

VOL. 2 | NO. 2 | SUMMER 2018

# Catalyst



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Counterrevolution*

**RICHARD  
LACHMANN**

*The Making of US  
Military Defeats*

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***Catalyst***

*A Journal of Theory & Strategy*

is published quarterly by

Jacobin Foundation.

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ISSN 2475-7365

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## *Editorial*

**T**he rise and fall of the Left dominates this issue of *Catalyst*. Or to be more precise, the Left in the global periphery. In the advanced capitalist world, the last few years have seen a tremendous turn against the political establishment, and even a revitalization of socialist politics. Jeremy Corbyn continues to be the most popular politician in Britain, while Bernie Sanders's political influence is not only formidable, but gathering momentum.

It seems only yesterday that similar changes were underway in Latin America. After two decades of brutal neoliberal austerity, left-wing governments came to power across the region — in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, and Venezuela, among others. This was the onset of the Pink Tide, a resuscitation of radical politics and, in some cases, even of a socialist vision. But in contrast to the events in the North, the left turn in South America seems to have run its course.

In our lead essay, René Rojas offers a sweeping analysis of this quite dramatic reversal of fortune. Rojas echoes the observation made by Pink Tide critics, that, despite their rhetoric, the regimes failed to break out

of the neoliberal orthodoxy they had inherited. He insists, however, that this failure was not due to insufficient will, but to political *capacity*. Whereas the classical Latin American left in the 1960s and '70s acquired power in an era of rapid industrialization and growth of the working class, the Pink Tide formed amid a period of deindustrialization and labor-market informalization. The Left in Allende's time could rely on a social base located in core economic sectors. The more recent left was based in shantytowns and a precariat which, while radical and mobilized, could not give it the leverage needed to push through reforms against bourgeois opposition.

One of the symptoms of the Pink Tide's weakness was a slide into clientelism and patronage politics. Nowhere has this been more evident than in the decline of the Workers' Party (PT) in Brazil. Once held as the beacon of the regional left resurgence, the party is now reeling under the blows of a massive corruption scandal and the conviction of its leader Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Benjamin Fogel provides a lucid analysis of the forces behind the scandals. He shows in some detail how the constraints that Rojas describes in his essay, both political and economic, have operated in the Brazilian context. But just as importantly, he criticizes the PT for failing to devise a strategy to overcome them, succumbing instead to the tawdry machinations of the political class. Here, as in other episodes of left accommodation, acquiring and holding office has rapidly overtaken the vision that originally inspired the movement.

The despair that so many Brazilians feel today is what the Palestinians have lived with for decades. As Bashir Abu-Manneh shows in his study of Palestinian literature, the experience of defeat and dispossession in 1948 had profound consequences for the people, not just politically but also culturally. He argues that the trauma of the *nakba* triggered not just a search for meaning, but also for a literary *form* in which to express it, a turn away from realism toward modernist techniques of representation. In a sensitive review of Abu-Manneh's book, Pam Morris notes

that while György Lukács criticized modernist literature as a retreat from reality, a turn inward, Abu-Manneh sees it as a struggle to retain a sense of hope amid an unending political retreat.

It is the recovery of lessons from a submerged past that motivates Kristen Ghodsee and Julia Mead's essay. For much of the Western left today, Eastern European state-socialist regimes comprise episodes best forgotten — experiments in social control that only discredited attempts to build a more humane future. But as Ghodsee and Mead point out, there are still some positive lessons to be gleaned from them, especially with regard to gender relations. Chief among these is the importance of economic redistribution — precisely what makes establishment liberals nervous today.

The issue is rounded out by a clutch of articles on the capitalist core. Chris Maisano offers a short note on the historic Supreme Court ruling which eliminated agency fees for public sector unions. As Maisano observes, the case was intended to further weaken the labor movement by striking it where it still has some power. But the story is anything but over — just weeks before the ruling was made, several states were rocked by the largest strike wave in recent years, all in the public sector. Even as unions reel under its blow, the strikes show a way forward.

Finally, we feature a debate between Jason Brownlee and Richard Lachmann on US imperialism. Brownlee agrees with Lachmann's argument, in his essay from *Catalyst* I, no. 3, that the military has proven to be a weak instrument for American global expansion since Vietnam, but suggests that Lachmann has misdiagnosed its causes. Lachmann offers a defense of his views, while agreeing that there is much to Brownlee's argument.

The question of US power will occupy a prominent place in forthcoming issues of *Catalyst*. ✎

**Viewed by many as the most promising development for the global left in decades, the Pink Tide is in retreat. To understand its decline, this essay compares its rise and achievements to the rise of the region's classical left, which emerged following the Cuban Revolution. Whereas the classical left's accomplishments were rooted in the structural leverage of industrial labor, the Pink Tide has been based on movements of informal workers and precarious communities. The Pink Tide built its base from a social structure that had been transformed by two decades of deindustrialization and industrial fragmentation. This had two critical implications — it gave newly elected governments far less leverage against ruling classes than the earlier left, and it also inclined them toward a top-down, clientelistic governance model, which turned out to be self-limiting. In the end, Pink Tide regimes were undone by their own constituents, whereas the classical left was toppled by the elites that it attempted to dislodge.**

# THE LATIN AMERICAN LEFT'S SHIFTING TIDES

RENÉ ROJAS

**T**he new millennium unleashed a wave of popular rebellions in Latin America, which propelled a number of left governments into power. These governments came to be known as the Pink Tide, and while they have not pursued full-blown “red” policies, they received enthusiastic support from radical quarters, including from some of our leading thinkers. Noam Chomsky, for instance, praised the achievements of the new reformers in the areas of democracy, sovereign development, and popular welfare.<sup>1</sup> The ability of these countries to soften neoliberalism’s worst effects, empower popular sectors, and stand up to US domination mark a welcome rebound from the prior “lost decades” of market fundamentalism and social exclusion. In the global context, the Pink Tide contrasts starkly with full-blown neoliberal continuity in the capitalist core and the discouraging outcomes of the Arab Spring in the Middle East.

Yet the tide is receding, and unlike daily coastal ebbs, the decline of

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<sup>1</sup> See also Tariq Ali’s enthusiastic praise of the Pink Tide in Tariq Ali and David Barsamian, *Pirates of the Caribbean: Axis of hope* (London: Verso, 2006).

the region's left is a longer-term retreat of reform governments. After Hugo Chávez came to power in 1999 as an outsider populist-nationalist, Lula, the historic leader of the Workers' Party, was elected president of Brazil in 2002, followed by Nestor Kirchner in Argentina in 2003, Evo Morales in Bolivia a year and a half later, and Rafael Correa in Ecuador one year after that. They and their successors enjoyed impressive runs. But beginning in 2015, key losses initiated a reversal of the Left's fortunes. That year, elections took down reform Peronism. Then followed a "constitutional coup" that toppled Dilma Rouseff in Brazil. Rafael Correa's coalition in Ecuador is crumbling after his reform candidate just eked out a win. Although Morales's hold on power remains firm, when Nicolás Maduro goes in Venezuela, bringing down with him what remains of the Bolivarian Revolution's accomplishments, the cycle will be complete.<sup>2</sup>

How should we evaluate the Pink Tide? What is its true record of achievements and failures? What undercut its promise and reversed its ascent? Interestingly, most assessments, from friends and foes alike, point to avoidable mistakes made by politicians and their parties. From the Right, analysts divide Latin American reformers into good and bad lefts, arguing, unsurprisingly, that Pink Tide shortcomings emanate from their original populist sin. There, while natural rents could buy popular allegiance, such patronage corroded stable republican institutions, irreparably polarized political and civil society, and inevitably led to fiscal disaster. Others from the Left, mostly radicals, point not to its demagogic overreach, but to the reformers' docility and acquiescence to elite power. Here, reformers are scolded for not going far enough; indeed, even the "wrong" strategies scorned by conservatives confined themselves

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2 As in all stylized periodizations, there will be exceptions, which are no less important by virtue of being outliers. The landslide election of national-populist AMLO in Mexico will take on special meaning if the former PRI and PRD politician manages to adopt a genuine reform program despite his dubious pedigree. There are also promising new radical lefts, such as the Broad Front in Chile, that must consolidate before they can vie for power.

to limits “permitted” by business elites, seeking to restore neo-liberal legitimacy.<sup>3</sup>

Such critiques of the Pink Tide reformers share a curious commonality. Both adopt voluntarist approaches to assessing the region’s left turn. Resurrecting a hobbyhorse of revolutionary socialists — notably pounded by those who argue that revolutionary opportunities have routinely been squandered in absence of “correct” leadership lines<sup>4</sup> — they focus on the decisions made by those in charge of the reform process. But they ignore, or give scant attention to, the opportunity structure in which these forces operated. Assessing the tactics of officials and activists in this fashion makes for, at best, an incomplete analysis. However much we sympathize with their programs, we need to understand how the circumstances of their rule substantially constrained their choices. The region’s contemporary left can best be evaluated only by situating its record within contemporary structural conditions.

A structural perspective that corrects for the voluntarist judgements of the Pink Tide urges us to move from a focus on the *will* of reformers to their *ability* to affect change. After all, how can we thoughtfully assess left governments’ *willingness* to challenge elite power without first mapping the contours of what was feasible? The international left, both allies and critics of the Pink Tide, needs a capacity-based assessment to generate a more solid appraisal of the accomplishments and limitations of the post-2000 left turn in Latin America. More importantly, placing the Pink Tide in its proper context offers invaluable lessons for new popular struggles currently taking shape in the region. Without an understanding of the structural conditions in which radicals operate, it will be impossible to design a strategy to overcome the failures of a left surge that seemed so promising. To do so, this paper proposes a comparison between the Pink Tide and the region’s classical postwar left.

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3 Jeffery Webber and Barry Carr, eds. *The New Latin American left: Cracks in the Empire* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012).

4 For an example see the essays in Colin Barker, ed. *Revolutionary Rehearsals* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2008).

## WHAT ONCE WAS &amp; WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

The excitement and expectations awakened by the Pink Tide's emergence was directly proportional to the deep pessimism that had engulfed radicals and socialists after two decades of defeat and surrender. The scope of the Left's retreat had dimmed the memory of the tremendous achievements of popular classes in the previous era. Beginning in the late 1950s, a new wave of radical movements, labor upsurges, and left parties either took power or succeeded in forcing the ruling class to make significant concessions. In many ways, this radical left realistically put socialism on the region's agenda — both in terms of democratically planned economic development and genuine popular rule. Reviewing the bases of the pre-neoliberal left's gains will help us better understand how the changed context of the 2000s constrained the Pink Tide and contributed to its decline.

ROJAS

*Latin America's Classical Left*

Latin America's prior radical surge culminated between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s.<sup>5</sup> Although its defining characteristic was the militancy of workers and other popular urban sectors, this left cycle originated with the 1959 Cuban Revolution and closed with the demise of the Central American *campesino*-based insurgencies. The classical Latin American left did not replicate the Cuban Revolution's distinctive dynamics and features, but the *barbudos'* triumph was instrumental in opening a new radical path.

For one, it broke with Moscow-dominated Communist Parties' Popular Front orientation, which hinged on alliances with modernizing capitalists. The key characteristic of the new left was its forceful rejection of subordinating working-class organization and demands to

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5 For a good discussion of the left's "cycles of struggle," see chapter 1 of Emir Sader, *The New Mole* (New York: Verso 2011). See also: <http://www.historicalmaterialism.org/reading-guides/marxism-latin-america-jeffery-r-webber>.

the requirements of a so-called bourgeois-democratic stage of development. It relied instead on militant class struggle to achieve decisive influence over, rather than remaining subsidiary to, the ruling class. And reflecting the radical policies implemented by the Cuban revolutionaries, this generation of the Left adopted a program of expanding and deepening the structural transformations unleashed by bourgeois modernizers. These involved comprehensive land reform, a thorough nationalization of key productive sectors, and the decommmodification of vast swaths of social provision. In addition, the classical left proposed a profound democratization of political and economic affairs.

Of course, this more radical agenda sometimes created fissures between the forces leading the militant movements and their representatives in the state — as witnessed in the debates that wracked Salvador Allende's Popular Unity government in Chile — but overall the classical left agreed that state power was a lever to push forward their transformative agenda. In the postwar period, this agenda was pursued via two distinct routes: labor insurgency in the growing manufacturing sectors of South America, and, a decade later, agrarian insurgency in the countryside of Central America.

The first strong challenges from the Left emerged from the rising militancy of Southern Cone labor movements. Though workers' socialist parties only came to power in Chile with Allende's 1970 election, militant labor movements shaped state policies throughout. Alongside a growing agitation among rural masses for land, Brazilian unions took the initiative to break through the bonds of *estado novo* corporatism, pushing the Goulart government to adopt pro-labor reforms in the 1960s. Meanwhile, militants within the Argentine labor movement began to exert ever-greater influence, and, in alliance with radicalizing Peronists, led a labor insurgency that repeatedly forced military governments to abdicate power. Similar pressures pushed a nationalist military government in Peru in progressive directions. By the early 1970s, most major Latin American economies confronted the specter of widespread working-class revolt and, along with it, the imprint of

significant social and institutional reforms.

When South American labor's assertiveness was beat back, the region's radicalism was not yet totally defeated. With the urban working class in the most industrially advanced countries in check, rebellion spread across Central America with seismic force. When mass movements for democracy and basic social rights for plantation labor and peasant communities arose and collided with landed oligarchies' recalcitrance, new people's armies emerged from organized rural communities and armed insurgency engulfed Nicaragua, El Salvador, and, to a lesser extent, Guatemala.<sup>6</sup> Soon, these rural and mass revolutionary movements lost their effectiveness. The Sandinista revolution was brought to its knees by US-organized military intervention and a ferocious blockade, while stalemates and negotiated transitions weakened the other two insurgencies.

