milestones, it is important to note, have occurred against a backdrop of rising community protests, as well as strikes and demonstrations by formally employed workers.

We begin with the weakness of organized labor. One major source of its frailty has been outsourcing, which has transformed the public sector into a funnel channeling public money into the pockets of the private sector. Its major consequences for workers have been layoffs, wage cuts, and erosion of benefits. By allowing workers in one workplace to be employed by different bosses and be recruited into different unions, outsourcing has undermined shop-floor organization and limited workers' legal ability to strike. It has likewise pitted formally employed workers against contract employees. For example, outsourced custodial workers typically earn less than half of the wages of their permanently employed counterparts.[8]

8 Department of Labour, "Sectoral Determination 1: Contract Cleaning Sector, South Africa," 2016, http://www.labour.gov.za/DOL/downloads/legislation/sectoral-determinations/

The outsourcing of cleaning, security, and other so-called "non-core functions" started in 1998 in universities and subsequently made its way to the public sector more generally. This was part of a larger state project of neoliberal restructuring tied to the ANC's GEAR program.[9] COSATU's tame response to this frontal assault on organized labor suggests that its formal alliance with the ANC and SACP — the Tripartite Alliance — rendered it toothless. In 1994, the ANC's social-democratic Reconstruction and Development Program was the condition for COSATU's electoral support for the ANC in the first elections. Even after this program was abandoned in favor of GEAR two years later, COSATU leaders were reluctant to challenge their alliance partner. Rather than mobilizing member unions and other social forces against this ANC-led assault on organized labor, COSATU adopted a policy formally barring its affiliates from working with groups deemed hostile to the Tripartite Alliance.[10]

This is not to say that COSATU simply capitulated. The union confederation did call a handful of general strikes against GEAR, but it did so in the form of annual one-day actions with advance notice to employers, effectively reducing these strikes to symbolic protests. Even more, they refused a programmatic opposition to privatization, opting instead for a "case-by-case" approach.

Thus, as Devan Pillay notes, COSATU politics became "enmeshed in institutionalized forms of corporatist decision-making at industry, regional and national levels."[11] The federation's drift toward business unionism means that it has increasingly come to reach routinized agreements sanctioned by the national bargaining councils and mired in proceduralism and legalism. This approach stands in stark contrast to its militancy during the 1980s when Black unions had just been legalized by the state: then its strategy was based

basic-conditions-of-employment/contractcleaningwages2015.pdf (accessed February 21, 2017); Department of Labour, "Private Security Sector Minimum Wages," http://www.labour.gov.za/DOL/downloads/legislation/sectoral-determinations/basic-conditions-of-employment/privatesec2016.pdf (accessed February 21, 2017).

9 Jonathan Grossman, "Renewed Organizing in the Outsourced Public Sector Workplace: The Experience of the Workers Forum at the University of Cape Town in the Struggle for Worker Unity, Organization and Mobilization," paper delivered at ILRIG seminar, Cape Town, March 2009, 2.

10 Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), "On Emerging Social Movements," Resolution No. 3, Resolutions of the 8th National Congress, Johannesburg, 2003; Devan Pillay, "Cosatu and the Alliance: Falling Apart at the Seams," in *COSATU in Crisis: The Fragmentation of an African Trade Union Federation*, edited by Vishwas Satgar and Roger Southall (Johannesburg: KMM Publishers, 2015), 119.

11 Pillay, "Cosatu and the Alliance,"

on a clear identification of the class enemy and committed to dismantling the apartheid system. In this period, workers closely associated the racist oppression of the apartheid state with capitalism more broadly.

After apartheid, however, this conceptualization of politics was abandoned. Workers began to view the state as acting on their behalf, most notably in the case of the 1995 Labor Relations Act. Often represented as a victory for South African workers, the Act has been used by municipalities and the national government to prevent strikes and contain worker militancy. Elaborate and tedious procedures must be followed before a strike certificate can be issued, which would allow workers to go on protected strikes. It also gives legislative cover to outsourcing and allows for appallingly insufficient "minimum wages" to be set by national bargaining councils and ministerial wage determinations. In practice, however, these minimums are treated as maximums; bosses can pay starvation wages and claim to have complied with the law.[12] The national government's new proposal for setting a national minimum wage illustrates this, with 50 percent of workers found to earn less than the suggested 3,500 rand per month for a forty-hour week, or twenty rand per hour.[13] Furthermore, COSATU and its affiliated leadership have habitually reached policing agreements with bosses. These ensure that workers comply, limiting internal union democracy by threatening to expel dissenters.

This double-edged sword of "worker-friendly" legislation and the accommodationist politics of union leadership have together rendered South Africa workers toothless in the face of major attacks on their living standards and organizations. Even when workers have defied leadership to challenge the ANC, the 1993 Regulation of Gatherings Act has been used to deny them their right to protest.[14] Where union leaders have been willing, workers have managed to organize major strikes despite these legal restrictions. There have been powerful protected strikes, such as the 2007 and 2010 public-sector strikes and the five-month 2014 platinum-sector strike — the longest in South African history. As early as 2005, workers, supported by students, scored a

12 Grossman, "Renewed Organizing," 4.

13 Cyril Ramaphosa, "Statement by Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa on the finalisation of agreements on labour stability and a National Minimum Wage," speech delivered February 8, 2017, http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/speeches/statement-deputy-president-cyril-ramaphosa-finalisation-agreements-labour-stability-and (accessed February 21, 2017).

14 Jane Duncan, *The Rise of the Securocrats: The Case of South Africa* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2015).

victory against outsourcing at the University of Cape Town (UCT) through consistent localized organizing inspired by a working-class politics of challenge and mobilization. UCT was pressured to adopt a code that required contract companies to pay workers substantially above the industry minimum wage.[15] It is also noteworthy that police statistics have described most of the thousands of community and labor protests in South Africa "peaceful" and "orderly."[16] Increasingly, however, workers have had to break out of their legal chains and take action without following procedures.

This frustration with the labor-relations system broke into the open in late 2012 in a strike at the Lonmin platinum mine in Marikana, not far from Rustenburg. The state responded to the strike with naked repression, which reached its peak with the shooting of thirty-four striking miners by police on August 16, 2012. The strike was one of many across the platinum belt, which, in line with the high levels of capital concentration described in the previous section, is primarily controlled by the mining houses Anglo-American, Impala, and Lonmin. In February 2012, workers at Impala Platinum (Implats) had downed their tools and demanded a wage increase for all workers. This demand came from a grievance filed by rock-drill operators, who are key to the mining process but among the lowest-paid workers in the sector.[17] Six months later, Lonmin workers struck, and the following month workers went on strike at Anglo-American Platinum (Amplats).

Significantly, all of these strikes were organized by workers' committees and waged against the advice of the leadership of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). Miners found this union, a loyal pillar of the Tripartite Alliance, too timid and legalistic to support their struggle for a living wage. Indeed, many union leaders were actively opposed to the strikes, actually trying to mobilize workers against it by pointing to the need to respect the wage agreement then still in force. Miners were dissatisfied with their call to wait for the next round of formal negotiations, and they certainly weren't enthusiastic at the prospect of waiting through the legal process of applying for a strike certificate. Lonmin workers demanded a monthly wage of 12,500

15 Grossman, "Renewed Organizing," 3.

16 Peter Alexander, Carin Runciman, and Boitumelo Maruping, "South African Police Service Data on Crowd Incidents: A Preliminary Analysis" (Johannesburg: South African Research Chair in Social Change, University of Johannesburg, 2015), http://africacheck.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/South-African-Police-Service-Data-on-Crowd-Incidents-Report.pdf (accessed December 4, 2016).

17 Luke Sinwell and Siphiwe Mbatha, *The Spirit of Marikana: The Rise of Insurgent Trade Unionism in South Africa* (London: Pluto, 2016), 29.

rand (US $1,250), which represented a three-to four-fold increase in their income at the time. The demand was not based on "reality" or what the bosses could afford, as was normal practice; rather, it was based on workers' needs. The same thing happened at Amplats, where miners demanded 16,050 rand per month.

However, at Lonmin, the bosses proved stubborn. Cyril Ramaphosa, founding secretary general of NUM and now a billionaire mining magnate and deputy president of the ANC, used his position to agitate for a harsher government response to the strike. It was his intervention, among other factors, that resulted in the massacre of thirty-four workers by police. Remarkably, the deaths of their comrades did not deter strikers, who continued with their action for three weeks before the bosses relented and granted wage increases of 22 percent for certain categories of workers. In 2014, roughly 70,000 workers at all three platinum companies united behind the demand of 12,500 rand in the name of the dead, launching a bitter strike that lasted five months.

Thus the Marikana massacre unleashed a protracted strike wave across the platinum, gold, coal, and diamond mines across South Africa. Strikes soon spread to other sectors of the economy, with workers taking inspiration from the defiant spirit of the Marikana strikers. This "Spirit of Marikana" then continued to radiate outward, spreading beyond organized labor into working-class communities across the country. In several cases, people in need of homes participated in mass land occupations in which they named their new settlements "Marikana."[18]

This spirit of defiance was also discernible in the 2012 farmworkers' strike in the Western Cape. As in the platinum belt, these were unprotected strikes, with the workers demanding wage increases based on their immediate needs. After five months of struggle, they won a 52 percent increase in the official minimum wage. This spirit likewise permeated the campuses. In 2015, university students and workers poured into the streets without applying for permission to march or strike, demanding a moratorium on university tuition fee hikes and an end to labor outsourcing. At campuses across the country, students were successfully able to block the fee hike and university administrations were forced to cancel outsourcing plans. Workers are now being

18 Trevor Ngwane, "Against All Odds: The 'Spirit of Marikana' and the Resurgence of the Working-Class Movement in South Africa," paper presented at the Twentieth International Conference on Alternative Futures and Popular Protest, Manchester Metropolitan University, March 30–April 1, 2015.

insourced on most South African campuses. What is most significant about each of these seemingly disparate struggles is that success only came when the law was willfully ignored and disruption — wildcats, blockades, campus shutdowns, etc. — was the tactic of choice. This militancy by ordinary workers and students opened up a world of possibility.

In this respect, the Marikana massacre represented a turning point in the unfolding class struggle in South Africa. Rising determination and defiance served to counter the fragmentation, demoralization, and despair. This spirit pervades struggles at both the points of production and reproduction. In the case of the latter, community protests are increasing and becoming increasingly disruptive and violent.[19]

PHASE ONE: NUMSA AND THE EFF

It was in this context of an increasingly resolute working class that we saw the emergence of both "the NUMSA moment" and the EFF. In the case of the former, NUMSA — the largest union in South Africa, with more than 338,000 members — formally broke with the Tripartite Alliance at its Special National Congress in December 2013. Rank-and-file members and their stewards voted against continued political support for the ANC and resolved to form a working-class party rooted in socialist politics. During the course of this congress, workers raised more than a hundred thousand rand for the widows of miners murdered at Marikana, in part to recognize the event's deep imprint on the working-class movement.

In a roughly contemporaneous break with the ANC, Youth League president Julius Malema was expelled from both the ANC Youth League and the party more broadly. He immediately resolved to form a new political party, officially launching the EFF on the site of the Marikana massacre on October 13, 2013. This fledgling party argued that black South Africans had won political power but that economic power remained concentrated in white hands. Without the nationalization of land, mines, factories, and farms, they maintained, black people would never be liberated from economic want and hyperexploitation. The EFF attracted a wide variety of supporters, from disgruntled ANC youth to former Black Consciousness and Pan-Africanist Congress militants, social-movement activists to local community organiz-

19 Alexander, Runciman, and Maruping, *South African Police Service Data (University of Johannesburg: South African Research Chair in Social Change, 2015).*

ers. Malema insisted that this was a party of the Left, and it quickly adopted Marxism-Leninism-Fanonism as its platform and declared socialism its goal.[20] Their strategy would be to topple the ANC at the ballot box and to gain a mass following by organizing protest marches, land occupations, and other militant actions.

Both the EFF and NUMSA tapped into the radicalizing mood of workers and youth. But how has each fared in relation to leadership, organization, and support base? The EFF appears to have bested NUMSA in this respect. In 2014, at barely four months old, it won a million votes in national elections — 6 percent of the national vote — becoming the third-largest party in Parliament. It dramatized its entry into government by coordinating the attire of its affiliated MPs, dressing them in red worker overalls ("boiler suits") and domestic-worker pinafores and *doeken* (head coverings) for all official business. The EFF made Parliament a site of real politics again, unafraid to ask pointed questions or to make irreverent statements. It was the EFF that would directly accuse the ANC of murdering workers in Marikana. EFF MPs were repeatedly ejected — sometimes forcibly — when they homed in on Zuma's use of state funds to remodel his Nkandla homestead, demanding that he "pay back the money." These antics assured the EFF constant media coverage as it sought to project itself as a fearless, radical party that fought against corruption and for the working class and the poor. In the process, the party eclipsed the official opposition party, the DA.

More recently, in the August 2016 local elections, the EFF maintained its share of the vote, transforming it into the position of kingmaker in several crucial municipalities where neither the DA nor the ANC secured a majority. In Johannesburg, the EFF threw its support to the DA, allowing the latter to take power in South Africa's largest city — to the ANC's chagrin. The EFF has predictably come under fire for supporting a party to the right of the ANC — not to mention a party with a storied history of whiteness — and for seemingly abandoning its roots in protest politics in favor of electoralism. Yet there is no doubt that the EFF has entrenched itself in the imaginations of many working-class youth and many of their parents, establishing itself as a key political player. This success comes despite serious concerns from the Marxist left about the party's true character as "populist," "left populist," "left reform-

20 Floyd Shivambu, *The Coming Revolution: Julius Malema and the Fight for Economic Freedom* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2014).

ist," or even "proto-fascist."[21] These criticisms relate primarily to Malema's dominant role in the party and his self-styling as "commander-in-chief," but they also concern the social composition of the EFF's base — disenfranchised youth and radical petit-bourgeois elements — as well as its militaristic and masculinist imagery.[22] But these critiques notwithstanding, the party's radical economic program and its willingness to publicly confront the ANC has won it public admiration.

In contrast, NUMSA quickly lost the momentum from which it initially formed the UF to bring together labor and community struggles. After forming an organization called Movement for Socialism intended to ready the terrain for a workers' party, the project stalled. While some critics have blamed this on persistence of NUMSA members' support for the ANC, it was in fact these same members' frustration and anger with ANC rule that made the NUMSA moment possible in the first place. It was first and foremost the militancy of the Marikana miners that opened the eyes of millions of workers and thus the doors through which NUMSA could pass. The question is then how the leadership has passed through these doors: that is, how the NUMSA leadership has functioned from its Special National Congress in December 2013 through its tenth National Congress in December 2016.

As a trade union, NUMSA's political character partly derives from its structural location in the economy. This is a contradictory location related to the role of workers under capitalism wherein they create the wealth but do not own or control it. The uneven development of capitalist sectors locates steelworkers in a position of enhanced (bargaining) power vis-à-vis other workers because of the importance of the steel industry in the MEC economy. But despite this centrality, they too have been subject to both neoliberal restructuring and the dynamics of global markets. The NUMSA moment represented an embryonic radicalization of steelworkers in which they began to catch a glimpse of a solution to their plight — and that of their class's plight more broadly — in directly confronting capitalist power. This meant working-class mobilization behind a vision of transcending capitalism, rather than merely trying to negotiate better terms of exploitation.

21 Tasneem Essop, "A Study of Collective Subjectivity and Political Representation within the Economic Freedom Fighters in the North West Province," Master of Arts in Political Studies dissertation (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 2016); see also Achille Mbembe, "Juju Prances into the Gaps Left by ANC," *Mail & Guardian*, July 31, 2014, https://mg.co.za/article/2014-07-31-juju-prances-into-the-gaps-left-by-anc.

22 Essop, "Study of Collective Subjectivity," 39–40.

Yet the NUMSA leadership's implementation of their members' mandate has not been immune to the dominant politics of business unionism in South Africa. As sociologist Devan Pillay correctly argues, "SACP influence within COSATU affiliates became widespread over the last two decades, including within traditionally 'workerist' affiliates such as NUMSA."[23]

The union's fixation on the stagist teleology of the SACP's "National Democratic Revolution" (NDR) theory[24] and the ANC's widely revered Freedom Charter have been defended on the grounds that they allow the union to win over supporters from the ANC base. But it has yet to proffer evidence that this strategy can succeed. Instead, NUMSA's insistence on the Freedom Charter has repelled Black Consciousness and Pan-Africanist layers who have long been opposed to this vision and nurse bitter memories of physical conflict with the "Charterists" during the volatile 1980s, when the ANC managed to get the upper hand in the battle for township support.

In the process of implementing its resolution to build a United Front, a Movement for Socialism, and ultimately a workers' party, NUMSA leaders have tended to introduce insulation walls between these three projects, rendering them as mutually exclusive stages. For example, this leadership insists that the UF cannot adopt a socialist vision and remains reluctant to put the idea of a workers' party on the agenda of the union's everyday practices. Nor has the NUMSA leadership encouraged its rank-and-file members to participate in the UF. Ordinary workers are not afforded the chance to play an immediate and direct role in the union's larger political project: that is, the search for real and lasting solutions to the problems of everyday life. This only fortifies the division between leadership and rank and file, marginalizing critical voices on the shop floor and privileging the politics of schooled stewards. NUMSA's strategic choices have appeared as political feebleness and a reluctance (or inability) to discuss questions of state power. This has in turn allowed accommodationist voices to fill the vacuum within the UF, and the EFF to project itself as the principal force critical of the Tripartite Alliance. Many NUMSA shop stewards are now joining and

23 Devan Pillay, "Cosatu and the Alliance." In Vishwas Satgar and Roger Southall, Cosatu in Crisis: The Fragmentation of an African Trade Union Federation (Sandton, South Africa: KMM Review Publishing, 2015)

24 For a brief critical assessment of the NDR in relation to the national question, see Gillian Hart, Rethinking the South African Crisis: Nationalism, Populism, Hegemony (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014).

voting for the EFF. NUMSA and its UF did not provide any viable alternative in the August 2016 local elections.

It is possible to discern a retreat by NUMSA and other left forces after the COSATU Special National Congress held in June 2015. Amazingly, the twin issues that led to the calling of the congress — namely, the need to build unity inside COSATU and the expulsion of both NUMSA and General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi from COSATU — were apparently not even discussed.[25] This omission represented a victory for the leadership of the crisis-ridden COSATU. Since the congress, COSATU's leadership has been desperate to demonstrate its continued relevance, even going so far as opposing the government on the level of the new national minimum wage.

By late 2015, it had become clear that some NUMSA-funded initiatives in which Vavi was involved were taking the form of popular fronts that privileged middle-class voices at the expense of workers. NUMSA's corrective pullback was sharp and has seen Vavi concentrating on building the new union federation rather than on the middle-class-led anti-corruption Zuma Must Fall and Save South Africa campaigns. In the absence of a viable working-class alternative, the political vacuum left by the ANC seemed as if it might be filled by centrist and right-leaning forces. NUMSA had the social weight to arrest this rightward slide, but chose not to deploy it.

Of course, given its status as the largest union in the country and given that many of its members come from socialist traditions of worker control, NUMSA will remain a key player in any potential revival of the working-class movement in South Africa. Yet it is our contention that NUMSA can do more to harness and harvest the potential strength that often appears to lie dormant within it. This will require a mechanism for drawing in as many workers as possible in the building of the working-class movement along the lines stipulated by the Special National Congress: namely, the UF, the Movement for Socialism, and a workers' party. In the struggle against apartheid it was the civics, the street committees, and joint shop-steward councils that functioned as this mechanism. Until the NUMSA leadership abandons its top-down approach to movement building, rank and file workers will remain marginal to the building of any proletarian organization — which is, of course, a contradiction in terms.

25 Pillay, "Cosatu and the Alliance," 269.

PHASE TWO: CAMPUS STRUGGLES

As NUMSA's UF foundered and the EFF aligned itself with the DA, the ANC found its primary challenger in a most unexpected place: on university campuses across the country. The student movement began when black students studying in universities that were white under apartheid demanded the full decolonization of higher education — and of society more generally. This movement made national news when UCT students demanded the removal of the iconic statue of Cecil Rhodes, colonist par excellence, from the lawns of this liberal English university. As the anti-Rhodes campaign grew, it captured the imaginations of students and workers even beyond the borders of South Africa, gaining coverage from the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, and other international outlets. The #RhodesMustFall campaign reached its peak on April 9, 2015, when the statue was triumphantly removed amid a large convergence on campus.

By October 2015, #RhodesMustFall had transformed itself into a nationwide student-worker movement in response to two major developments: a proposed tuition fee increase at all public universities, and the continued outsourcing of certain categories of university employees. Thus were born the three strands of the university movement: #RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall, and #OutsourcingMustFall. It is important to note that the movement developed in the context of the neoliberalization of higher education, which simultaneously depressed workers' wages and hiked students' tuition fees. As such, we treat this movement as a conjunctural South African iteration of a larger project of capitalist restructuring in relation to the 2008 crisis of globalized capital.

The demands of the #RhodesMustFall campaign to decolonize the institutional culture, symbols, and curriculum of UCT should be understood as emanating from the alienation black students experience in liberal white universities. The roots of this alienation, of course, lie in the life circumstances of most South Africans. As black students and aspirant members of the middle class, they felt this alienation acutely, linking it with the failures of the national liberation movement and the idealization of the new South Africa as a "rainbow nation." In a country formally run by a black-led government but still largely dominated by white economic interests, questions of

whiteness, white privilege, and white domination became burning issues for students and workers on the campuses. Understanding their role as the generation tasked with completing the national liberation struggle, following Fanon, they developed a racialized discourse that embraced black scholarship and ideas and rejected everything white as colonial. In some cases, the latter included the rejection of white students, and staff as allies in their struggle.

The rise of this decolonization movement found an echo at other universities in the form of "Black Thought" discussion and agitation groups.[26] At its best the movement's ideological challenge amounted to a substantial critique of the racism, patriarchy, and colonial legacies persisting in the universities as well as in knowledge systems and social practices more broadly. This stance posed a serious challenge to both campus administrations and to the status quo, since bureaucrats had little to offer that could placate this movement. Yet, despite its radical potential, we must point out that there was much in the ideological basis of the movement that served to undermine its potential.

The students rescued the ideas of Pan-Africanism and Black Consciousness from dusty library shelves, attempting to render them relevant to contemporary struggles. They read the works of African struggle icons fervently in their quest to understand history and ideology, identity, and strategy. Yet their discussions tended to venerate and adulate rather than criticize and analyze. They were marked by an unreflective rejection of "European" influence and an attendant affirmation of an "indigenous" worldview associated with postcolonial theory. Class as an analytic category was replaced by race, with little engagement with decades of nuanced race-class debates in South Africa.

The exclusive emphasis on race at the expense of class — rather than devising an articulation of race and class — meant that elitist tendencies in the movement were not critically examined. Many black working-class students are now studying at universities. To recall an earlier South African student movement, the 1976 Soweto movement devoted much attention to mobilizing black working-class high-school students. By contrast, the contemporary student movement for decolonization has largely failed to organize

26 Leigh-Ann Naidoo, "Centring the Black Intellectual," *Mercury*, December 9, 2016, http://www.pressreader.com/south-africa/the-mercury/20161209/281827168394340.

beyond the campuses, and in its initial phases it didn't even make connections with campus workers. Indeed, it only managed to do the latter in a limited way after it became the #FeesMustFall campaign, as we detail below.

#FeesMustFall retained a peculiar class character indeed. If tertiary education is largely viewed as a means toward upward mobility, many in the movement read this as a guarantee: those who have studied and worked hard deserve a better life — as opposed to their lesser-educated counterparts. Thus #FeesMustFall gained support from middle-class parents on this elitist basis.

The movement did not properly address these questions partly because of the reductive view of blackness in its prevailing analysis. Its uncritical reliance on upper-middle-class support left many students blind to the contradiction between the struggle against class privilege and inequality, on the one hand, and tying their fate to the upper classes and aspiring to join them in the world of privilege, on the other. Without a more nuanced understanding of race in relation to class, it grew increasingly difficult to expand the scope of the struggle. Rather than addressing the failures of basic education and the need to improve the school system as a whole, students focused on narrower struggles over hiring on campus. More generally, the movement did not explore the link between racialized alienation and multiple forms of capitalist exploitation and dispossession in the workplace, at home, and on campuses across the country. Without this sort of conjunctural analysis, we end up with a false choice between race and class — either/or instead of both/and.

The development of the decolonization movement into what became known as #FeesMustFall began to address some of these limits. Even if the movement was most widely covered by the media at the elite campuses of UCT and Wits University in Johannesburg, rather than in the less resourced former "black" universities, it spread to universities and vocational colleges across the country as students began to turn their attention to escalating university tuition fees. Parents, academics, and workers alike could relate to the demand for free education, which could, if won, change the lives of the majority. Support for the campaign and its militant and disruptive methods, such as university shutdowns and student-worker strikes, was overwhelming, and the government and campus administrations were caught unawares. It was this element of surprise that forced the national government to concede to the

students' demand for no fee hike in 2016. Broadening its impact, the student movement supported campus workers' struggle for an end to outsourcing; in turn, workers supported students' demands. On most campuses, outsourced workers won a commitment by administrations to end outsourcing and, in some cases, they secured top-ups to their meager wages. Thus the student-worker alliance and its use of disruptive tactics won significant victories both for students and for workers.

The EFF's student wing — its "Student Command" — has also played a major role in the movement; as with all party-affiliated student groups, it contests Student Representative Council elections on most campuses. Also like all party-affiliated activists, they were prohibited from acting as members of their party in the broader movement, because activists were wary of outside interference and the perceived opportunism of political parties. This meant that student leaders assume positions of leadership without declaring their party allegiance in a context where no proper structures exist to keep them formally accountable.

Sustained and violent state repression has substantially weakened the movement. From the militarization of campuses to restrictions on protest actions, students have witnessed the contracting of private security guards with little to no experience dealing with protests. The result has been the constant unleashing of rubber bullets and chemical agents on students and workers, leading to severe injuries. A student leader at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban was incarcerated for six months after being denied bail by the state. Hundreds of student leaders have been suspended and several of them expelled from universities across the country.

Without strong organizational structures, the movement was largely helpless in the face of this well-organized onslaught. At a base level, this meant failure to support one another and a lack of functional anti-repression committees. As administrations ramped up coercion on campuses, they isolated elements of the movement. A radical minority turned toward increasingly brazen guerrilla tactics aimed at the disruption of normal university activities. This predictably invited more repression, which yielded further isolation, and so on. Though the state has made some concessions, when analyzed in context these can safely be regarded as largely tokenistic, such as departments discussing decolonization approaches in closely

managed contexts. And while the government has increased its subsidies to tuition fees, these come at the expense of other university programs.

The workers' movement in the universities has generally subsided at this point. Various categories of workers like gardeners, security guards, and cleaners are now insourced, but at a pace and on terms unilaterally determined by management. This piecemeal transition means that some workers gain higher wages as others are not yet up to speed, which predictably fragments solidarity. More broadly, the unity of students and workers seems to have dissolved without any concrete campaigns to solidify their alliance. While community and union protests in support might help their cause, the failure of the student-worker movement to engage with the working class beyond campuses leaves it relatively isolated. NUMSA has certainly issued supportive press releases and even attended a handful of student events and provided sporadic resources, but union locals have tended to focus on more immediate issues: factory reports, wage negotiations, congress preparations, and the like. The UF has, with very few exceptions, largely failed to marshal worker and community support for students and university workers. With the student movement now in a phase of decline, the few links established will be hard to sustain.

If the EFF and UF together constitute a first phase of the post-Marikana radicalization — twin moments — then the campus movements make up a second phase, or what we here call the third moment. This second wave includes off-campus struggles inspired by #FeesMustFall, such as the March 2016 monthlong wildcat strike by four thousand Pikitup garbage workers in Johannesburg. This follows a first wave of class struggle across the platinum belt and farmland in the Western Cape, as well as escalating community protests across the country. The second phase of post-Marikana radicalization requires the conscious development of existing organizations and further mobilization of potentially aligned class fractions. Such a politics of class mobilization and challenge, rather than of inward orientation and containment, is the necessary precondition for any expansion of the latest wave of struggle — let alone its very existence. It will require boldness and belief in the organic capacity of workers to take their own struggle forward.