In sum, the post-Cuban Revolution Latin American left was founded on the mobilization of the working class and popular sectors. It strove to displace the ruling class from power and aimed to advance toward some kind of socialism and radical democracy. It is ironic, then, that the classical left acquired a reputation for having a narrow, class-reductionist approach in its demands and cultural priorities. Without a doubt, it raised the material standards and improved the livelihoods of all subaltern groups. But the classical left's impact went far beyond "mere" economic improvements for working masses. No other political force in the region's history contributed as much to democratizing political and social life across the board as the postwar left. Besides elevating popular sectors into forces to be reckoned with in national political arenas, the breadth and depth of the classical left's reform program had enormous impacts on gender and racial equality. Indeed, we owe the completion of democratization in Latin America to that generation of radicals.

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6 For Nicaragua, see John Booth, *The End and The Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution* (Westview Press: 1985); for El Salvador, see Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and for Guatemala, see Susanne Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala: Rebels, Death Squads, and US Power* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

*The Pink Tide*

The demise of Latin America's left could not last forever. After the blows inflicted by authoritarianism and negotiated democratization, a new left eventually reemerged. Around 2000, defensive struggles against neoliberalism in the region turned into an offensive wave that once again shook elite rule. Popular forces began mounting protest, first in sporadic episodes and later in generalized upsurges. This resurgent mobilization embodied expanding cycles of popular resistance to market reforms and it was on its strength that the Pink Tide governments came to power in Venezuela, Argentina, Bolivia, and Ecuador. And once in office, they adopted social policies aimed at reversing the harshest effects of two decades of economic liberalization.

The Pink Tide is characterized by two key features. First, its base in the mass mobilizations that began roughly in the second half of the 1990s. As structural adjustment and austerity threw growing swaths into the economic insecurity of the informal sector, laboring classes were also severed from their established links to establishment parties. Facing an intensified instability and material insecurity and cut off from parties that once represented their interests vis-à-vis the state, the region's "dis-incorporated" masses responded with increasingly militant protest. As traditional political institutions lost the ability to effectively represent the interest of working people, and basic living conditions deteriorated, mass defiance grew in waves. This characteristic — expanding mobilization amid political disintegration — is central to the rise of the Pink Tide. The present comparative analysis, therefore, relates to cases where it was prominent, chiefly Venezuela, Argentina, and Bolivia.<sup>7</sup>

In most cases, this groundswell of protest advanced in proportion to the weakening of the neoliberal status quo. After he failed to take

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7 Conversely, Brazil is not deemed a Pink Tide country. There, like in the "Left" in Chile — the poster child of market orthodoxy — the PT and its leader, Lula, were not propelled or consolidated into power by a protest cycle and by the decay of traditional

power in 1992, Hugo Chávez rode the tide of discontent and routed the traditional parties to win the Venezuelan presidency in 1998. For the next few years, periodic upsurges would defeat counterrevolutionary moves, bolster the Chavista hold on power, and deepen the progressive agenda. In Argentina, waves of localized protests by unemployed workers gained steam in the latter half of the 1990s, and following an economic collapse, laid siege to the capital. With the centers of power choked off and uncontrollable unrest in the streets and commerce, a new brand of Peronism headed by Nestor Kirchner built up support by leaning on, and making concessions to, sections of the militant *piquetero* movement.

In Bolivia, the traditional party system centered around the MNR, the dominant party following the 1952 nationalist revolution, began to fall apart as mass organizations escalated mobilizations. A relatively new left party with Evo Morales at its head, the MAS, got ahead of the cycles of protest that became more threatening with each new round of mobilization. Fighting key planks of liberalization, these movements — indigenous communities, small coca farmers, informal neighborhood residents, etc. — culminated in virtual insurrections in 2003 and 2005, which toppled successive governments and voted Morales into the presidency.

The Pink Tide's second key feature is the new governments' commitment to ameliorating the welfare of the mobilized constituents that paved its road to power. The welfare program of Pink Tide reformers is best captured in Silva and Rossi's notion of "second incorporation."<sup>8</sup> A

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parties. Similar points can be made about the return to power of the Sandinistas and the electoral success of the FMLN in El Salvador.

8 Eduardo Silva and Federico Rossi, eds. *Reshaping the Political Arena in Latin America: From Resisting Neoliberalism to the Second Incorporation* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018). Their new edited volume is the most comprehensive account of the role that parties, unions, and movements played in recasting Latin American politics and states following the ant-neoliberal rebellions. Their previous solo-authored books — Eduardo Silva, *Challenging Neoliberalism in Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) and Federico Rossi, *The Poor's Struggle for Political Incorporation: the Piquetero Movement in Argentina* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) — are also must reads for those wishing to acquire a historical understand-

diverse set of progressive measures offered the region's battered working sectors immediate and substantial relief. Besides pushing general wages upward via raising minimum wages and other mechanisms, reformers reversed some of neoliberalism's worst effects by expanding outlays on welfare programs. They subsidized basic services, like transport and utilities, and diverted huge sums to cash transfers for the most vulnerable groups such as the unemployed, mothers without formal work, and the precarious poor.

Some Pink Tide policies were more far-reaching. Going beyond Lula's touted *fome cero* (or "zero hunger") anti-poverty handouts, the Kirchners in Argentina restored industry-wide collective bargaining, which boosted wages for an increasing chunk of the working class, and guaranteed transfers for mothers who kept their children in school. The most ambitious reforms were adopted by the Bolivarian government. Hugo Chávez, who already dedicated more resources to housing and local infrastructure programs than his pink peers, instituted *misiones*, decentralized programs that made free health, education, and other services available to all Venezuelans.

As described by Silva and Rossi, the rollout of social programs by the Pink Tide breathed new life into the political culture, shrunken for decades by neoliberalism.<sup>9</sup> Typically, this occurred as new or restructured parties brought organized subaltern groups into their fold. In Argentina, Kirchnerism made alliances with unemployed *piqueteros* and reached a reaccommodation with the country's industrial unions. The MAS in Bolivia integrated shanty dwellers, informalized miners and peasants, and community organizations. Again, the Bolivarian revolution went the furthest and deepest: after experimenting with a range of institutional links to militant groups, it settled on communal councils as the key mechanisms for connecting organized urban slum communities

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ing of the Pink Tide's emergence. As will become clear, I share much of these authors' analyses. I differ, however, in my assessment of how far "second incorporation" has gone and the bases of its limits.

9 Silva and Federico Rossi, eds. *Reshaping the Political Arena*, p. 8

to state institutions. In short, Pink Tide reformers designed a number of new public institutions to advance popular interests, which genuinely upgraded their political participation and influence.

### *The Pink Tide's Retreat*

The Pink Tide produced undeniably progressive results. As explained, one of its pillars was significant increases in spending on social programs. Venezuela and Ecuador in particular saw dramatic spikes as Chávez and Correa took immediate steps to divert national revenues to social provision. The neo-Peronists, after halting further austerity cutbacks, steadily raised social spending from under 7 percent of GDP at the height of the crisis to nearly 10 percent in five years.<sup>10</sup> Since then, social programs have periodically enjoyed large infusions, to the point that when Cristina Fernández left office, Argentina allotted one of the highest shares to social spending in the region, second only to Chile. By the time the Bolivarian regime consolidated itself in 2006, social spending reached one-eighth of GDP just as the oil economy boomed. The MAS government in Bolivia took a bit longer to reverse years of cutbacks, yet by 2009 Morales had restored social allocations to former high points. After subsequent tumbles, his government once again boosted social spending to one-eighth of GDP (See Figure 1).

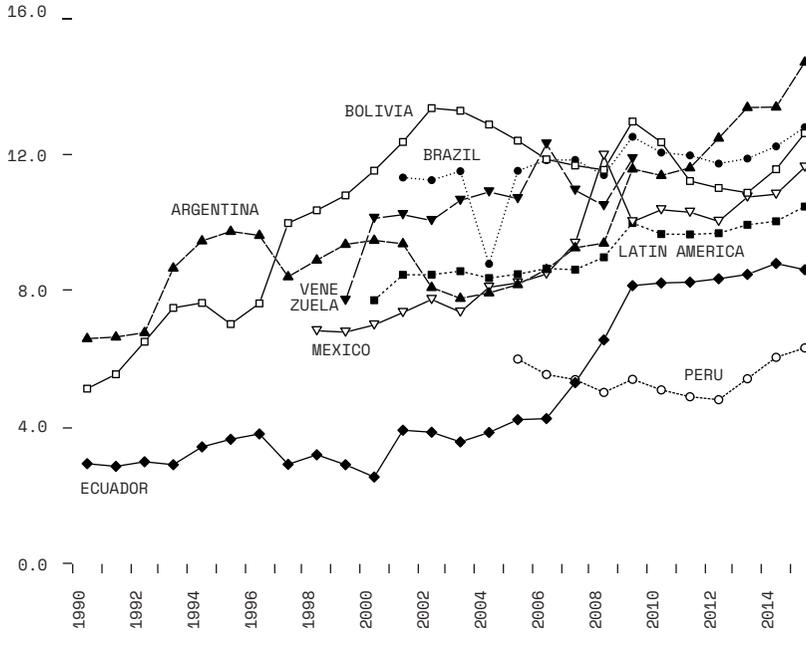
Increased social spending had significant effects on poverty and inequality. By expanding benefits for the most vulnerable, social programs dramatically reduced poverty rates. Most Latin American countries saw significant increases or no improvements in the share of people forced to live in stark poverty. Over the following decade, however, Pink Tide countries succeeded in reducing the proportions of those surviving on three dollars or less a day. The most dramatic improvements were the direct consequence of reformers' social orientation, as is acutely reflected in the Ecuadoran and Argentine cases.

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<sup>10</sup> The social spending figures for Argentina only include federal level outlays.

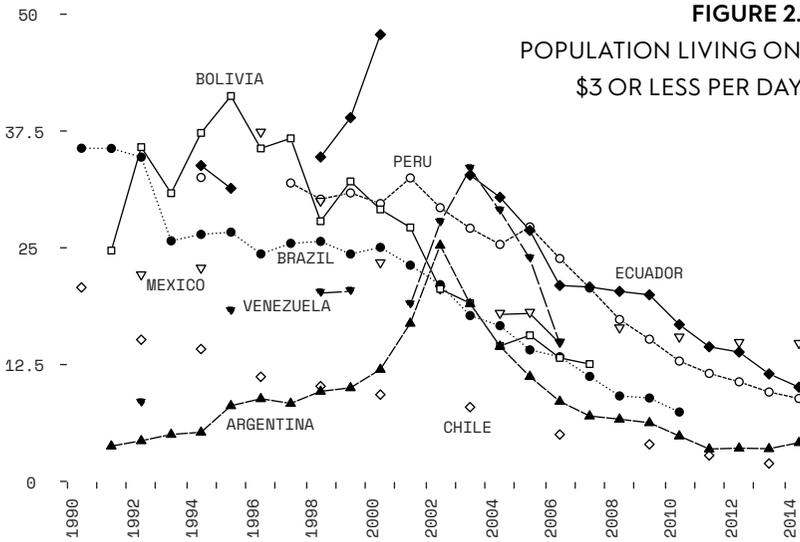
THE LATIN AMERICAN LEFT'S SHIFTING TIDES

FIGURE 1. PUBLIC SOCIAL EXPENDITURE AS % OF GDP



ROJAS

FIGURE 2. POPULATION LIVING ON \$3 OR LESS PER DAY



Sources: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Statistics and Indicators (CEPALSTAT).

Venezuela's record was more erratic. After modest gains, poverty shot back up in 2002 and 2003, a regression intentionally caused by a domestic oil blockade engineered by displaced and revanchist elites. More telling was the response: once mobilized masses overcame the oil lockout and beat back attempts to oust Chávez, the Bolivarian regime consolidated itself and adopted the thorough programs described above. The result was an unprecedented anti-poverty performance, one that even the World Bank had to grudgingly recognize (see Figure 2).

What Argentina accomplished in over a dozen years — a 20 percentage-point drop in poverty, the Bolivarians, under constant counter-revolutionary fire, did in four! Unfortunately, Venezuela's present economic collapse has wiped out these gains. Still, the redistributive social policies prioritized by left governments aggressively addressed inequality. As Gini scores bear out, Pink Tide countries became the most equal countries in the region, with Venezuela and Argentina leading the way.<sup>11</sup> Even Bolivia, which in 2000 shared with Brazil the distinction of being the region's least equal country, pushed its coefficient from .6 to .47 during Morales's first five years in office, a drop few societies have ever experienced.

Yet, despite its accomplishments, the Pink Tide is in retreat. Whereas the classical left was crushed by its own ruling classes, its more recent incarnation is presently under siege at the voting booth, rejected by much of its own constituency. Besides Morales and the MAS in Bolivia, all other Pink Tide governments have suffered declines. The neo-Peronist Daniel Scioli lost to a revamped center-right neoliberal candidate in November 2015; while Scioli just barely upped his party's vote total, Macri, the winner, claimed roughly 4 million more votes than the opposition's combined total from 2011. Evidently, the Right was successful in picking up votes from the reformers' natural constituents.

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<sup>11</sup> See my article's recent for a discussion on the regional inequality record since 2000. René Rojas, "The Ebbing "Pink Tide": An Autopsy of Left-Wing Regimes in Latin America," *New Labor Forum* 26, no. 2 (May 2017): 70–82. As with my discussion above, that piece also relies on ECLAC data.

In Ecuador, Rafael Correa's coalition won with the narrowest of margins last year and has since splintered irreparably. The worst has been the Chavista unravelling. Although Maduro, Chávez's successor, just won a second term, the deep crisis and decomposition of the Bolivarian process is undeniable. Despondent over inflation, shortages, hunger, and corruption, the Venezuelan urban poor, the same who repeatedly mobilized to protect Chávez, now, re-impooverished, are simply defeated. Increasingly, the government has had to restrict participation and amend rules to remain in power. In 2015, the opposition won a resounding parliamentary majority. This year, after rewriting Chávez's constitution, the official Socialist Party handily beat a redivided opposition. Elections might have been clean, if not completely fair, and vote totals accurate, but turnout was abysmal. The 2 million fewer votes for Maduro than for Chávez in 2012 show that the boycott called by the opposition was boosted by Bolivarian frustration and disillusionment. Other Pink Tide governments may have escaped the Venezuelan catastrophe, but their erstwhile backers are clearly abandoning them.

More importantly, the transformative potential of the Pink Tide has run its course. The goal of expanding social improvements failed to overcome rigid fiscal barriers. Confined to the same sources of revenue as their neoliberal predecessors and regional rivals, reform governments found it difficult to sustain increased welfare spending. In Argentina, for instance, where expenditures rose the most dramatically in recent years, the losing Kirchnerist candidate came from the conservative wing of neo-Peronism and acknowledged the inevitability of austerity in his campaign.

The central reason for the Pink Tide's failure to push its reform agenda was because of its stubborn reliance on revenues flowing in from commodity rents, as shown in Figures 3 and 4. Much like their neoliberal predecessors, they remained dependent on natural-resource exports, and hence were prisoner to fluctuations in commodity prices. As global crude prices rebounded bullishly from the deflated levels of the 1990s, Venezuela deepened its dependence on oil. By 2013, over

four-fifths of export earnings came from crude, compared to under half when Chávez first came to power.<sup>12</sup> The Kirchners were elected in Argentina right when global prices for soy and its derivatives began a prolonged expansion. And they took full advantage: whereas these goods accounted for less than a quarter of all earnings the year before Nestor's election, by the time Cristina left office, they provided nearly 40 percent of export revenues.

When world commodity prices plummeted, the result was an unavoidable tightening of services and goods for their urban poor backers. Leftists in power could only think of tapping and squeezing as much as possible from their countries' existing production and commercial circuits rather than developing new, alternative, and more reliable means to provide for their constituents. A recent Chavista voter could not have put it better, declaring that the government "just needs to find a way to make an economic revolution, so we can eat once again!"<sup>13</sup> In short, poor urban voters abandoned the Pink Tide for its inability to break through the limits set by the neoliberal economy. Whereas elites beat back the classical left for going too far, the Pink Tide governments are falling to the very sectors that voted them into office, who are punishing left regimes for not going far enough.

What then explains this inability to transcend the restrictive economic models and social policies they inherited and seek sustainable and qualitatively superior social provision? Why wasn't the Pink Tide capable of deepening democratic participation beyond top-down neo-corporatism that recreated subordinating forms of clientelism? In other words, what prevented the Pink Tide from moving past its initial reforms toward the "economic revolution" demanded by its supporters? One possibility is that the regimes were constrained by their ties to elite interests, as some radical critics have claimed. But such accusations fail to capture the more complex dynamics at work.

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12 Rojas, "Ebbing," 74.

13 Nicolas Casey and William Neuman, "I Give and You Give": Venezuela's Leader Dangles Food for Votes," *New York Times*, May 18, 2018.

FIGURE 3. LEADING ARGENTINE EXPORTS (% OF TOTAL)

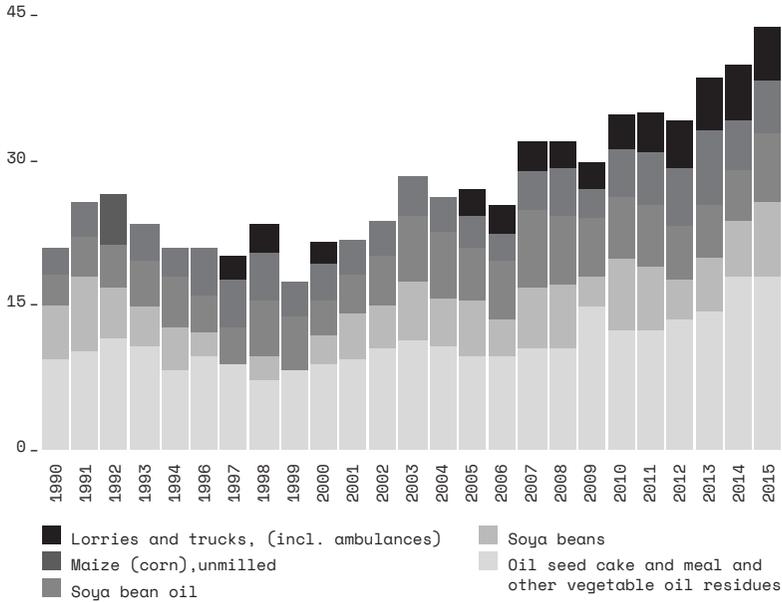
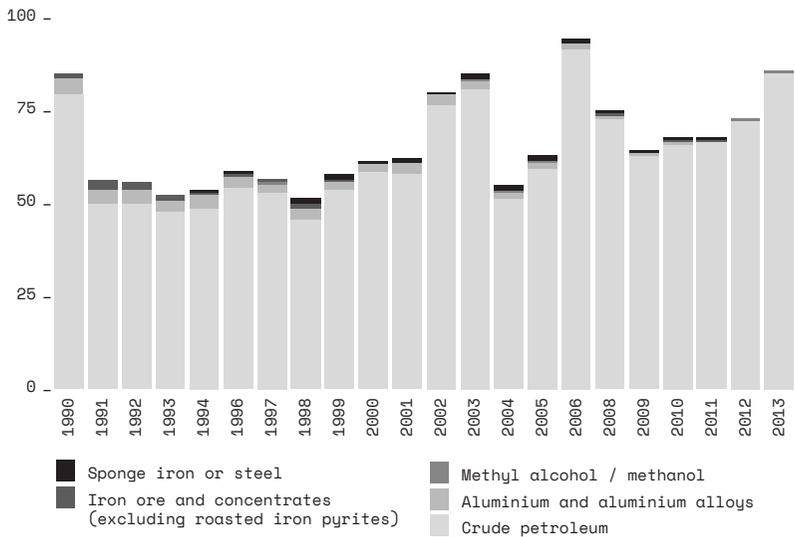


FIGURE 4. LEADING VENEZUELAN EXPORTS (% OF TOTAL)



Sources: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Statistics and Indicators (CEPALSTAT).

Pink Tide officials clearly understood the basis of their rule was active popular support. They realized that political survival depended above all on satisfying their constituents' interests. Herein lies the key puzzle: if their vital commitment is to the poor urban masses, why did they avoid deeper economic reforms that might have taken them off the tracks of clientelist welfare provision and on to a path of sustainable social and political non-elite integration and power?

Pink Tide governments failed to move toward more substantial restructuring not out of overriding obligations toward business elites. Rather, they failed to deepen reforms that might have secured the backing needed to stay in power because they felt unable to take that more challenging route — and were correct in that assessment. Incapable of pressing in that direction, they had to opt for the more achievable short-term gains, thus avoiding a head-on collision with local ruling classes. They opted to win elections with the resources made available by the economic status quo. This is in sharp contrast to the classical left's strategic dilemmas. The classical left typically faced hostile political elites, yet fought to compel governments, from the outside and below, to adopt immediate fundamental reforms. They pushed uncompromisingly toward radical ends even if it meant sacrificing the electoral viability of elite-oriented reform governments, and ultimately, democracy itself. The exceptional Chilean case, where the working class elevated its own parties into power, broadly follows the same pattern of relentless pressure exerted to deepen reform even before Allende's election. The key distinction is between a left in power doing what it felt was feasible to gain votes, and the earlier left using its leverage to push beyond holding state office, to strive for a deeper transformation.

ROJAS

### CAPACITIES BEHIND CONTRASTING LEFT ORIENTATIONS

The main factor distinguishing the Pink Tide from the classical Latin American left is not just the latter's more radical will. The classical left's

aggressive pursuit of reform derived, as just noted, from its greater *ability* to pursue radical reforms. This enhanced sense of its ability, in turn, was *rooted in greater transformative capacities*. To understand this difference, we need a conceptual framework that helps us unpack the mechanisms that govern subaltern political leverage. There are two axes on which laboring groups' power turns: the first measures their *mobilizational resources*, and the second, their *structural leverage*.

Mobilizational resources refer to the social ties, organizations, and institutions that help working people engage in collective action. The ability of popular sectors to mobilize effectively is built on shared resources that underpin organizational bonds, cultures, and infrastructure. These help working people overcome the divisions and the costs that normally inhibit collective action. Atomized workers and the poor in general have very diverse sets of immediate needs, which often makes it hard to come together around a political agenda; in addition, they typically confront particularly high costs when taking on powerful elites. Without robust and internally vigorous organizations to bring them together, they have a hard time developing the solidarity and preparation needed for collective action. Mobilizational resources, in other words, give workers and the poor the ability to construct and maintain the organizations they need to confront their ruling classes.

The most obvious example of this is trade unions. Unions have classically been the vehicle through which workers build solidarity and reduce the costs of political engagement. But there are also other examples, many of which lie beyond the workplace. In the United States, the role played by the Black church in the Civil Rights Movement is a paradigmatic instance. Other examples are civic associations, political parties, neighborhood associations, etc., all of which pool resources, help generate shared identities, and create bonds of trust and facilitates coordination among individuals.

Structural power, by contrast, comes from the leverage that ordinary people might enjoy owing to their positions in institutions valued by elites. Unlike mobilizational capacities that must be *built up*, structural

leverage is *built in* to subaltern sectors' position in the economy. The key to it is the fact that ruling classes rely on working people's labor as the source of their own wealth and income. When workers or peasants withhold this labor, it imposes intolerable costs on economic elites, and this becomes a lever for extracting concessions from power centers. The mere refusal to participate in routine tasks and activities threatens to undermine ruling-class power. The more workers and the poor are integrated into institutions that produce value for ruling classes, the higher their potential structural leverage.

Organizational power and structural leverage are related but distinct. It is very possible for groups to build large and enduring movement organizations, but not have structural power in the economy. And of course, it's very common to be located in key economic sectors, but to fail in building the organizations needed to take advantage of it. Comparing the capacities of the classical left and the Pink Tide in these two dimensions helps explain both their achievements and limitations. I offer two claims in particular. Firstly, the classical left's accomplishments were rooted in robust structural leverage. Elevated structural power in turn undergirded for workers and the poor effective organization and heightened confidence to make demands for radical reform. By contrast, the Pink Tide was propelled by a relatively sudden and powerful growth of mobilizational capacities, but with weak structural power. While the mobilization of built-up association capacities achieved quick reforms, when these reached their limits, they were ultimately hamstrung by the absence of effective structural leverage. These realities, in turn, arose from two paradoxical developments.

The capacity of Latin America's classical left was rooted in the growth and profit strategies of hostile economic and state elites. Economic modernization promoted by business and political managers spawned a working class positioned in economic areas that mattered most for elite goals. Labor movements, unions, and their partisan organizations deployed this leverage in a bid for structural transformations. Their challenge was so threatening that elites decided to quash it altogether.

The Pink Tide experience differs in crucial ways. A decade or more of anti-neoliberal resistance had revitalized subaltern associational capacities, raising them to levels not seen in decades. Armed with renewed organizational resources, the urban poor rebelled, brought down governments, and replaced them with friendly left governments. Once in power, however, the regional left was handicapped by state elites' confinement to the basic contours of the neoliberal model they inherited. Popular sectors pushed as hard as they could, but their mobilizations could only achieve so much.

Once they had exhausted their disruptive potential, the Pink Tide subaltern constituencies lacked the leverage necessary to push further. Without constituencies with the structural power necessary to take on business elites, left governments focused on appeasing their followers with neo-corporatist welfare provision, avoiding harsh confrontations with leading economic sectors on which they relied for the revenues they redistributed. Ironically then, in one sense, Pink Tide commitments to their urban poor voters blocked more aggressive reforms. Pink Tide restraint, therefore, did not flow from pledges to defend the interests of commodity-based business elites and restore neoliberalism's legitimacy. Its timidity, rather, was a symptom of the least costly strategy they could devise to satisfy their constituents' interests and secure reelection, despite its built-in limitations.

This raises another key factor for understanding the Pink Tide's shortcomings. The diminishing returns of popular mobilizational power introduced a dynamic which further damaged subaltern organizational resources. Because the urban poor faced difficulty in sustaining their associational capacities, while Pink Tide governments were interested in maintaining some degree of organization among their followers, both sides settled on an accommodation — the state channeled political resources and welfare funds to its grassroots backers in exchange for continued organized support. Although the arrangement did increase the political participation of the urban poor, it came at the cost of deepening a culture of clientelism. This resulted in an increased dependence

of the poor on the state, which in turn further reduced popular organizations' ability to push Pink Tide governments toward deeper reforms. This contrast — between the politics of patronage and clientelism on one hand, versus mobilization based on structural leverage on the other — is what separates the political fortunes of Latin America's two lefts.

### THE “CLASSICAL” LATIN AMERICAN LEFT

Ironically, the rise of Latin America's classical left was fueled by elite modernization projects. For the first time since the Mexican Revolution, the region's popular sectors effectively threatened ruling-class power. Its foundation was the organized industrial working classes that emerged with the post-Depression industrial development in the region's most economically advanced countries, along with the rebellious “peasantry” that was thrust into militancy with capitalist transformation of agriculture. Aided and often coordinated by an ancillary layer of students and low-level professional revolutionists, these effective left movements were built on radicalizing segments in unions and insurgent proletarianized rural communities and associations.

ROJAS

#### *ISI and Agrarian Modernization*

Self-interested elite responses to either adversity or new opportunities in the world economy enhanced popular classes' capacities for struggle. Elite efforts to modernize their economies, through industrialization or the promotion of agro-industrial exports, provided the foundations for working-class and peasant militancy. Absent these programs, the structural and organizational backbone of the classical left would not have acquired the power it did.

The process was initiated by the Great Depression. In the larger economies, mainly in South America, the ruling class confronted shrinking trade, and then the turmoil of the war years, by adopting an inward-oriented development model known as import-substitution

industrialization, or ISI. For ruling classes in these countries, the global crisis undermined profit strategies based on traditional commodity exports. Trade restrictions in traditional markets and declining export revenues caused financial havoc and sharply reduced their ability to import manufactured goods. This loss of externally produced manufactures persuaded states to turn to the development of local industry. The state created incentives for domestic business to invest more heavily in local industry, which had been slowly developing since the turn of the century. This new economic strategy had the added benefit of giving political elites more bargaining power in the global state system as their economies expanded and deepened their industrial base.