CONCLUSION

John Saul has repeatedly described the ANC in power as an instance of "failed liberation," drawing upon Fanon's account of "false decolonization" more generally.[27] In his telling, the ANC's fiscal and social policies, in conjunction with the longstanding financialization of the MEC, spelled the beginning of the end before Mandela even assumed power. In a story now well rehearsed, Mandela abandoned the ANC's platform prior to the 1994 elections. In one of his first post-prison speeches in 1990, Mandela now notoriously proclaimed, "The nationalization of the mines, banks, and monopoly industries is the policy of the ANC and a change or modification of our views in this regard is inconceivable."[28]

Less than two years later, however, Mandela traveled to Davos to attend the World Economic Forum. As he told his authorized biographer and longtime confidant Anthony Sampson, "They changed my views altogether. I came home to say, 'Chaps, we have to choose. We either keep nationalization and get no investment, or we modify our own attitude and get investment.'" The ANC subsequently modified its own attitude — that much is certain — but investment failed to follow. Instead, the 1990s were marked by capital flight, financialization, and the repatriation of MEC returns to foreign holders.

Longtime SACP leader Jeremy Cronin, currently the ANC's Deputy Minister of Public Works, insists, "They used their vast media and ideological power to browbeat us into believing that reconstruction and development would be best served by implementing a macroeconomic package that put a premium on fighting inflation, and on sweeping liberalization and de-regulation measures."[29] For Cronin and other defenders of the ANC's early-stage capitulation, acting in a neoliberal world imposes inherent limits on any national liberation project. But now more than twenty years after the passage of GEAR, the opening salvo in the ANC's project of deregulation, we know that, far from being an aberration, obsessive inflation targeting was at the core of the ANC's platform and remains so to this day. We concur

27 John S. Saul, *A Flawed Freedom: Rethinking Southern African Liberation* (London: Pluto, 2014).

28Allister Sparks, *Beyond the Miracle: Inside the New South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003):176.

29Jeremy Cronin, "Address to the SACTWU 12th National Congress," August 22, 2013, http://www.sacp.org.za/main.php?ID=4071.

with Saul's reading of Fanon: this is a false road to decolonization and has only entrenched South Africa's dependence upon European, East Asian, and American capital abroad. It has utterly decimated organized labor, which has begun to fracture formally over the last couple of years. Finally, the failure to integrate institutions of higher education, coupled with austerity measures and outsourcing campaigns, has provided an opening for resistance but also facilitated vicious infighting that has fragmented campus movements and student-worker alliances across the country.

We are left then with a paradox: the level of struggle is as high as ever when analyzed in quantitative terms, but the organized Left does not appear to be benefiting. As Peter Alexander and his colleagues have demonstrated repeatedly, struggles over access to housing and municipal services remain at an all-time high, and campus struggles rival any student movements since the demise of apartheid.[30] Likewise, the post-Marikana wave of worker militancy brought us the longest strike in South African history, contagious wildcat strike waves, and the rise of NUMSA's United Front. By the same token, however, while these service delivery protests may be frequent, they do not attempt to coalesce into a sustained force capable of making demands on state power. The student movements have begun to unravel, with the age-old race-versus-class debates returning to center stage, private security forces ramping up repression have turned campuses into veritable war zones. The wildcats are now long over, and the UF seems an empty shell by comparison with more successful opposition movements such as the EFF. In short, the large number of protest actions has not translated into a sustained left power base.

Without the articulation of these multiple forces — workers, unionized and nonaligned; intellectuals on the campuses; and residents living at the point of reproduction (the so-called "communities") — into an organization capable of representing the particular interests of each, the Left will continue to fail to make any impact whatsoever. This was professedly the project of the UF, yet so far it has failed to build substantial inroads in township-based community organizations (with a few notable exceptions), lacks any real basis in shop stewards' networks, and is dominated by professional activists and NGO workers rather than the students, workers, and residents we would

30 Peter Alexander, Carin Runciman, and Trevor Ngwane, "South Africa's Rebellion of the Poor," paper for Third International Conference on Strikes and Social Conflicts, Barcelona, June 16–19, 2015.

imagine would populate its ranks. A flagship left organization is useless if it doesn't have an actual base. If this was a major problem with the Democratic Left Front, it is *the* problem of the UF.

The time is long past for putting any of our eggs in the ANC's basket. The notion that a progressive developmental bourgeoisie will suddenly awaken is ludicrous, given that this class fraction has lain dormant for nearly a quarter-century. Besides, despite Mandela's flaws, his spirit represented the last residue of decolonial fight left in the party. While his death in 2013 precipitated a wave of internal criticism within the party, the ANC remains largely untransformed and certainly unwilling to represent proletarian interests. Perhaps the ANC was already beyond the pale when Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa ordered police to massacre dozens of striking workers at Marikana. This was why Marikana represented such a turning point: not only was it horrific in terms of a democratic state murdering its own citizens, this was a case where an alleged liberation party that remains nominally aligned with a Communist Party, one whose deputy president was the founding secretary-general of the most important miners' union in the country's history, ordered the mass murder of workers in the name of national interest.

Marikana provides a way forward for rebuilding the working-class movement because it revealed just how much material power workers possess. This was a rare and public instance of organized workers sloughing off the chains of class collaboration and containment. The Marikana miners created a center of authority for a workers' movement bereft of the will to fight. Their unsanctioned struggle exposed the limitations of the trade-union bureaucracy, swapping substitutionism for the leadership of workers who could finally trust one another. In this respect, we might understand Marikana as a forebear of the NUMSA moment. From the mines to the shop floors, the way forward for workers is to build on the foundations of the spirit of Marikana. Above all, this means reenergizing NUMSA's political project of building a militant UF and a workers' party.

With the limits of its initial attempt now well established, workers themselves at the points of production *and* reproduction must drive this effort. The alternative — a top-down mobilization rooted in leaders' lack of confidence in workers' capacity to advance their own struggle — has limited the content of the UF's politics, thereby impeding its growth. A stray intellectual or two

representing the unions is hardly sufficient; indeed, without workers and community leaders at the forefront of the mobilization effort, the UF will remain stillborn.

We wish we could end on a more optimistic note, but the entrenched trajectory of crony capitalism, austerity measures, further deregulation, and financialization means that the country is likely to shed decent jobs over the coming decade. The rand is worth around half what it was at the time of the Marikana massacre; far from being a holdover of the apartheid era, informal labor and attendant survival strategies are growing rather than receding. The paradox of the Left is perplexing: the number of struggles increases monthly, seemingly correlated with popular immiseration. But these fragmented outbursts fail to coalesce into a unified force capable of challenging the dominance of financial capital and its partisan handmaidens. Above all, this is because the movement of struggle and the turmoil it engenders are devoid of a center of leadership. The NUMSA moment provided just this, much as the Marikana strike wave did before it, but both now appear to be waning in influence. Perhaps our optimism is misplaced and this is wishful thinking — the superimposition of a coherent, aesthetically pleasing organizational form on contending insurgent fractions that refuse to be disciplined. But short of harnessing collaborative power, facilitating collective self-organization, and promulgating a socialist vision, radical outbursts will remain high in number but amount to nothing of any enduring consequence.

BOURDIEU'S CLASS THEORY

The Academic as Revolutionary

DYLAN RILEY

Pierre Bourdieu was a universal intellectual whose work ranges from highly abstract, quasi-philosophical explorations to survey research, and whose enormous contemporary influence is only comparable to that previously enjoyed by Sartre or Foucault. Born in 1930 in a small provincial town in southwestern France where his father was the local postman, he made his way to the pinnacle of the French academic establishment, the École Normale Supérieur (ENS), receiving the *agrégation* in philosophy in 1955. Unlike many other *normaliens* of his generation, Bourdieu did not join the Communist Party, although his close collaborator Jean-Claude Passeron did form part of a heterodox communist cell organized by Michel Foucault, and Bourdieu was clearly influenced by Althusserian Marxism in this period.[1]

Following his *agrégation*, Bourdieu's original plan was to produce a thesis under the direction of the eminent philosopher of science and historical epistemologist Georges Canguilhem. But his philosophical career was interrupted by the draft. The young scholar was sent to Algeria, evidently as

1 David Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 20.

punishment for his anticolonial politics,[2] where he performed military service for a year and subsequently decided to stay on as a lecturer in the Faculty of Letters at Algiers.[3]

Bourdieu's Algerian experience was decisive for his later intellectual formation; here he turned away from epistemology and toward fieldwork, producing two masterful ethnographic studies: *Sociologie de l'Algérie* and *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique*. The young scholar's opposition to the Algerian war, however, put him in danger, and in 1959 he returned to France, assuming a post as a teaching assistant to Raymond Aron in 1961.[4]

In 1964 Aron called on Bourdieu to administer his Ford Foundation–funded Center for Historical Sociology, and in the following years Bourdieu gathered around himself a Pleiades of collaborators (Luc Boltanski, Yvette Delsaut, Claude Grignon, Jean-Claude Passeron, and Monique de Saint-Martin) who would help him establish an extraordinarily powerful and productive school. During this period Bourdieu turned his attention to the French educational system, producing (with Jean-Claude Passeron) a pair of works on the reproductive function of education: *Les héritiers, les etudiants, et la culture* and *La reproduction*.

Bourdieu broke with Aron in 1968 in response to the latter's conservative condemnation of the student protests of that year. During the later sixties and early seventies, Bourdieu laid the foundations for his dominant position in French sociology, publishing a huge variety of works touching on substantive theoretical and methodological questions. In 1975 he founded the Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales, which became a factory for Bourdieu's own work and that of his students. By the late seventies and early eighties, his major mature works had appeared: *La distinction: critique sociale du judgement, Homo academicus, La noblesse état*, and *Les règles de l'art*, among many others.

During the 1990s Bourdieu radicalized, becoming the organic intellectual of the *gauche de la gauche*, in which capacity he produced *La misère du monde*, a massive series of interviews documenting the ravages of neoliberalism on the lives of everyday people. Given this intellectual and political profile, it is quite understandable that Bourdieu would be an unavoidable point of

2 David Swartz, *Symbolic Power, Politics, and Intellectuals* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013), 195.

3 Swartz, *Culture and Power*, 22.

4 Swartz, *Symbolic Power*, 196.

reference for the contemporary intellectual left: a brilliant and indefatigable sociologist who combines the intellectual sophistication of Lévi-Strauss or Jean-Paul Sartre with the empirical rigor of Anglo-American survey research and ethnography while also carrying on the venerable French tradition of the engaged intellectual, especially toward the end of his life. Indeed, the social theory that he has singlehandedly created is to the contemporary intellectual left what neo-Marxism was to the students of the 1960s.

Distinctively, however, Bourdieu, while attractive to the avant-garde, also appeals to the stolid mainstream of American social science, whose tolerance for French imports is usually quite limited. What explains this strikingly broad appeal? This essay will consider two accounts: the view that Bourdieu's is a grand sociological theory (or what I will refer to hereafter as a macrosociological theory) like those of Marx, Weber, or Durkheim, and a contrasting view that Bourdieu's sociology resonates with the social conditions that characterize elite academics, especially in the United States.

Macrosociological theories are distinguished by their explanatory ambition. In particular they have three characteristics: They link structural divisions in society to observable behaviors; they develop explanations for why, given those divisions, societies can reproduce themselves; and they sketch the processes through which societies change. When successful, these theories thus offer some account of stratification, reproduction, and social change. Marx's theories of class conflict and mode of production, Weber's sociology of domination, and Durkheim's accounts of the division of labor, anomie, and social solidarity are all macrosociological theories in this sense. Bourdieu's work also presents itself as just such a theory, but a close examination of his work reveals that his explanations are often tautological or weak. Indeed, this essay strongly endorses Philip Gorski's recent claim that "Bourdieu's oeuvre does not contain a general theory of social change."[5] This, I argue, poses a puzzle: If Bourdieu's sociology is largely nonexplanatory, his current popularity cannot be accounted for by the power of its macrosociology.

I then turn to a second account suggesting that Bourdieu's appeal is based on the unmatched ability of his work to articulate the experiences and political

5 Philip S. Gorski, "Bourdieu as a Theorist of Change," in *Bourdieu and Historical Analysis*, edited by Philip. S. Gorski (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 13.

hopes of elite academics in the contemporary period. I identify three features of Bourdieu's sociology that render it attractive to this group. First, like network analysis, its basic social ontology resonates with the lived experience of elite academics, who are the main consumers of this social theory. Second, Bourdieu's sociology holds out the possibility of political relevance to an intelligentsia with little organizational link to popular forces. In particular, Bourdieu's account of symbolic power promises a transformation of the social world through a transformation of the categories through which the social world is understood. Social change can thus be achieved without identifying an external nonacademic agent that might carry that change forward. In a period in which such a social agent is far from apparent, the appeal of shortcut politics of this sort is obvious. Third, Bourdieu's sociology offers a high-powered defense of the privileges of academic life. A considerable part of Bourdieu's political energy was devoted to defending the autonomy of the academy: in an earlier period, its autonomy from politics; in a later period, its autonomy from the economy. His sociology, therefore, can simultaneously appeal to the reformist impulses of sociology's "engaged" wing and the conservative impulses of its professional one.

BOURDIEU'S SOCIOLOGY CONSIDERED AS A MACROSOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Before delving into the analysis, it is necessary to introduce Bourdieu's basic terminology. Although it may seem abstract, it is, unfortunately, indispensable for understanding his work. There are four central concepts in Bourdieu's sociology: capital, habitus, fields, and symbolic power.

Capital refers to resources. Bourdieu identifies three main varieties: economic (understood basically as income and ownership), social (basically understood as connections), and cultural (informal education, cultural objects, and credentials). These can be measured in two dimensions: quantity and structure. Thus, particular agents may possess more or less total amounts of capital, and this capital may be structured in different proportions. Accordingly, although two "agents" may have the same total overall amount of capital, one might have a greater proportion of cultural capital and the other of economic capital.[6] Generally, the volume and structure of capital

6 Rogers Brubaker, "Rethinking Classical Theory: The Sociological Vision of Pierre Bourdieu," *Theory and Society* 14, no. 6 (1985): 745–75, esp. 765–66; Mathieu Hikaru Desan,

determines one's "position in social space" or class position. The primary class division in Bourdieu's scheme is between those with high and low total capital, but within each of these classes there is a further difference between those with a greater proportion of either economic or cultural capital. The concept of capital is thus supposed to provide a map of the main social divisions in contemporary society.

Habitus is a set of preconscious dispositions, including tastes, a sense of the self, bodily stances, and, crucially, skills or "practical mastery." The habitus is established primarily in the family, but in "differentiated" societies the school also plays a key role. In general, habitus produces patterns of behavior that reproduce the social agent in the position he or she currently occupies.[7] More specifically, habitus translates different class positions, specified by different forms of capital, into observable behavior.

Fields are agonistic social games in which agents struggle with one another over some socially defined stake, such as profit or prestige. Although there are an unspecified number of such fields, the economic field, the political field, and the field of cultural production are among the most important. Bourdieu sees social reality as made up fundamentally of fields, and social action as action in fields. The consequences of the general use of this metaphor are profound, and I examine them in detail in the subsequent section.

The final pillar of Bourdieu's sociology is the concept of *symbolic power*. Symbolic power derives from the misrecognition of historically contingent social relations, especially the rules that govern particular fields, as if they were given by nature.[8] This misrecognition of the arbitrary character of the rules that govern fields is a crucial element in Bourdieu's theory of reproduction.

To summarize, Bourdieu's general conceptual scheme is this: one's resources (capital) produce a character structure (habitus) that generates

"Bourdieu, Marx, and Capital: A Critique of the Extension Model," *Sociological Theory* 31, no. 4 (2013): 318–42, esp. 325.

7 Pierre Bourdieu and Monique de Saint-Martin, "Anatomie du gout," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 2, no. 5 (1976): 2–81, esp. 18. The fullest definition comes in Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la practique* (Geneva: Librarie Droz, 1972), 178–79, where Bourdieu writes that habitus is to be "understood as a system of durable and transposable dispositions which, integrating all past experiences, functions in every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions, and makes possible the accomplishment of an infinity of tasks, thanks to analogical transfers of schemes permitting the resolution of problems having the same form." For the notion of habitus as practical mastery, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 142–46.

8 Pierre Bourdieu, "Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field," *Sociological Theory* 12, no. 1 (1994): 1–19, esp. 14; see also "Rethinking Classical Theory," 754–55.

particular sorts of behavior in the contexts of particular social games (fields). These contexts are then stably reproduced, because the process that links capital, habitus, and field together is systematically distorted by lay understandings that serve to legitimate the existing unequal distribution of resources (symbolic power). Bourdieu uses these concepts to develop an account of stratification, social reproduction, and social change. His ambition is then to develop a social theory of the same range and power as the classical social theories of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber. Does he succeed?

CAPITAL AND HABITUS: A NEW THEORY OF CLASS?

One of Bourdieu's fundamental claims is that habitus, understood as a system of dispositions, appreciations, and practical mastery, is the product of class position, and more specifically the product of the volume and structure of capital that agents possess.[9] The habitus is a preconscious framework or "generative mechanism" that operates in an analogous way in a wide variety of different contexts[10] and therefore shapes a huge variety of behaviors. Habitus provides the basic frameworks of cultural tastes;[11] it embodies a fund of tacit knowledge[12] and even shapes orientations to the body. As Bourdieu writes, "Habitus produces individual and collective practices, thus history, that conforms to the schemas engendered by history."[13] His claim therefore is that there is a close connection between this deep and powerful schema and class position. Accordingly, it should be possible to demonstrate that differ-

9 Pierre Bourdieu, *Le sens practique* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980), 93. Here Bourdieu says that habitus is "the product of a determinant class of regularities." In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 101, Bourdieu states that "the dispositions … derive from … position in economic space."

10 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 101; Bourdieu and Saint-Martin, "Anatomie," 19.

11 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 87. In this text Bourdieu describes the formation of the habitus in a situation without a specialized system of education as "pervasive pedagogic action" that creates "practical mastery." In his later *Pascalian Meditations*, he writes that, "In so far as it is the product of the incorporation of a *nomos*, of the principle of visions and division constitutive of a social order or field, habitus generates practices immediately adjusted to that order, which are therefore perceived by their author and also by others as 'right,' straight, adroit, adequate, without being in any way the product of obedience to an order in the sense of an imperative, to a norm or to legal rules" (143).

12 There is a good summary in Swartz, *Culture and Power*, 101–102.

13 Bourdieu, *Le sens practique*, 91.

ent habitus are the result of different "volumes" and "structures of capital" possessed by agents in specific fields.

A privileged empirical domain for studying habitus is taste, because tastes make dispositions and schemas of appreciation tangible. Thus, as a way of empirically demonstrating the connection between class and habitus, Bourdieu attempts to demonstrate a connection between class position and differences in aesthetic tastes.[14] His work in this area, however, suffers from two problems. Bourdieu fails either to specify either an empirically tractable meaning of the term "class," or to show any compelling evidence for the existence of "habitus" in the sense of a "generative mechanism" that can be applied to numerous domains. This is most evident in the book that many consider to be his masterpiece, *La distinction* (*Distinction*, in English).

One would expect a book about class and taste such as *La distinction* to begin with a conceptualization of class. Bourdieu's general thesis is that the dominant class, defined loosely as consisting of those high in cultural and economic capital, has a "taste for freedom" expressed in its aestheticizing and detached relationship to culture, while the dominated class, consisting of those low in total capital, has a "taste for necessity" expressed in an attachment to concrete and tangible objects.[15] These claims are very ambiguous. One problem is that Bourdieu inflates the notion of class in *La distinction* to such an extent that he undermines its usefulness as a concept for empirical research. Thus, he writes:

> Social class is not defined by a property (not even the most determinant one, such as the volume and composition of capital) nor by a collection of properties (of sex, age, social origin, ethnic origin — proportion of blacks and whites, for examples, or natives and immigrants — income, education level, etc.), nor even by a chain of properties strung out from a fundamental property (position in the relations of production) in a relation of cause and effect, conditioner and conditioned; but by the structure of relations between all the pertinent properties which gives its specific value to each of them and to the effects they exert on practices.[16]

14 Bourdieu and Saint-Martin, "Anatomie," 19.
15 Swartz, *Culture and Power*, 166–67.
16 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 105.

A similar statement appears in an earlier preparatory study coauthored with his collaborator Monique de Saint-Martin: "The variations according to class or class fractions of the practices and of the tastes that they reveal (see figures 1 and 2) are organized according to a structure that is homologous to the variations of economic and scholastic capital and to social trajectory."[17] It is worth parsing both of these passages a bit. In the first, Bourdieu says that social class is not "defined" by any particular property but rather by "the structure of relations between all the pertinent properties." But he never explains which "structures of relations" produce which classes. Furthermore, although he invokes "pertinent properties," he provides no account of what "pertinent properties" are to be used to distinguish classes, so invoking relations among them is not particularly enlightening.

The second passage is equally troubling. Bourdieu here adds two new and untheorized dimensions to class: *scholastic capital* and *trajectory*. But their relationship to economic and cultural capital, his main dimensions of social division, is not explained. For example, it is never clear whether scholastic capital is a form of cultural capital or a separate type of capital altogether. Is it possible, for example, to have little culture capital but lots of scholastic capital? In any case, to make sense of this, the reader is referred to "figures 1 and 2," which also famously reappear in *La distinction* as the "space of social positions" and the "space of life-styles."[18] These figures appear to show a correspondence between tastes and class in the Bourdieusian sense, but since they have been constructed according to the capacious definition of class above, they cannot demonstrate this. The figures contain information about numbers of children, hours worked per week, and the size of the town the "class" comes from, as well as whether the occupational groups in question are expanding or contracting demographically (indicated by arrows), none of which clearly has to do with "class" in the sense that Bourdieu conceptualizes it or in any other sense.

Bourdieu's attempt to explain habitus as a result of class is thus vitiated by a basic conceptual weakness. He does not explain how his indicators of "class" connect to his theoretical class map. Thus, his scheme of the space of social positions contains a series of seemingly irrelevant (from the point of view of class analysis) social differences. This creates a serious problem for his

17 Bourdieu and Saint-Martin, "Anatomie," 14.
18 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 128–29.

work on class and tastes because, in the absence of a clear concept of class, any difference in taste along any social dimension recorded in his surveys becomes evidence of a class difference in habitus. Paradoxically, then, for a book often considered a classic of sociological theory, *La distinction* suffers from a common error of empiricist social research: the concepts and indicators Bourdieu uses collapse into one another, so that any array of evidence would seem to be compatible with his argument. Bourdieu's theory of class and habitus, then, lacks empirical content in the technical sense that it is unclear what evidence is imaginably incompatible or inconsistent with his account. The claim that class position determines habitus is thus quite similar to the statement Karl Popper famously cited as an example of a nonempirical statement: "It will rain or not rain here tomorrow."[19] By being compatible with all conceivable evidence, Bourdieu's account undermines its explanatory status.

At times Bourdieu seems to try to solve this problem by resorting to the tautological claim that habitus is in fact an indicator of class rather than an outcome of it. There is a conceptual warrant for this claim in much of his work. Bourdieu often discusses habitus as an internalization of class position and, in his work on capital, speaks of habitus as an embodied form of capital.[20] In this case, presumably, differences in taste would themselves be an indicator of "class habitus."[21] Thus Gorski states that "in Bourdieu's view, social position [class] influences individual disposition [habitus], and vice versa [!], *ad infinitum*, if not in wholly determinate or ineluctable fashion."[22] But this would obviously presume the "classness" of habitus, which is precisely what Bourdieu's analysis is supposed to demonstrate. To define habitus as an "embodiment" of class is to undermine the explanatory agenda of attempting to demonstrate a relationship between them.

These problems of conceptualization are not abstract theoretical concerns. They introduce deep ambiguity into the specifics of Bourdieu's evidence. For example, among Bourdieu's strongest pieces of evidence is a table showing differences in the percentage of respondents who described

19 Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1968), 40–41.

20 Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Readings in Economic Sociology*, edited by Nicole Woolsey Biggart (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 280–91, esp. 282–83.

21 Brubaker, "Rethinking Classical Social Theory," 767.

22 Philip S. Gorski, "Nation-ization Struggles: A Bourdieusian Theory of Nationalism," in *Bourdieu and Historical Analysis*, 254.

certain objects as potentially constituting a "nice photo." Bourdieu divided respondents into three "classes" or clusters of occupations. These were: the popular classes, the middle classes (artisans, white-collar workers, technicians, and the "new petit-bourgeoisie"), and the higher classes (independent employers, engineers, liberal professions, and professors). The results of the table were suggestive, showing that only 1 percent of artisans found that an automobile accident might make a nice photo, while 17 percent of professors and artistic producers had this view. Similarly, while 37 percent of educators and artistic producers thought that cabbages might make a nice photo, only 7 percent of the working-class respondents thought this.[23]

In explaining this pattern, Bourdieu states that the "capacity to think as beautiful or better as susceptible to an aesthetic transformation ... is strongly tied to cultural capital inherited or *scholastically acquired*" (my emphasis).[24] Note the symptomatic slippage between "inheritance" and "scholastic acquisition." It cannot be sufficiently stressed that only the first of these interpretations is consistent with Bourdieu's concept of habitus as determined (in part) by "cultural capital." This is because class habitus is not something acquired in a secondary educational process. Indeed, in an earlier work Bourdieu specifically rejects the notion that the habitus can be fundamentally altered in education; schools, according to him, largely transmit preexisting differences in the "primary habitus" created by early socialization.[25] Therefore, "scholastically acquired cultural capital" is not really cultural capital at all: it is simply schooling. Bourdieu's evidence from the photographs, then, although among the strongest pieces of data in *La distinction*, is hardly decisive since it is compatible with two entirely different, and indeed fundamentally opposed, explanations of the pattern of responses.[26] It is quite

23 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 526.

24 Bourdieu and Saint-Martin, "Anatomie," 24.

25 Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (London: Sage, 1977), 43. Here the authors argue that schools reproduce inequalities because to succeed in them students' early pedagogical experiences (which they call "primary habitus") must match the pedagogical expectations of the school: "The success of all school education ... depends fundamentally on the education previously accomplished in the earliest years of life, even and especially when the educational system denies this primacy in its ideology and practice by making the school career a history with no pre-history."

26 Paul Dimaggio and Michael Useem, "Social Class and Arts Consumption: The Origins and Consequences of Class Differences in Exposure to the Arts in America," *Theory and Society* 5, no. 2 (1978): 141–61, esp. 147–48, provides an account of the relationship between class and taste along the lines of this second interpretation. The authors argue that class

possible that Bourdieu's survey evidence is profoundly at odds with the theory of habitus, because what the evidence may show is the importance of pedagogy rather than class background.[27]

Furthermore, the entire notion of a coherent habitus, determined by class or otherwise, is not well supported by Bourdieu's evidence. To recall, the habitus cannot be indicated by differences in one particular domain of tastes. Since it is a "generative mechanism," it should produce similar differences across a wide variety of domains. In support of this point, Bourdieu presents evidence not only on tastes but also on the frequencies of various activities: "Do-It-Yourself," "Photography," "Records," "Painting," "Musical Instrument," "Louvre and Modern Art Gallery," "Light Music," and "News." Bourdieu's evidence here demonstrates some intriguing differences. Thus, while 63 percent of the working class reported "Do-It-Yourself" activities often, only 40 percent of the upper class did so. Similarly, while 16 percent of the educators and artistic producers reported painting, only 4 percent of the working-class respondents did so.[28]

But it is simply not the case that Bourdieu's survey evidence suggests similar differences in tastes across widely varied domains, or even within single domains of taste. Thus, in the area of cultural activities, the evidence shows that museum attendance is strongly shaped by "class" (in the loose sense of occupational groupings), but photography and home movies showed relatively little class difference with 50 percent of the working class engaged in this activity, compared with 59 percent of the middle classes and 65 percent of the upper classes.[29]

Even within highly focused areas, like taste in movies, the idea of a single transposable class habitus does not seem to be supported. For example, a survey of "movies seen" that divided the respondents into four categories ("social and medical services," "junior commercial executives and secretar-

differences in taste are largely a result of differential access to education.