In Central America, economic transformations followed an almost inverse logic. While top state managers were transforming the industrial structures of the region's larger economies, market forces were reshaping the composition of isthmian agriculture. After the war, elites of Central America's more backward economies moved to diversify into new agro-industrial branches to take advantage of expanding global markets during the boom years. Although the state was involved, it played less of a role in the expansion and diversification of Central American agro-business, which was fueled by new opportunities for agrarian oligarchies to expand markets for traditional commodities such as coffee, and increasingly for newer, more processed goods like sugar and cotton.

### *Key Features of Elite-Led Industrial Transformations*

Besides refashioning the basic structures of Latin American societies, these elite-led initiatives produced new class alignments that would be crucial for the formation and rise of the Left. Three ISI features are especially noteworthy for their impact on working-class capacities. The first is the basic reality of industry versus traditional commodity production. Diverting resources into manufacturing concentrated thousands upon thousands of laborers with basic skills into more technologically

advanced labor processes. Secondly, ISI entailed planned measures to move from low-level manufacturing, such as textiles and foodstuffs, to integrated industrial complexes that connected basic goods, like steel, to higher value-added downstream finished products. A key aim of this vertical integration was the development of capital goods sectors that would solidify domestic manufacturing, relieving the economy from its dependence on machinery imports. The attempt to move up the industrial pecking order placed more skilled workers into more selective and technologically advanced branches.

Lastly, elite industrialization strategies gave prominence to the “commanding heights” of the economy, core branches deemed indispensable for the overall program and treated as sacred cows. The state approached these special sectors — finance, utilities, foreign trade, transport, and heavy industries — with special care and advantages. Guaranteed and growing investment in these essential branches not only provided them with unwavering protections, it multiplied the workforce that labored in strategic areas. All three key features operated in a context of reduced real unemployment, as industrial expansion absorbed hundreds of thousands of underemployed workers in the “traditional” economy.

ROJAS

### *Industrialization and Economic Transformation*

The transformation of Latin American societies was deep and dramatic. In the more developed countries, as planners’ projects came into being, simple industries grew and evolved into more comprehensive and integrated industrial complexes. At the height of the ISI period, the share of manufacturing in GDP rose to almost one-third in the largest economies. To put these shifts in perspective, US manufacturing shares had peaked in the mid-1950s postwar boom at about 35 percent. Even in countries whose economic infrastructure was skewed toward natural commodities, manufacturing exploded.

The driver behind this transformation was a massive influx of

investment in machinery and technology. In Argentina, for instance, business nearly tripled its annual investment in industrial infrastructure from an average of slightly more than 2 percent of GDP in the early 1940s to 6 percent in the early 1960s. A decade later, capital investment increased further.<sup>14</sup> In Chile, ISI policies were less ambitious and got off to a later start. During the 1940s and early 1950s, despite planned attempts to kick-start domestic manufacturing, industrial investments stagnated. But in the decade leading up to the 1964 Christian Democratic victory, state promotion of manufacturing became more effective, with annual investments in new machinery averaging close to 7.5 percent of GDP. Business continued to invest at that pace under Frei, the country's aggressive bourgeois modernizer, and even during socialist Allende's first two years in office. Brazil was the most impressive example of diverting resources into manufacturing. There, annual investment in capital goods doubled between 1950 and 1964, when reformer Goulart was ousted, and then quadrupled over the next fifteen years!

Sustained investment in industrial plants transformed Latin American economies. Southern Cone countries in particular, along with Mexico, emerged as predominantly urban and manufacturing societies. Brazil, for instance, where coffee was still the main export in 1950, developed the most advanced manufacturing in the region. Over the course of two decades, industry grew from 17 percent of GDP to nearly a quarter of all output. At the height of the labor mobilizations before the 1964 military intervention, manufacturing already exceeded 22 percent of all production. In Chile, the manufacturing share of the economy more than doubled in the twenty years leading up to 1972, from just over a tenth to nearly a quarter of GDP on the eve of the coup. The manufacturing boom was the strongest in Argentina. Whereas it already represented 28 percent of GDP by the early 1960s, manufacturing came to account for over a third of all output by the end of the country's

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<sup>14</sup> André Hofman, *The Economic Development of Latin America* (Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1999), 192–3.

second industrializing push in the mid-1970s. These sectoral shifts translated into tectonic redistributions of national labor forces which until recently had been predominantly rural. By 1970, under a quarter of the labor force worked in agriculture in Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, and Venezuela. Even Peru and Brazil, long dominated by peasant and plantation production, saw their shares of workers toiling in agriculture cut to less than half.

The results were impressive. Throughout the region, industrial development fueled overall expansion, driving some of the world's most impressive growth rates. An economy like Brazil's, for instance, whose chief export was coffee in 1950, found itself selling trucks and chemicals to the world twenty years later. During the same two decades of Brazil's economic turnaround, yearly growth rates, which averaged 7.5 percent over the entire period, consistently exceeded 10 percent beginning in the mid-1960s. During the 1960s, Mexican growth averaged 7 percent per year. Even Argentina, which notoriously suffered a series of stop-and-go cycles, nearly doubled per capita national output from the early 1950s to the mid-1970s. Similarly, in Chile, gross per capita product was three-fifths higher in 1972 than it was at the time ISI efforts consolidated in the mid-1950s. In short, industrial development was not only an unprecedentedly profitable for the region's business elites, it was also a reliable formula for stability and electoral success — if its political fallout was kept within manageable limits.

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### *Industrialization and Working-Class Formation*

The new accumulation strategies made the region's elites fabulously wealthy. They opened profit opportunities in vital new lines with guaranteed state backing. Yet they also unleashed new forces that presented a host of challenges to those elites. Chief among these was the newly found power of the working class, which came down on the establishment to devastating effect. Of course, some degree of disruption would have been inevitable, since this was the era in which democratic rights

witnessed a real deepening across the region. But whatever power was extended to ordinary citizens was multiplied by the placement of workers in structural locations from which they could sabotage the realization of elite interests. The emerging working class capitalized on its strategic location to build powerful labor organizations. It then mobilized its organizational capacity to exercise leverage and make increasingly radical demands.

Strong growth brought new entrants into urban labor markets at accelerated rates. During the 1950s, job growth equaled population growth rates. Even as demographic rates exploded and the countryside expelled a seemingly unending flow of internal migrants, rapid industrial development could not absorb the ongoing waves fast enough. From 1950 to 1973, even as the per capita hours worked were flat, the total number of hours worked expanded at high rates. Brazil required 37.5 percent more labor hours in 1960 than in 1950, and another 29 percent more a decade later.<sup>15</sup> Over those two decades, Argentine industry required almost a third more human work time. Total work hours expanded by 50 percent in Mexico. In Chile, total hours of industrial work grew by a quarter from 1960 to 1970.<sup>16</sup> And throughout, workers' productivity rose many times over. In Argentina and Chile, it doubled from the 1950s to the mid-1970s, while in Brazil and Mexico, labor productivity nearly tripled.

It was in this context of growing labor demand and tight labor markets, along with rising growth and productivity, that masses clustered into ever more profitable industrial production. During the 1950s, manufacturing labor, as a share of the working population, reached unforeseen (and never to be seen again) levels. Brazil saw its manufacturing labor force grow from one-tenth to over one-seventh of those

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<sup>15</sup> Hofman explains that from 1950 to 1973, the quantity of new labor contributed roughly 40 percent more than the quality, or skills, of labor during those years. Hofman, *Economic Development*, 123.

<sup>16</sup> Hofman, *Economic Development*, 59.

economically active.<sup>17</sup> In Chile, the industrial share of the labor force went from around 15 percent to almost a quarter by 1973. In Argentina, the industrial share dipped slightly from its 1960 high, yet in 1975 it was still nearly one-quarter of the working population. Laboring in the very plants that were essential to the success of business and state strategies, workers found that they were *the* indispensable ingredient to elite economic success. The labor movement understood that if they stopped cooperating and withheld their contribution — their ability and willingness to work — or threatened to do so, the entire strategy could be paralyzed and might even collapse. This formidable leverage was even more powerful when the capacities of other crucial sectors, namely transport and construction, were factored in. Combined with workers in these key areas that built up and connected the increasingly strategic manufacturing complexes, the share of the labor force with looming structural leverage increased to one-fourth in Brazil, over a third in Chile, and roughly two-fifths in Argentina by the 1970s. When one out of four or one out of three workers perceives he is essential for the materialization of employers' profits, the rise the class's confidence is immeasurable.

As industrialization advanced, so too did union density. Workers' advantageous location and the historic self-assurance it sustained promoted increasing organization in the labor movement. As they acquired awareness of their positional power, workers strove to build stronger organizations. Of course, they sometimes had the backing of powerful institutions, as in Argentine and to a lesser extent, Brazil. But without an awareness of a forceful capacity underwriting them, workers would not necessarily choose to invest in their unions, much less set them into action. This reality, more so than state and partisan sponsorship, was behind increasing unionization rates, particularly in strategic sectors. In Brazil, which had the weakest labor movement, one-fifth of all workers

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<sup>17</sup> This section relies on data from the Maddison Project's *Historical Development* database: <https://www.rug.nl/ggdc/historicaldevelopment/maddison/releases/maddison-project-database-2018>.

became unionized: between 1965 and 1975, union membership doubled from 1.6 to 3.2 million workers. In Chile, union density increased threefold in the ten years leading up to Allende's toppling. By 1973, half a million workers were union members. The working class achieved the most impressive organization in Argentina. There, the state had encouraged unionization, and by the end of Perón's second stint, union density reached an almost unthinkable 50 percent!

Strategically located and now also organized, the region's labor movements did not hesitate to make use of their mobilizational capacities. In Brazil, the most militant sections, situated primarily in steel, organized a strike wave that was a central precipitating factor behind the 1964 military coup. In 1958, there had only been thirty-one major strikes; but after Vice-President Goulart became president, workers turned up the pressure. By 1963, when the General Workers Command (CGT) led the "strike of 700,000," 172 major stoppages paralyzed key industrial centers and put elites on warning.<sup>18</sup> The most intense waves of industrial insurgency disturbed the economic and political orders of Chile and Argentina. In the former, rebellions were already commonplace by the early 1960s, when workers organized roughly 250 strikes each year.<sup>19</sup> But with the aggressive industrialization push under Frei, industrial insurgency exploded. During his 1964–1969 government, Frei endured an average of 1,000 strikes each year. Even when the Communists and Socialists reached power in 1970, the major labor federation headed by these two parties could not contain the relentless strike wave. Allende faced 1,800 stoppages his first year in office but had to contend with a full 3,300 two years later.

The story is similar in Argentina. The industrial rebellion that toppled anti-Peronist military juntas did not dissipate once the workers'

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18 Ian Roxborough. "The urban working class and labour movement in Latin America since 1930" in *The Cambridge History of Latin America VI, Part 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 351.

19 Strike data in this and subsequent sections, when not otherwise specified, is taken from Adaner Usmani, "Democracy and the Class Struggle," *American Journal of Sociology*, forthcoming.

*caudillo* returned triumphantly in 1973. In fact, Perón was welcomed by an escalation of stoppages by workers who anticipated sympathetic concessions.<sup>20</sup> Incessant, major strikes exploded from 550 in 1974 to 1,250 in 1975. Not only were production and profits threatened, private property, the very basis of bourgeois rule, was under attack as the labor movement, over the heads of its officials, pressed for deepening expropriations and political transformations.

The cumulative effect of this newfound working-class radicalism was to trigger a furious response from regional ruling classes. Across the more industrialized countries, the state strove to undermine the foundations of working-class power even if doing so sacrificed the growth model in which it had invested so ambitiously. The region's string of coups — 1964 in Brazil, 1966 and 1976 in Argentina, 1973 in Chile, 1975 in Peru — all had the goal of restructuring the economy in ways that restored unchallenged bourgeois rule.<sup>21</sup> Pinochet's coup against Allende immediately and ruthlessly destroyed labor's organizations and demolished left parties, never hesitating to physically eliminate their most advanced militants. Almost overnight, the region's most advanced working class was demolished, and, like survivors of a natural calamity, emerged from the ruins scattered and immobilized. By contrast, in Argentina, as in Brazil and Peru, corporatism had so entrenched unions within the state that military terror failed, even with its near-genocidal assaults in Argentina, to break labor's associational capacities.

More to the point, Chile's left was unable to recover because of economic transformations wrought by repeated crises which, over a short period, wiped out entire branches of manufacturing. In Argentina, the survival of ISI's strategic sectors underwrote workers' leverage well into

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20 Juan Carlos Torre, *El gigante invertebrado: los sindicatos en el gobierno, Argentina 1973-1976* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno de Argentina Editores, 2004).

21 It is worth noting that wage increases, inflation, and fiscal crises were not the central issues for the authoritarian governments. These were symptomatic of a deeper problem that had to be rooted out. The regimes' first statements in all countries allude to a threat to the overall market order and pledged to eliminate working-class capacity to inflict its power on the entire economy. This is what military juntas meant when they vowed to restore western capitalist civilization.

the 1980s. Like in Brazil, labor's effective mobilizations played a decisive role in restoring democracy before the generals could "reorganize" society. Lula's comrades escalated their second-wind industrial revolt, with strikes nearly doubling each year from 1979 to 1986 when they peaked at 1,500 and cost employers 50 million days of lost work. This was the furnace that forged the "new unionism" that gave birth to the PT.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, sturdy industrial unions in Argentina led strike waves that by 1981 shifted to offensive mode and drove the generals from power.<sup>23</sup>

But the decline of labor, and with it, the classical left's plummeting influence, arrived when market reforms led to the type of economic restructuring first produced by Chile's earlier shocks. Spurred by recurring imbalances that were endogenous and endemic features of ISI, elites moved away from developmentalism. Opening their economies to foreign competition and removing protectionist policies led to the slow disintegration of the industrial systems that ISI aimed to build. As elites tore down one growth model and replaced it with another, they simultaneously shattered the basis for the Left's power.