27 Paul Dimaggio, "On Pierre Bourdieu," *American Journal of Sociology* 84, no. 6 (May 1979), 1460–74, esp. 1468, has pointed out that Bourdieu offers no real evidence on habitus at all: "Bourdieu suggests the myriad ways in which socialization can, in general, form deep structures of personality and perception. But since he does not establish empirically the relationship between social class and early childhood experience, it seems premature to allege that the *habitus* of different social classes are *fundamentally* different."

28 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 532.

29 Ibid., 532.

ies," "office workers," and "small shopkeepers and craftsmen" — categories, again, only distantly related to Bourdieu's theory) found that preferences differed across these groups for some films (*The Trial*, *Vice and Virtue*, and *Salvatore Giuliano*). However, other films in the same survey were appreciated by all four occupational groupings.[30]

This brief discussion of Bourdieu's evidence suggests that it is insufficient to support his claim that there existed distinctive "class habitus" in France in the 1960s and 1970s. On some very specific items there were differences, but these may have had as much to do with access to education, free time, and resources as the deep, generative schema of "class habitus." Indeed, Bourdieu shows little evidence of a consistent and transposable habitus of any sort operating similarly across different cultural activities. Instead, certain sorts of activities and tastes seem relevant to class, others much less so.

As one of Bourdieu's most perceptive interlocutors puts the point, "Occupation [in *La*] is correlated with consumption habits and with indicators of dispositions, but often quite weakly."[31] In short, Bourdieu produces very little evidence to show that different classes as specified by differential possession of cultural and economic capital produced different habitus. Not only do the occupational categories in his surveys have an indeterminate relationship to his concept of class, his empirical evidence on habitus does not persuasively indicate that a unified "generative mechanism" of taste exists at all.

The discussion up to this point has presumed that Bourdieu's main project in *La distinction* and his related studies was to show that habitus was rooted in class differences. But he simultaneously puts forward a second, very different account. After the first half of the book lays out the theory of habitus and attempts to document it, chapter six opens with the disconcerting claim that "the different social classes differ not so much in the extent to which they acknowledge culture as in the extent to which they know it."[32] This difference between knowledge (*connaissance*) and acknowledgment (*reconnaissance*) forms the basis for the "cultural goodwill" that Bourdieu holds to be characteristic of the petit-bourgeoisie. Basically, his argument here is that a wide range of middlebrow tastes are oriented to the search for substitutes for legitimate high culture. This leads to a particularly high rate of consumption of "pretentious"

30 Ibid., 361.

31 Brubaker, "Rethinking Classical Social Theory," 766–67.

32 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 318. Bourdieu and Saint-Martin make the same point in "Anatomie," 36.

cultural objects, objects that pretend to be something other than they are: kitchenettes as opposed to kitchens, stamp collections as opposed to art collections, decorated corners as opposed to rooms.[33]

Bourdieu continues this style of analysis when he argues that the working-class habitus is marked by an "acceptance of domination," evidenced not only by "the absence of luxury goods" but also by "the presence of numerous cheap substitutes for these rare goods, 'sparkling white wine' for champagne, imitation leather for real leather, reproductions for paintings." These, according to Bourdieu, are "indices of a dispossession at the second power, which accepts the definition of the goods worthy of being possessed."[34]

These passages have provoked intense criticism as being "patronizing" and for running against considerable evidence of the cultural autonomy of the working class.[35] What has been less noticed is how profoundly at odds Bourdieu's analysis of cultural good will is with his previous account of class habitus. In fact, all of his writings on culture are marked by two formally incompatible claims: on the one hand, that each class, or more broadly, social group, has *its own* habitus and therefore *its own* schemas of perception and appreciation (tastes); on the other, that the petit-bourgeoisie and working class are dominated by the schemas and perceptions of the dominant class. Evidently, however, in order to be culturally dominated, the petit-bourgeoisie and the working class must share at least some elements of the habitus of the dominant class, since one of the key elements of habitus is precisely those "categories of perception and appreciation"[36] through which particular cultural objects come to be acknowledged as legitimate. If different classes really had different habitus, as is suggested in Bourdieu's first position, there could be no relations of cultural dominance among them. Each class would simply inhabit a parallel symbolic universe with its own "values." Conversely, if relations of cultural domination exist among classes, they must share broadly the same habitus. To assert both arguments simultaneously is incoherent.

Bourdieu's account of the connection between habitus and class, to

33 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 251–253 and Bourdieu and Saint-Martin, "Anatomie," 37.

34 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 386.

35 Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Fin de Siècle Social Theory: Relativism, Reduction and the Problem of Reason* (New York: Verso, 1995), 178.

36 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 101.

summarize, suffers from three basic problems. First, since Bourdieu offers no clear conceptualization of class, it is unclear how the differences of taste he finds relate to class differences in any sense. Second, even accepting that the occupational categories he uses *do* represent classes in some way, the patterns he finds are incompatible with the theory of habitus. Bourdieu presents no evidence that his respondents possess a "generative mechanism" that can be seen operating in widely different domains of culture. In fact, his evidence points in the opposite direction: that some very specific forms of cultural practice are strongly linked to some occupational groups while others are not. Third, Bourdieu is in fact implicitly working with two incompatible models of the relationship between culture and class, one that conceives of habitus as stratified by class and another that conceives of them as shared across classes. Thus, in one basic sense, Bourdieu's sociology does not succeed as a macrosociological theory because he fails to link underlying social-structural divisions to observable behavior.

MISRECOGNITION AND THE SCHOOL SYSTEM: BOURDIEU'S ACCOUNT OF REPRODUCTION

I now turn to evaluating Bourdieu's work along the second dimension: his account of social reproduction. Bourdieu, of course, acknowledges the pervasive class inequality of modern capitalism. This imposes a problem very familiar to the tradition of western Marxism. Given the obvious inequalities and injustices of contemporary capitalism, how is it possible that such societies can stably reproduce themselves over time?[37] Bourdieu's answer to this undeniably real puzzle is symbolic power, which can be best grasped as, in Mara Loveman's words, "the ability to make appear as natural, inevitable, and thus apolitical that which is a product of historical struggle."[38] Bourdieu's account of symbolic power closely parallels the French Marxist Louis Althusser's theory of ideology.[39] Bourdieu, like Althusser, claims that the misrecognition of the social world is a precondition for action; there-

37 Pierre Bourdieu, *Sur l'État: cours au Collège de France (1989–1992)* (Paris: Seuil, 2012), 259.
38 Mara Loveman, "The Modern State and the Primitive Accumulation of Symbolic Power," *American Journal of Sociology* 110, no. 6 (2005): 1651–83, esp. 1655.
39 Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Montly Review Press, 1970), 164.

fore, a false, imaginary, or incorrect understanding of the social world is the universal default condition of actors in capitalist society. Furthermore, like Althusser, he emphasizes that this condition of universal misrecognition is reinforced through the education system. Therefore, the school is the central institutional mechanism of social reproduction under capitalism. To consider this account of social reproduction, it is necessary first to get a general sense of why Bourdieu thinks misrecognition is universal.

Bourdieu sees misrecognition as universal because, as noted earlier, he sees society as made up of a set of competitive games called fields. Each field, just like a game, has its own rules and stakes. Thus, for example, the field of the economy is defined by a competitive struggle among firms for profits. But there is also a field of cultural production, an intellectual field, and a field of political power. Each such field has stakes analogous to profits, such as intellectual prestige or political power.[40] The ubiquity of fields undergirds the ubiquity of misrecognition; in order to be a player in a game, one cannot constantly question the rules of the game by pointing out their arbitrary and historically constructed quality. To question the rules of the game would mean no longer to play but rather to observe.[41] In Bourdieu's conception, players in games misrecognize the arbitrary character of the rules that govern their action in that they take them as unquestionable givens. To summarize, if to be a social actor is to be like a player in a game, and to be a player in a game requires submission to the arbitrary rules of the game, then action implies misrecognition. Granted, there are ambiguous elements to this explanation of misrecognition. (Does playing basketball really require that one suppress the realization that the rules of the game are an arbitrary product of history?) But the truly fundamental question is different: Are agonistic games (fields) a good metaphor for social life in general?[42]

It is striking how rarely this question has been posed, given the enormous amount of energy scholars have devoted to defining fields, clarifying ambiguities in Bourdieu's usage of the term, and deploying the notion in empirical work. The ludic metaphor that underlies the idea of the field and

40 Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 11; Jeffrey J. Sallaz and Jane Zavisca, "Bourdieu in American Sociology, 1980–2004," *Annual Review of Sociology* 33 (2007): 21–41, esp. 24.

41 Bourdieu, *Le sens practique*, 56–57.

42 For a penetrating critique of the application of a ludic metaphor to society, see Perry Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism* (London: Verso), 56–57.

its corollary of universal misrecognition remains an unexamined assumption within much of the literature on Bourdieu and influenced by him.

One general problem with the ludic or field view of the social is that there are many zones of social life that are not configured like games. One of these is the world of labor, in the sense of material transformation and creation. Even in the most exploitative and alienated conditions, labor involves a collective effort at transformation and is therefore oriented toward a project, not toward "stance-taking" or "distinction" in a field. Furthermore, it is not clear why participation in the labor process would require misrecognition as submission to the rules of the game, as in Bourdieu's fields. Indeed, effective labor processes, as both Marx and Weber clearly understood, require constant, reflexive monitoring of the consequences of various courses of action.

Another key type of action which would seem to escape the field metaphor is social movements, especially revolutionary social movements, which are often explicitly oriented to identifying and challenging previously unacknowledged rules of the social game. Just as in the case of labor, social action here would seem to require a *break* with misrecognition rather than submission to it.

A final type of social interaction outside of the field metaphor is interaction oriented to communication. Again, this sort of social structure cannot be understood as a field of competition in the Bourdieusian sense because mutual understanding is a result of mutual and sympathetic interpretation, not agonistic distinction.

All of this suggests that Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction is highly questionable to the extent that it depends on the universalization of the ludic/field metaphor. There is little reason to think competitive games, and the necessary misrecognition that occurs in them according to Bourdieu, exhaust the totality of social relations; as a consequence, it seems implausible that symbolic power as misrecognition can work as a general account of social reproduction.

Bourdieu offers, in addition to the general idea of misrecognition, a more specific and institutionally rooted theory of reproduction focusing on the education system. He posits a fundamental transformation in modern society from a mode of "family reproduction" to one of "school reproduction." In the family mode of reproduction, resources and property are passed down through the family. In the school mode of reproduction, they are at least

partially invested in an education that then provides the inheritor with a certificate. Bourdieu argues that this second mode provides much greater legitimacy to the dominant classes than the family mode, and that this legitimacy increases to the extent that the education system itself becomes increasingly autonomous from the direct control of the dominant economic class.[43] As Bourdieu and Passeron put the argument:

> Nothing is better designed than the examination to inspire universal recognition of the legitimacy of academic verdicts and of the social hierarchies they legitimate, since it leads the self-eliminated to count themselves among those who fail, while enabling those elected from among a small number of eligible candidates to see in their election the proof of a merit or "gift" which would have caused them to be preferred to all comers in any circumstances.[44]

Schooling and examinations thus translate class inequalities into inequalities of merit, legitimating these inequalities both in the eyes of the dominant and subordinate classes. According to Bourdieu, to a large extent the dominant class of contemporary class of contemporary is a credentialed elite.[45] To recall, this is also Althusser's argument: that the school ISA is the key institution in reproducing capitalism.

It is beyond the scope of this article to fully engage with the debates about the role of schooling in capitalist reproduction. Two points are worth making, however. The first is that Bourdieu's account of reproduction through schooling is heavily dependent on the French case. The French school system, with its enormous prestige and relatively high degree of autonomy from the business class, is closely associated with the particular dynamics of French social development, characterized as it has been since at least 1789 by a powerful and centralized state staffed by a highly educated bureaucratic cadre and a relatively lackluster industrial capitalism. Thus, although it may be true that credentials play an absolutely crucial role in legitimating capitalist social relations in France given this particular pattern

43 Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (Thosuand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1990), 152–53; Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 383.

44 Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction*, 162.

45 Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction*, 166–67; Bourdieu, *The State Nobility*, 384–85.

of development, there is little reason to see this as a general phenomenon.[46] However, capitalist reproduction certainly *is* a general phenomenon, rendering doubtful an invocation of the school system as an adequate explanation for capitalist reproduction as such. US capitalism, both the leading and archetypical case, stands as the disconfirming instance. There has been little correlation, even at the highest levels, between winning out in competition, the *sine qua non* for capitalist success, and educational attainment among business owners/entrepreneurs. Indeed, the culture of the US capitalist class has tended to be dismissive of formal university training compared to practical industrial experience; but this has had little negative consequence for capital's legitimacy in the US.

The second problem with Bourdieu's account of reproduction is more analytical. Although the question of social reproduction really has meaning only in the context of a theory of capitalism as intrinsically conflict-ridden, unequal, and unstable, Bourdieu has never theorized capitalism. In fact, the term *capitalism*, in contrast to *capital*, appears almost nowhere in his work. This lacuna weakens his account of reproduction, because he fails to see that there are very good material reasons for direct producers to support capitalists independently of the education system or misrecognition.[47] Because capitalist profits are the condition for economic growth and employment, it is possible for it to be in the material interests of individual workers or groups of workers to support profits and, *a fortiori*, capitalist property relations. As a consequence, capitalism, much more than other systems of production, possesses a potential "material basis of consent" — independently of any other mechanisms.[48]

Finally, Bourdieu's neglect of electoral democracy as a potential mechanism of social reproduction is also noteworthy. Democracy, to begin with, in the basic Schumpeterian sense of an institutional system for establishing an alternation of political elites, is almost completely absent from Bourdieu's

46 Fritz Ringer, *Fields of Knowledge: French Academic Culture in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 55: "The development of secondary and higher education in France and Germany during the nineteenth century was not directly and functionally linked to economic growth."

47 For an exemplary account, seek Vivek Chibber, "Rescuing Class from the Cultural Turn," *Catalyst* 1 (Spring 2017).

48 Adam Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 138–39.

work.[49] In his monumental lecture course *Sur l'État*, Bourdieu mentions democracy in passing in his discussion of public opinion, in his very brief summary of the work of Barrington Moore, and as an ideology of American imperialism.[50] In other work, he develops the idea of the political field, and a sophisticated account of the relationship between party leaders and followers.[51] But even in his seminal article on political representation, where one might expect a discussion of party systems, voting, and parliaments, there is almost no analysis of these issues; instead, his discussion turns upon the idea that the represented are expropriated of their means of political representation.[52] Indeed, even a highly sympathetic observer admits that his work has mostly ignored the standard topics of political sociology, limiting his impact in this field.[53]

This neglect of democracy is particularly surprising because elections would seem far more directly related to the legitimation of political authority than the school system;[54] indeed, elections are a key example of the lengthening of the "chains of legitimization"[55] he understands as crucial to the stability of modern political order. Elections institute a quasi-fictive political equality that masks real inequalities and makes states appear as the expression of a nation constituted of formally equal citizens. In elections individuals do not appear as members of social classes or other interest groups.[56] Thus, elections

49 Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Limits of Self Government* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 27–28; Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Free Press, 1962), 269.

50 Pierre Bourdieu, *On the State: Lectures at the Collège de France 1989–1992* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2014), 81–82, 159–60.

51 Mustafa Emirbayer and Erik Schneiderhan, "Dewey and Bourdieu on Democracy," in *Bourdieu and Historical Analysis*, edited by Philip S. Gorski (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 140–44.

52 Pierre Bourdieu, "La représentation politique," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 36 (1981): 3–24.

53 David Swartz in "Pierre Bourdieu and North American Political Sociology: Why He Doesn't Fit In but Should," *French Politics* 4 (2006): 84–89: "Indeed Bourdieu does not devote much attention to public demonstrations, strikes, police, army, prisons, or war. Nor does he devote much attention to those political units, such as legislatures or constitutions, commonly treated as institutions by political scientists. Except for the act of delegating political power, Bourdieu has not devoted much attention to political processes, such as decision making, coalition building, or leadership selection" (87).

54 Bourdieu, *On the State*, 194, 216–19, 259–60.

55 Ibid., 131.

56 Perry Anderson, "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci," *New Left Review* 100 (1976–77): 5–78, 28; Göran Therborn, *What Does the Ruling Class Do When It Rules?* (London: Verso,

establish a highly individualized relationship to the state, creating fundamental problems for collective movements aiming to transcend or transform state power and capitalism. Class interests in electoral democracies are delegated to representatives of those interests and neither classes nor masses in general bring direct political pressure to bear on the state.[57]

It would be difficult to argue, then, that Bourdieu offers a compelling account of capitalist reproduction. Insofar as his theory is based on misrecognition, it rests on an implausible extension of the ludic metaphor of the field to all social relations. Insofar as it is based on the school system, it generalizes the specificity of the French case while ignoring the powerful economic and political mechanisms that also operate to stabilize capitalism. Thus Bourdieu's theory does not successfully meet the second criterion of a macrosociological theory. He has no plausible account of social reproduction.

RELATIVE DEPRIVATION AND THE INTELLECTUALS: A BOURDIEUSIAN THEORY OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION?

I now turn to Bourdieu's understanding of social transformation. It is necessary to begin by noting that the field metaphor creates severe obstacles to any compelling account of social change, for by reducing social life to an agonistic game it precludes the very possibility of collective and purposive action, since all action is constituted by stance-taking in a field whose rules themselves are treated as unquestioned.[58] Therefore, any account of social change that Bourdieu produces must do without a strong notion of collective agency.

The constraints that the field metaphor places on a theory of transformation are best demonstrated by examining Bourdieu's political sociology, where he extensively deploys it. His central claim about politics is that oppositions among political representatives explain far more about their views than their relations to their electoral or social bases do. To understand any specific political position, therefore, "It is at least as necessary to know the universe of stances offered by the field as it is the demands of the laity (the 'base') of whom

2008), 113.

57 Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy*, 13–14.

58 Jacques Rancière in *Le philosophe et ses pauvres* (Paris: Flammarion, 2007), 258 points out that Bourdieu's classes are always struggling, but without recognizing that they are in fact classes. The result, he argues, is a "parmenidean Marxism" with classes but without history.

those responsible for taking these positions are the declared representatives: the taking of a position, the word says it marvelously, is an act which has no meaning except relationally, in and by difference, the distinctive gap."[59] It is thus the differential positions in the field of politics that account for what politicians struggle over. There is an obvious truth to this approach to modern politics, although it is hardly original to Bourdieu.[60]

However, by treating politics as an electoral game or "field," Bourdieu is woefully unequipped to address the decisive political events that created the modern world and thus must be central to any plausible account of social change: the English Civil War, the American Revolution and Civil War, the French Revolution, German unification, or the Italian Risorgimento. This explanatory blankness is not accidental, nor does it have to do with the absence of appropriate evidence or an aversion to "the philosophy of history," as Bourdieu himself sometimes suggests. It is, instead, a consequence of the field metaphor. This metaphor can't be used to explain these revolutionary struggles because they break with the pattern of stance-taking in an established institutional context that is the exclusive domain of Bourdieu's political sociology. It is no surprise then that there is no Bourdieusian theory of revolution, democratization, or the rise of authoritarianism yet. The types of social processes that produce these outcomes completely transcend intra-field struggles.

Without the mechanism of collective action, Bourdieu is left with two options to explain change, both of which he employs. The first is to invoke the concept of differentiation: "In my elaboration of the notion of field, I have insisted on the process that Durkheim, Weber and Marx described, that is to say, as societies advance in time, they differentiate themselves into special and autonomous universes — that is one of the only tendential laws on which, I think, we can agree."[61] Leaving aside the absurd notion that Marx and Weber thought differentiation was a "tendential law" requiring no further elaboration, what is striking about this claim is its empty Comtean hubris. In the place of an explanation Bourdieu invokes an agentless master process

59 Bourdieu, "La représentation politique," 5.

60 Ibid., 22; Pierre Bourdieu, "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups," *Theory and Society* 14, no. 6 (1985): 723–44, esp. 740. The first text's debt to Michels is blindingly obvious. However, as is the case with most of Bourdieu's intellectual debts, he dismisses the source of his ideas in a footnote.

61 *Sur l'État*, 318.

unfolding "as societies advance in time." This account of social change is no account at all.

Bourdieu's second account of change shifts in the other direction from the macro dynamics of differentiation, to agents engaged in a competitive field. In this account, which Bourdieu calls the "hysteresis effect," social change occurs because actors pursue strategies that are maladapted to the current state of the field in which they are acting. The best example of this second sort of argument is Bourdieu's analysis of the 1968 crisis. He argues that the crisis was the product of the overproduction of academic degree holders after about 1960, who developed unrealistic career expectations because demographic expansion was driving down the value of their credentials, while their career expectations were aligned to a previous state of the academic field. The French degree holders thus were in the grips of a form of false consciousness. They thought their degrees entitled them to certain positions that would have been available to them in a previous state of the field, but these positions were becoming scarce as more people entered higher education. As a consequence, the degree holders found their degrees to be worth much less than they had expected. This disappointment led them to form an alliance with nonacademic intellectuals and the working class against the educational establishment.[62] The various leftist movements that swept France in this period were the result of a misrecognition in which agents in "homologous" positions in social space (degree holders, nonacademic intellectuals, and the working class) came to understand themselves as similar.[63]

There is both a general theoretical problem with this argument and a serious empirical weakness. The theoretical problem is that it still leaves unexplained why conditions in the field changed — the explosion in the number of degree holders. In the first place, Bourdieu offers no account of why the three sets of actors suddenly found themselves in a "homologous" position. To say that they all experienced relative deprivation at the same time begs the question. The student unrest of 1968 was after all part of a worldwide movement against capitalism and the state that remains outside of Bourdieu's explanatory framework. It is at least interesting to note that the revolts of the late sixties occurred precisely at the turning point in the world economy

62 *Homo Academicus*, 162–80.

63 Ibid., 175–77; Alexander's summary in *Fin de Siècle Social Theory*, 147–48, is extremely useful.

from long boom to long downturn, but in Bourdieu's analysis such broader structural factors make no appearance.

Comparatively, too, the analysis is questionable. The Italian sociologist Marzio Barbagli, in a book with uncanny parallels to *Homo Academicus*, argues that an acute situation of intellectual overproduction with respect to positions characterized Italy after unification. In the period after World War I the situation dramatically worsened, as established intellectuals faced the prospect of unemployment after their return from the front while recent degree holders faced diminished career prospects. These dynamics together produced a sense of "relative deprivation," as a rise in expectations created by the war combined fatally with a loss of status or career expectations.[64] But, in a political context characterized by an advancing revolutionary socialist party, intellectuals shifted not to the Left but to the extreme right. In fact, Barbagli argues, many organizations of intellectuals, such as those for engineers and primary-school teachers, took part in violent repressive expeditions against working-class institutions in the early 1920s.[65] In short, Barbagli claims that the very same dynamic that Bourdieu argues produced left-wing radicalization in France in '68 — a sense of relative deprivation with respect to career prospects — led to fascism in Italy.[66]

Since roughly the same process produced different outcomes in these two contexts, a satisfactory explanation of the politicization of intellectuals would seem to require the specification of factors, particularly the orientation of left parties to intellectuals, apart from this effect itself. In sum, Bourdieu's theory of change remains vague. Indeed, what is most striking about it is its banality. One hardly needs Bourdieu in order to come up with a theory of relative deprivation.[67] Furthermore, this theory in any case is insufficient to account for Bourdieu's central political outcome: the left-wing politicization of French academics in the late sixties.

64 Marzio Barbagli, *Educating for Unemployment: Politics, Labor Markets, and the School System–Italy, 1859–1973* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 119.

65 Ibid., 119–22.

66 Ibid., 10. There is still no adequate comparative historical analysis of the dynamics that lead intellectuals to the Right or the Left.

67 Michael Burawoy's gloss in *Conversations with Bourdieu: The Johannesburg Moment* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2012), remains unsurpassed. There he writes, "This is a repotted version of the theory of relative deprivation that once informed so much social psychology and social movement theory" (39).

Bourdieu's sociology does not therefore constitute a macrosociological theory on any of the three dimensions I identified in the introduction. His class analysis fails to link class structure to a distribution of observable behaviors. Instead, it veers toward to a series of empty tautologies as the meaning of class expands to include any social difference — including, alarmingly, taste itself. His crypto-Althusserian theory of reproduction fails to account for the political and economic dimensions of the problem, while resting on an implausible generalization of the ludic metaphor. Finally, Bourdieu's two accounts of social change (a nineteenth-century-style evolutionism and a "repotted" theory of relative deprivation) are, not surprisingly, unconvincing.

These explanatory weaknesses are not, of course, personal failings. In terms of intellectual sophistication and empirical range, Pierre Bourdieu's work is virtually peerless. The problem, paradoxical as this may sound, is that Bourdieu has no theory of class structure in the sense of a structured relationship between direct producers and surplus appropriators whose interaction could drive historical development. Bourdieu's fields do not themselves contain any dynamic of development; their occupants, mired as they are in misrecognition, can never constitute collective actors.

WHY BOURDIEU?

It is important to face the facts. Despite these serious problems, Bourdieu is the sociological theorist of the hour. Indeed, when people mention "theory" in the context of a discussion about sociology, they usually mean Bourdieu. In the period between 1980 and 1984, only 2 percent of all articles in the top four sociology journals cited Bourdieu, but by the first half-decade of the twenty-first century, this had increased to 12 percent.[68] If these articles were restricted exclusively to ambitious theoretical treatises, one can imagine that the number would expand considerably. Wacquant's description of Bourdieu as "the most celebrated sociologist of the moment" still holds true more than a decade after Bourdieu's death.[69] As a British scholar recently put it, "There is no doubt about it: Pierre Bourdieu

68 Sallaz and Zavisca, "Bourdieu in American Sociology," 25–26.

69 Loïc Wacquant, "Further Notes on Bourdieu's 'Marxism,'" *International Journal of Contemporary Sociology* 38, no. 1 (2001): 103–109, esp. 104.

is the single most influential sociologist of the later twentieth century."[70] This imposes a serious puzzle. Since Bourdieu's sociology does not offer a macrosociology, as it purports to, the attraction of his work must lie in a different direction. Thus a different approach to grasping its popularity is necessary. The remarks that follow are necessarily somewhat speculative and require real research to be substantiated. They are offered here in the spirit of discussion.

As I argued in the introduction to this article, there are three reasons for Bourdieu's popularity among elite academics in the advanced capitalist countries, especially in the United States. First, his sociology resonates with the lived experience of academics; second, it offers an ersatz political identity to left-oriented academics; third, it offers a powerful defense of academic privilege and autonomy for professionally minded scholars. Bourdieusian sociology is thus best understood not as social theory at all, but as an ideological formation resting on a common experience and providing a political project that can integrate the academic "Left" and "Right."

RESONANCE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

Many social theories gain their plausibility because they project onto a macro scale the microsocial worlds of their producers and consumers. This is particularly so with the Bourdieu's notions of "field" and "symbolic power." It would be entirely incorrect to conclude that because these concepts are a restrictive metaphor they are therefore universally inapplicable; this would reverse Bourdieu's own dogmatism. On the contrary, the idea of field is highly applicable to academic life. Academics are in the business of stance-taking and distinction. Their cultural products do gain meaning in polemical opposition to others. It is not surprising, therefore, that some of Bourdieu's most successful analyses focus on how political stances among intellectuals are often thinly veiled translations of their position in the field of cultural production.[71]

Thus, one of the main things Bourdieu's work offers to elite academics is a generalization of their lived experience. From the perspective of Bourdieu's

70 Will Atkinson, *Beyond Bourdieu: From Genetic Structuralism to Relational Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 1.