### *The Agrarian Route to Left Radicalism*

The decline of the Left in the Southern Cone did not mark the end of radicalism in Latin America as a whole. Just as workers' movements and parties were defeated in the more industrialized regions, another front for Latin America's left burst forth in three Central American countries — Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala. These insurgencies, which primarily adopted armed struggle rather than industrial

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22 The strike wave was triggered by a surprisingly disruptive steelworkers' strike in 1978 that was followed by one hundred strikes the following year in which half a million workers faced down the general's repression and walked out. See Ruth Berins Collier, *Paths toward Democracy: The Working Class and Elites in Western Europe and South America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Strike escalation and Brazil's new unionism signaled labor's surviving capacity to galvanize and lead rising popular opposition to the dictatorship.

23 Gerardo Munck, *Authoritarianism and Democratization: Soldiers and Workers in Argentina, 1976–1983* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2010).

rebellion, were born and amassed power as a direct result of the effects of elite agricultural modernization.

Rural agitation had also been an important dimension of South American left strategies. Indeed, changes made in the countryside to support industrialization activated layers of rural laborers who often lent their weight to the radical upsurge. In Peru, for instance, workers in competitive export plantations became a militant force on the Left.<sup>24</sup> In Chile, peasant enfranchisement and land reform restructured rural social relations and reorganized former tenants and landless sectors into concentrated forces with influence over one of the most contested political issues of the moment.<sup>25</sup> But rural radicalism in Central America deserves special attention because capitalist agrarian transformation there became the foundation for a unique route to popular insurgency.

The main impact of these rural-based insurgencies was to deliver real democratic reform and permanently dismantle the repressive labor system on which their agrarian oligarchies relied.<sup>26</sup> The Sandinistas led a generalized insurrection that toppled the Somozas in 1979. In neighboring El Salvador, the FMLN twice attempted to replicate the former's strategy. They came close, first in 1981, then again with the final 1989 offensive, occupying vast sections of the capital, each time fighting the oligarchic military regime to a standstill. The Guatemalan guerrillas built a less potent military apparatus that was essentially contained by the early 1980s, yet, punching above their weight and withstanding the regime's genocidal response, they also forced a stalemate. The Salvadoran insurgency best illustrates the Left's achievements: the mass armed insurgency of proletarianized rural communities was so costly to the traditional agrarian oligarchy that it reshaped their fundamental interests. By making the extra-economic forms of labor exploitation

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24 Jeffery Paige, *Agrarian Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975).

25 Brian Loveman, *Struggle in the Countryside. Politics and Rural Labor in Chile, 1919-1973* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).

26 Jeffery Paige, *Coffee and Power: Revolution and the Rise of Democracy in Central America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

unviable, it forced ruling classes to shift to other commercial and manufacturing sectors.<sup>27</sup> Removing coercive labor control as a profitable option opened the door to a negotiated democratic transition. The success of agrarian radicalism in Central America was rooted in a combination of mass organization and structural leverage that departed in important ways from the classical South American model of insurgency.

### *Agrarian Transformations*

Two interconnected phenomena linked agrarian modernization in Central America to rising rural militancy. First, expansion intensified pressure on subsistence farming communities, which either lost their holdings or were pushed into marginal areas. Peasant displacement was intensified by the emergence of new commodities that thrived alongside coffee. Chief among these were cotton, sugar, and livestock, which experienced massive growth from the demand coming from the postwar economic boom in the advanced world. Secondly, as the agrarian frontier expanded, it sucked hundreds of thousands into the plantation labor force. While labor demands for coffee were the highest, these were seasonal, concentrated in the October–January harvesting months. The boom in nontraditional agro-exports absorbed labor into more stable, even yearlong, work in more technologically advanced crops and their derivatives. Diversification thus fomented the creation of new labor markets with more advanced processing segments that absorbed more permanent workforces. And as peasants were pulled from subsistence and petty commodity production, new basic food industries sprang up, most notably in El Salvador. The combined effects of pressure on peasant communities and accelerated proletarianization would prove essential to the insurgent movements. Escalating, zero-sum conflicts between exporters and plantation workers, and between landed elites and peasant communities, served to organize popular sectors into

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27 Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Forging Democracy from Below: Insurgent Transitions in South Africa and El Salvador* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

vigorous associations. These incorporated almost whole cloth into armed movements that mobilized the seasoned popular movements into massive physical assaults on the agro-export economy.

The postwar boom fueled and reconfigured the commercial plantation system. Between 1950 and 1975, Central American coffee exports almost tripled to 10 million quintals. Four-fifths of that growth occurred in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua.<sup>28</sup> This second coffee boom pushed plantation elites to intensify production after 1960: in El Salvador, production increased by 50 percent by 1980, while in Guatemala and Nicaragua, expansion was even more dramatic.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, rising American demand for other key natural commodities presented new lucrative opportunities for landed elites. Cotton production to supply the textile industry quadrupled from the 1950s to 1980, going from under half a million to 1.75 million bales.<sup>30</sup> Cotton required the best, costal flatlands and new plantations swallowed up traditional estates and farms formerly dedicated to food crops: In El Salvador, land converted to cotton expanded 2.5 times, to 130,000 hectares by the late 1960s, while in Nicaragua it tripled to 363,000. Cotton expansion was the most dramatic in Guatemala where it rose exponentially from just 5,000 to 225,000. Sugar cultivation followed the same rates.<sup>31</sup> Finally, livestock expansion exploded as Central American exports rose from around \$10 million in 1960 to \$300 million by the late 1970s. Most of the expansion was destined for the insatiable US market. New infrastructure was required to service the region's expanding agribusiness. Massive investments led to the construction of new roads, railways, and ports, as well as dams and other electric plants that satisfied the economies' ballooning energy needs.

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28 Robert Williams, *States and Social Evolution: Coffee and the Rise of National Governments in Central America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

29 Otto Solbrig, *Economic History of Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 506.

30 Robert Williams, *Export agriculture and the crisis in Central America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 15.

31 Paige, *Coffee*, 91.

The spectacular growth of agribusiness created two simultaneous conflicts between landowners and popular sectors, which provided the foundations for the potent guerrilla wars that engulfed Central America. First, it pitted agrarian business elites against entire peasant communities pushed into increasingly marginal lands or thrown off land altogether. Booming crops like cotton spread through the fertile Pacific strip, appropriating from local communities whatever holdings they still held. Cattle pastures pushed beyond quality arable land and extended the agrarian frontier by absorbing marginal mountainous and forested lands. Displacement thus occurred via two paths: often, the removed peasants were tenants on traditional estates who were evicted en masse as plantation owners converted to new cash crops. At other times, displacement came about as landed elites used state or para-state coercion to throw newly established communities off irregularly settled lands.

Expansion of export agriculture, particularly cotton and cattle, brought land conflict to a boil by the late 1970s. El Salvador illustrates how abrupt and far-reaching the dislocation was: researchers estimated that between 1971 and 1980, the share of rural families who were landless more than doubled, growing from an already untenable 29 percent to an unthinkable 65 percent.<sup>32</sup> Those who retained their means of subsistence fared scarcely better: in 1975, 34 percent possessed less than one hectare and 15 percent farmed between one and two hectares.<sup>33</sup> Hardest hit were areas in the north and northeast, precisely where cattle production had taken hold after the US granted El Salvador an import quota and approved a local meatpacking plant.

Nicaragua and Guatemala experienced similar patterns of expansion and displacement of communities who had settled previously marginal lands. In the former, cattle expanded dramatically in Matagalpa, where in some municipalities pastures came to encompass 95 percent

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32 Williams, *Export Agriculture*, 170.

33 James Dunkerley. "Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean Since 1930" in *The Cambridge History of Latin America VII* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 272.

of surveyed land. Poor traditional farmers were pushed further east toward the border. The Matagalpa-Masaya corridor later provided strong support for the Sandinistas during the mid-to-late 1970s. In Guatemala during the 1960s, impoverished highland peasants, many pressured by new cattle ranchers, moved to the coast to till better land. But they immediately found themselves competing with the cotton barons taking over the area. Soon, cotton production again marginalized peasant groups as it came to dominate 70 percent of land in those zones.<sup>34</sup> As in Nicaragua, these Mayan communities became core participants in the armed movement as they were squeezed from all sides. Similarly, in El Salvador, the northeastern provinces that suffered the most displacement became bastions of the FMLN.

Land conflicts alone would likely not have generated the uncontrollable rise of the Central American armed left. Another consequence of export agribusiness contributed to the explosion of mass peasant insurgency. For as sugar, cotton, and cattle barons were evicting peasants and seizing their lands, plantations were also attracting increasing numbers of workers, particularly during harvest time, from the very areas experiencing encroachment. The skyrocketing demand for labor opened a second front in the struggles between subaltern rural groups and modernizing agrarian elites.

Labor demand for export crops was driven both by territorial expansion and by the steadily rising yields from productivity-enhancing inputs. Whereas cattle ranching had low labor requirements, the new plantations were extremely labor-intensive, particularly during peak times of the production cycle. Again, cotton best illustrates the exponential growth of seasonal wage employment in Central America. Until the mid-1950s, cotton cultivation in the region required less than 100,000 pickers come harvest. Ten years later, the number of cotton-harvesting jobs surpassed 350,000. A decade after that, cotton plantations employed nearly half a million pickers.<sup>35</sup> In addition, limited processing

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34 Williams, *Export Agriculture*, 55.

35 Williams, *Export Agriculture*, 62.

segments such as ginning, baling, sugar refining, and meatpacking created tens of thousands of permanent jobs. Many of these, along with employment in the modest manufacturing in wage goods tied to market agriculture, were taken by the growing numbers of displaced peasants forced to migrate to capital cities and other towns. The most precarious of those in the sprouting slums also supplied large portions of the seasonal labor. In Nicaragua, for instance, a third of cotton pickers came from large urban areas. Most harvesting, however, was done by the growing rural population languishing on the peasant margins.

Throughout the region, the very communities that were squeezed by export farming and ranching sent hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children to earn cash at harvest time. The more modern agriculture encroached on their lands, the more rural communities relied on seasonal wage labor. Unable to survive on the diminishing returns of subsistence farming, seasonal wages became indispensable. Not only did these communities supply major shares of harvesters on coastal plantations, but the proportion of their populations making the yearly trips down to the coast also grew. In El Salvador, up to 70 percent of beleaguered peasant communities in the north migrated annually in search of wages. In Guatemala, whereas between 10 and 15 percent of cotton-harvest workers were from the capital during the 1960s, far more descended yearly from peripheral highland provinces: by the end of the decade, over three-fifths of seasonal migrants came from two western highland Mayan provinces, and most of the working population from Kiché and Huehuetenango were harvesters.<sup>36</sup>

### *Agrarian Modernization and Class Formation*

Not surprisingly, migrant seasonal workers forced into wage work received very harsh treatment on the plantations. Coercive labor conditions sparked militant resistance by these newly proletarianized laborers.

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<sup>36</sup> Williams, *Export Agriculture*, 64–65.

Beginning in the late 1960s, plantation workers throughout the isthmus began striking for better conditions and better pay. Because even minimal labor rights and protections undermined their ability to make profits, elites responded with brutal repression. Throughout the region, the 1970s saw an escalation of intertwined plantation labor mobilizations and land invasions. Unable to press their demands through nonviolent labor action, the growing peasant movements turned to armed actions to defend themselves and to win basic labor and civil rights.

The intertwined nature of land and labor conflicts thus fueled the rise of the region's radical left. But mass guerrilla insurgency in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador arose from a phenomenon that was the inverse of what propelled labor rebellions in the Southern Cone. Whereas workers' positional leverage there undergirded rising levels of organization, in Central America communitarian associational capacities pitted against revanchist elites facilitated mass armed disruption of the whole economy by the newly formed agricultural working class. Interestingly, peasants and indigenous highlanders were mostly not compelled to join sides; rather, their struggles in their communities *were* the insurgency.

In all three countries, the crises of the 1970s sparked intense yet short-lived industrial action by workers in the food-processing industries that accompanied the growth of commercial agriculture. But because the Central American economies were so dependent on agro-exports, the strike wave among coffee, cotton, and sugar workers was the most threatening. In Guatemala, for instance, harvesters began agitating in the mid-1970s. Their efforts culminated in a February 1980 sugar walkout that rapidly spread to seventy of the largest sugar and cotton plantations that employed over 75,000 workers. In addition to the formation of new organizing structures that emerged to coordinate the rebellion, migrant workers received the active support of the Committee for Peasant Unity, the CUC, a broad rural front organized to fight for land and resist the assaults by landowners and military and paramilitary forces. The strike was so disruptive that the state was compelled to concede and raise day

wages by nearly three times. Similar worker protest took place in Nicaragua. El Salvador experienced the strongest wave of labor rebellion in the agro-export sector. There too, the mid-1970s saw generalized mobilization, with students and public workers playing a central role. But once more, seasonal plantation workers were the most effective. Peasants led an extensive organizing effort and, supported by liberation-theology sectors of the church, had formed FECCAS, the Christian Federation of Peasant Association. With such backing, coffee workers launched a weeks-long series of strikes in 1977 throughout the coastal region. On this occasion, however, the state responded with repression as police mowed down picketers.

Plantation workers were capable of mounting such effective mobilization under such oppressive conditions because of the organizational resources provided by their home communities. In other words, the struggles of otherwise vulnerable migrants, workers who faced the highest costs for making demands on elites, were underwritten by the associational capacities developed by their villages from traditional structures as well as from the cooperatives formed against predatory landlords. The support from federations like FECCAS and CUC to both land invasions and seasonal labor strikes best illustrates the intertwined nature of land and labor conflicts. More to the point, it reflects how peasant communitarian institutions mobilized farm workers who simultaneously battled landed elites from their position in export agriculture. Their militancy in turn bolstered the peasant-based insurgency, helping to deploy it as an armed destabilization of export production and its auxiliary infrastructure.

A distinct combination of associational and structural capacities thus formed the basis for guerrilla movements. As repression against peasant organizing intensified, emerging popular movements responded by increasing coordination and came together into broad revolutionary coalitions such as the National Front for Popular Unity in Guatemala, and the Popular Revolutionary Bloc and the United Popular Action Front in El Salvador. These in turn formed tight bonds with the armed

factions that emerged simultaneously. Eventually, when state terror — which reached genocidal proportions — closed off all avenues for open political activity, popular coalitions and the peasant communities that built them joined the armed insurgency entirely. By the early 1980s, mass incorporation into the guerrilla movements created a radical force that began exerting a different type of systemic leverage over elite interests.

State violence having denied them the possibility of exercising leverage at the site of production, organized popular sectors returned to more marginal areas to consolidate the movement. The retreat did not eliminate their ability to disrupt elite interests. Although workers could no longer make use of their position in production, subaltern groups, now fully integrated into the revolutionary movement, inflicted heavy blows on the export elites. From the safety of guerrilla-controlled territory, the revolutionary movement waged a campaign of sabotage against nearby plantations and ranches as well as the infrastructure projects that sustained export activity — highways, bridges, hydroelectric dams, transmission towers, ports, etc. were all hit. Insecure about their investments, many elites, even when not directly affected, abandoned their properties. Again, in El Salvador, where the mass insurgency was strongest, export-agricultural interests were severely damaged.<sup>37</sup> Export agriculture's share of GDP was cut in half in the decade after 1975 and never recovered. In fact, the insurgency there imposed a transformation of profit strategies. Elites moved their investments into other sectors which did not rest on extra-economic coercion of labor. As Elisabeth Wood explains, it was this leverage over core economic interests and elite responses that paved the way for peace negotiations and genuine democratic reforms.<sup>38</sup>

The parallel onset of industrial and agrarian modernization and the structural power of subordinate classes in Latin America supports one of Marx and Engels' key points, what we might call the “revolutionary

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37 Wood, *Forging Democracy*.

38 Wood, *Forging Democracy*, 54–67.

gestation” claim, in the *Communist Manifesto*. They maintain that as capitalist development “tears asunder” the old order, it fosters from within a class with the potential to overturn the new bourgeois order. As competitive pressures prodded industry to centralize production and bring masses of workers under one roof, that very process also organized the “proletariat” into a class “for itself,” with common daily experiences, adversaries, and grievances — and at the same time, armed this growing and concentrated industrial army with the social heft to take down the system. The job of radicals was to harness this built-in potential and provide it with programmatic and strategic direction. The more capitalist production expanded, the more organized and weighty the working class would become, and the more the revolutionary left would accomplish. In essence, Marx and Engels predicted a virtuous circle, propelled by a positive feedback loop between structural power and effective organization and radical politics.

The trajectory of Latin America’s classical left appears to conform broadly to the *Manifesto*’s thesis. Firstly, capitalists’ drive to compete globally generated the growing potential of the region’s left. There is no doubt that the Left’s achievements far outpaced the successes of the pre-1951 period in scope and depth. When subaltern sectors rebelled previously, their struggles were largely confined to enclaves of natural commodity production that characterized Latin America. In addition, and retrospectively, the classical left, rooted in the industrial class, far outperformed a new, perhaps ultra-left, generation of challengers in the general May 1968 context. The region’s new radicals, inspired by the fighting spirit of new Guevarist ideas, criticized what they viewed as the established left’s conservatism, and urged the most marginalized popular sectors to create conditions that would accelerate revolutionary change.<sup>39</sup> The MIR in Chile, Montoneros and ERP in Argentina, and the Tupamaros in Uruguay — the urban guerrilla stars of the moment — claimed that subaltern groups least bound by the moderating influence

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39 Aldo Marchesi, *Latin America’s Radical Left: Rebellion and Cold War in the Global 1960s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

of traditional parties and unions best embodied the new “Americanist” radical spirit. But the historical record reveals this challenge to have been not only short lived, but also a failure. The Left’s accomplishments came not from these urban guerillas or Guevarist histrionics, but from the struggles of the classical left’s painstaking work among workers and agrarian communities.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, the classical left’s achievements went far beyond narrow, bread-and-butter categories. The 1968 generation routinely accused their predecessors for ignoring various kinds of nonclass oppression. Ironically, however, it was the classical left’s accomplishments on material issues that opened opportunities for struggles for gender and racial equality and cultural progress. Without the generalized gains in social provision and without the advances in the democratization of the economy and other spheres of social life, the fights for women’s rights and indigenous enfranchisement, for instance, would never have gotten off the ground and gathered steam. These direct and indirect achievements must be kept in mind when comparing the classical left to the Pink Tide.

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### THE RISE AND WEAKNESS OF THE PINK TIDE LEFT

Formally speaking, the Pink Tide comprised the Left governments that came to power during the 2000s. These consisted of new parties or coalitions, or refashioned traditional ones. By no means radical — much less anticapitalist — they nevertheless aimed to reform reigning

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40 It is sometimes claimed that the young radicals accelerated the demise of the classical left by pushing labor and popular movements too far and provoking the authoritarian backlash. This claim is only partially correct. Placing the blame on the new Guevarist left that aimed to turn the region into “one, two, three Vietnams” for the intensifying agitation of the period misses the radicalization of demands and tactics occurring inside the allegedly “moderate” classical left. The young challengers, mainly from middle-class, university extractions, themselves failed to fully grasp this crucial development. The undeniable conservatism of the traditional left’s prior strategy and of many of the communist and labor officials in top party positions often led the 1968 generation to fail to appreciate the radicalization of the rank-and-file militants who preserved ties to the old, conservative left parties.

neoliberal orthodoxy in significant ways.

The Pink Tide's emergence must be understood in the context of the post-1980 neoliberal turn. If ISI provided the foundations for the rise of Latin America's classical left, its eclipse by economic liberalization policies laid the bases for the emergence of the contemporary left. On top of the political problems described above, state-led and centrally planned industrialization was handicapped by a set of economic flaws. Faced with recurring commercial and fiscal imbalances, state managers adopted market-reform policies that provoked the social and political conflicts that decades later gave rise to the Pink Tide. Neoliberalism produced unprecedented levels of social exclusion and turmoil. Massive marginalization and popular resistance to it eventually created the political upheavals that led to left electoral wins. Simultaneously, however, the neoliberal turn hamstrung the Pink Tide by consolidating a social weakness that ultimately undermined more radical transformations and continued electoral success.

### *Key Neoliberal Transformations*

Perhaps the central feature of Latin America's turn to neoliberalism was the opening of its economies to global competition. As domestic manufacturing was exposed to global competitors, only its most efficient sections survived. This resulted not so much in generalized deindustrialization as in a highly fragmented and uneven manufacturing sector. Some branches, no longer protected by tariff barriers and deprived of favorable credit lines, were entirely wiped out. In other cases, the old industrial complexes were dismantled, with those individual branches staying afloat which successfully raised productivity during ISI. As state industries were broken up and privatized, investors targeted promising plants, streamlining them to continue to compete successfully and even expand. Both dimensions — the wholesale elimination of some industries and the fragmentation of former industrial chains — decimated working-class power.

Trade liberalization, loss of state support, and privatization had the immediate effect of abruptly raising levels of unemployment and under-employment. As factories shuttered or were rationalized, hundreds of thousands of employees were thrown out of work almost overnight. The numbers are frightening. Job loss in Argentina, which had historically boasted virtual full employment, was the most dramatic. According to official counts, unemployment doubled during the first five years of the 1990s, from 6 to 12 percent. By 2000, it reached 15 percent, and after a financial meltdown and devaluation the following year, it stood at nearly 20 percent. As liberalization and structural adjustment took hold in Bolivia, unemployment rose to roughly 9 percent in 2001 from 3 percent a decade prior. During the same period, joblessness more than doubled in Ecuador, rising to 14 percent by the end of the 1990s. These were not one-off spikes. Unemployment averaged over 15 percent from the mid-nineties to the mid-aughts in Argentina and roughly 10 percent in Ecuador.

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Official Venezuelan statistics are similarly staggering. Once market reforms were introduced, unemployment never fell below 7.5 percent, reaching 15 percent by the end of the 1990s and averaging nearly 12 percent in the decade-and-a-half prior to the consolidation of Chavismo. Since the election of Pink Tide governments, many have gradually been able to find work again. Unemployment, however, still reflects crisis levels: in 2015, when Kirchnerism was defeated in Argentina and before the worst of the present Venezuelan disaster, both countries registered 8 percent joblessness rates. Worse still, most of the job recovery has been in the informal sector.

The material reality of the working class has been harsher than even the above figures suggest. For while huge chunks of the population entirely lost their means of subsistence, an even larger portion of the population ended up scrounging their livelihood in the expanding informal sector. In Argentina, over two-fifths worked in informal conditions, most as off-the-books employees in mushrooming micro-enterprises or as unskilled “freelancers” in petty retail and services.

Over a decade of Kirchnerist rule barely made a dent in informal employment, which remained at 37 percent when the neo-Peronist lost the 2015 elections. In Bolivia, a full 70 percent of the economically active population toiled in the informal sector on the eve of Morales's 2005 triumph. Yet here, again, reduction has been nothing to boast about. In 2014, the last year for which there is official data, nearly three-fifths of the working population was still getting by on unregulated work. Correa's reforms in Ecuador did absolutely nothing to reign in informality: the informal workforce stood at 57 percent when he left office last year, the exact same proportion as when he was inaugurated. The overall story repeats itself in Venezuela. After structural adjustment policies were enacted in the late 1980s, informality climbed from just over a third to over one-half of the working population when Chávez was elected. Then, it continued to climb after elites shut down the oil industry. After the Bolivarian state gained control of the sector, reforms reduced the informal sector, but ever so slightly, from a high point of 58 to just under half in 2014. In general, the vast majority of all workers in Pink Tide countries were thrown into unregulated and insecure work by market reforms; and nearly half is still relegated to such precarious jobs.

Stubbornly high unemployment and escalating dependence on the informal sector dissolved the foundations of working-class leverage. With a majority of workers competing for a shrinking pool of regular, secure jobs, and most forced to obtain a living in atomized, precarious work, using their economic position to make demands became nearly impossible. Surpluses of skilled employees precluded bargaining for improvements even in thriving industrial sectors. More generally, the prospects for confronting the new harsh conditions collectively evaporated as appeals to solidarity and common organizational efforts collapsed. Striking in these circumstances was suicidal. In short, the post-liberalization realities removed nearly all possibilities for workers to use their labor-market positions to demand concessions, be they individual or collective.

Capital's shift to branches that are relatively insulated from labor disruptions is reflected in rates of investment in new machinery and equipment. Compared to the 1951 period, the drop was dramatic. In Ecuador and Bolivia, where industrialization efforts were always weaker, investments in plant and technology remained low. In Argentina, elites dedicated far less to bring new machinery online, although privatization tends to inflate gross fixed-investment numbers. While plenty of money was spent on modernizing healthy branches, real capital formation suffered steady declines from the mid-1970s peak through the 1990s. Where gross capital formation topped 31 percent of GDP in 1976, it shrank to a mere 14 percent by 1990. It recovered slightly but did not exceed one-fifth of total output until 2006. In Venezuela, the drop in machinery investments was equally sharp under neoliberalism. From the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, the state oversaw investments amounting to 13 percent of GDP on new technologies and equipment. After the structural adjustments of the mid- and late 1980s, annual capital investments were cut nearly in half.

With investment diverted away from industry, manufacturing naturally lost its share of overall output throughout the region. Pink Tide countries experienced sharp reductions. From its mid-seventies apex of over a third of GDP, Argentine manufacturing diminished to roughly one-quarter twenty years later. It has never recovered. More importantly, that 25 percent aggregate figure hides a sharp polarization between a few advanced, highly efficient branches and an agonizing collection of small, dispersed firms that were on the brink of closure.<sup>41</sup> In Venezuela, the industrial share of GDP reached 22 percent prior to market reforms; when Chávez was first elected, manufacturing had shrunk to 17 percent, and it has continued falling since.

In combination with the rise of informality, these changes led to a drastic fall in union density across the region after the 1980s. Pink Tide countries were not spared, and in many ways, they experienced

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41 Bernardo Kosacoff, *La industria argentina: un proceso de reestructuración desarticulada* (Buenos Aires: CEPAL, 1993).

the most pronounced drops, falling to levels not seen since the early twentieth century. Nor has the collapse of unionization recovered since the Left came to power. Argentina's decline in union density is startling considering the levels achieved during ISI. Whereas half of all employees were in unions in the 1970s, by the 1990s, just over one-fifth of workers were members.<sup>42</sup> According to the ILO, ten years of Kircherist government etched the share of workers in union up to 30 percent, but union density has since resumed its decline. Bolivia and Venezuela also experienced sharp deterioration in labor organizing, with drops in their unionized workforces ranging from one-third to one-half. Whereas during ISI, the promotion of industry around the mining and oil sectors drove peak union density to a quarter or more of all workers, by the 1990s only around 9 and 13 percent of Bolivia and Venezuela's workers, respectively, belonged to labor unions.<sup>43</sup>

With historically low levels of unionization, in a context of rampant informality and industrial fragmentation, it is unsurprising that the region's workers lost their capacity for collective action — even for economic self-defense, much less to demand additional gains. Although the data is incomplete and not altogether reliable, there is no denying that as employment was degraded or eliminated, workers were unable to respond with effective mobilization. In Argentina, as crisis and restructuring shredded living standards, unions were not altogether quiescent. The 1980s hyperinflationary crisis drove workers to protest aggressively for salary adjustments: that decade, there were an average of over five hundred yearly labor conflicts, most concentrated in the latter years when real wages sank the fastest.<sup>44</sup> While far below the mid-1970s upsurge, the rate of labor protest reveals the preservation of significant associational capacities. By the 1990s, the ability to mobilize was in irreversible decline as privatization, disintegration, and flexibilization

42 Kenneth Roberts, *Changing Course in Latin America: Party Systems in Latin America's Neoliberal Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 100.

43 Roberts, *Changing Course*, 100.

44 Nueva Mayoria, "La Conflictividad Laboral, 1980-2016," February 2016.

hollowed out workers' associational power. The once-powerful Peronist labor movement, now under unrestrained assault, only mustered 330 yearly actions. By the latter half of the decade, as hundreds of thousands of jobs vanished and wages were essentially frozen, there were a mere 110 industrial conflicts per year. The loss of associational and mobilization capacities in manufacturing was clearly behind the overall weakening, as industrial conflicts shrank by nearly half. The collapse of labor mobilization in other Pink Tide countries, though not as extreme given the lower baselines, was similarly gloomy. Bolivia and Ecuador saw yearly strikes diminish from an average of roughly 240 and 100, respectively, to fewer than 100 and 40. Venezuela experienced the near disappearance of labor mobilization during the 1990s. The year with the most strikes, 1992, witnessed a meager fifteen stoppages.