71 Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, xvii.

sociology, their social world can appear as a microcosm of society as a whole. Indeed, the notion that social life is constituted as a "field," far from requiring a critical break with lived experience, is basically the common sense of how the world works for the professoriate.[72] It is therefore hard to imagine a sociological theory whose social ontology is more perfectly aligned with the lifeworld of the chattering classes.

ERSATZ POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Bourdieu's sociology, however, offers something more than a generalization of the "professorial" experience. It also offers an identity, one with certain parallels to what Lenin called the "professional revolutionary." Bourdieusian sociologists are a vanguard. They possess insights into the workings of the social world that derive from their social theory but are denied to the laity mired in the swamp of common sense and everyday understandings.

This entire conception is based on the notion of a radical cleft between social theory and lay knowledge, itself a consequence of universal misrecognition. Actors, insofar as they are stuck in the logic of practice, engaged in the social game, cannot grasp the real structure of the fields in which they act. They operate according to a preconscious, tacit conception of the world, a "feel for the game." Reflection on the social world, the formation of the social as an object of knowledge, cannot occur within the game. Bourdieu insists repeatedly that the attribution of a reflective capacity to agents in a field of practice is an intellectualist illusion:

> Knowledge does not depend solely as an elementary relativism teaches, on the particular "situated and given" point of view that an observer takes on the object: there is a much more fundamental alteration, and a much more pernicious one, since, being constitutive of the operation of knowledge, it is likely to pass without being perceived, that practice undergoes by the sole fact of taking "a point of view" on it and thus

72 David Swartz puts the point well in *Culture and Power*: "The focus on individual competition as the predominant form of conflict in modern stratified societies certainly taps an important dimension of differentiation in the modern period. However, this focus may also disproportionately reflect Bourdieu's own professional milieu and his choice of areas of investigation. Education and high-brow culture are supreme instances of individual competitiveness and distinction. These preferred substantive areas of investigation may have excessively shaped his view of class conflict" (188).

constituting it as an object (of observation and analysis).[73]

For Bourdieu, then, reflective thought, the formation of practice as an object of analysis, requires a break with practice. Conversely, practice as lived experience requires a break with reflection. Agents can act only in so far as they *do not* reflect on their actions; reflection is, consequently, possible only from a position outside the field of action.

Sociological insight requires a break with practice, achieved through a special form of training through which budding sociologists create a new habitus or set of scientific dispositions to replace their preexisting lay ones. There is therefore a nexus between theory and practice in Bourdieu's sociology — but, unlike revolutionary Marxism, for example, this nexus has its effects primarily *within the world of sociology*.

Rogers Brubaker, in an essay that goes a long way to clarifying Bourdieu's appeal along this dimension, has grasped this point particularly clearly. He calls for a break with "conceptualist, theoreticist, logocentric reading[s]" of Bourdieu; in other words, with readings that would examine the logical coherence and empirical plausibility of Bourdieu's works. Instead, the aspiring sociologist "should aim to master practically, to incorporate into his or her habitus, the thinking tools that Bourdieu makes available."[74] Unfortunately, those who lack "access to Bourdieu's *atelier* [workshop] or seminar room" tend to confront his work theoretically rather than practically.[75] Zavisca and Sallaz express a similar idea in less elevated language when they ask "how Bourdieu's ideas have been put to use in research published in major American sociology journals."[76] Bourdieu's sociology, in short, promises a kind of self-transformation. Correctly approached, it is *a way of becoming a sociologist* rather than an explanatory framework for understanding the social world.

Bourdieu's sociology, from this perspective, can be thought of as a kind of secularized radical Protestantism, promising a form of intellectual rebirth through practices of discipline designed to create a new sociological habitus. Like the Calvinist ethic Weber described, Bourdieu's sociology requires a constant examination of the self, a process glossed under the term

73 Bourdieu, *Le sens practique*, 46.

74 Rogers Brubaker, "Social Theory as Habitus," in *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, edited by Craig Calhoun, Edward LiPuma and Moishe Postone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 217, 219.

75 Ibid., 216.

76 Sallaz and Zavisca, "Bourdieu in American Sociology," 22.

"reflexivity."[77] Culturally, this sociology belongs to a range of other practices highly characteristic of the contemporary intelligentsia: yoga, fad diets, exercise monitors, and so on.[78]

Why would academics look for this? There is no reason to think that Bourdieusian sociologists are any more careerist than others; indeed, if anything, the opposite is probably true. The sorts of intellectuals who are drawn to Bourdieu tend to want to use their knowledge to better the world. But, particularly in the United States, they lack any plausible political vehicle for linking their studies to social change. There is no organizational connection between social theory and political practice: excluding, of course, the vast sea of intellectually empty and crypto-technocratic "policy-relevant" social science churned out by the truckload in American academia. One hypothesis to explain the attraction of Bourdieu's work is that it turns the potentially radical energy of social critique inward, thereby creating a form of political engagement that promises the attainable goal of accumulating "symbolic power" in lieu of confronting real exploitation and domination. The appeal is best indicated, again, by Brubaker's gloss: the point of Bourdieu's texts "is not simply to interpret the world; it is to change the world, by changing the way in which we — in the first instance, *other social scientists* — see it."[79] This pale recapitulation of Marx's (uncited, naturally) eleventh thesis on Feuerbach is an effective summation of Bourdieu's appeal. In him we have a thinker who mobilizes vast intellectual resources in the pursuit of a militant project to transform sociological consciousness in place of transforming society.

THE DEFENSE OF ACADEMIC PRIVILEGE

The inner-directed radicalism of Bourdieu's sociology is paradoxically connected to another distinctive feature of it: its obsession with the defense of differentiation or "autonomy." Bourdieu's ultimate political vision, despite the radical-chic vestments in which it appears, is classic pluralism, familiar to readers of Dahl, de Tocqueville, Mosca, or Weber. This view grounds a defense of intellectual autonomy in a quite conservative sense as the institutional basis

77 For a canonical discussion of this dimension of Bourdieu's work see Loïc Wacquant, "Toward a Social Praxeology: The Structure and Logic of Bourdieu's Sociology," in Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), 36–46.

78 For a good discussion of this, see Mark Greif, *Against Everything* (New York: Pantheon, 2016).

79 Brubaker, "Social Theory as Habitus," 217.

for forcing the dominant class to universalize its particular interests.

This claim might seem tendentious. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that much of what Bourdieu had to say politically was quite radical, especially at the beginning of his intellectual career in Algeria and toward the end of it, as he combated French neoliberalism during the nineties. Indeed, some of his political stances, particularly in the realm of geopolitics, are strikingly acute, incomparably superior to the bovine platitudes that pass for "political analysis" in much of US sociology.[80] One litmus test of his political independence is his rightful and forceful condemnation of the NATO bombing of Serbia, at a time when many "progressives" in North America and Europe were mumbling mealy-mouthed apologetics.

But the striking thing about Bourdieu's political writings, however, is how limited they are. In the absence of any theory of capitalism, his political positions amount basically to a defense of existing arrangements against the encroachment of market logic. His fundamental political value is autonomy, particularly the autonomy of sociology, rather than freedom or equality. The intellectual foundations of this politics are rather conservative. Nowhere is this stated more clearly than at the end of *La noblesse état*:

> It is clear that whatever their grounds or motives, these struggles among the dominants necessarily add to the field of power a bit of that universal — reason, disinterestedness, civic-mindedness, etc. — that, originating as it does in previous struggles, is always a symbolically effective weapon in the struggles of the moment. And, while taking care not to pronounce judgments on the comparative merits of one or another regime that are often identified with "political philosophy," we may advance the notion that progress in the differentiation of forms of power is constituted by so many protective acts against tyranny, understood after the manner of Pascal, as the infringement of one order upon the rights of another, or more precisely, as the intrusion of the forms of power associated with one field in the functioning of another.[81]

Bourdieu here appears to embrace a vision of society run by a plural, interlocking set of elites engaged in struggle with one another and as a result

80 Pierre Bourdieu, *Political Interventions: Social Science and Political Action* (New York: Verso, 2008), 355–57.

81 Bourdieu, *State Nobility*, 389.

constantly forced to articulate their particular interests in general terms.[82] This argument strongly recalls the notion of a mixed constitution: a political vision running from Aristotle to Weber and beyond. At the end of the day, then, Bourdieu's sociology, in some contrast to his explicit political writing, leads to the endorsement of hoary elitist liberalism, providing an honorable perch for the sociologist as the modest sage of the good society. What it does not contain, of course, is a critique, or even analysis, of capitalism as a system of class relations.

CONCLUSION

The appeal of Bourdieu's sociology, in short, is due neither to its explanatory power nor to its ability to generate new problems and questions. There are very few explanations in his corpus, and the main ones that do exist are implausible. To account for Bourdieu's ascendancy, one must look therefore to the "logic of practice" rather than the "logic of theory." Bourdieu's sociology simultaneously resonates with the lived experience of elite academics, offers a form of ersatz radicalism focused on self-transformation, and provides the sociologist with a sense of having an elevated social role. This is not to imply that the Bourdieusian mentality is wholly negative. Perhaps the best analogy is to the role of Protestantism prior to the French Revolution. Before an actual political movement aimed at establishing modern citizenship emerged, the struggle for it took the form of an attempt to remake the self through practices of discipline. Bourdieu's sociology may be similar in this sense. Perhaps it is the placeholder for whatever truly radical critical theory will come after. In any case a radical, self-conscious movement to subject the entire of society to truly human control will signal not the fulfillment but the end of Bourdieusian sociology.

82 Ibid.

IRISH POLITICS SINCE THE CRASH

DANIEL FINN

> It may be ruled out that immediate economic crises of themselves produce fundamental historical events; they can simply create a terrain more favorable to the dissemination of certain modes of thought, and certain ways of posing and resolving questions involving the entire subsequent development of national life.
>
> — **Antonio Gramsci**[1]

As the centenary of Ireland's 1916 Rising approached, political elites on both sides of the Irish border were hoping for a backdrop of stability, if not tedium, while they cantered through a decade of emotionally charged anniversaries. Yet in the wake of the global crash and its profound impact on the Irish, British, and European economies, they have had to steer a path through a far more treacherous landscape.

The Great Recession hit the Republic of Ireland especially hard, resulting in a disastrous slump. Private bank debt was absorbed by the state and the burden of the crisis transferred to its citizens. Unemployment soared,

1 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 184.

drastic cuts in public spending were imposed, and control over economic policy was surrendered to officials from the "Troika" of the European Union, European Central Bank (ECB), and International Monetary Fund (IMF). The clear parallels between the Irish experience and that of the EU's Mediterranean fringe saw those countries branded collectively as "the PIGS" (Portugal, Ireland, Greece, and Spain). But as the eurozone crisis ground on, Ireland found itself being presented to its fellow PIGS as a paragon of economic recovery and political stability — proof that the Troika's harsh medicine could be made to work.

Meanwhile, Northern Ireland experienced the global crash through a very different set of parameters. As part of the United Kingdom, the region did not share in the fortunes of the eurozone, yet this advantage was cancelled out by its membership in another currency union with its own core–periphery divide. Heavily reliant on the public sector to keep the local economy afloat, Northern Ireland had every reason to fear the brutal austerity program that the UK's Conservative government imposed after 2010. Responsibility for implementing these cuts would fall on the regional power-sharing administration, composed of unionist and nationalist parties, thus putting their uneasy partnership under intense strain. Political turbulence might jeopardize the peace agreement that had brought a long period of low-intensity warfare to a halt in the late 1990s.

Belying its reputation for stability, the Republic of Ireland has in fact witnessed dramatic shifts at the ballot box, with support for the traditional parties rapidly eroding as they hung tight to the austerity consensus. New political forces, predominantly from the Left, have established a strong bridgehead in the Irish party system. While social unrest has not reached the levels seen in Greece or Spain, since 2014 a major protest movement against water charges has taken shape and forced the stewards of austerity into a humiliating retreat. The sectarian mold of Northern Irish politics has acted as a barrier to similar fluctuations, but the region has nonetheless contributed its fair share of political drama and now faces a bumpy road as Britain starts the process of extricating itself from the European Union. By the time Ireland's "decade of centenaries" has concluded in the early 2020s, the contours of political life on the island will have been transformed to an extent that seemed inconceivable before the crash.

BOOM TO BUST

The recession suffered by the Republic of Ireland has been described by two IMF economists as "the costliest banking crisis in advanced economies since at least the Great Depression."[2] It came after a long period of sustained growth that seemed to have banished the legacy of economic backwardness and put the Irish state on an equal footing with its West European neighbors. Standard hagiographies of the "Celtic Tiger" traced its origins back to the 1960s, when Irish governments had abandoned their attempts to cultivate a domestic manufacturing base through protectionism and turned instead to foreign capital. Some patchy growth ensued over the next two decades, before the Irish economy fell into a prolonged slump for much of the 1980s. With unemployment hovering around the 15 percent mark and the state crippled by debt, the Irish experiment in self-government was scathingly criticized by its intellectuals and by those who voted with their feet and departed for better prospects abroad.[3]

By the turn of the century, a spectacular turnaround had transformed the national mood. For well over a decade, the Irish economy posted growth rates that were substantially higher than the West European average. Unemployment fell dramatically; for the first time in its modern history, Ireland experienced large-scale immigration as foreign-born workers were attracted by the boom. Several factors had converged to make this possible. The orientation toward foreign direct investment (FDI) belatedly paid off from the early 1990s on; with US companies keen to find investment sites for tariff-free exports to the European single market, Ireland could offer them an English-speaking workforce, low corporation tax rates, and assiduous support from the technocrats of the Industrial Development Authority (IDA). US firms made major investments in software, electronics, and pharmaceuticals. European structural funding made it easier to bridge the gap between Ireland's limited tax base and the need for public investment in services and infrastructure (a fact usually omitted by those who celebrated Ireland as a rare example of "expansionary fiscal contraction" working in practice).[4] Demographic

2 Thomas Molloy, "Irish Meltdown Was World's Worst Since 1930s — IMF Report," *Irish Independent*, June 28, 2012.

3 For the verdict of a leading historian, see Joe Lee, *Ireland 1912–1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), especially the concluding chapter, "Perspectives."

4 Stephen Kinsella, "Is Ireland Really the Role Model for Austerity?" *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 36, no. 1 (January 2012).

change also played a part in the boom, as the ratio of working-age citizens to children and pensioners had improved considerably.

Still, the realities of boom-time Ireland never quite measured up to the hype. For all the talk of Ireland having caught up with its neighbors, there was no sign of convergence when living standards were measured in the round: social protection accounted for 14 percent of GDP in the early 2000s, against an EU-15 average of 27 percent.[5] The state of the Irish health service was widely considered a national scandal.[6] Meanwhile, rates of poverty and inequality were second only to the United States among OECD countries. The contribution of the FDI sector was exaggerated by the widespread practice of transfer pricing: between 1990 and 2010, employment at US-owned companies rose by 127 percent, but their declared income went up by a staggering 2,457 percent.[7] By 2011, the effective tax rate for US firms in Ireland would be 2.2 percent — drastically lower than the figures for Britain (18.5 percent), Germany (20 percent), or France (35.9 percent).[8]

Most ominously, economic growth in the 2000s had come to rely heavily on a gigantic property bubble. After the capital-gains tax was cut by half in 1998, bank loans increased by 466 percent over the following decade and less than 2.5 percent of that sum was invested in high-tech industry, while construction and real estate attracted nearly a third of total lending.[9] This was made possible by a dramatic surge in credit from German, French, British, and US banks, which accepted the moonshine verdicts of ratings agencies on such institutions as Anglo Irish Bank.[10] Between 2000 and 2007, private-sector debt rose by 612 percent of Irish GDP — almost five times the West European average.[11] Few countries were more perilously exposed to a global downturn than the Republic of Ireland.

When Lehman Brothers collapsed in September 2008, the Irish government acted quickly to shore up the private banking system, extending an

5 Fintan O'Toole, *After the Ball* (Dublin: New Island, 2003), 62.

6 Maev-Ann Wren, *Unhealthy State: Anatomy of a Sick Society* (Dublin: New Island, 2003).

7 Jesse Drucker, "Man Making Ireland Tax Avoidance Hub Proves Local Hero," *Bloomberg*, October 27, 2013.

8 Jim Stewart, "PwC/World Bank Report 'Paying Taxes 2014': An Assessment," *IIIS Discussion Paper* no. 442, February 2014.

9 Seán Ó Riain, *The Rise and Fall of Ireland's Celtic Tiger: Liberalism, Boom and Bust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 82–83.

10 Ibid., 104–10.

11 Servaas Storm and C.W.M. Naastepad, "Myths, Mix-ups, and Mishandlings: Understanding the Eurozone Crisis," *International Journal of Political Economy* 45, no. 1 (Spring 2016).

unlimited guarantee to cover the liabilities of Irish institutions. Seventy billion euros were eventually funneled into the banks to cover their losses from property lending, while a series of austerity budgets took €30 billion out of the national economy between 2008 and 2014, with a two-to-one ratio of spending cuts to tax increases. (Irish GDP in 2014 was a little over €180 billion.) Unemployment soared to 15 percent by 2012, from a pre-crisis level of barely 4 percent, and emigration rates surpassed those of the 1980s slump: by 2014, 475,000 people had left since the crisis began, and 17.5 percent of Irish-born people over the age of fifteen lived outside the state — a higher proportion than in any other OECD member state, including Mexico. As the OECD notes, without this "macroeconomic adjustment mechanism," the Irish unemployment rate would have approached the levels seen in Greece or Spain.[12]

When a team of officials from the Troika arrived in Dublin at the end of 2010 to take charge of the local economy, the fiasco was complete. European officials had initially reacted with some annoyance to the unilateral moves the Irish government had taken in the wake of the crash.[13] They later took a stern line against any move to alter the terms of the bank guarantee or even to impose losses on bondholders who had not been covered by the guarantee in the first place. Michael Noonan, finance minister in the Fine Gael–Labour coalition that held office from 2011 to 2016, has claimed that he was directly threatened by the ECB chief Jean-Claude Trichet when he proposed a modest step toward burden-sharing.[14] One thing was beyond doubt: the dominant players in the EU were happy to see Ireland bear a grossly disproportionate share of Europe's financial crisis in order to get French and German banks off the hook for their reckless lending. Astonishingly, by 2013, Ireland had paid more than Germany *in absolute terms* to cover the cost of the crisis; there could be no starker illustration of the power imbalance between "core" and "peripheral" states in the eurozone than that.[15]

12 Ciara Kenny, "One in Six Irish-Born People Now Live Abroad," *Irish Times*, September 16, 2015.

13 Donagh Brennan, "Guaranteeing Recidivism," *Irish Left Review* 1, no. 2 (2013).

14 Sarah Bardon, 'Noonan Told 'Bomb Would Go Off' If Bondholders Burned," *Irish Times*, September 11, 2015.

15 Ann Cahill, "42 Percent of Europe's Banking Crisis Paid by Ireland," *Irish Examiner*, January 16, 2013. The Republic of Ireland has a population of approximately 5 million; Germany, sixteen times that figure.

MEASURING RECOVERY

The apparent reversal in Irish fortunes since the trough of the slump has naturally inspired a torrent of self-congratulation in establishment circles. Government ministers basked in the praise of European leaders and were quick to point the finger at other EU member states for their supposed deviations from the path of virtue. Yet the source of those tributes should have inspired suspicion among those less inclined to swoon at the praise of foreign dignitaries: the same people were holding Ireland up as a role model at a time when its economy was still flatlining by every conceivable measure. The principal benchmarks used in assessing the Irish recovery were as follows, in declining order of significance: the absence of social unrest, bond-market spreads, GDP growth, and the employment rate. The first of these indicators was by far the most important, and explains why Angela Merkel, ECB president Mario Draghi, and their associates were so keen to shower praise on Dublin's record as they faced political turbulence elsewhere in the eurozone. As long as the Irish citizenry seemingly remained passive, everything else was a detail. The other metrics of economic success require careful unpacking.

The interest rate on Irish government bonds came down sharply after the critical point that triggered the EU's bailout program. But this reduction was largely unrelated to the underlying health of the economy. The most pessimistic view of Irish economic prospects derived from the assumption that inflated bond-market spreads were a function of the private bank debt that had been imposed on the state. However, it is now clear that ballooning interest rates owed more to a general climate of uncertainty about the future of the euro. When Draghi announced in July 2012 that the ECB would do "whatever it takes" to prop up the single currency, the rates began to come down from their previously unsustainable levels, even though the ratio of debt to GDP in the peripheral eurozone states had not improved and was in fact worsening.[16]

GDP is almost as doubtful a measure of real economic health, with transfer pricing in the multinational sector rendering all statistics open to question. As the hype surrounding Ireland's recovery reached a fever pitch,

16 Ó Riain, *Rise and Fall of Ireland's Celtic Tiger*, 277–78.

Ireland's central bank governor Patrick Honohan felt compelled to intervene, warning that much recent growth could be attributed to "distorting features" that derived from the tax practices of multinationals.[17] Figures released in July 2016 purported to show GDP growth of 26 percent the previous year — a moment of low farce that may have punctured the credibility of those statistics for good.[18]

The only benchmark that truly corresponds to reality as experienced by the majority of Irish citizens is the employment rate. There has been a real decline in unemployment since its 2012 peak, with the number of those out of work falling below 8 percent by the autumn of 2016. Emigration has kept the figures down, of course, while many domestic job-seekers have been railroaded into cheap-labor schemes to keep them off the books. Two-thirds of all income gains between 2011 and 2016 were hoovered up by those who earned more than €70,000.[19] Nonetheless, the shift in employment trends is the only kind of recovery that offers meaningful relief for those who have borne the brunt of the crisis.

Insofar as the authorities in Dublin have a long-term economic plan, it is founded exclusively on the two main pillars of the pre-2008 economy: FDI and the property/finance nexus. Along with the "virtual growth" based on financial chicanery, there has been some real growth in the foreign-owned sector, with a cluster of digital-economy firms such as Google, Facebook, Apple, and Twitter launching or expanding their operations.[20] While the goal of the Troika's austerity programs in Ireland and southern Europe was to force down unit labor costs, supposedly making exports more competitive, Ireland's export-led growth has in fact come from high-wage industries, with salaries almost 80 percent higher than in the rest of the economy.[21] IDA-supported companies account for roughly one-tenth of total employment and are heavily clustered in certain areas; two-thirds of digital-economy jobs, for example, are based in

17 Eoin Burke-Kennedy, "Central Bank Governor Warns Government over Growth," *Irish Times,* October 31, 2015.

18 Vincent Boland, "Irish Tell a Tale of 26.3% Growth Spurt," *Financial Times*, July 13, 2016.

19 TASC, *Budget 2016: Equality Analysis* (TASC: Dublin, 2015), 6.

20 Aidan Regan and Samuel Brazys, "Celtic Phoenix or Leprechaun Economics? The Politics of an FDI-Led Growth Model in Europe," Geary Institute Working Paper, January 12, 2017.

21 Ibid.

Dublin, which has barely one-quarter of the population.[22] The selective benefits deriving from this model have now been jeopardized by pressure from Brussels to bring Irish tax law into line with the regional norm. The European Commission has ruled that tax breaks for Apple constitute illegal state aid and ordered the company to pay back €13 billion to the Irish state — much to the displeasure of the authorities in Dublin, who are contesting the ruling with a determination they never showed when bank debt was the issue.[23]

However precarious Ireland's FDI-based growth may prove to be, it is at least a safer bet than the reheated property market, which has caused house prices in Dublin to soar beyond the reach of middle-income workers barely a decade after the great crash. The only viable solution to a chronic shortage of affordable homes would be a major public-housing program — something government ministers refuse to contemplate because of its likely impact on the balance sheets of property developers.[24] Meanwhile, vulture funds have been turning the screws on holders of distressed mortgages that they acquired during the slump, exacerbating the problem still further.[25]

NO GOING BACK

There have been two conflicting messages presented to the Irish people since the recession began: on the one hand, that a few years of sacrifice will be followed by a return to the *status quo ante*; on the other, that there can be no repeat of the "bad old days." The first message is most likely to come from politicians facing an election in the near future, while those with less reason to fear the voters have felt at liberty to drive home the second line without any rhetorical sugarcoating. Stephen Collins of the *Irish Times* gave a neat summary of what the latter group have in mind when they insist there can be no regression to old habits:

22 Ibid.

23 Alex Barker and Arthur Beesley, "Apple Hit with €13 Billion EU Tax Penalty over Illegal Irish Aid," *Financial Times*, August 30, 2016.

24 Eoin Burke-Kennedy, "Why State's Housing Plan Won't Make Property More Affordable," *Irish Times*, March 3, 2017.

25 Attracta Mooney, "'Aggressive' Vulture Funds Swoop In on Irish Property," *Financial Times*, February 18, 2017.

> Budgetary targets have to be met as part of our EU obligations. Even if there were no EU obligations, any government would have to maintain budgetary discipline in order to retain its capacity to borrow on the international money markets. The great lesson of Irish political history is that populist politics has created a cycle of boom and bust that has plunged the country into recession that has had to be cured by austerity politics in decade after decade. The disciplines of the EU Fiscal Treaty mean that populist politicians cannot wreck the economy for short-term political advantage any more, but whether the penny has really dropped with the electorate is a moot point.[26]

The "great lesson" Collins alludes to is strictly for the birds. Ireland ran a budget surplus in every year but two from 1998 to 2006; its debt-to-GDP ratio declined from 82 percent in 1995 to 38 percent in 2000 and 25 percent in 2007.[27] If the EU's new fiscal regime had been in place during the boom, such figures would have assured Dublin of a clean bill of health. The argument that excessive public spending was responsible for the Irish slump cannot withstand a moment's scrutiny, but it has been used to legitimize a new pan-European economic structure that places iron shackles on national democracy, described by Wolfgang Streeck as "a historically novel construct, designed to ensure the market conformity of formerly sovereign nation-states: a market straitjacket for democratic politics, with powers formally resembling various other innovations in international law, except that in this case what they involve are not 'a duty to protect' but a duty to pay."[28]

The 2016 budget assigned €6.6 billion to cover interest repayments on the national debt: three-quarters of the amount spent on education, and 18 percent of all Irish tax revenue, compared with just 3.4 percent in 2007.[29] The Think-Tank for Action on Social Change (TASC) has estimated that an additional payment of €5.7 billion annually will be needed to bring down the overall debt in line with the EU's fiscal compact. While that imperative for-

26 Stephen Collins, "Does Battering of Coalition Indicate a Shift in Irish Democracy?" *Irish Times*, May 26, 2014.

27 Ó Riain, *Rise and Fall of Ireland's Celtic Tiger,* 51.

28 Wolfgang Streeck, *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism* (London and New York: Verso: 2014), 116.

29 TASC, *Budget 2016*, 14.

mally comes into play from 2019 onwards, in practice its effects will be felt much sooner.[30] As long as the EU's policy constraints remain in place, Dublin will have to prioritize debt reduction over any move to repair the damage after six years of gouging cuts in public spending.

The power holders in Dublin have gladly embraced this burden, despite having previously spoken of the need for debt write-offs to take account of Ireland's tremendous sacrifice for the eurozone. When the Syriza-led government took power in Athens at the beginning of 2015, Michael Noonan lined up foursquare behind Germany's rejectionist front, evidently hoping that a lesson in the perils of defiance would be driven home to his own restless citizens.[31] *Mirabile dictu*, Noonan later found that Irish pleas for assistance with bank recapitalization were greeted with stony indifference by European officials, as "the political appetite to give Ireland further debt relief was non-existent."[32] Even if there are several years of sustained growth in the real economy, there is little chance of a return to the conditions of 2007 — let alone progress beyond that all-too-modest benchmark.