Since then, labor protest has dwindled even further in most Pink Tide countries. In effect, the working class, even under leftist governments, has remained without potent sources of systemic leverage and has failed to recover the organizational resources needed to revamp its associational capacities and militancy. Argentina alone, thanks to the dramatic economic recovery triggered by a massive 2002 devaluation and its moderately protectionist effects, has had a resurgence in labor protest. In 2007, after five years of robust expansion, unions waged over one thousand struggles.<sup>45</sup> But this figure is misleading; the rebirth of strikes under the Kirchners reflects the way their institutionalization of a recentralized collective bargaining regime boosted unions' associational capacities for the purposes of wage stabilization.<sup>46</sup>

Still, neoliberal restructuring's erosion of labor's positional power did not completely wipe out subaltern disruptive capacities. As labor was marginalized, popular sectors developed other effective organizational resources that gave them resounding abilities to disrupt. Neoliberal

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45 Taller de Estudios Laborales, *Informe trimestral de estadísticas laborales y económicas* No. 12 October 2009 (Buenos Aires), p. 20. Available at: <http://www.tel.org.ar/spip/est/inftri0ct09.pdf>.

46 René Rojas, forthcoming manuscript.

crises and instability pushed growing informal sectors and precarious communities into struggle just as the basis for industrial insurgency withered. Their escalating protests built up powerful movements which, although lacking structural power, exerted a different form of overwhelming leverage.

### NEOLIBERAL CRISIS AND SUBALTERN REMOBILIZATION

The marginalizing effects of neoliberal restructuring of industry and social provision helped remobilize popular sectors against elites. But economic degradation and social exclusion alone did not directly spur left organization and mobilization. After all, it took over fifteen years for popular forces to recover real influence. Rather, disruptive subaltern remobilization took place following an extended buildup of a new infrastructure for political mobilization. Paradoxically, such new class capacities were not based on structural leverage in the economy, but rather, on the elimination of that leverage. Facing their marginalization, popular sectors initiated a series of protest cycles, over the course of which they developed, expanded, and coordinated new forms of effective organization. This new associational power became strong enough to oust neoliberal governments and replace them with Pink Tide parties. Its lack of a structural foundation, however, could not forestall the exhaustion of popular organizational resources, leaving it vulnerable to rollback by state elites.

#### *Cycles of Protest and Rising Organization*

Market reform's social devastation prodded popular sectors into waves of protest over subsistence needs. Once disincorporated and severed from state-backed employment and social provision, vast layers of workers and the poor formed independent campaigns to fight for material goods largely unconnected to work and production. Cast off by neoliberalism

and forced to survive on the margins of formal markets, former clients and constituents of modernizing government brokers developed new organizations or recast old ones to press authorities for access to basic services, utility subsidies and infrastructure, urban titling, freedom to pursue semi-legal activities without harassment, and/or just plain relief handouts. Lacking positional leverage, such efforts relied on maximizing disruption through direct action, which in turn required strengthening existing bonds of solidarity.

In Bolivia, for instance, former miners turned coca growers refashioned labor and peasant associations first developed by the ISI corporatist state to organize defense of their new livelihoods against eradication campaigns. In Venezuela, slum dwellers formed community associations to protect and support their new neighborhoods and fight for affordable transport. In Argentina, unemployed families organized road blockades to demand welfare plans from the state. These initial defensive rounds of anti-neoliberal resistance spawned the organizational building blocks that laid the foundation for more extensive associational capacities that popular sectors would successfully mobilize to bring down neoliberal governments.

As second-generation market reforms aggravated exclusion and simultaneously cut into the state's ability to address popular grievances, protests expanded. Defensive and local organizations began cooperating with their peers and shifted to more offensive demands. Ramping up mobilizations, popular groups soon formed protest blocs that coalesced around political demands which were more national in scope. The process of branching out and coordination led to qualitative jumps in subaltern associational capacities. Broad fronts were created, some cohering more formally than others. They tackled liberalization proposals that resonated widely, confronted acute economic crises, or took on standing administrations altogether.

In Bolivia, peasant leagues, workers' confederations that had welcomed informal workers, and federated shanty-neighborhood councils lent support to local struggles over water rights. These

then led national demonstrations that brought down the president during the 2003 “Gas War.” Bolivia’s mass movements achieved the highest degree of institutionalization, providing the formal organizational bases of the new MAS party which jumped to the head of the protests, later elected Morales to the presidency, and has since been the hegemonic force in the country. In Argentina, the unemployed *piqueteros* escalated their mass disruptions, organized mass assemblies to coordinate their actions, and eventually formed powerful fronts that included unions and community organizations. During the 2001–2002 financial collapse, they brought the country to a standstill, intensifying provincial roadblocks and then centralizing their rebellion around the capital. Soon thereafter, they helped stabilize Kirchner’s shaky government, as a number of their federations became key neo-Peronist support bases. The Venezuelan process was somewhat different. There, early unrest by community groups and semi-clandestine formations that built alliances set the stage for Chávez’s first election in 1998. But in the Bolivarian revolution, anti-neoliberal protest organizations took associational capacities to a new level afterward, as they mobilized to defend the radicalizing government from a series of early elite attacks.

*From Independent Militancy to Populist Clientelism*

Despite their success in catapulting left governments into power, these mass movements soon became dependent on the state and lost their great disruptive capacities. Three dynamics combined to produce this outcome. Firstly, the movements underwent the inevitable process of exhaustion connected to constant and costly mobilization. Secondly, the relief and redistributive demands that fueled their rise were partially fulfilled by the new governments in the form of new and expanded welfare programs; these were typically channeled through movement structures. Lastly, to the extent that mobilization continued, it soon shifted from grassroots militant protest aiming to overturn neoliberalism

to more agitation coordinated from above to defend Pink Tide governments. These factors combined to weaken and further demobilize mass protest movements that sustained the Pink Tide and to erode their independence. Not only did the insurgent organizations suffer a decline in their abilities to mobilize; reincorporation and allegiance to “their” governments and partisan structures meant that they came to depend on state resources, rather than the organizational resources painstakingly amassed in struggle, for their members’ well-being *and* for their institutional survival.

From their marginalized positions, popular organizations succumbed to these conditions. Cut off by market reforms from economic institutions valued by elites, they became subordinate to leftist authorities and brokers. Unable to deploy structural leverage, their agitation was subsumed under the political requirements of Pink Tide rule. Left governments were not merely manipulating their constituents. Since they were dependent on this social base, Pink Tide politicians committed to delivering as best as possible — failing on this front would result in electoral defeat. Latin America’s new left was thus caught in a clientelist cycle that preserved the status quo rather than pushed beyond it. Governments institutionalized popular groups and channeled commodity rents to their backers, maintaining a level of organization that served to fend off challenges and turn out the vote. In return, popular constituents secured the reproduction of their organizations which they deployed not only to defend Pink Tide governments but also to provide and even expand relief for members. Of course, in this subordinate relationship and from weak social locations, former insurgents could no longer push for more radical demands. The Pink Tide was trapped in a neoliberal growth model, albeit with improved distributional policies. The Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela and the rise of neo-Peronist populism in Argentina best illustrate the transformation of powerful insurgencies into dependent clienteles as well as how this shift further compromised the Pink Tides inherent social weakness.

*Venezuela: From Militant Tsunami to Tottering Trickle*

The originating event that led to the rise of radical Bolivarian populism was the February 1989 insurrection known as the *Caracazo*. This rebellion inaugurated the anti-neoliberal mobilizations that peaked a decade later with the Pink Tide's string of electoral successes. The revolt, led by the unemployed and informally employed residents of the capital's suburban slums, was directed at the reelected Social Democrat (Acción Democrática, or AD) icon Carlos Andrés Pérez who had presided over the oil-boom splurge of the 1970s. In the 1980s, he again campaigned on a populist platform, denouncing neoliberal restructuring and multilateral financing conditionalities as "a neutron bomb that killed people, but left buildings standing." CAP, as Pérez is known, was a leading figure in the party system installed by the Punto Fijo power-sharing agreement with his Christian Democratic (COPEI) rivals, a pact that emerged from the contentious re-democratization of 1958. It enshrined the quasi-corporatist arrangement whereby state-supported unionization and the benefits of institutionalized collective bargaining were exchanged for labor's allegiance. Under the Punto Fijo regime, formal employees enjoyed generous real wages, which from 1960 to the mid-1980s grew well above productivity gains.<sup>47</sup>

Though *puntofijismo* was already under pressure by the late 1980s, CAP led the neoliberal attack on Venezuelan petro-corporatism. Pérez began his second stint by at once implementing the very pro-market, IMF-recommended reforms he had denounced. Also foreshadowing the bait and switch, or "neoliberalism by surprise" approach of former or would-be populists across the region, CAP's program — the infamous *paquete* (or "package") — only increased the vulnerability of the expanding informal workforce by deepening their dependence on the market for basic needs.<sup>48</sup> Thus, when CAP's *paquete* accelerated privatization,

47 Jonathan Di John, *From Windfall to Curse?: Oil and Industrialization in Venezuela, 1920 to the Present* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2009), 51.

48 Susan C. Stokes, *Mandates and democracy: Neoliberalism by surprise in Latin Amer-*

increased sales taxes, further liberalized trade, and eliminated subsidies, the precarious urban poor exploded. To restore order, Pérez sent in the military with shoot-to-kill orders. By the end of the *Caracazo*, thousands lay dead, though hundreds have never been accounted for.

The rebellion had three critical consequences for the emergence of the Bolivarian regime. Firstly, it put the final nail in the coffin of the disintegrating AD-COPEI party system. The adoption of neoliberal policies threw huge numbers out of work and undercut the resources that sustained the incorporation of workers, particularly eroding the AD's institutionalized links to unions. Growing segments of the working class concentrated in hill shanties surrounding opulent central Caracas were now cut off from the bipartisan system of interest representation. Secondly, the urban poor deepened their local organizing efforts. With a majority of the working class cut off from the traditional systems of representation, radicals and community activists developed barrio associations, both legal and not-so-legal, rooted in mutualist provision and defense of social services. These marginalized but organized sectors would become the bedrock of Chávez's social support. The Punto Fijo system in tatters, elites found it impossible to secure the consent of these increasingly mobilized groups. Finally, the *Caracazo* activated a layer of middle-ranking, nationalist officers who had been forced to repress the rebellion. In fact, Chávez and his cohort began conspiring seriously to take power and reinstall a "progressive-nationalist" regime after their experience putting down the insurrection. Ironically, Chávez's new radical populism arose with the backing of the very sectors he had been ordered to repress. As an outsider attacking the old order's neoliberal turn, he was well positioned to bring the informal workers into a governing coalition.

The turn of the century opened a process of deep transformation, driven by repeated elite attempts to topple Chávez followed by massive mobilizations defending his rule and radicalizing the reform process at

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*ica* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

each step.<sup>49</sup> Following his failed 1992 coup attempt, Chávez, who with two words — “for now” — famously admitted only a temporary setback, was swept into office six years later. The same informal sectors that had rebelled in 1989 and supported his uprising now overwhelmingly voted for his vague anti-poverty and anti-corruption pledges. While Chávez ended up with 56 percent, neither AD nor COPEI ran candidates, as they sensed the popular hostility toward *punto fijo*ismo. After a brief grace period during which the opposition worked to reorganize itself, elites, now genuinely threatened by a new constitution, went on the offensive. After Chávez won another election with 60 percent under the loosely assembled Movement for the Fifth Republic, opponents orchestrated lethal street violence followed by an April 2002 coup, used their technical and bureaucratic supremacy to conduct a protracted and devastating lockout of the strategic oil industry at the end of that year, and, given the failure of their extra-parliamentary tactics, finally launched a recall referendum campaign in 2004 to oust Chávez legally.

Each move galvanized Chávez's supporters, spurring their organization and mobilization and resulting in turn in enhanced leverage over Bolivarian social policy. In response to the short-lived coup, hundreds of thousands of Chavistas, activating their barrio networks, descended onto the capital, confronting the putschists with mass direct action and prompting the restoration of Chávez's rule by loyalists in the military. Chavista success on the street encouraged further advances in popular political participation and militancy. Bolivarian activists responded to the employers' strike of 2003–2004 by mobilizing at work sites, particularly in the oil industry, where worker ingenuity and self-management restarted production, though not before elites shrank economic output by 8 percent and reversed promising declines in poverty. This time, Bolivarian workers' roles in beating back elites' economic attack led to the formation of a new labor confederation, the UNT, which largely displaced the corporatist holdover CTV, which had sided with employers

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49 George Cicciariello-Maher, *We Created Chávez: A People's History of the Venezuelan Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

during the lockout. The UNT put forward radical reforms like workers' control and co-management of production and the formalization of flexibilized wage earners.<sup>50</sup> The final assertion of popular power came in 2004, when Chavistas organized constitutionalist mobilization in defense of the Bolivarian regime and soundly defeated the Right's recall campaign with 2 million more backers turning out in relation to the 2000 presidential elections.

The lesson was unequivocal: Chávez's political survival depended on consolidating his supporters' organized power and addressing their radicalizing demands. Within a year, Chávez declared that his revolution would be socialist in nature. Twenty-first-century Bolivarian socialism contained two basic pillars: universal social provision and a restructuring of participatory political institutions. Chávez intensified the redistribution of oil revenues, which began a steep five-year climb as the lockout was overcome and global crude prices rebounded. It was over this period that per capita social spending doubled. With this infusion of hard currency, the new Bolivarian regime founded a number of social programs, called *misiones*, which offered universalist health care, free secondary and postsecondary education for students of all ages, and popular distribution of subsidized food. Decommodified social provision naturally underpinned popular allegiance to the government. On this basis, the Bolivarian regime reconstituted a new corporatist model, petro-patronage now financing state linkages primarily with the informal sectors of the working class. To institutionalize this expanded clientelism, Chávez created two key associational structures: a unified Socialist Party (the PSUV) and communal councils. Both were hybrid organizational models, combining horizontal participatory mechanisms at the grassroots level with top-down decision making with the party leadership and the state.<sup>51</sup>

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50 Steve Ellner, "Conflicting Currents in the Pro-Chavez Labor Movement and the Dynamics of Decision Making" in Silva, Eduardo, and Federico Rossi, eds. *Reshaping the Political Arena in Latin America: From Resisting Neoliberalism to the Second Incorporation* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018).