ELECTORAL TURBULENCE

There have been three clear trends in Irish electoral politics since the crash: unprecedented volatility, decline in support for traditional parties, and a substantial rise in the left-wing vote from a low historic base. Historically, politics in the Republic of Ireland has differed sharply from the pattern in neighboring countries, with two center-right parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, having dominated the electoral stage since the early years of the state. Support for left-wing forces has traditionally been by far the weakest in Western Europe, averaging 14 percent in the 1980s and 1990s, at a time

30 TASC, *Budget 2015 Commentary: A Chance to Address Ireland's Inequality Problem*, (TASC: Dublin, 2014), 24.

31 Even the right-wing *Sunday Independent* was moved to protest at Noonan's stance: "Something profoundly amoral surrounds the wrecking of a country and its people at the altar of German-driven austerity. The current policy of diplomatic appeasement may not be as wise as it appears to be for satraps rarely win the respect of their masters . . . is it really acceptable that a small nation like Ireland will stand idly by, or worse still cheer from the side-lines if Greece is thrown to the wolves?" (*Sunday Independent*, "Do not pass by Greece's tragedy," 22 February 2015.)

32 Suzanne Lynch, "Bank Recapitalization Idea Has Quietly Slipped Off Political Agenda," *Irish Times*, May 14, 2016.

when the regional average exceeded 40 percent.[33] The rival conservative parties traced their origins to the civil war of 1922–23, but their once-bitter ideological conflicts had largely faded by the 1950s. From that point until the eve of the recession, the configuration of Irish political life was remarkably stable. Fianna Fáil would always outpoll Fine Gael, and Fine Gael would always outpoll the ineffectual Irish Labour Party. Fianna Fáil was the only party that could form a government on its own; Fine Gael could only lead a government with support from Labour; Labour could only get a taste of power as a junior partner to Fine Gael. There was a slight recalibration of this pattern from the 1980s on, when Fianna Fáil abandoned the policy of never forming coalitions with its rivals, and a succession of minor parties entered the stage without managing to displace Labour as Ireland's third electoral force. But the basic landscape of Irish politics remained much as it had been since the time of Eisenhower and Macmillan.

To the surprise of many commentators, this structure outlasted many of the distinctive features of Irish society that had shaped it in the first place: a scrawny industrial base, the centrality of the national question, and the overwhelming influence of the Catholic Church. It set Ireland clearly apart from its fellow PIGS in southern Europe, which had gone through cycles of revolution, civil war, and dictatorship in the last century. In Greece and Portugal, the electoral strength of the radical left on the eve of the Great Recession put it on a level footing with Ireland's timid social democrats. But since the crisis began, the Irish party system has been wrenched completely out of shape, and a stable pattern has yet to emerge. Fianna Fáil suffered an outright collapse in the 2011 general election, losing all but twenty of its seventy-one seats. Labour chalked up its best-ever performance on that occasion, surpassing Fianna Fáil with almost 20 percent of the vote, but saw its support evaporate in turn after entering a coalition with Fine Gael. The combined Fine Gael–Labour vote share in 2011 was 55.5 percent; five years later, they could barely manage 32 percent between them, having shed more than half a million votes in the meantime.

Alongside the unprecedented shifts *between* the traditional parties, there has been an equally pronounced shift *away* from those parties. During the last prolonged recession in the 1980s, the two center-right parties averaged 79

33 Peter Mair, "Party Competition and the Changing Party System," in *Politics in the Republic of Ireland*, edited by John Coakley and Michael Gallagher (London and New York: Routledge, 1999, 114–15.

percent of the vote between them across five general elections; in the last pre-crisis election, they still managed to harvest 69 percent of all ballots cast. In 2016, their combined score fell below 50 percent. In national elections from 1997 to 2011, three-quarters of all votes went to Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, or Labour. 2016 saw their electoral support drop to a little over 56 percent, while parties that had no experience of government in the Republic and candidates with no party allegiance whatsoever won 38 percent of the vote.

What do these shifts mean in terms of ideology? Ireland's left turn since 2008 may seem a tame affair in comparison to Greece or Spain, but if we take account of the pre-crisis starting point, the trend is nonetheless striking. Following the crash, the gap between right/center-right forces and their left/center-left challengers narrowed considerably: from almost 50 percent in 2007, it had fallen to 20 percent by 2011. After a century as an outlier, Ireland appeared to be shifting toward the European model of class-based, ideological politics at a time when that model was facing a crisis of its own in several neighboring states. However, a finer-grained analysis revealed a more complicated picture, as the left/center-left bloc referred to above contained disparate forces with little inclination to unite around a common project.

The Irish Labour Party was in prime position to capitalize on the new mood in the 2011 election, and doubled its vote by putting forward a moderate anti-austerity programme; Sinn Féin (to be discussed in greater detail below) also gained ground, as did left-independents and the socialist groups, but all to a lesser extent. Labour then faced the biggest challenge and opportunity since its foundation. By staying out of government, the party could have put itself at the head of a left-of-center bloc already supported by a third of the electorate, and pushed Fine Gael to coalesce with Fianna Fáil in a coalition enforcing Troika-mandated austerity. Instead, it opted to join forces with Fine Gael, scrapping its own election platform and signing up to the full Troika programme. Labour paid a heavy price for this decision in 2016, losing two-thirds of its voters and winning just seven seats — the worst performance in the party's history, five years after its best.

Labour's dwindling band of loyalists have insisted that the party had no choice but to do a deal with Fine Gael: lacking the support to form a government of its own, it could at least restrain the larger party's worst proclivities in office. This line of argument rests on two dubious assertions. The first is that Labour actually did much, or indeed anything, to stop Fine Gael from pursuing

an aggressive right-wing agenda. The second is that Labour and other forces to its left had reached the limit of their support in 2011 and stood no chance of challenging conservative hegemony in the next general election. For a party which had already doubled its vote to dismiss the idea that it could progress any further betrays a startling lack of ambition. Facing a government with a programme that was bound to provoke widespread anger, Labour would have had every reason to expect a swing in its favor over the next election cycle. Stephen Collins of the *Irish Times* let the cat out of the bag in the wake of the 2016 poll, admitting that if Labour had remained on the opposition benches after 2011, "it would probably have emerged as the biggest party by now."[34]

With Labour in free fall, the baton passed to Sinn Féin, a party whose rise since 2008 has been founded on a strong anti-austerity profile. Although its European Parliament members sit with the post- and neocommunist parties of the United Left group, Sinn Féin has more in common with the Scottish National Party or Catalonia's Republican Left; the closest analogy, however, would be with the *abertzale* left in the Basque Country, the only other political movement in Western Europe with longstanding ties to an armed insurgency. As a party that organizes in both parts of a divided island, Sinn Féin is especially hard to pin down, because the two states differ so greatly in their political complexion. In Northern Ireland, Sinn Féin has won support primarily as a nationalist party, with its position on economic issues less important to voters than its image as the most effective and determined representative of the Catholic-nationalist minority. South of the border, however, the only space available to Sinn Féin lay on the left of the spectrum as a challenger to the Labour Party.[35] A left-wing platform was central to its electoral growth in the Republic from the mid-nineties on, but this ideological plank remained subordinate to Irish nationalism, as one of the party's leading intellectuals has frankly acknowledged.[36]

Sinn Féin's political orientation will be discussed further in the final section of this article, as will the broader implications of the 2016 poll. But one thing was already clear before any votes were cast. Labour's choice in 2011 ensured that voters would not face a choice between two alternative governments with distinctive platforms when they next went to the polls, as neither

34 Stephen Collins, "Seismic shift could lead to FG minority regime," *Irish Times*, February 29, 2016.

35 Daniel Finn, "The Adaptable Sinn Féin," *Jacobin* 21 (spring 2016).

36 Eoin Ó Broin, *Sinn Féin and the Politics of Left Republicanism* (London: Pluto, 2009), 295–99, 308–309.

Sinn Féin nor its Trotskyist rivals would be in a position to make the kind of electoral gains required. The conservative parties had entered the crisis with a commanding lead over their opponents and could thus absorb even a large swing to the left without losing their grip on the reins of power. With the anti-austerity left facing an electoral impasse, the focus of social resistance now shifted unexpectedly to the streets.

IRELAND'S WATER WAR

The self-satisfaction of Irish politicians since the crisis began derived above all from the lack of *indignados* on Irish streets. Yet the winter of 2014 and 2015 suggested that Ireland's image as a comatose nation whose citizens would accept large dollops of austerity without complaint was under threat. Protests against water charges rapidly snowballed into the biggest social movement the state had witnessed for decades. An earlier challenge to austerity might have been expected to come from the Irish trade unions, which remain by far the most important social organizations in the country. However, from the beginning of 2010 to the end of 2013 there were just thirty-seven industrial disputes involving a little over fifteen thousand workers, from a working-age population of 3.6 million.[37] While the failure of organized labor to mobilize against government cutbacks is not unique to Ireland, the Irish movement entered the crisis with its own particular disabilities. Industrial relations during the boom years had been governed by a corporatist system known as "social partnership." Trade union officials often presented this model as a dramatic breakthrough which had established a new relationship between workers, employers, and the state; business merely saw it as a way to limit wage increases during a time of near-full employment. The real measure of "partnership" was the declining rate of union density, from 53.1 percent in 1995 to 31.7 percent in 2007.[38] 45 percent of professionals were unionized when the crisis began, but just 36 percent of plant and machine operatives, 23 percent of construction workers, and 8 percent of hotel and restaurant staff.[39]

Having proved unable to overcome the hostility of private employers to unionization when the labor market was tight, the Irish labor movement

37 Figures from Central Statistics Office: www.cso.ie.

38 Daryl D'Art and Thomas Turner, "Irish Trade Unions under Social Partnership: A Faustian Bargain?" *Industrial Relations Journal* 42, no. 2 (2011).

39 Kieran Allen, "The Trade Unions: From Partnership to Crisis," *Irish Journal of Sociology* 18, no. 2 (2010).

faced an uphill battle as the dole queues lengthened after the crash. The unions were nonetheless able to organize an impressive public-sector strike in November 2009 that mobilized 250,000 workers. Placed temporarily on the defensive by this action, the government's main priority was to take organized labor off the pitch. This goal was secured by the Croke Park Agreement of June 2010, which traded a promise of no compulsory redundancies or wage cuts in the public sector for a no-strike pledge and an ill-defined but extensive program of "reform" in working practices. Employers and conservative media outlets pocketed these concessions before launching an immediate offensive against the rest of the deal, which was duly scrapped before it had expired so that further job and pay cuts could be imposed on the public service. Such deals allowed the union leadership to preserve the illusion of "partnership," and Labour's entry into government supplied another excuse for passivity. With the principal stronghold of Irish trade unionism in the public sector tied down, private-sector employers had even less reason to feel inhibited.

Resting serenely on its laurels, Enda Kenny's government was then caught unawares by the eruption of protest at the end of 2014. A national march against water charges called by the umbrella group Right 2 Water brought more than a hundred thousand people onto the streets of Dublin in October 2014, the equivalent of a million marching in Spain; it was followed by an even bigger day of action on November 1, with simultaneous protests all over the country mobilizing well over two hundred thousand in opposition to the charges. Right 2 Water was supported by Sinn Féin, the radical left, and several trade unions, but much of the popular impetus came from community-based groups whose supporters had little previous experience of activism.[40] Protests continued in the early months of 2015, while Irish Water kept pushing back the deadline for registration as widespread noncompliance showed little sign of dissipating. In July 2015, the company was forced to admit that its own carefully massaged figures still showed a nonpayment rate of well over 50 percent.[41]

Guardians of conventional wisdom were at a loss to explain this spasm of discontent at a time when the narrative of recovery was ubiquitous. It would have been less of a puzzle if they were prepared to remove their

40 Ronan Burtenshaw, "The Politics of Disillusionment," *Village*, June 13, 2015.

41 Fiach Kelly, "Irish Water Collects Less than Half of Water Charges Owed," *Irish Times*, July 15, 2015.

ideological blinkers. To begin with, the benefits of "recovery" had not been felt in the working-class communities that supplied the foot soldiers of the campaign. Second, the message from government and media circles since 2008 had been that desperate times required desperate measures: austerity might not be pleasant, but it was essential to keep the bond-market wolves from the door. If the same voices were now assuring Irish citizens that the national emergency had passed, it was natural that many of those citizens would expect to see their burdens lightened and that they should take action to speed the process along.

A survey conducted at the beginning of 2015 gave a snapshot of opinion among the campaign's most dedicated supporters. Asked to give their reason for protesting, the majority (60 percent) agreed that "austerity has gone too far."[42] The fact that water charges became the lightning-rod for this sentiment was partly fortuitous. A scheme to impose user fees on households for water consumption appealed to the Fine Gael–Labour coalition for a number of reasons. There would be an immediate revenue stream, and they could trim the national debt a little by constituting Irish Water as a formally independent company; its borrowing would thus be kept off the state's books. Further down the line, Irish Water could be sold off to private interests, keeping the business lobby content. But water charges had the disadvantage of cutting across the carefully cultivated lines of division between tenants and homeowners, private- and public-sector workers, those with jobs and those without. With its latest measure, the government inadvertently catalyzed a mass movement against austerity that brought a whole new layer of people into action, stretching far beyond the traditional left-wing or republican milieu. Fifty-five percent of those surveyed had never taken part in a protest before; now, 78 percent believed that the most effective way to secure political change was through protesting.[43]

Irish media commentators predictably started proclaiming the death of the water-charges movement as soon as it had begun and set about vilifying the protesters with a degree of mendacity that exceeded the usual standard. A campaign built through social-media networks, whose activists made no bones about their intense distrust of traditional media, was not to be

42 Rory Hearne, *The Irish Water War, Austerity and the "Risen People"*, Department of Geography, Maynooth University, April 2015.
43 Ibid.

dispatched to the wrecking yard so easily. The government's strategy suffered a major blow in July 2015 when Eurostat rejected its case for keeping Irish Water off the state balance sheet, demolishing one of the main arguments for setting up the company in the first place.[44] Right 2 Water celebrated with another big national demonstration at the end of August, showing that it could still bring huge numbers onto the streets. With a general election fast approaching, the issue had lost none of its potency and would have to be grappled with by any government that emerged from the vote.

FLAGS OF CONVENIENCE

If the Republic of Ireland had been distinguished until 2014 by the apparent passivity of its citizens, its northern neighbor remained as much of an outlier as it ever was. The most sustained and troublesome campaign of protest in Northern Ireland since the recession began was provoked not by any economic issue but by a dispute over national emblems. From December 2012 to March 2013, the region was rocked by unionist demonstrations (and widespread violence) after Belfast's city council voted to restrict the number of days on which the British flag would be flown outside City Hall. The controversy posed a major challenge for the local power-sharing administration in a region still deeply marked by the long, bitter conflict of the seventies and eighties.

While the protests engaged a relatively small number of people — ten thousand at their high point in mid-December 2012 — they were backed by a much larger cross-section of unionist opinion than such figures would suggest:

> The numbers involved in the street protests were only ever a very small percentage of the unionist population. Even in the protest heartland of east Belfast no more than one percent of the population participated in the demonstrations. However there was considerable tacit support: a poll taken in mid-January showed that despite the violence and the losses to traders, 46 percent of unionists thought the protests should continue.[45]

44 Cliff Taylor, "Eurostat Says State Control over Irish Water 'Exceptional'," *Irish Times*, July 30, 2015.

45 Paul Nolan et al., *The Flag Dispute: Anatomy of a Protest*, Queen's University, Belfast, 2014, 10.

The immediate trigger for the unrest was a mass leaflet campaign in east Belfast by the two main unionist parties, targeting the middle-class, bi-confessional Alliance Party. With neither unionist nor nationalist representatives possessing an overall majority, Alliance had found itself exercising the casting votes on Belfast council and proposed a compromise whereby the Union Jack would be flown on certain designated days. Sinn Féin and its main nationalist rival, the Social Democratic and Labour Party, voted in favor of this compromise. A more constructive unionist leadership, representing a more self-confident community, would have celebrated the deal as a triumph: in the 1980s, few could have imagined a scenario in which Sinn Féin councilors might vote in favor of the British flag being flown in Belfast, even for a solitary afternoon. Straightforward political opportunism certainly played its part, as the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) leader Peter Robinson had lost his Westminster seat in east Belfast to an Alliance candidate in the previous UK election. But the underlying factors went much deeper than that.

The working-class unionist areas that supplied the majority of flag protesters have seen few material benefits since the peace agreement of 1998 and the belated formation of a cross-community government between Sinn Féin and the DUP in 2007. Long-term economic trends are working against them, the factories and shipyards of Belfast's industrial heartland having long since closed down, with no other source of skilled blue-collar employment taking their place: "New sites of consumption in the city center, riverfront, and former docks have replaced the traditional productive economy centered on heavy engineering and shipbuilding. Those with skills, education, and access to finance have done well in the new economy, while those without resources are increasingly corralled in the 'sink' estates of the inner and outer city."[46] The same processes have affected working-class nationalists, who are still at greater risk of unemployment than their unionist counterparts; but nationalists had always been less likely to secure well-paid blue-collar jobs, so the decline of heavy industry has not had the same impact on their fortunes.[47] In this context, it is all too easy to put forward a narrative that attributes unionist regression to nationalist advance — in much the same way that the

46 Peter Shirlow and Brendan Murtagh, *Belfast: Segregation, Violence and the City* (London: Pluto Press, 2006), 26.

47 Brendan O'Leary and John McGarry, *The Politics of Antagonism: Understanding Northern Ireland* (London: Athlone Press, 1993), 129–131.

radical right has won support in depressed postindustrial regions elsewhere in the UK by holding immigrants responsible for the ravages of neoliberalism.[48]

An especially farsighted political leadership would be needed to assuage these grievances and anxieties without exploiting them for short-term gain. Rare enough in most countries, a leadership of that caliber is certainly not to be found in contemporary unionism. When Northern Ireland's postwar settlement was taking shape in the late nineties, parties allied to the loyalist paramilitary groups spoke of providing working-class unionists with a voice of their own, and went much further than the mainstream unionist parties in acknowledging discrimination against nationalists under the old Stormont regime. That experiment has ended in failure, however: whether it was sunk by its own political contradictions or by ties with a dysfunctional milieu may be open to debate, but the outcome is not in doubt. The Progressive Unionist Party, once considered the most promising vehicle for a confident new unionism, was last seen trailing after the flag protests in the hope of a modest revival.

The DUP secured its current position as the dominant unionist force by denouncing the Ulster Unionists for their willingness to negotiate with Sinn Féin, whereupon it proceeded to strike a bargain of its own, leaving many supporters bewildered. Long the party of choice for working-class unionists, the DUP had previously combined its hardline stance on constitutional issues with a vaguely left-wing economic program, but has since abandoned that rhetoric to embrace undiluted Thatcherism.[49] With nothing to offer its working-class voters on the economic front, the party has all the more reason to ramp up tensions over cultural issues — and may not be able to control the upheavals which ensue. Researchers from Queen's University reached a depressing and ominous conclusion about the sentiment behind the flag protests: "The desire to be heard is not accompanied by any desire to listen."[50]

48 "Loyalists had come to see the peace process as a zero-sum game in which nationalist gains and unionist losses are part of the same equation ... the only concessions that are recognized are those made by unionism, and these are not framed within a narrative about peace, but rather as part of an unfolding story of loss." (Nolan et al., *Flag Dispute*, 10, 142)

49 David Gordon, *The Fall of the House of Paisley* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2009), 55–59. One ironic result of the peace process has been to reduce the salience of class in Northern Irish politics: The two ethno-national blocs were formerly divided between middle-class (Ulster Unionists, SDLP) and working-class (DUP, Sinn Féin) parties, but the latter now win votes from across the social spectrum, while remaining strictly monocultural in their respective bases (Jocelyn Evans and Jonathan Tonge, "Social Class and Party Choice in Northern Ireland's Ethnic Blocs," *West European Politics* 32, no. 5, 2009).

50 Nolan et al., *Flag Dispute*, 142.

WAR BY OTHER MEANS

Another reminder of how elusive "normality" remains in Northern Ireland came in April 2014, when Sinn Féin's leader Gerry Adams was arrested and held for questioning about his alleged role in the abduction and killing of a middle-aged woman in 1972. In what would prove to be the conflict's bloodiest year, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) had accused Jean McConville of working as an informer for the British Army. She was kidnapped, shot, and buried in secret; her remains were not discovered until 2003. The murder took on fresh political significance when former IRA leader Brendan Hughes accused Adams of giving the order to have McConville killed in an interview that was published after Hughes's death in 2008.[51] Transcripts of that interview, and of others conducted with republican and loyalist paramilitaries, had been deposited with the history department of Boston College. The idea to use those transcripts as material for a criminal prosecution against Adams appears to have originated with Norman Baxter, a retired police officer whose loathing of Sinn Féin (and Adams in particular) is shared by many veterans of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) — now repackaged as the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).[52] But PSNI officers would not have felt at liberty to arrest a senior political figure without believing that the time was right for such a move and that people further up the chain of command would not stand in their way.

Whatever may have been said behind closed doors, there was a clear public signal from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Theresa Villiers, just two weeks before Adams was taken into custody. Speaking before an audience of religious dignitaries, Villiers laid down a clear line about the way the conflict should be remembered, calling for "a proportionate focus on the wrongdoing of paramilitaries, rather than the almost exclusive concentration on the activities of the State, which characterizes so many of the processes currently under way," and deploring "a one-sided approach which focuses on the minority of deaths in which the State was involved rather than the great majority which were solely the responsibility of the terrorists."[53] As

51 Ed Moloney, *Voices from the Grave: Two Men's War in Ireland* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010).

52 Eamonn McCann, "Norman Baxter's Long Crusade," *CounterPunch*, February 13, 2012.

53 Liam Clarke, "Theresa Villiers: Stop Fighting over Past and Start Delivering for Present,"

a dose of rhetorical snake oil, the speech was exemplary. The whole idea of a struggle between paramilitaries and the state forces, between "terrorists" and those upholding the rule of law, has been damaged beyond repair after the inquiries conducted in recent years by various judicial bodies and by the PSNI's own Historical Enquiries Team (HET). A more realistic picture has emerged of a conflict that pitted the IRA and other republican groups against state forces and loyalist paramilitaries. The British state never perceived the loyalists in the same light as the IRA, as an enemy that would have to be defeated at all costs. Depending on the circumstances, the loyalists were seen as a nuisance that would have to be contained or as a useful ally. Collusion was extensive and systematic across the whole span of the conflict.

This view of the "Troubles" has long been commonplace among nationalists (including staunch opponents of the IRA). The difference now is that it has been vindicated by official reports whose authors can hardly be dismissed as republican sympathizers or dupes. Take, for example, the findings of one HET report on the so-called Glennane Gang, whose members were responsible for well over a hundred murders in the 1970s, including some of the most notorious atrocities of the time: "Members of the Nationalist community and relatives of the victims in cases such as these are convinced that investigations were not rigorously conducted, in a deliberate effort to conceal security forces' involvement and perpetuate a campaign of terror by loyalist paramilitaries against Catholic civilians. The HET is unable to rebut or allay these suspicions."[54] When serving members of the RUC were implicated in a sectarian attack on a Catholic pub, with ballistic evidence connecting their weapons to several killings by the Glennane Gang, they were given suspended sentences (with the exception of one officer who had already been convicted of murder); Northern Ireland's most senior judge described them from the bench as "misguided but above all unfortunate men" who had been motivated by "the feeling that more than ordinary police work was needed and was justified to rid the land of the pestilence which had been in existence."[55]

With eminent judicial figures willing to describe the attempted murder of nationalist civilians as "extraordinary police work," it is hardly surprising

Belfast Telegraph, April 17, 2014.

54 Anne Cadwallader, *Lethal Allies: British Collusion in Ireland* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2013), 117.

55 Ibid., 306–307.

that the history of the conflict was littered with similar instances of collusion, many of which have now been carefully documented.[56] Nor is it surprising that Villiers should be so keen to call a halt to investigations that threaten London's ability to whitewash the historical record. The arrest of Gerry Adams must be seen in this wider context, as part of a battle over historical memory and as a shot across the bows for his party. For the state, the monopoly of legitimate force, which has been reestablished as a result of the peace process, must logically encompass the monopoly of determining what force is legitimate. The ongoing battle over so-called "legacy issues" has the potential to disrupt a settlement that remains precarious almost two decades after the Belfast Agreement was signed.

BALANCING THE BOOKS

A more immediate threat to stability, however, came from an issue that brought Northern Ireland closer to the British and European norm: drastic cuts in public spending. Talks at the end of 2014 were meant to resolve disputes over flags, parades, and historical memory, but ended up kicking those matters into touch. They did, on the other hand, result in a clear statement of economic priorities. The text of the Stormont House Agreement committed the parties to "a comprehensive programme of Public Sector Reform and Restructuring" that would lead to "a reduction in the size of the NICS [Northern Irish Civil Service] and the wider public sector."[57] This commitment to reduce the size of Northern Ireland's public sector, like the wider talk of "rebalancing" the local economy, is based on a shoddy diagnosis of the region's ailments. It is true that Northern Ireland has long depended on a large subvention from the British Treasury, without which it would be unable to maintain current levels of employment. Public expenditure accounted for 67 percent of Northern Irish GDP before the crash, compared to 34.5 percent in its southern neighbor.[58] But to claim, as so many pundits do, that government spending is "crowding out" private enterprise is to

56 Almost 90 percent of those killed by loyalist groups were civilians: 878 of 1,027 deaths, or nearly half of all civilians to die during the conflict. Republicans killed 723 civilians, British state forces 186.

57 Stormont House Agreement, 2014, www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-stormont-house-agreement (accessed March 1, 2017).

58 Denis O'Hearn, "How Has Peace Changed the Northern Irish Political Economy?" *Ethnopolitics* 7, no. 1 (2008).

stand reality on its head. In truth, the role of the public sector has expanded because private industry is so weak.

Those who favor the "crowding out" thesis often note that public-sector employment, at 31 percent of the workforce, is almost twice the UK average of 17 percent. However, a clearer picture emerges when we look at the entire working-age population. Public-sector employment per working-age adult may be 4 percent higher in Northern Ireland (18 percent) than in the United Kingdom as a whole (14 percent). Yet the real gulf is between the respective figures for private-sector employment: 59 percent in the United Kingdom and 41 percent in Northern Ireland.[59] The share of household income that came from social benefits in Northern Ireland was 31 percent before the recession, against 25 percent in Britain and 18 percent in the Republic; the proportion of working-age people on disability benefits was 74 percent higher than in Britain.[60]

These stark figures bear witness to the decline of Northern Ireland's manufacturing base and the failure of its business class to generate any viable substitute. A similar pattern can be observed in many parts of Scotland, Wales, and northern England, where industry has been sacrificed for a new economic model based on finance and tilted heavily toward London and the southeast. A short-lived construction bubble at the tail end of the global boom that saw Northern Irish property prices soaring past the UK average was never going to be a long-term solution; predictably, it burst when the world economy plunged into recession.[61] It is absurd to imagine that such trends can be reversed by slashing public-sector employment: The sort of "rebalancing" that would entail brings to mind a one-legged man who has the other limb amputated in pursuit of symmetry.

The other magic bullet upon which Northern Irish politicians are relying — "magic" being the operative word in this case — is a cut in the corporation tax rate. Local political elites have spent years asking London for the freedom to vary the UK rate, and the Stormont House Agreement gave a conditional green light for such a move. Yet this demand has always been rooted in a simplistic and largely misleading view of the southern economy, which attributes its success in attracting foreign investment exclusively to its low rate

59 Paul MacFlynn, "Public Sector Employment in Northern Ireland," *NERI Research in Brief*, no. 20 (2015).

60 O'Hearn, "How Has Peace Changed the Northern Irish Political Economy?"

61 Ibid.

of corporation tax.[62] A report by a senior official at the UK Treasury that was published in 2007 found "no clear and unambiguous case" for a cut: "The policy would result in a net cost of about £2.2 billion over ten years, with no prospect of full cost recovery over the long run."[63]

Having set out the long-term vision in the Stormont House Agreement, Britain's Conservative government presented the short-term bill in the shape of a demand for deep cuts in welfare spending. For Sinn Féin in particular this presented a grave challenge, highlighting the divergence between its northern and southern platforms. Sinn Féin's northern leadership had previously shown little sign of discomfort at the neoliberal drift of economic policy in the power-sharing administration: Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness signed up to the consensus on corporation tax, describing the prospect of a cut as "an exciting opportunity for the regional economy."[64] But even a party as dexterous as Sinn Féin would find it hard to denounce welfare cuts on one side of the Irish border while imposing them on the other, and the party leadership opted to take a stand on the issue. The result was a protracted standoff that threatened to bring down the power-sharing executive. The Dublin government threw its weight behind the Conservative–DUP line on welfare, sensing an opportunity to tarnish Sinn Féin's anti-austerity image in the South.

BREAKDOWN

For the first time since the Good Friday Agreement was signed in 1998, economic issues had become the main focus of political life in the region, in place of the usual concerns. But the picture was complicated by an unexpected development: the killing of IRA veteran Kevin McGuigan in August 2015, allegedly by his former comrades, which led the DUP to threaten withdrawal from the power-sharing executive.[65] The budget dispute ultimately ended in a fudge, with the Northern Irish government granting Westminster the authority to impose welfare cuts while pledging to top up benefits from

62 Jim Stewart, "Corporation Tax: How Important Is the 12.5% Corporation Tax Rate in Ireland?" *IIIS Discussion Paper* 375 (2011).

63 Conor McCabe, *The Double Transition: The Economic and Political Transition of Peace* (Belfast: ICTU/Labour After Conflict, 2013).

64 Ibid.

65 Henry McDonald, "Death of an Assassin: How the Killing of Kevin Mcguigan Reawakened Belfast's Political Strife," *Guardian*, September 13, 2015.

its own resources — a move immediately dismissed as a sleight-of-hand accounting trick by rival politicians.[66] The so-called Fresh Start Agreement also contained the clearest commitment yet to slash the local rate of corporation tax by 2018.

Sinn Féin and the DUP were thus ready to face the Assembly election in May 2016, with their coalition deal apparently secure for the time being. Both parties held onto the great bulk of their support (although Sinn Féin faced a challenge from the People Before Profit Alliance in Foyle and West Belfast, two urban constituencies where the left-wing group took seats at its expense). Just as the election results were being digested, an unanticipated problem came into view, as a majority of UK citizens voted to leave the European Union. Martin McGuinness hastily called for a referendum on Irish unity on the grounds that 56 percent of Northern Irish voters had opted for Remain; Sinn Féin had campaigned vigorously against Brexit, while the DUP supported the Leave campaign. In practice, support for EU membership could not be mapped onto a border poll in any straightforward manner, even if the balance of opinion did break down roughly along communal lines, with the biggest Remain majorities in strongly nationalist constituencies. But if the question of Scottish independence is placed back on the agenda, the prospect of "being stranded in an offshore appendage of a Little Britain," as Malachi O'Doherty put it, could spur renewed agitation for Irish unity — or even a partnership of some kind with a newly independent Scotland.[67]

To general astonishment, the DUP's leader Arlene Foster then drove Sinn Féin to pull the plug on their coalition by refusing to take responsibility for gross incompetence in the management of a renewable-heating scheme that could end up costing Northern Ireland half a billion pounds. In a resignation statement, Martin McGuinness vented his frustration with the DUP's petty, obstructionist approach; this led Foster's party colleague Nelson McCausland to boast that Foster had been "too strong and too smart" for Sinn Féin to cope with.[68] That keen political intelligence was hardly in evidence when the results came in: with a 10 percent jump in turnout, the DUP had lost ten of its thirty-eight seats and came within a hair's breadth of being outpolled by Sinn Féin. Unionist parties now find themselves on a level foot-

66 John Manley, "People 'Conned' by Stormont Welfare Deal," *Irish News*, November 24, 2015.

67 Malachi O'Doherty, "The Same Recklessness that Has Tipped Us Out of the EU Could Cause Northern Ireland's Departure from UK," *Irish News*, June 25, 2016.

68 Nelson McCausland, "Why Real Reason for Martin Mcguinness' Resignation Is that Arlene Has Been Running Rings Round Him," *Belfast Telegraph*, January 12, 2017.

ing with their nationalist rivals for the first time in the history of Northern Ireland. If the two main parties are unable to patch up their differences in short order, a period of direct rule from London will intervene. At a time of general uncertainty for the United Kingdom, the DUP has proved staggeringly incompetent in its political tactics. The Union is not in danger yet, but it will need far more effective champions over the period to come than Foster and her associates.

SOUTHERN PROSPECTS

The second Northern Irish poll came almost exactly a year after southern voters gave the incumbent parties a bloody nose in their own general election. During the final months of 2015, opinion polls had appeared to show a clear picture. The outgoing Fine Gael–Labour coalition would not be re-elected; support for the three main parties would fall to its lowest-ever level; but there would still be a secure conservative majority in the new Dáil, as long as Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil could agree to some kind of "grand coalition" deal. All of which came to pass, but with a surprising twist, as the gap between the two center-right parties closed drastically in the final weeks of the campaign. Fine Gael had looked set to outpoll its rival by at least 10 percent, cementing its position as the dominant force in Irish conservative politics. As it transpired, there was almost a dead heat between the two. The calculus behind coalition horse-trading suddenly changed, with one party chastened while the other had a spring in its step. Pundits were quick to blame an excessively right-wing Fine Gael platform, put together with assistance from the British Conservatives.[69] While Fine Gael spokesmen spent most of the campaign boasting about a "recovery" that many Irish citizens had yet to experience in their daily lives, the Fianna Fáil leader Micheál Martin dusted off the center-left image that was once so important for his party, promising to give investment in public services priority over tax cuts for the upper middle class — and also to scrap water charges. This prompted one optimistic reading of the result as proof of "an emerging social-democratic majority."[70] If so, it was a majority with no chance of manifesting itself in government formation.

69 Fiach Kelly, "Jaded FG Pays Heavy Price for Choosing Wrong Ground to Fight Election Campaign," *Irish Times*, February 29, 2016.

70 Fintan O'Toole, "Election Result Driven by Emerging Social Democracy," *Irish Times*, February 29, 2016.

In one of his final essays, written shortly before Ireland's 2011 election, the late Peter Mair had identified "a growing divide in European party systems between parties which claim to represent, but don't deliver, and those which deliver, but are no longer seen to represent":

> Governing capacity and vocation becomes the property of one more or less closely bounded group of political parties ... representation or expression, on the other hand, or the provision of voice to the people, when it doesn't move wholly outside the arena of electoral politics, becomes the property of a second group of parties, and it is these parties that constitute the new opposition. These latter parties are often characterized by a strong populist rhetoric. They rarely govern, and also downplay office-seeking motives. On the rare occasions when they do govern, they sometimes have severe problems in squaring their original emphasis on representation and their original role as voice of the people with the constraints imposed by governing and by compromising with coalition partners.[71]

Mair pointed to the experience of his native country as a striking illustration of "the constraints imposed by governing" — above all, the inability of Irish governments to secure debt relief without precipitating a head-on clash with the European Commission and the ECB. Five years later, the impact of recession and austerity had transformed the Irish party system into a perfect example of the "bifurcation" Mair had described. Throughout Europe, traditional parties have been losing support in recent years, but the process has advanced furthest in the peripheral eurozone states, where the Troika and its austerity programs have opened a chasm in political life. Elections in Spain, Portugal, and Ireland during the winter of 2015–16 delivered remarkably similar outcomes. In each case, the dominant center-right and center-left parties lost ground to outside-left anti-austerity forces, but would still have been able to form a government with a solid majority if they joined together in a "grand coalition." However, this was precisely what those parties wanted to avoid, with the experience of the PASOK–New Democracy alliance in Greece at the forefront of their minds. Nobody wanted to leave parties like Sinn Féin, the Left Bloc, or Podemos at the head of the opposition, where they would

71 Peter Mair, "Bini Smaghi vs. the Parties: Representative Government and Institutional Constraints," *EUI Working Papers*, RSCAS 2011/22 (2011).

have a real prospect of winning the next election, just as Syriza had done in January 2015.

Three different countries produced three different responses to this dilemma. In Spain a second election was called within months, while in Portugal, the Socialists attempted to draw the hard-left parties into a governing alliance without committing to the radical anti-austerity stance Syriza had adopted. The Irish solution was to try and form a grand coalition while calling it something else. After two months of inconclusive talks, during which it seemed as if the deadlock might not be broken without a fresh election, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil eventually came to an arrangement. Martin turned down the offer of full participation in government, but gave his blessing to a Fine Gael minority government that would have the support of right-wing independents. Stephen Collins of the *Irish Times* bluntly described it as "a mechanism for the center ground of Irish politics to hold on to power without putting Sinn Féin and the hard left in the position of being the only alternative government."[72] If we replace the euphemistic term "center ground" with "right wing," that formula will do perfectly.

There was a price to be paid: namely the suspension of water charges, upon which Fianna Fáil insisted. This step was greeted with splenetic fury by much of the Irish commentariat, who warned that it would invite further protests against austerity. As Cliff Taylor observed in the *Irish Times*, "The water-charge controversy was always about much more than water — and so the collapse of political will on the issue in the face of public opposition is bound to have consequences."[73] However, the climbdown was unavoidable: with nonpayment rates soaring upward after the general election, Fianna Fáil could only backtrack on its pledge to suspend charges if it was willing to support a government dragging thousands, if not tens of thousands, of people through the courts by the midway point of its term in office. The three channels of protest carved out by the water-charges movement — electoral campaigns, street marches, and nonpayment — all proved vital. The conservative parties have not abandoned hope of imposing water charges at some point in the future, but their retreat over the

72 Stephen Collins, "Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil Have an Incentive to Deliver Political Stability," *Irish Times*, May 7, 2016.

73 Cliff Taylor, "Mixed Messages on Water Charges May Open the Door to Other Campaigns," *Irish Times*, May 14, 2016.

issue did constitute a real victory for popular mobilization, in a country its leaders had gleefully held up as the Weak Man of Europe.

There had been an ill-conceived attempt to use the water-charges movement as a lever that could shift the entire balance of political forces: namely, the Right 2 Change (R2C) platform, which was organized by some of the trade-union officials who had supported the protests. R2C placed Sinn Féin at the heart of its ambitions for government formation and tailored its program to accommodate that party's outlook. In the run-up to the 2016 election, Sinn Féin ruled out going into coalition unless it had the upper hand in any alliance, which left the door open to an arrangement with Fianna Fáil as long as Sinn Féin had more seats in the Dáil. With the two parties neck and neck in the opinion polls for much of 2015 and Sinn Féin consistently polling in the region of 20 percent, the R2C leadership was encouraged to believe that a "progressive government" that could abolish water charges was within their grasp.

A more realistic objective would have been to firm up Sinn Féin's stance against coalition with the right-wing parties while promoting greater unity among the other political forces involved in the water charges movement. This approach could not have led to the formation of a left-wing government — Labour's decision in 2011 had taken that option off the table for the next electoral cycle at least — but it might have boosted the anti-austerity vote and rendered it more cohesive. As it turned out, the R2C platform was unable to keep Sinn Féin's star in the ascendant during the last stages of the election campaign. Its eventual score — just below 14 percent — was still the party's best performance since the 1920s, but a good deal lower than its polling figures over the previous year and a full 10 percent behind Fianna Fáil. Ireland's anti-austerity left had found itself in a difficult position after Syriza's capitulation to pressure from the Troika in 2016, much like its Iberian counterparts. The lesson of the Greek experience was that a more radical approach — including a willingness to ditch the euro if necessary — would be needed to disrupt the Berlin Consensus.[74] But the first instinct of parties like Sinn Féin and Podemos was to shy away from that prospect, talking instead of a break with austerity within the framework of the eurozone — a scenario that lacked all conviction after the "waterboarding" of Greece.

74 Stathis Kouvelakis, "Syriza's Rise and Fall,'" *New Left Review* (Jan–Feb 2016).

Despite Sinn Féin's disappointing result, forces to the left of Labour now have their strongest-ever foothold in the Dáil, while the political establishment has been forced to test out an unorthodox political alliance after burning through its traditional options in the space of five years. Normality has yet to be restored. Three factors are likely to be crucial in the period to come. Will the cohesion of the governing alliance prove greater than that of its opponents? Will the experience working-class communities gained in the struggle against water charges carry over into new forms of social resistance? And will the Irish economy be spared the impact of external shocks from Britain, Europe, or the wider world? The answers to these questions will determine whether the 2016 election proves to have been the beginning of the end or the end of the beginning.

THE TEA PARTY IN RETROSPECT

Catalyst INTERVIEWS **VANESSA WILLIAMSON**, COAUTHOR (*with* THEDA SKOCPOL) OF

The Tea Party & the Remaking of Republican Conservatism

Can you remind us about the developments that drove the Tea Party's initial appearance in the wake of Obama's election in November 2008?

Within weeks of President Obama's inauguration, there were scattered local protests opposing his approach to stabilizing the American economy. There were demonstrations against the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (popularly known as the "economic stimulus package"), against Obama's housing policies, and so on. These protests were very small — often a few dozen people. You'd see signs calling for "states' rights" and all kinds of other things. It was far from a coordinated movement.

The use of phrases like "states' rights" should remind us that the Tea Party did not spring from nowhere. The Republican Party has been moving rightward for decades, and it was not a coincidence that several Tea Party activists I interviewed dated their first political experience to Barry Goldwater. The Tea Party was simply a new iteration of that politics.

You start to see concerted "Tea Party" events in late February 2009,

after Rick Santelli, a CNBC news personality, went on a "rant" on the floor of the Chicago Mercantile exchange, complaining that Obama's housing policies would benefit irresponsible people at the expense of hardworking Americans, and calling for a "Chicago Tea Party" to address the issue. The speech was picked up by conservative radio hosts and eventually by Fox News, which actively promoted the April 15 "Tax Day" Tea Party rallies for weeks in advance. Fox News hosts acted as headliners for Tea Parties across the country. The "Tea Party" symbolism gave conservatives, disheartened after the defeats of 2006 and 2008, a new label to rally behind.

That summer, Tea Party members participated angrily in their representatives' town hall meetings, and in September there was another large Tea Party protest in Washington. Early the following year, Republican candidates won some surprising elections — including Scott Brown's victory in Massachusetts — and in the midterm elections, Republicans retook the House and were in a position to stymie the Obama administration's agenda for the next six years.

What was the relationship of the initial Tea Party to the Republican Party? What were the main points of conflict?

The Tea Party was not a monolith. In our book *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, we describe its three discrete elements. First, a grassroots base made up of older white conservatives who were very concerned about demographic change and immigration was galvanized by the election of Barack Obama. Second, a conservative media infrastructure served as a kind of social movement organization to rally the grassroots base. Third, a segment of the Republican elite, typified by the Koch brothers, was dedicated to a very extreme antigovernment ideology and worked to harness the energy of the Tea Party moment into long-term electoral power.

The three components of the Tea Party were not in perfect alignment. The grassroots members of the Tea Party felt deeply threatened by the demographic and social changes represented by the election of Barack Obama. They worried that Obama's policies would benefit "undeserving" people, people who did not work hard enough to earn their benefits. Of course, this perception of welfare is not new and has always been suffused with racist assumptions about who works hard. Tea Party activists were also especially concerned about

immigration, and immigrants receiving government benefits without paying their share of taxes. On the other hand, Tea Party activists supported the major components of the welfare state that supported people like them — Social Security and Medicare. This support for benefits for the "deserving" put rank-and-file Tea Partiers at odds with the more elite elements of the Tea Party who were (and are) committed to a major rollback of the social safety net for everyone. When Obama was in the White House, it was relatively easy to paper over these differences. But now, with unified Republican control in Washington, I think you are beginning to see the tension between the extreme ideology of cutting the social safety net, and the reality that the Republican base benefits from government programs along with everyone else. That's why the politics of the Freedom Caucus are so interesting. Of course, operating as a minority bloc within the party, you may be able to take your ideological stand with the knowledge that the rest of the party will, in essence, save you from yourself.

The question of why this right-wing extremism has caught on is complicated. Some of the political polarization in recent decades seems to have stemmed from rising economic inequality and from geographic shifts in partisanship — Democrats crowded in cities and Republicans dominating rural areas. And then, of course, the parties are increasingly sorting by ethnicity, which any comparative-politics expert would tell you does not bode well for our democracy. Finally, periods of racist reaction tend to follow periods of racial progress, and I think we are definitely seeing that now. I do not think there is a single answer.

What is striking, however, is the extent to which members of Congress have given up on playing a "long game." There does not seem to be much sense that they need to preserve institutions or practices for when the majority changes hands again, which typically serves as a stay on extremism.

But back in 2009 and 2010, when the Republicans were in the minority, it was relatively easy to mask these differences. Still, a relatively small part of the Republican elite recognized and moved quickly to take advantage of the Tea Party's grassroots energy. Americans for Prosperity (AFP), for instance, massively expanded its reach in the states during the Tea Party era, often working with local Tea Party activists on their policy priorities, most prominently their campaign to roll back union rights. Today AFP is part of a broader network of organizations supported by the Koch brothers that operates with

a level of funding and staffing equivalent to a major political party.

But AFP's priorities were not really the primary issues that motivated grassroots activists in 2009 and 2010. And this is something we saw come to the forefront in the 2016 election. Donald Trump really managed to tap into the grassroots Republican xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment.

Could you please lay out what seemed to be the potential and limits of the Tea Party?

As a movement of older white conservatives, the Tea Party was always limited demographically. This is a general problem in the Republican Party, which is a primary reason we are seeing voter suppression laws appear in Republican-controlled states that could be competitive for Democrats. If you do not have enough voters to win a majority, you have two choices. One, you can reach out to new constituencies. Two, you can disenfranchise and demobilize the voting blocs that typically support your opponents, so that your voters are still a majority on Election Day even if they aren't a majority of the population. The contemporary Republican Party has chosen the second option.

The other limitation of the Tea Party is less obvious. Within a year of Obama's inauguration, about nine hundred local Tea Party groups had sprung into existence. These groups were engaged in local politics, holding regular meetings: real grassroots activism. But a year after the 2010 midterms, more than a third of those groups had died out. The grassroots Tea Party had an impact in the early years of the Obama administration, in concert with media and elite aspects of the Tea Party. The grassroots did not have staying power as an independent set of organizations.

That rapid decline should serve as a warning for the groups on the Left that have been following the Tea Party playbook in organizing opposition to Trump. If you are looking for a model of sustained activism over more than a few years, the grassroots Tea Party is not it. I think groups like Indivisible have done tremendous work to build grassroots energy on the Tea Party model, but they will need more than the Tea Party example if they want to persist. Luckily, the Left has a rich tradition to draw upon.

Did the Tea Party electorate flock to Trump?

I think it is a mistake to imagine there is a distinct "Tea Party electorate." The Tea Party was a label adopted by older white conservatives in the early years of the Obama administration. Tea Party supporters were sometimes angry that Republican elected officials were too moderate, but they were still Republicans. In the general election, of course, the Republican electorate as a whole flocked to Trump.

But there is certainly continuity between the motivating issues of the Tea Party and Trump's supporters. Even compared to other conservative Republicans, Tea Party supporters had especially negative views about immigrants and ethnic minorities. They also tended to endorse more authoritarian policies. In the Republican primary, Trump's supporters were distinct from other Republicans in their anti-immigrant attitudes and were also especially authoritarian. So, within the Republican Party, the attitudes that distinguished Tea Party supporters were also the attitudes that distinguished Trump supporters.

What can we expect in terms of policy? Will Trump actually put into place a significant right-wing populist program?

There is no reason to be surprised that the right-populist rhetorical positions Trump took during the campaign amount to nothing substantive when they conflict with the priorities of Republican leaders in Congress who actually understand the politics and the procedures by which legislation occurs. Doing serious work on behalf of anyone else, in particular on behalf of working and middle-class people, would be wholly out of keeping with Trump's personal and professional history.

The real tension is not between Trump and the Republicans, but between an extreme antigovernment ideology that has taken hold among Republican elites and the realities of governing. That tension would exist even if one's idea of governing were simply placating a base — that is, older white people who, by and large, rely on major government programs like Social Security and Medicare.

The Republican Party is in a strange position right now. With unified political control, it is likely their best opportunity to pass the major cuts to

the social safety net that free-market ideologues like the Koch brothers have been seeking for decades. But, at the same time, Republicans are now in the position of actually having to govern. In the Obama era, they could impose austerity via gridlock — shut down the government and impose arbitrary, across-the-board cuts with the excuse that the other party was not willing to negotiate. They could weaken progressive policies and then decry those policies' limitations. Now it is harder to shift blame for cuts to popular programs. You can see the challenge in the fight over the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Suddenly, voting for repeal is not a symbolic act but a real piece of policymaking, and the value of "Obamacare" becomes clearer to people.

In terms of Trump's personal impact on policymaking, I think it is likely to be threefold. One, continued attacks on civil liberties, particularly for immigrants and minorities. Two, as we saw with the Carrier deal, perhaps some symbolic moves that give the impression that the administration is defending American workers and jobs, with minimal actual effects other than large cash infusions for those companies' CEOs. Finally, to the extent that the administration's political appointees can shape policy implementation, we can expect incompetence, conflicts of interest, and profiteering.

Will implementing benefit cuts have legislative consequences?

To the extent that Republicans cut the benefits their base relies upon, they do risk legislative consequences — presuming those benefits are sufficiently obvious. Not every fight is going to play out like the aborted effort at ACA repeal, however. Much of our welfare state is "submerged," as Suzanne Mettler describes it, so it is often hard for Americans to perceive the ways they benefit from government — for instance, via tax benefits rather than direct spending. Moreover, by drawing out the timeline for benefits reductions, running programs poorly, and starving government of funds via top-heavy tax cuts, Republicans can certainly find backdoor ways to damage American social protections.

MANAGEMENT-BY-STRESS

A REPLY TO JOSHUA MURRAY & MICHAEL SCHWARTZ'S
Collateral Damage: How Capital's War on Labor Killed Detroit

MIKE PARKER

Over the past half-century, the Japanese auto industry, led by Toyota Motors, has risen to the peak of world car production, taking an ever-increasing share of the world market away from the US companies that had controlled the industry since the birth of the assembly line. What accounts for this fundamentally important development? Opinions are, unsurprisingly, sharply divided. Mainstream media, defending US employers, attribute American firms' declining competitiveness to the recalcitrance of the United Auto Workers (UAW), which it views as defending the laziness and greed of its members, who blindly resist every management initiative at every level, from the shop floor to the bargaining table. Some union sympathizers, by contrast, including supportive intellectuals and academics, see it as resulting from employers' insistence on controlling the labor process and seeking to raise profits through intensifying exploitation — at a time when Japanese producers have already clearly demonstrated the necessity of capital–labor cooperation for achieving their historically unprecedented productivity growth and rates of innovation. The differences in these two perspectives could not be starker, yet both miss the real transformation of the auto industry.

THE LOGIC OF "FLEXIBLE PRODUCTION"

In their article "Collateral Damage: How Capital's War on Labor Killed Detroit," Joshua Murray and Michael Schwartz offer an original, highly sophisticated, and comprehensive version of the latter approach. They argue that, starting in the 1940s, the US auto industry gave up on the system of "flexible production," originally installed by Henry Ford, in order to implement a new production system that aimed to defeat the unions and assure management's dictatorship over the labor process. Flexible production had not ceased to deliver record rates of profit and increases in productivity, but it had become unbearable to the Big Three employers because of the leverage it provided workers. It depended for an important part of its productive efficiency on locating factories close to one another in order to facilitate coordination between them, relied on a single source ("mother plant") to provide key components for the whole system, and employed just-in-time methods of delivering inventories, all of which made for pressure points that workers could attack in order to disrupt production.

The new system of "dispersed production," according to Murray and Schwartz, sought to shift the balance of power by depriving workers of precisely these pressure points, opening the way for managers to step up class struggle to intensify labor and hold down wages. The Big Three accomplished this by dispersing factories over wide geographical areas, building redundant plants that duplicated one another's output, and dismantling just-in-time delivery. They therefore chose to step up control over the labor process and directly assault workers rather than enhance labor-management collaboration to create a faster-growing "pie" that could simultaneously support higher profits and better compensation to workers.

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, while the Big Three were dropping flexible production in favor of dispersed production, Japanese producers adopted, according to Murray and Schwartz, a version of that same flexible production in the form of the Toyota production system, which proved far superior, allowing them to best their American rivals in raising productivity, reducing costs, sustaining quality, and driving innovation. This enabled Japanese automakers to take an ever-increasing share of the US market from

the late 1960s. Flexible production, according to Murray and Schwartz, also proved far superior for Japanese workers because it depended on labor–management cooperation that brought them higher wages, a form of full employment, and limits on the intensification of labor, just as it delivered higher efficiency and more rapid innovation to Japanese employers.

Why did the Japanese adopt flexible production, despite the leverage to disrupt production and resulting power to extract concession, it supposedly gives workers? According to Murray and Schwartz, both Toyota and Ford initially adopted the system under the threat of strike and disruption by its workers; they stuck with it in spite of the enhanced shop-floor control and material gains it allowed workers because it made extraordinary potential increases in productivity possible. Like Ford, Toyota chose a strategy of increasing profitability through increasing efficiency and innovation, by way of labor-management cooperation and limits on labor intensification and exploitation. In so doing, it rejected American automakers' strategy of intensifying class conflict against labor. Japanese producers have continued to increase their technological advantage over their American counterparts throughout the last half-century, exerting ever greater competitive pressure upon them. Yet US producers have clung stubbornly to their dispersed system, seeking to sustain their competitiveness by raising the rate of exploitation. This has meant holding down wages and intensifying the class struggle, an approach that has led them to relocate production to areas where workers are more easily exploitable, especially the US South and Mexico. They have therefore sought to defend their position by taking a growing share of a slower-growing product, while their Japanese rivals have forged ever further ahead by sharing a fast-growing pie with their workers.

The problem, for Murray and Schwartz, is to explain why Japanese and American producers took divergent paths. But their explanations do not seem entirely clear, or fully consistent internally. They contend that the Japanese stuck to flexible production because they were "explicitly aware of the long-term virtues of the [flexible production] system." The Americans, by contrast, stayed with dispersed production, in line with what Murray and Schwartz argue is a general "trait of capitalist production": that "when workers obtain and utilize disruptive leverage to systematically extract remunerative and work process concessions, management … will sacrifice efficiency and

innovative capacity to retain unfettered control." Indeed, they argue, "only labor can restrain this destructive tendency of capitalism." But why did their counterparts and rivals not see things and act the same way they did, under apparently similar conditions? Why weren't American automakers aware of the long-term production advantages of flexible production that impressed themselves on the Japanese? How and why did Japanese automakers avoid the generalized capitalist tendency to rely on increased exploitation to transcend workers' disruptive leverage? The divergent lines of reasoning adduced by Japanese and American automakers that, according to Murray and Schwartz, lay behind their divergent productive paths still cry out for explanation.

Murray and Schwartz's account covers a broad sweep of history and can be approached, and called into question, at several points in terms of both its empirical and analytical claims. Did the Ford assembly-line regime really provide workers greater control in order to win their acceptance, or as a straightforward consequence of this system's superior productiveness? Was the Toyota system actually an unavoidable concession to workers' militancy, or was it imposed on workers in the wake of their crushing defeat in the bitter class struggles of the early 1950s? Was Toyotaism essentially the same as the Fordism, or did it represent a radical transformation of that system in new directions? Did the Big Three decisively reject the Toyota system or end up embracing it?

I believe that Murray and Schwartz's answers are substantially wrong on all these questions. I leave it to others to deal with their contention that the regime of Henry Ford and Harry Bennett's social police and condescending paternalism could be characterized in any sense as a cooperative stance by management, as workers' control, or as respect for workers. I want to focus on their other assertions — most importantly, the idea that workers should embrace the Toyota production system because it gives them more control and limits the intensification of labor to which they can be subjected. Not only does this belief set unions and workers on a dead-end path, but it has huge implications for understanding the dynamics of modern capitalism. After all, if there is a production system that is a long-term win-win for both capital and labor, the basis for class conflict can potentially be eliminated, at least to a significant extent.

WHAT'S IN A NAME

Let's begin with the Toyota production system.

Japanese managers, led by Eiji Toyoda and Taiichi Ohno, took as their starting point in the early 1950s the Henry Ford assembly line, as already developed over more than three decades in Detroit. But they shaped a new system of management that was very different from any that had ever prevailed in the United States, at Ford or anywhere else. In a relatively short time, Japanese companies used that system to beat US-based automakers in the marketplace. Far from being a step forward for workers, the success of this new system depended in large part on intensifying work, super-exploiting most workers, reducing workers' power at the workplace, and destroying or at least containing independent unions. It has required a new level of union struggle to resist. But most US unions have not been up to the fight and are now suffering the consequences.

In the 1970s, when this organization of production was gaining traction in the United States, it was called the Japanese production system, the Toyota production system, or more commonly, by some of its US promoters, "lean production." Names, of course, are half the battle in any propaganda war. Who can be against "flexibility"? Who could argue for "fat" production? Virtually every company had its own version. These new systems were marketed as American products and not despised imports, making it easier to sell them in the United States, particularly to the companies' employees.

IN JAPAN: MANAGEMENT AND WORKERS

In the United States, the image of the Japanese workplace has been enshrouded in myth. This has meant that industrial analysts, among them Murray and Schwartz, have tended to treat salient aspects of the system as increasing workers' leverage and improving their working conditions and living standards, when in fact these aspects simply reflect management's own production priorities.

Lifetime employment with no layoffs was an important aspect of the Japanese system. Combined with promotion by company seniority, it tied workers to their companies, preventing them leaving to join another one.

But lifetime employment was limited to a central core of workers, making up perhaps a third of the labor force. As a corollary, there was part-time, contingent employment for a majority of workers. So when management wished to expand or contract production, it could turn to the labor force of temporary workers who could be let go or rehired as needed. Since the work was so tough, even core workers were forced to leave if they could no longer handle the job. By age fifty or fifty-five, "lifetime employment" meant transfer to one of the supplier plants at lower wages.

Japanese management's concern with minimizing the appearance of inequality in its labor force is legendary. Equality in the workplace was symbolized by supervisors and workers wearing the same uniform or sharing the same cafeteria. But the Japanese system also gave supervisors the ability to award workers with different pay increases. After many years, two workers doing the same job might be making considerably different wages. So much for prioritizing equality.

Japanese management is known for eliciting workers' input concerning production. It puts pressure on workers to provide suggestions for improvement and offers them rewards for doing so. Workers who do not contribute do not get to advance. Thus, all too many workers feel obliged to give suggestions, even though in so doing they speed up other workers and sometimes even themselves. In the Japanese auto industry, there was no local union to protect workers or see that they benefited from their own suggestions.

It is a central contention of Murray and Schwartz that flexible production endowed Japanese workers with "a degree of control over the intensity of the production process." Yet most observers of Japanese industry — Japanese and foreign — have observed the exceptional intensity of work in Japan. There is even a special term for one of its consequences: *karoshi*, sudden death due to overwork.

The Japanese system became possible because auto companies defeated militant unions in an extended series of bitter and decisive class battles in the early 1950s. The employers succeeded in crushing the radical, hitherto expanding Japanese trade-union movement that had exploded onto the scene right after World War II. On its ruins, management created a new set of unions dominated by companies and managed by supervisors who were

frequently the union officers. Management's resulting dominance of the production process, with the cooperation of these "enterprise unions" and the corresponding vulnerability of workers, provided the foundations for the Japanese system and its spectacular innovation and efficiency.

US AUTOMAKERS AND THE JAPANESE PRODUCTION SYSTEM

It is not clear why Murray and Schwartz assert that US automakers resisted the Japanese-Toyota production system. In fact, US producers worked very hard to try to implement it and adapt it to the US context. They did not, however, have an easy path, especially because they did not have the pro-company enterprise unions that their Japanese counterparts had to help them. Instead, US automakers confronted the UAW, which had, over the previous decades, won some limited power that was embedded in the formal contract and "past practice" shop-floor rules. The Big Three also faced their own bloated, privileged local managers, who had been trained in Taylorist management practices and were heavily resistant to change. Still, to push their agenda of installing Japanese methods, top management had a trump card. The automakers' rapid loss of market share and resulting worries about plant closings put the fear of job loss into the hearts of both UAW workers and local managers, and US manufacturers were able to push ahead.

US management used a variety of approaches to learn and put in place Japanese management methods. They traveled to Japan, secured the advice of academic experts in the Japanese production system, and hired Japanese managers to operate their plants. Especially noteworthy in this regard were the joint ventures. Each of the Big Three companies partnered with Japanese companies in establishing a plant in North America that was nominally owned by the partnership but actually managed by the Japanese partner. Ford and Mazda opened the Mazda Plant in Flat Rock, Michigan, in 1987. Chrysler and Mitsubishi opened Diamond Star in Normal, Illinois, in 1988. GM and Suzuki opened Canadian Automotive Manufacturing Inc. (CAMI) in Ingersoll, Ontario, in 1986. But the first, most famous, and most important joint venture was the GM-Toyota New United Motors Manufacturing Inc. (NUMMI) factory, which opened in 1984 in Fremont, California.

The NUMMI narrative soon became a legend. The joint venture, so the story goes, started with a GM plant that had been closed because of poor production performance by its unruly, frequently absent, drugged-up workforce and uncooperative union. But the new group of managers, recruited from Toyota, using the same workforce and the same union, turned the plant into one of the best and most efficient in the United States within two years. That, at least, was the NUMMI myth; in fact, Toyota cherry-picked the GM employees to be allowed back in the plant, the union agreed to a contract that gave the company virtually complete control over the work process, and the union leadership committed itself to assisting the NUMMI managers. In the two years since GM had closed the plant, most of the workers had run out of unemployment benefits, few had found employment that paid comparably to their auto jobs, and many were facing bankruptcy. So when the offer to work for Toyota came along, many became "born-again workers," devoted to the company that had saved them and willing to do anything to keep their new places.

Even so, the hard reality of work at NUMMI soon began to take its toll. In response to the brutal intensification of work at NUMMI and the other three experimental unionized transplants, a militant and dynamic opposition developed, despite the efforts of the international union to quell it in the interest of the company. In fact, in all four joint ventures, insurgents succeeded in kicking out the initially loyal local union leaderships and replacing them with others more to their liking. It was a far cry from the pacified labor regime that predominated in Japan.

Toyota closed NUMMI in 2010, throwing 4,500 workers into a 12 percent unemployed work pool. This was not because NUMMI had a problematic plant, a failing product, or poor workforce. Its productivity rates were comparable to those in Toyota-owned plants elsewhere in the United States. Toyota could easily have shifted more Corolla production to the NUMMI plant or scheduled it for the new hybrids coming on line, but it had had enough with employing a unionized workforce in the United States. The Japanese partners of the other joint venture experiments soon followed.

Despite all the claims about partnership, Toyota preferred to manage without the UAW. Wherever unions raised their heads at other US locations, Toyota fought with all the traditional union-busting techniques. Any

notions of "respect" for and "commitment" to workers were discarded, like the workers at NUMMI. But the UAW international, after years helping to spread the gospel of the Toyota production system, barely put up a fight. It quickly settled the fightback NUMMI workers launched against the closing of the plant, in exchange for severance pay averaging about $55,000 per worker. In exchange, the UAW also agreed to a gag order that stopped UAW local and international leaders from criticizing Toyota for closing the plant.

INTRODUCING THE TOYOTA PRODUCTION SYSTEM INTO EXISTING US PLANTS

Introducing the Japanese production system in new Japanese–owned or –run nonunion plants was relatively easy. Transforming strongly unionized plants owned by US companies with established management routines along Japanese lines was a lot more difficult. Early on, the Big Three won the top levels of the union over to the belief that the future of the industry lay in copying the Japanese model. But union locals still retained a good deal of autonomy, and local officials who wanted to be reelected had to respond to workers on the shop floor. So began a long period of rewriting local contracts and taming or eliminating the power of local leaders.

One way the companies and top union leadership asserted their hegemony was by way of "jointness" programs, which were ostensibly aimed at securing "worker input" on issues like product quality, safety, and absenteeism reduction by appointing full-time union representatives to deal with them. The problem was that the jointness positions were filled not by elections of the local union membership or even selection by the union local itself, but rather appointment by top officials of the UAW international. Shop-floor workers derisively called these appointees "clipboarders." The clipboarders came to constitute an army on the shop floor, tasked with enforcing the new production system over the objections of local members and sometimes local officers.

The representative structure of the UAW at the local level was weakened, meanwhile. The number of shop stewards (or "committeemen") was reduced and the union leadership increasingly withdrew support for shop-floor actions

and cut back on defending shop leaders when they were disciplined. The number of clipboarders circulating on the plant floor often exceeded the number of stewards.

Local officers allowed themselves to be "won over" to the program because demonstrating their loyalty to the international was required if they were to have any hope of moving up the union hierarchy or staying off the production line in the event that they lost office. Indeed, it was not uncommon for local officers who supported the international to be voted out of office and then be appointed by the international to full-time positions in the plant, so they could help to implement the new production system and campaign to return to union office in the next election. Members of locals were "won over" with the carrot and the stick. The biggest stick was the company's threat to close the plant; the carrots included things like worker-involvement programs, quality circles, recognition programs, and the like.

During the 1970s and 1980s, there was strong resistance to the introduction of the Toyota system in many local plants. But this was ultimately undermined by the strong pro-company policies of the international union, in particular the companies' ability to close — or threaten to close — plants where dissidents were powerful, especially by obliging one plant to compete with another for the prize of remaining open. The companies did make some accommodations to the UAW nationally and locally, notably with respect to job classifications. For example, the "flexible" system required skilled trades classifications to be reduced from dozens to one or two — to allow *management* greater flexibility in making work assignments. In most US plants the reduction did not get past four or five classifications.

CONVERGENCE

By the early 2000s, the technology and work processes in most US plants (domestic and foreign-owned) converged and looked very similar, the outcome of "Toyota-ization." Major body stampings were produced in the assembly plant itself or nearby. Parts were scheduled by computerized "logistics" programs based on just-in-time production. Outsourcing production of parts previously made in the plants was extensive, but the number of suppliers was kept limited. The dispersion and duplication of production

so central to Murray and Schwartz's argument were not substantially different between corporations. In some plants, workers from supplier companies worked inside the plant alongside regular workers, at lower wages. Working for different organizations at different pay greatly weakened solidarity in the workplace.

In all plants, just-in-time became the goal. US-owned plants had the equivalent of Andon boards and pull cords (see below) and reduced in-process buffers (accumulation of product between stations) and inventory as they adopted just-in time. (Toyota, at the same time, was finding that it needed buffers in many operations.) Most US plants had "teams" and other "worker involvement" programs. Many superficial signs of status were removed: supervisors removed their ties; supervisors and hourly employees parked in the same lots and ate in the same cafeterias. But management was now even more firmly in control of the production process and production-process decisions.

The Toyota production system had come out victorious in the United States auto industry and was spreading to other sectors, like health care. The convergence was by no means complete — the most significant difference being that most plants owned by US companies still had unions, while US plants with Japanese owners did not. As a consequence, some US-owned units still maintained work rules that provided some defense for individual workers, protected seniority rights (like the right to bid on jobs) more effectively, and provided workers greater recourse in conflicts with supervisors. Of course, some local unions did a better job than others in maintaining a measure of local union power.

MANAGEMENT-BY-STRESS

The defining feature of the Toyota production system is a structure that enables it to manage itself with a minimum number of managers. It accomplishes this by purposely constantly stressing itself to reveal weak spots. Features that might appear to provide worker control are actually about enabling tight management control over the work. Let's look at a few of the key elements.

THE PULL CORD

As evidence that Japanese "automakers *explicitly* accepted institutionalized constraints" on management's rights to set production schedules, work standards, and discipline of workers, Murray and Schwartz cite the "pull cords allowing all assembly-line workers to stop production if they could not keep up with production." The pull cord usually goes with the "Andon board" — some form of display above the work station or the whole line that shows how each station is doing. (The term is now widely used in the United States — an indication of the widespread adoption of the Toyota production system.) In one of its more primitive forms, the Andon board is made up of three lights: red, yellow, and green.[1] The light is green when the station is running easily. If a worker is getting into difficulty, he or she pulls the cord to turn on the yellow light to alert the team leader. If the problem cannot be fixed quickly, the worker pulls the cord to light up the red light and stop the line. Music starts to play when the red or yellow light comes on to draw further attention to the problem.

It is, of course, a very big and expensive deal if the line stops. Given the just-in-time system for delivering parts and the lack of buffers between stations, when a station stops working, an entire group or department may also be stopped immediately. In that case, an area supervisor will rush to that station, which is easily identified by the display board, and take action. If the problem is a part or machine problem, it can be quickly addressed. If the "problem" is that a particular worker is unable to keep up (while the workers doing the same job on other shifts are able to do so), then the supervisor can counsel, discipline, or replace the worker. If a worker cannot finish a task in the allotted time and passes on uncompleted product without pulling the cord, it is almost certain that a worker downstream will identify the problem and call a supervisor, at which point the original worker will be disciplined for not pulling the cord. The upshot is that a worker will try mightily to keep up and avoid pulling the stop cord and drawing her supervisor's attention unless she is certain the problem is not her fault.

One might therefore conclude that the supervisor's preference is to see

1 Of course, today, there are elaborate digital boards that deliver messages and production targets but quickly switch to announce any problem that comes up at a station. Push buttons or operator screens frequently replace pull cords.

all green lights all the time. But under this management system, all green means the supervisor is not properly doing her job. This is because all green lights indicate that nobody is being pushed to the limit and some may not be being pushed at all. If the lights are all green, the supervisor speeds up the line until yellow and red start to appear. At that point, the supervisor redistributes tasks to those who show only green and then speeds up the line once more, repeating the process until all stations show only occasional yellow and red.

There are many ways to speed up a work process without physically speeding up the assembly line. One is to keep the same speed but remove one person from the crew and redistribute the work among those remaining. Another is to reduce the working space along the line for each task and forbid workers from working over the line between stations.

A further option might be to add new tasks to an operation, such as inspecting the work piece as it comes into the station and pulling the cord if there is any defect. This makes it easy to catch a problem early and identify who or what caused the error. This may add just two seconds to a job, but that means the other tasks need to be sped up to make room for those two seconds. Moreover, management gets the additional benefit of workers watching each other's work and reporting any mistakes immediately. This process is what the famous principle of *kaizen,* or "constant improvement," in production is all about.

Some of us have labeled this system "management-by-stress" because it requires much less supervision. It frees supervisors from having to watch each worker individually. At the same time, it puts pressure on every worker to keep up that is similar to having a supervisor constantly watching you at work. The system quickly identifies the station with problems, allows the supervisor to focus on the most problematic worker, and indicates what remedial action is required to transcend the difficulty and achieve a higher level of efficiency.

It should thus be clear that the pull cord does not allow an individual to restrain the system when he or she is under stress, but rather constrains workers to improve or intensify their labor so as not to interrupt the line. It thus allows the system to stress all workers, to compel them to conform to the system's requirements. Nor does the pull cord give workers power over

schedules, work standards, and discipline, as Murray and Schwartz assert. Rather, it increases management's ability to identify "problem workers," intensify work, set and change work standards, and discipline workers.

This is not to deny that the pull cord could theoretically be a weapon against management in the hands of the workers. But workers would have to be able to organize effective collective action in deploying it. For example, if many workers pulled the cord at the same time, they would have tremendous power. This is something a strong union *could* use to turn the tables on Japanese-style management. That is why eliminating, coopting, or at least defanging unions is an essential part of the management system.

JUST – IN – TIME

One of the best-known elements of the Toyota production system is the "just-in-time" work process. Toyoda and Ohno substituted a "pull" system for the "push" system that marked Ford's production line. As Murray and Schwartz explain, instead of piling up quantities of product between steps in the production process to serve as buffers just in case something, somewhere, goes wrong, just-in-time makes it a principle to remove all buffers. Of course, the advantage in theory of having buffers available is obvious. If a person at one station needs to stop and fix something for a short time, this will not interrupt the work of the people upstream or downstream, because what is normally supplied to them will continue to be available. What has the potential to be a costly stoppage can thus be avoided.

But buffers are costly, too. Buffers are essentially inventory. Not only is producing the extra material in inventory a cost, but so is the cost of storage space, the cost of moving materials in and out of inventory, and the damage that can happen to product while in storage. So getting rid of buffers saves all the costs associated with inventories. It also opens the way to improving the quality of production: it is easier to see the source of a problem when you know exactly when it happened and that was only ten minutes ago. Then, too, if you eliminate buffers, you don't fill up storage bins with defective product made between the time of the problem and the time when it is discovered. From management's point of view, buffers hide the problems. Just-in-time makes any problem stand out so it can be addressed.

Nevertheless, the biggest reason why just-in-time is essential to the

Toyota production system is that, like the Andon system, it greatly improves management control over the work process. When there are buffers between stations, a worker can take a thirty-second break and then rush to catch up. Getting rid of buffers gets rid of this tiny bit of worker control. The worker is under constant pressure to keep at her job consistently in exactly the way it was assigned to her.

Murray and Schwartz are right that, all else being equal, just-in-time can give workers tremendous leverage because it can leave production and management more vulnerable to interruption. Indeed, there are cases where unions have used just-in-time to force concessions from the company. The best-known example is the 1998 strike at two Flint, Michigan, GM plants that forced more than twenty-five GM assembly plants to stop production for lack of parts and a hundred parts plants for lack of anywhere to store output. GM had to pay unemployment penalties for the nearly two hundred thousand workers it had to lay off. The union used the arrangement of just-in-time supply between plants successfully to force management concessions.

The same power is potentially available to small groups of workers within a plant that has eliminated buffers between departments and between stations. From management's point of view, just-in-time urgently requires the employer to strip workers of this power. In real life, the supervisor has the power to define any job in the department, reassign workers to that job, and discipline any worker who does not do it properly. Individual workers and most small groups of workers have little ability to use just-in-time to their advantage because management can respond with severe discipline, including firing. Workers can only use just-in-time against management if there is a strong union willing to back them up, so that, for example, any employer discipline of a few workers will be met by more workers joining in. From the company side, just-in-time requires management domination of the union, if there is one.

STANDARDIZED WORK

In the Toyota system and virtually all modern "quality" systems, quality of product is defined as limiting the variation from specification. For this, standardized work becomes essential. The best way to ensure that a product

always comes out the same is to see to it that you always start with the exact same materials and that every step in the process is also exactly the same. It follows that that management must carefully define how a job is to be done and then insist that the job be done that way. If jobs are done in different ways, then the only way to approach quality (conformance to specification) is by inspection. But if you can eliminate variation in the process, you can eliminate part variation and discarded parts and greatly reduce the amount of inspection (and the number of inspectors).

The problem is that much of the cost of standardized work is borne by the worker. If the standardized job requires you to hold a part with the left hand and tighten with the right, then switching hands is a variation in the process. This may not seem like much, but to a worker doing a repetitive job, it may be the difference between carpal-tunnel syndrome and healthy wrists. Standardization also prevents the worker from making the job more interesting by trying out different ways of doing it. For management, forcing workers to perfect standardized work processes has the added advantage of making that particular task easier to control and to automate or outsource. By reducing tasks to specified components, it is also easier for supervisors to move tasks from one worker to another. So here again we have the basic conflict: management's control over the work process versus workers trying to protect their minds and bodies. It is not a scenario that leaves much room for cooperation and mutual respect. In a plant where the union is stronger, management finds it harder to discipline workers who do not strictly adhere to the standard procedures.

GATHERING WORKERS' IDEAS *and* EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT

To describe the reality of work teams would take much more space than we have here. The bottom line is that work teams and various employee involvement programs range from fraud to psychological manipulation. For the most part, teams are just another word for groups organized around supervisors where the supervisor is fully in charge. Standardized work means that individual workers are prevented from trying different ways of doing things on their own. The ideas need to go through their teams, and worker suggestion programs are channels for management to appropriate worker

ideas and then decide which will be tried and adopted. With management constantly putting pressure on the job by speeding up the line (or taking equivalent measures), workers are forced to try to find ways to relieve the resulting stress. But a time-saver can only be implemented through management — and the ultimate result will not be relief time, but management assigning additional jobs to fill the newfound time.

MULTISKILLING

Under the "flexible work system," workers are trained to do many tasks rather than just one. But as we have seen, given "standardized work," most jobs are made up of very specific, simple tasks that can be done by most of the workers. Even so, workers are not taught most jobs. Usually they learn only the jobs allocated to their supervisor's team, and perhaps not even all of those. So, contrary to Murray and Schwartz's assertion that learning multiple tasks leads to "increasingly skilled" production personnel, it turns that a worker who knows many simple tasks is often not as skilled as someone who knows different ways to do a more complicated task. More important, "multiskilling" provides a feel-good description for ending job classifications. All else being equal, a rigid job-classification system does not seem particularly desirable from any point of view — and normally the most rigid, counterproductive job lines will be ignored where that makes sense. In the skilled trades, under the old system, workers from different trade classifications frequently helped and taught each other.

But rules about job classifications in an authoritarian environment became an important defense against arbitrary management directives. A job-classification system gives the worker limited rights to refuse work that is out of classification and rights to limit being transferred solely at the discretion of the supervisor. It also gives workers some rights to move to a job they feel best fits their capabilities and needs. Insisting on rigid job-classification lines becomes a lever for a worker to use in dealing with an uncooperative or hostile supervisor. The upshot is that eliminating classifications means a supervisor can assign a worker to do any job at any time and can define that job's content. This gives the supervisor enormous additional power at the expense of the worker.

To eliminate classifications is to eliminate one of the important ways that

workers can survive the workplace as they age or get injured. With a classification system, a worker can bid on a job that he feels better suits him. For example, until US plants adopted lean production, the janitor classification paid slightly less than a line job and required cleaning up some pretty messy situations. Yet it was one of the most desired jobs in the plant, and it frequently took years of seniority to qualify a successful bid on it. The job was not particularly standardized, so it involved more decision-making and discretion than a line job. Perhaps most importantly, though, because it could be varied at the worker's discretion, janitorial work was something an older body could survive when it was no longer possible to take the body-breaking, repetitive work of an assembly line. Introducing multiskilling and getting rid of classification meant eliminating the separate janitor job, most of which was simply added onto the production jobs. "When the line is down, pick up a broom and sweep, or clean your machine." Major janitorial work was simply outsourced to firms paying far less. The good jobs, ones that were survivable, simply disappeared from the plant.

The Toyota production system also sharply reduced the skill levels of jobs in the skilled trades. By combining different trades — machinists, electricians, welders, millwrights, plumbers, carpenters — into one or two "maintenance" classifications, management appropriated the right to assign anyone any job. At the same time, much of the truly skilled work was outsourced to separate construction firms or vendor maintenance personnel, who were usually nonunion. The remaining skilled jobs in the plant were increasingly "standardized," with written step-by-step procedures for many tasks; bit by bit, many of them were transferred to production workers.

Skilled work usually means a good job — one with both respect and self-respect. The work is generally more interesting and more varied and requires decision-making on the job. The companies' attack on skilled trades saved them more than money. Under just-in-time, the amount of time it takes for a skilled tradesperson to repair a machine can vary enormously and affect a whole department. By diminishing the number of skilled workers through contracting out, cutting back on the scope of their work, and reducing their discretion, management greatly lessened their shop-floor power — a power on which local unions had often relied in bargaining and in defending union rights.

ELIMINATION OF WASTE

One way to define the goal of management-by-stress is as a system that eliminates "waste" — anything not required for direct production. It turns out that waste includes such features of production as maintaining inventory buffers, repair work on parts not produced right the first time, and excess material and energy used in production. Getting rid of waste also includes getting rid of unnecessary worker time.

Consider an assembly line. If a particular job on the assembly line takes one minute, finding a way to reduce that to forty-five seconds through better tools, better procedures, or cracking the whip, would seem to get rid of a big chunk of wasted time. Of course, if all this meant was that the worker stood around for those fifteen seconds, time would be saved, but there would be no resulting increase in productivity. So what really counted was not so much "saving time" per se, but rather finding a way for the worker do something *else* productive in that fifteen seconds. One way to accomplish this was to simply speed up the assembly line, so that the next job for the worker came along in forty-five seconds rather than in one minute.

The distinction between saving time in general and saving time that has to be paid for is essential. Anyone who has ever worked an assembly line knows that one of the ways workers survive a repetitive, mind-numbing, body-breaking assembly-line job is by finding ways to create a few seconds of relaxed time to stretch, scratch, or take a drink of water. But from management's perspective, this is time to be eliminated. One of the major sources of the productivity gain the Toyota system achieved was thus derived from raising the average work time from forty-five to fifty seconds in each minute — typical in many older US plants — to fifty-five to fifty-eight seconds in each minute. A frequent measure of *kaizen* is how much waste time can be squeezed out of a job. The combination of increased work time combined with standardized work resulted in higher carpel-tunnel-syndrome rates in the plants that perfected *kaizen* — but it simultaneously meant higher productivity and profitability.

A SYSTEM FOR MACHINES, NOT PEOPLE

All these elements, as well as others, work together. Instead of trying to make the system work by compensating for possible deficiencies, management-by-stress does the opposite. As noted above, it removes these compensations to reveal weakness, then keeps putting the system under increasing pressure to reveal new weak points, which can then be addressed. If some parts of the system never break down, they are, in the eyes of management, probably overresourced, so resources are removed or moved. It means increasing the pressure and moving material from the strongest points to the weakest points. From the point of view of an engineer designing a machine or a structure, this approach makes a great deal of sense and is very attractive. When fighting the Toyota system in the seventies, eighties, and nineties, we termed it "management-by-stress" because we saw that as the central operating principle — stress the production system, cause faults, and arrange for those faults to be as visible as possible, even if it means shutting down all operations for a time. Not only does this achieve much higher productivity, it does so with fewer managers — another savings. But the problem was that this production machine was made up of human beings, who were pushed until they failed and who were then discarded in accord with the requirements of profitability.

For one brief paragraph in their paper, Murray and Schwartz acknowledge many of these elements in citing Christian Berggren's "catalogue of oppressive elements of Toyotaism." But Murray and Schwartz regard these elements as incidental to the system. In reality, they are central to it.

CONCLUSION

The tensions in the system of management-by-stress are enormous. The very devices that drive the system to new heights of productivity are also tools that workers could use against management to win concessions. But if workers use these tools to relieve the pressure or stress on them, the system loses its driving force. Stress is the regulator of the system; relieving stress destroys that regulation. The system only works if management can keep workers from using these tools in their own interest. This has to be done at many levels. At the individual level, we have seen how the system quickly and sharply identi-

fies workers who do not keep up and how supervisors reward cooperative workers and discipline or remove those who resist. Management has long understood that using the iron fist is best only as a last resort. It is far cheaper to try to induce workers to cooperate through manipulating their fears and dreams. This is done through programs to foster identification with the company, as against other companies and the world; programs to reward individual contributions (even if they result in others losing their jobs); fostering competition between workers; and keeping open hopes for advancement. In order to fight unionization and maintain workforce stability, the model flexible plants do pay near the top of the industry scale, which is usually more than the average wage in the surrounding area because the companies locate in low-wage areas. But these plants also rely on speed-ups, outsourcing, automation, and extensive use of temporary workers to limit the total number of their higher-paid workers and keep up hopes among the lower-paid workers that they will be selected to move into the higher-paid group.

The aggregate levels are more important. Strong workers' groups and unions, where workers collectively and consciously use just-in-time or stopping the line to back up their demands on management, can overcome supervisors' power over individuals and, if organized across plants, challenge the most determined management. In Japan, management relies on enterprise unions — unions in name only — to help them maintain culture and discipline at the workplace. In the United States, Japanese manufacturers have strongly, and so far successfully, resisted unionization.

US–owned auto plants that have converted to versions of lean production (another name for management-by-stress), have had to maneuver and make some concessions to get the UAW's cooperation. In essence, the companies make deals with the international union to help maintain some of the union's organizational needs by appointing "jointness personnel" and making decisions on plant locations. In return, the companies get cooperation with management in the main elements of lean production and in constraining any local resistance to the system. While the union structure may be more financially stable, an important result is the increasing alienation of members from their union. Increasingly, members see their union less as the vehicle to defend themselves at work and more as another boss. This also means that members identify less with their union in politics — something evident in recent elections.

Whatever the name — flexible production, lean production, or management-by-stress — the Toyota production system contains many attractive features from an engineering and management view. It makes sense if we think of the production process as a machine. From a social point of view there are advantages as well — higher productivity, less waste, higher quality products. But from a social point of view, these advances have a very high cost: They put many people out of work or into lower-paying jobs. The production system is an important cause of the rapid motion toward a two-tier society. The jobs that remain cause a great deal of bodily wear, with most workers unable to sustain the pace as they get older. Slowing the pace of work and adapting it to what is comfortable and engaging for humans over a long period reduces the productivity and profitability of the system. To function properly, the system requires destroying, coopting, or placing major constraints on unions. "Flexible production" does not eliminate the basis of class struggle even if, for a time, it can suppress its visibility.

For those who want a fuller discussion of what is presented here, I suggest looking back at a couple of works from the battle over management-by-stress, which was ultimately won by the employers in the auto industry.

Mike Parker and Jane Slaughter, *Working Smart: A Union Guide to Participation Programs and Reengineering* (Detroit: Labor Notes, 1994).

Christian Berggren, *Alternatives to Lean Production: Work Organization in the Swedish Auto Industry* (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1992).

THE NEW "CULTURE OF POVERTY"

CHRIS MAISANO

McDowell County, West Virginia, is one of the sacrifice zones of American life. The poorest county in one of the poorest states in the country, it's been the setting for a seemingly inexorable social catastrophe that's still unfolding decades after it began. In the middle of the twentieth century, McDowell was the heart of West Virginia's coal industry, a place where the struggles of the United Mine Workers lifted entire communities out of poverty and degradation and into proletarian respectability. It was the home of one of the largest coal mining and processing industries in the world, and at its height it provided enough employment to support a population of roughly a hundred thousand.

Then came the collapse. The Appalachian region lost tens of thousands of mining jobs in the 1980s, and few places were hit harder than West Virginia. Between 1983 and 1992, the state lost close to twenty thousand

mining jobs, many of them in McDowell. Mechanization was the leading culprit, but rising competition from Western coal producers and natural-gas fracking have also played major roles.[1] As a result of coal's decline, McDowell's population cratered — there are eighty thousand fewer people living in McDowell today than there were fifty years ago. The median income in the county is barely above $20,000, a third of residents (including over 60 percent of children under five) live below the federal poverty line, and less than two-thirds of adults have graduated from high school. The catastrophic scale of McDowell's opioid epidemic has pushed the county government to take the unprecedented step of filing suit against a group of drug wholesalers, accusing them of responsibility for the nation's highest rate of deaths by drug overdose. The most shocking measure of McDowell's devastation is its life expectancy — seventy-three years for women and sixty-four for men. These figures are comparable to those in Mongolia and Namibia, not the rest of the United States or any other advanced capitalist country in the world.[2]

McDowell County is not a place where many people could reasonably be described as "privileged." But it is largely white — over 77 percent, as of 2015. In the 2016 presidential election, 75 percent of its voters cast their ballots for Donald Trump, a higher proportion of the vote than Trump won in the state as a whole.

This combination of white despair and seemingly overwhelming enthusiasm for Trump was too much for the media to resist. Before and after November 8, intrepid journalists filed a spate of reports on the region that take us, in the words of one prominent *New Yorker* article, into "the heart of Trump Country." For the professional-managerial class, places like McDowell have become a screen for projecting their anxieties about the rough beast they blame for delivering Donald Trump to the White House — the white working class.

A pre-election video report on McDowell from the *Guardian* is symptomatic of the genre. Titled "Why the Poorest County in West Virginia Has Faith in Trump," the report takes a largely sympathetic look at the dire

1 Brad Plumer, "Here's Why Central Appalachia's Coal Industry Is Dying," *Washington Post*, November 3, 2013, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2013/11/04/heres-why-central-appalachias-coal-industry-is-dying.

2 Bernie Sanders, "The Great Divide: Life in McDowell County," n.d., https://www.sanders.senate.gov/life-in-mcdowell-county.

circumstances confronting McDowell's residents. It's premised on the observation that Trump received a higher percentage of the GOP primary vote in the county — over 90 percent — than anywhere else in the country. While this is undoubtedly true, the Trump Country narrative that's built on that number begins to fall apart the moment one interrogates it. Trump may have received an overwhelming share of the vote in the McDowell County Republican primary election, but only 860 people voted in that context. By contrast, close to 2,700 people voted in the county's Democratic primary election, and Bernie Sanders won about 1,500 votes, or 55 percent of the total. Hillary Clinton won more votes in the McDowell primaries than Trump did — 817 to 785.[3]

A similar dynamic played out in November's general election. While McDowell County delivered three-quarters of its votes to Trump, turnout was abysmal. Just 36.4 percent of its eligible voters showed up on Election Day, a participation rate far below the rest of the state (57.5 percent) and the country as a whole (about 60 percent).[4] While Trump's hard-hat routine undoubtedly won him the support of some working-class white voters in places like McDowell, their role in powering Trump's unexpected victory has been consistently overstated. As Mike Davis argues in a compelling analysis of county-level voting data, the Trump Democrat phenomenon "is real but largely limited to a score or so of troubled Rust Belt counties from Iowa to New York," where a confluence of plant closures and growing immigrant populations have stoked a nationalist and nativist backlash.[5]

3 West Virginia Secretary of State, "McDowell County Results, Primary Election — May 10, 2016," 2016, http://services.sos.wv.gov/apps/elections/results/results.aspx?year=2016&eid=22&county=McDowell. To put these figures in context, Trump won the statewide GOP primary with about 77 percent of the vote; Sanders won the Democratic primary with 51 percent. So both candidates outperformed their statewide showing in McDowell, with Trump significantly increasing his already overwhelming margin of victory. It's worth noting that Paul Farrell, a lawyer from Huntington, also ran in the Democratic primary and won about 9 percent of the vote statewide and in the county. It is difficult to know whether his absence from the race might have boosted Sanders's performance even further. For full primary election results, see West Virginia Secretary of State, "Statewide Results, Primary Election — May 10, 2016," 2016, http://services.sos.wv.gov/apps/elections/results/results.aspx?year=2016&eid.

4 West Virginia Secretary of State, "2016 General Election Turnout," 2016, http://www.sos.wv.gov/elections/current/Pages/2016-General-Election-Turnout.aspx; United States Elections Project, "2016 November Election Turnout Rates," 2016, http://www.electproject.org/home/voter-turnout/voter-turnout-data.

5 Mike Davis, "The Great God Trump and the White Working Class," *Jacobin*, February 7, 2017, jacobinmag.com/2017/02/the-great-god-trump-and-the-white-working-class.

McDowell County was not among them, despite its prominence in the punditry's imagination. It was not overrun with hillbilly stormtroopers bent on striking a blow in defense of their increasingly devalued whiteness. To the extent that its residents felt compelled to participate in the electoral process at all, one could make a strong case to call it Sanders Country instead of Trump Country. When offered the opportunity to vote for Bernie Sanders's social-democratic agenda, many of McDowell's down-and-out did so. About 120,000 of their fellow West Virginians felt the same way and carried an avowed socialist to a clean sweep of all fifty-five counties in the state's Democratic primary election.[6]

Since the basic rule of journalism is "simplify, then exaggerate," perhaps we shouldn't be too surprised by its failure to adequately illuminate the political behavior of working-class whites. Unfortunately, many scholars and intellectuals have not fared much better in untangling these issues. Over the last year, a spate of widely praised books purporting to illuminate the sources of white malaise have fallen into many of the same traps. Whether historical, sociological, ethnographic, or autobiographical, these books share fundamental weaknesses. They confuse symptoms for causes, overemphasize culture and identity at the expense of political economy, and fail to offer any insight as to how the impasse of contemporary politics might be broken.

WHITE IS THE NEW BLACK

The "culture of poverty" thesis is one of the most malleable and resilient tropes in American politics. Formulated by the sociologist Oscar Lewis and popularized by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, its intellectual pedigree can be traced back to the liberal left, not the chauvinist right. Nevertheless, its focus on cultural practices and family structures in explaining poverty among African Americans made it very easy for a rising generation of conservative intellectuals to appropriate it for their project to roll back the gains of the New Deal/Great Society welfare state.[7]

In their view, the black poor found themselves in poverty not because of economic structures or legal-institutional discrimination, but because of a set of values and behaviors ostensibly specific to the "black community" and

6 Cathy Kunkel, "Losing West Virginia," *Jacobin*, March 6, 2017, https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/03/losing-west-virginia.

7 Paul Heideman and Jonah Birch, "The Poverty of Culture," *Jacobin*, September 16, 2014, https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/09/the-poverty-of-culture.

passed from one generation to the next. By now, the particulars of this narrative should be quite familiar. By providing the black poor with cash benefits, government policy, the argument goes, underwrote a range of pathological behaviors: single-parent/female-headed households, out-of-wedlock births, mass unemployment, criminality, violence, and drug addiction. Instead of reducing poverty, the welfare state generated perverse incentives for people to remain poor and maintain the bad habits that got them there.[8]

The most influential statement of this school was *Losing Ground*, by the odious Charles Murray. Published in 1984, Murray's policy proposals were praised by Democrats and Republicans alike — Bill Clinton referred to Murray's work as a "great service" to the country — and directly inspired the successful campaign to "end welfare as we know it."[9] He followed it up with *The Bell Curve* (1994), an open defense of the notion that differences by race in IQ test results are rooted in racial genetic differences, and most recently *Coming Apart: The State of White America 1960–2010* (2012). In *Coming Apart*, Murray showed that his reactionary ideas could just as easily be applied to poor whites as poor blacks. In his view, the intensifying class polarization among whites in recent decades can also be explained by divergent cultural values and behavioral repertoires. The white elite is well off *because* it works hard, goes to college, stays married, goes to church, and gives to charity. The white underclass, by contrast, has more in common with the black welfare queens of popular imagination. In Murray's telling, they're poor not because of structural problems but because they drop out of school, have children out of wedlock, avoid work whenever possible, depend on welfare, sell and abuse drugs, and engage in criminal activity — all the while dooming their offspring to a similar fate. To break the cycle, upper-crust whites must begin to "preach what they practice" and inspire their poor relations to get their acts together. Like their counterparts on the other side of town, an expanded welfare state won't save them — only a steady diet of bourgeois virtue can.[10]

Murray's influence permeates the pages of *Hillbilly Elegy*, the bestselling memoir by Appalachian boy-made-good J.D. Vance. In the wake of the election, Vance has become the punditocracy's go-to native informant on all

8 Adolph Reed Jr., "The Underclass Myth," *Progressive*, August 1, 1991, http://progressive.org/magazine/the-underclass-myth/.

9 Jason DeParle, "Daring Research or 'Social Science Pornography'?: Charles Murray," *New York Times Magazine*, October 9, 1994, http://www.nytimes.com/1994/10/09/magazine/daring-research-or-social-science-pornography-charles-murray.html

10 Charles Murray, *Coming Apart: The State of White America 1960–2010* (New York: Crown Forum, 2012), 294–95.

things white trash. He and Murray have spoken together at think tanks like the American Enterprise Institute, and their views are often linked in media reports on the white poor. As Vance somewhat awkwardly discloses at the outset of the book, "There is an ethnic component lurking in the background of my story."[11] For Vance, class is not a matter of political-economic structures but cultural identity, something close to a racial category in itself. In his view, the poor Scots-Irish Americans he grew up with aren't held back by the bleak economic prospects confronting them, but by a Lamarckian moral degeneracy transmitted from one generation of hillbillies to the next. As he claims in one particularly appalling passage, back home "you can walk through a town where 30 percent of the young men work fewer than twenty hours a week and find not a single person aware of his own laziness."[12] He is often compelled to acknowledge the grim realities of the region's economic collapse, but quickly retrains his fire on "a culture that increasingly encourages social decay instead of counteracting it."[13] It's a vicious little book, a litany of well-worn complaints against the intemperate and shiftless poor disguised as a hardscrabble personal narrative.

The likes of Murray and Vance are not wrong to discern a cultural chasm between the white elite and the increasingly immiserated ranks of the white poor. Clear divergences in marriage and divorce rates, out-of-wedlock births, church attendance, and drug abuse are all observable phenomena and appear to have intensified in recent years. But that's to be expected when almost all the growth in new income accrues to the top, while real wages and living standards collapse at the bottom. It would be quite an achievement if working-class communities and family structures held up under such enormous economic strain. But they have not, and the fallout from these developments should not come as a surprise. Vance's grandparents could relocate from their corner of eastern Kentucky to Ohio for well-paid work at a unionized steel plant. How many people can follow the same strategy today? Who in their right mind would uproot themselves to drive an Uber or pack boxes at an Amazon warehouse for low wages and no benefits? Under these circumstances, staying home to collect disability checks or sell meth looks like a much more rational decision.

11 J.D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016), 3.

12 Ibid., 57.

13 Ibid., 7.

CAN THE HILLBILLY SPEAK?

The impulse to transmute class into a cultural/identity category is not confined to the Right. It is a common maneuver in the contemporary Left, where discussions of "classism" often substitute for serious considerations of political economy and class structure. Instead of understanding class relations in structural terms, the concept of classism relates primarily to attitudes, stereotyping, and interpersonal behavior. Its proponents often attempt to sneak a structural dimension in through the back door by arguing that the classist attitudes of the powerful shape public policies and institutional rules at the expense of people at the lower end of the class hierarchy. While the political implications of the concept are often left unspoken, the critique of classism does not imply a movement from below to overturn the structural underpinnings of class exploitation but rather a change in attitudes from above to "build bridges" across the class divide. Instead of getting workers into unions and socialist parties, the goal is to get elites into a seminar room so they can understand and unpack their class privilege. What they do with that privilege after they've unpacked it is left unaddressed.[14]

This relentless focus on intersubjective, interpersonal relations between individual members of different classes completely overlooks the ways in which capitalism operates as a system of objective social relationships. As Ellen Meiksins Wood has argued, the universal market dependence that defines capitalism necessarily imposes certain imperatives on economic activity: competition, profit maximization, accumulation, productivity growth. Workers and capitalists alike are subject to the constraints of the market and are forced to comply with its demands in order to survive. They simply have no choice but to do so, regardless of their personal beliefs, attitudes, and values. Exploitation occurs not because owners and employers are prejudiced against workers but because the whip of competition constantly forces them to cut costs, intensify workers' labor, and reduce wages.[15] Even if

14 Much of this discussion occurs in the language of the nonprofit sector, which has given rise to organizations devoted specifically to the concept of classism. For an example, see Class Action, "About Class," n.d., http://www.classism.org/about-class/. The nonprofit group Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) offers a clear example of how the contemporary discourse around white privilege easily maps onto discussions of classism. See Erin Heaney, "Cross-Class Capacity Tool," SURJ, March 18, 2016, http://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/cross_class_capacity_tool.

15 Ellen Meiksins Wood, "The Politics of Capitalism," *Monthly Review* (September 1999),

prejudicial attitudes toward working-class people were eradicated tomorrow, class exploitation would still continue. What's more, those attitudes would likely resurface because abusing and mistreating other human beings always requires a justification.

This concern with treating poor and working-class people with respect is not, of course, completely misguided. The Left's cultural milieu has largely been confined to academia, and any honest attempt to make our organizing spaces accessible and welcoming to working-class people should be encouraged. This does not, however, take us very far past the realm of interpersonal behavior and microaggressions, the very terrain on which so much of today's Left feels most comfortable. It does not help us understand how the class structure works as an impersonal, objective system of exploitation, nor does it offer any insight as to how it might be upended through the collective action of the working class itself.

White Trash by Nancy Isenberg offers a clear example of the culturalist school of class politics and its limitations. Unlike Vance, Isenberg is a liberal; her book is aimed at puncturing the national mythos of the classless society. She is not out to berate or shame the poor Southern whites she focuses on but to place them at the heart of historical battles over the nature of American identity. Her approach to the question, however, has the perverse effect of putting white elites at the center of the story.

The book is largely a chronicle of the ways in which elites have sought to control, manage, and manipulate the embarrassing rednecks down in the holler. Because it relies largely on primary sources generated by the wealthy and well educated, *White Trash* focuses mainly on their anxieties and obsessions: breeding, racial purity, moral degeneracy, eugenics. The poor rarely get a chance to speak for themselves in this story, and when they do it's typically when politicians, landlords, journalists, novelists, and media executives ventriloquize them. Isenberg finds room to consider the cultural implications of the reality TV show *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*, but you won't find an index entry for Populism, one of the most important political and cultural movements of the Southern poor in US history.

While the search for agency and resistance has arguably been overemphasized in other fields of social history, it's strange to find so little of it in a book on poor white people written by a contemporary liberal historian. A similar history of the black poor would be roundly criticized for this, and right-

https://monthlyreview.org/1999/09/01/the-politics-of-capitalism/.

fully so. Instead, Isenberg's book has been showered with largely sympathetic appraisals from the leading media organs of the professional-managerial class.

That's because *White Trash* is not really a history of class structure or class relations in the United States but a history of classism. As such, it falls into the same traps as the discourse of white privilege that dominates the academic and activist left. Contemporary privilege theory ostensibly seeks to center and defer to the agency of people of color, but it consistently brings the focus of attention back to the thoughts, motivations, and actions of white people.[16] It also provides ample opportunity for activists to engage in competitive virtue signaling, a game that does little more than build the personal brands of those playing it. The concept of classism does much the same thing, but on a different register. It is the mechanism by which a history of poor people becomes a history of what elites have thought about and done to poor people. Like the concept of white privilege, it does not provide an adequate account of the phenomenon it seeks to explain, nor does it offer much support for a political practice that might actually achieve its stated goals. It points toward little more than a class-inflected version of the interminable "conversations on race" that do more to support political careers and nonprofit jobs than they do to end racism.

ALL TOO RATIONAL

Of all the books seeking to explain the appeal of right-wing politics in the age of Trump, *Strangers in Their Own Land* by Arlie Russell Hochschild has probably been the most popular and best received among educated liberals. Much like Thomas Frank in *What's the Matter with Kansas?* — another book indelibly linked to a particular electoral cycle — Hochschild visits a down-and-out corner of the heartland in an attempt to understand why so many downscale whites strenuously oppose ideas and policies that seem to be in their own best interests.

After years of ethnographic fieldwork in the oil and gas lands of southwestern Louisiana, Hochschild grapples restlessly with what she calls the Great Paradox: "the need for help and a principled refusal of it."[17] Among Hochschild's subjects, the paradox manifests itself as opposition to government regulation in the face of truly catastrophic environmental

16 Asad Haider, "White Purity," *Viewpoint*, January 7, 2017 https://viewpointmag.com/2017/01/06/white-purity/

17 Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (New York: New Press, 2016), 35.

pollution. For her, explaining this ostensible paradox does not mainly require reference to the configuration of power and interest in a region dominated by energy companies. While she is compelled to acknowledge their prominent place in Louisiana's political economy, she is at pains to minimize their impact as a source of state revenues and as employers. This is not entirely misguided; the share of Louisiana's state budget that comes from mineral revenues has sharply declined since the 1970s. But oil and gas still plays an important role in the state's labor market. The industry's share of state employment has remained steady even as automation advances and offshore production in the Gulf of Mexico has increased. Crucially, the industry continues to pay above-average wages to local residents, and the fracking boom has clearly contributed to economic growth in the region.[18] As Hochschild acknowledges, wages for permanent workers in fracking "hover around $80,000 plus benefits. As a carpenter in Louisiana, you can earn about $33,000; as a truck driver, $46,000; and as an elementary school teacher, $34,000. Maybe you needed training to get a job as a plant operator, but you didn't need a college degree."[19] Despite the risks and externalities, these are good jobs in the eyes of many working-class Louisianans — the kinds of jobs that can make the people who benefit from them, directly or indirectly, identify with the companies that provide them.

Hochschild largely skips over these considerations (the chapter on "Industry" is a brisk twelve pages) to focus her attention on culture and affect instead. She portrays local opposition to environmental regulation as a fundamentally irrational phenomenon, an expression of the "deep story" that structures the emotional landscapes of her subjects. The deep story is the way that people try to make sense of their situation, an account of life as it *feels* to them, completely devoid of facts or judgments made on the basis of objective criteria. Politics, in this view, is not a battle of interests but a clash of competing narratives. It's a cultural conflict driven by different ways of "seeing and feeling about a place and its people," where considerations of objective self-interest are swept away by the overriding force of raw emotion.[20]

18 Gregory B. Upton Jr., "Oil Prices and the Louisiana Budget Crisis: Culprit or Scapegoat? An Analysis of the Oil Drop on the Louisiana Budget," LSU Center for Energy Studies, October 24, 2016, http://www.enrg.lsu.edu/files/images/publications/online/2016/Upton_10-2016_Oil_and_Gas_and_the_Louisiana_Economy_FINAL.pdf; Beau Evans, "Louisiana's Economic Highs, Low Tied to Oil and Gas," *Times-Picayune*, September 21, 2016, http://www.nola.com/business/index.ssf/2016/09/economic_highs_and_lows_for_me.html.

19 Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land*, 90.

20 Ibid., 19.

This is not an opportune moment to defend the place of rational behavior in American politics. Many of Trump's core supporters are deeply invested in *Breitbart*'s fantastical nonsense, and all too many liberals seem to have taken leave of their sanity in the wake of Trump's election. But the appeal of conservative politics among a section of working-class whites is not necessarily mysterious or irrational. Roughly a third of Hochschild's subjects were employed directly or indirectly by the oil and gas industry.[21] Almost all of them were willing to accept — or at least resign themselves to — pollution and disease as the price to pay for steady employment at decent wages.

Take the case of Janice Areno, the subject of an entire chapter of the book. While Hochschild relies on an emotional profile ("The Team Player") to explain her Tea Party politics, a much simpler and materialist explanation is closer to hand. As Hochschild's account makes clear, Janice's entire world is structured by the dominant local industries. She works as an accountant for a land-management company that leases property to oil and gas companies. Her father worked as a union pipefitter for Citgo. Her sister worked as a shipping supervisor checking train cars for a chemical company, contracting a debilitating autoimmune disease in the process. While she's fully aware of the costs associated with the industry (including a toxic-waste landfill a block from her home), she also knows that the companies produce useful goods and provide jobs, no matter how destructive or dangerous they might be.[22] As another of Hochschild's subjects concludes, "Pollution is the sacrifice we make for capitalism" — and nobody in southwestern Louisiana is offering any kind of alternative to it.[23]

While controlling pollution may be in these residents' interest, so are income and employment from the industry that causes it. This is a very common dynamic in areas dominated by extractive industries. An analogous situation can be found in places like West Virginia, where the thorough intertwining of the coal industry with community life and the Democratic Party has made it very difficult to formulate an alternative program for economic development.[24] It should not be surprising to a sociologist that so many people in a place like southwestern Louisiana would defer to the energy

21 Ibid., 249.
22 Ibid., 165.
23 Ibid., 179.
24 Cathy Kunkel, "Losing West Virginia," *Jacobin*, March 6, 2017, https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/03/losing-west-virginia.

companies politically, even when they make arguments against environmental regulation that are demonstrably false. These people could hardly be more aware that these companies making good profits and reinvesting them locally is the fundamental prerequisite for their receiving good wages, and they are not prepared to force industry to shoulder the costs of an environmental cleanup that would reduce those profits. Considering the structures and choices the residents of southwestern Louisiana confront, their commitment to probusiness, antigovernment, individualistic politics is all too rational.

RECOGNITION OR REVOLUTION

Much of the postelection discourse has focused on "racial and cultural resentment" as the force driving support for Trump among downscale white voters. This has been a favorite trope of a clutch of liberal journalists seemingly bent on defending the remains of Third Way liberalism from an unexpected ideological challenge from the Left.[25] This school consistently portrays white racism as a sort of unmoved mover, a primordial force that has no explanation outside of its own existence. The liberal journalist Ned Resnikoff offers a particularly egregious example of this tendency in an article that traces racial antagonisms to "an ancient, tribal section of the human brain."[26]

Of all the books under consideration here, *The New Minority* by Justin Gest comes the closest to offering potentially useful material concerning the vexed question of working-class whites and their place in contemporary politics. By highlighting the grim realities of deindustrialization, Gest provides a backdrop for the political behavior of the scores of people he interviewed in "post-traumatic cities" like East London and Youngstown, Ohio. Capital moved out of these places in the late 1970s, precisely the moment when immigrants and people of color moved in. Union membership collapsed along with industrial employment and the historic parties of the working class appeared to lose interest in representing their traditional base.[27] Against such a back-

25 A good example of the genre is Zack Beauchamp, "No Easy Answers: Why Left-Wing Economics Is Not the Answer to Right-Wing Populism," *Vox*, March 13, 2017, http://www.vox.com/world/2017/3/13/14698812/bernie-trump-corbyn-left-wing-populism.

26 Ned Resnikoff, "The Center Has Fallen and White Nationalism Is Filling the Vacuum: Racism Has the Power to Transform Both Left and Right," ThinkProgress, January 5, 2017, https://thinkprogress.org/the-center-has-fallen-and-white-nationalism-is-filling-the-vacuum.

27 Justin Gest, *The New Minority: White Working Class Politics in an Age of Immigration and*

drop, it is not difficult to understand why a section of white, native-born workers might be attracted to the politics of the far right. As Johanna Brenner and Robert Brenner argue in a classic essay on the subject:

> It appears possible for the stronger sections of the working class to defend their positions by organizing on the basis of already existing ties against weaker, less-organized sections. They can take advantage of their position as Americans over and against foreigners, as whites over and against blacks, as men over and against women, as employed over and against unemployed, etc. In so doing, working people may act initially only out of what they perceive to be their most immediate self-interest. But over time they inevitably feel the pressure to make sense of these actions and adopt ideas which can make their actions seem reasonable and coherent. These ideas, are, of course, the ideas of the right.[28]

Adopting these sorts of exclusionary strategies is certainly indefensible, but it is not fundamentally irrational. When the potential for class-based resistance has been profoundly reduced, grievances leading to fightbacks that might otherwise be directed at economic elites can be easily be displaced on to blacks, immigrants, Muslims, queers, and other targets closer to hand. Politics abhors a vacuum, and the hollowing out of unions and parties that could potentially develop class-based identities that cut across lines of race, national origin, sexuality, and religion has given the far right an opportunity to step into the breach by organizing that builds on existing solidarities like gender, race, and nation. The extent to which working-class whites have rallied to the banner of the far right is often overstated. But there is no doubt that in the absence of any alternative political articulation, many will come to interpret their marginalization in cultural terms and identify a coalition of well-heeled liberals and supposedly ascendant minority groups as the enemy — not capital and its political functionaries.[29]

The question, as ever, is what to do about it. Gest proposes to offer working-class whites recognition and representation as an interest group in the Democratic Party coalition, along the same lines as African Americans,

Inequality (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 43–44, 79–81.
28 Johanna Brenner & Robert Brenner, "Reagan, the Right, and the Working Class" Verso Books blog, https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2939-reagan-the-right-and-the-working-class
29 Gest, *New Minority*, 135.

LGBTQ people, and Latinos. From a socialist point of view, it is difficult to imagine a worse way of dealing with the problem. Recognizing the "white working class" as a discrete cultural-identity bloc would mark the final ideological triumph of Third Way liberalism and foreclose any possibility of breaking out of the cul-de-sac of culturalist politics. Its integration as just one more "community" in the constellation of interest groups would certainly benefit those individuals called upon to represent it, as with the earlier integration of African Americans and other historically oppressed groups. But it would not further the possibility of building a broader political alliance, one that cuts across identitarian lines and is grounded in a shared position as part of the working class.

What would a socialist approach to this problem look like? Since the election, Bernie Sanders has been holding televised town-hall meetings in places where Trump won, including McDowell County, West Virginia. As ever, his core message is simple and direct: your problems are not caused by immigrants, queers, blacks, or Muslims — they're caused by the rich, and we must all work together take their power away from them. To build and sustain a truly universal working-class movement, this position can't be where our politics ends. But it is the only place from which it can begin.

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