51 Steve Ellner, "Social and Political Diversity and the Democratic Road to Change

But this Bolivarian socialist project carried grave risks. Firstly, dependence on petro-patronage made popular welfare dependent on the vagaries of the global crude market. So, as oil prices began to decline — most notably in 2009 and 2015 — social spending also spiraled downward. The economic and social crises produced by falling oil revenues tested the urban poor's Bolivarian commitments. Their allegiance was further eroded by the bureaucratization entrenched by the regime's partisan and communitarian institutions which created powerful conservative constituencies and incentives for corruption. Though the PSUV and the community assemblies were built on vibrant grassroots self-activity, this popular participation was ultimately channeled in a top-down manner by the authority and interests of new elites. Given the deteriorating economic situation and the alienation verticalist centralization wrought on rank-and-file Chavistas, the new regime began suffering massive disillusionment and desertion, even before Chávez's unexpected death and the disappointments of his politically clumsy successor, Nicolás Maduro. When the economy nosedived in 2015, predictably hurting informal workers and their families the worst, Chavismo could find neither the political initiative to shift to a radically different development model nor motivate its historic backbone to defend the regime from growing right-wing attacks.

The recession, propelled by collapsing oil prices, worsened dramatically after 2014, with output shrinking by almost 6 percent in 2015 and by even more the following two years. Inflation doubled from around 60 to 120 percent in 2015 and has since entered five-digit territory. The combination of acute shortages, consumer price ceilings, and multiple exchange rates helped generate a ruthless black market for goods and dollars inflicting additional blows to the poor's living standards. The opposition exploited the crisis to mount an offensive that began with violent street demonstrations and culminated in the successful December 2015 takeover, with a near supermajority, of Congress by the

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in Venezuela" in Steve Ellner, ed. *Latin America's Radical Left* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014).

Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD) coalition. Since then, with the economy in a freefall and poverty at unprecedented levels, the country finds itself in a stalemate that is aggravating the crisis. After wielding partisan control of the judiciary to block the opposition's recall campaign, Maduro launched a constitutional assembly which the PSUV, despite its shrinking support base, has used to govern. In a context of generalized collapse, he has exploited new electoral rules, the opposition's inability to overcome key strategic differences, and widespread Chavista disillusionment to hold on to power in the last elections.

### *Argentina: The Peronist Giant Returns on Feet of Clay*

The Argentine case parallels Venezuelan developments in many respects. Whereas the *Caracazo* opened the drawn-out crisis of neoliberalism and the traditional party system, in Argentina, it gathered steam during the 1990s and culminated in December 2001 with the country's own popular rebellion and political implosion. At the same time, the Pink Tide experience in Argentina departs significantly from the Venezuelan experience. For one, the old party system was not completely undone as the new reformers represented a reconfiguration of Peronism, the mainstay of postwar politics. Consequently, left movements needed to be even more forceful to win substantial concessions. Accordingly, the new regime did not radically alter its core policy platform or the state's representative institutions.

As in Venezuela, the popular explosion against the political class was fueled by the squeeze imposed on workers by market reforms. The open trade, deregulation, and privatization policies of orthodox Peronist Carlos Ménem expanded poverty, precarious work, and unemployment to unprecedented levels. Regionally, Argentina had come closest to full employment under its ISI regime. By the end of the 1990s, half the population had slid into poverty, joblessness had expanded to one-fifth, and over half of the employed population worked informally. Traditional blue-collar sectors like construction and manufacturing were

particularly hard hit, with roughly half of employees in these sectors out of work at the time of the collapse.

Beginning in the late 1990s, swaths of workers and their families who had been thrown out of work or into the insecurity of informal labor initiated a series of revolts that grew progressively until they enveloped and shut down the capital at the end of 2001.

Meanwhile, austerity measures adopted by both major parties — the Peronists and the Radical Party (UCR) — seeking IMF loans to back the local currency's dollar parity pushed even middle layers in Buenos Aires and other large cities into street protests. After the UCR-led ruling alliance reappointed the architect of the 1990s monetarist reforms and froze all bank accounts to avoid a run on the currency, the capital exploded in December of 2001 amid fears of an impending devaluation. The rebellion, which resulted in dozens of fatalities and hundreds of injuries, forced the UCR president to flee and in the course of a week toppled three interim presidents.

While formal industrial unions were either passive or complicit with liberalization, unemployed workers spearheaded the mobilizations. The main tactic used was highway roadblocks in demand for unemployment relief. Initially, these *piqueteros* were concentrated in provincial towns which had depended almost exclusively on shuttered plants. Relying on community and former work-site networks, thousands suffering sudden joblessness demanded relief by blocking major highways. Fearing the impact of these actions on the stability of the already fragile neoliberal agenda and hoping to contain the protests, authorities responded by delivering relief “plans.” Instead, this dynamic helped multiply the associational capabilities of the *piqueteros* who replicated a tactic that evidently worked.<sup>52</sup>

Throughout Argentina, masses of the unemployed organized to shut down highways, expecting public assistance. The *piquetero* movement

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52 Candelaria Garay. “Social Policy and Collective Action: Unemployed Workers, Community Associations, and Protest in Argentina,” *Politics & Society* 35, no. 2 (2007): 301–328.

thus grew in intensity and spread until it was in a position to engulf the country's administrative and economic centers. Through the late 1990s, the movement consolidated its associational resources as regional and then national federations were created. As Eduardo Silva shows, in 1997, there were 140 total roadblocks, disproportionately held in the interior.<sup>53</sup> By 2002, there were over 2,300; they grew to involve an average of 2,000 participants with over half in the economic heartland around Buenos Aires.<sup>54</sup> Largely, the *piquetero* eruption and the destabilization of its escalating disruptions brought down the old regime.

The popular rebellion, under the slogan “*que se vayan todos*” (roughly “throw them all out”), dissolved broad segments of the existing party system and forced Peronism to refashion itself for its own survival. Nestor Kirchner took office after winning a mere 22 percent in the early elections held June 2003. Though *piquetero* mobilizations had subsided somewhat, by midyear the capital had experienced 120 roadblocks and Buenos Aires province, 194. To stabilize the situation and solidify its tenuous rule, the new government prioritized their demobilization. To remove the *piqueteros* from the streets, Kirchner extended and bolstered the reforms of the interim government. Crucially, this involved consolidating the relief “plans” into a single workfare-style program, *Plan Jefes y Jefas de Hogar*, and selectively conferring management of these funds to the unemployed workers' organizations in exchange for political allegiance. Indeed, by 2002, this plan covered 1.5 million households, accounting for 7.5 percent of federal expenditures.<sup>55</sup> Coupled with other key reforms, this shift to consolidated and expanded discretionary relief played a huge role in demobilizing the *piqueteros*.

The default and massive devaluation adopted by the interim government, gave a much-needed boost to exports, generating new revenues for social spending. When the price of soy and other primary

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53 Silva, *Challenging*, 83

54 Garay, “Social policy,” 312. See also Silva, *Challenging*, 83.

55 Agustina Giraudy, “The Distributive Politics of Emergency Employment Programs in Argentina (1993-2002),” *Latin American Research Review* (2007): 33–55.

commodities began rising in 2003, the new government raised export taxes and channeled growing portions of the export windfall into state coffers. Within a year of Kirchner's election, international soy prices had doubled; in 2007, when these began spiking again, he further raised *retenciones* from the timid 13.5 percent adopted by the interim government (they had fallen to a mere 3.5 percent under Meném) to 35 percent. It was during this period that real per capita social spending increased by half. As job growth rebounded furiously — unemployment had been halved by 2006 — much of this expansion came to be disbursed through a new targeted per-child cash transfer, the *Asignación Universal por Hijo* (AUH), created at the end of 2009. By 2013, it covered over 2 million poor families, offering the region's most generous transfers to nearly a third of all households.<sup>56</sup>

The rapid return to growth and the expansion of welfare programs had crucial political consequences. Firstly, party and state institutions were only partially transformed. Whereas the anti-Peronist liberal parties were irreversibly damaged, the PJ underwent an important realignment. Under the new growth and welfare regime, the neo-populists rose to dominance within Peronism. After securing social stability and consolidating rule, Kirchner's wife, Cristina Fernández, won back-to-back elections, the second in 2011 with an overwhelming majority and popular mandate. Nevertheless, while the traditional factions of Peronism were weakened by the 2001–2002 rebellion and mobilizations, the very restoration of growth and order promoted the recovery of old-guard Peronist centers of power. These were able to open a new front against Kirchnerist electoral dominance, as well as its new patronage systems. By 2015, they had formed a powerful block of local *caudillos* and bureaucratic officials, receiving over one-fifth of the vote. The old liberal opposition, by contrast, lost all capacity to compete for power: while a few Radical leaders hold onto provincial machines, national

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56 Agustín Salvia and Julieta Vera. "Desigualdad y pobreza por ingresos en la Argentina 2010-2014" *Observatorio de la Deuda Social Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Católica de Argentina, 2013).

candidates have scarcely cleared 10 percent, whether in primaries or elections. Rather, the party has dispersed behind personalist candidacies or deals with new emerging oppositions.

Secondly, besides demobilizing most *piqueteros*, the new conditional and targeted welfare funds became the conduit for incorporation into the Kirchnerist populist coalition. While the new clientelism benefitted the vast informal sector, it did so by coopting unemployed organizations and stripping them of their independence and militance. Though a minority of the *piquetero* movement attempted to maintain the initiative, the bulk was reshaped and integrated into robust Kirchnerist patronage networks. This has not only eliminated their autonomy in carrying out disruptive actions in favor of members' interests, it has also stifled their mobilizational capacities. The funds pumped into these groups no longer enhance their organizational resources, establishing instead brokerage systems for the delivery of services. Yet unlike the Bolivarian process, Kirchnerism concurrently failed to install new structures of popular participation and state intermediation.

The result has been a sharp decline in popular organizational capacities along with weakly institutionalized neo-Peronist partisan incorporation. Meanwhile, whereas Venezuelan elite opposition suffered a series of debilitating defeats until 2015, in Argentina pro-market forces were able to reorganize against little resistance from the movements. Although a 2008 mobilization against rising export taxes was not a complete success, it revealed the contours of a new forceful opposition. Institutionally, the anti-populist opposition would be built around the social-liberal administration of the capital under current president, Mauricio Macri. Beginning in 2011, the Kirchners had to withstand rising protest in Buenos Aires and beyond fueled by reactivated middle layers or rebuilt Peronist bureaucracies. In the context of a weakly structured Kirchnerist following, the reassembled opposition amounted to a formidable challenge.

All in all, these developments dealt a powerful blow to the diffuse and demobilized Kirchnerist coalition. As the economy began faltering

in 2013–2014, they were ill-equipped to block the opposition's advance. Having peaked in late 2012, world soy prices experienced a freefall throughout 2014, dramatically reducing public revenues. The share of social expenditures fell by more than one-tenth, and for the first time under the Kirchners, per capita welfare outlays were cut. In the meantime, as the state continued to allot multibillion-dollar yearly sums for debt repayment, it began running deficits which sharply undermined the peso. Though the Fernandez government increased cash transfers and the minimum wage, rising inflation undermined their real values. With GDP contractions in 2014 and again in 2016, and amid spiraling consumer prices, Macri comfortably beat Fernández's chosen successor in the 2015 runoffs. Tellingly, the Kirchnerist candidate increased the coalition's turnout by half a million votes; the anti-populists, however, doubled their vote total to over 12 million!

Venezuela and Argentina illustrate the built-in weakness of the Pink Tide left. Whereas ISI empowered workers by placing them in the most indispensable positions for the realization of elite interests, the neoliberal accumulation model inherited by Pink Tide governments dissolved working-class power. If postwar industrialization programs gestated challengers to, if not gravediggers of, bourgeois rule, market reforms birthed rebellious masses without the tools to contest the foundations of elite power. These constraints impeded the new movement's ability to push through core transformation of the economic model that marginalized them. Fortunately, when assessed relative to elite power, subaltern weaknesses were not completely debilitating. For while neoliberalism eroded workers' leverage, it also fragmented business capacities.

The combined effect of post-ISI elite fragmentation and the disorganizing impact that left governments had on domestic business communities is a present inability to impose a coherent and ruthless orthodox program on former Pink Tide countries. Where they have taken back power, anti-Pink Tide liberals have largely failed to undo the core reincorporation social policies of their predecessors. In Argentina,

Macri has not dared take away centralized collective bargaining or the main Kirchnerist welfare program, the AUH. And the very announcement of an IMF agreement triggered massive remobilization of the associational capacities of workers and the poor. In Venezuela, the unravelling of social provision is occurring under the Chavista government. But the fact that the Right has been unable to regain power in such appalling social conditions reflects the opposition's inability to forge a unified program that could meet minimal conditions for post-Bolivarian rule.

The key point is that reliance on the informal urban poor as its mainspring left the Pink Tide without the type of power needed to push through radical programs. This impotence underpinned a vicious cycle. Unable to break with the neoliberal model, the best Pink Tide governments could do to meet their backers' interests was to divert commercial rents to popular constituencies. This cemented a negative feedback loop between the political benefits of natural-commodity export strategies and new forms of clientelism with the informal poor. In lieu of constructing a strategy atop a structurally empowered social force capable of driving a more radical emancipatory and egalitarian program, the Pink Tide was forced to exchange mobilized support for patronage. The arrangement hampered its social support base. When the trade bonanza dried up, the arrangement collapsed. This structural weakness, more than elite sabotage, undermined Pink Tide rule.

ROJAS

## CONCLUSION

How should the Left react to the Pink Tide's decline? Arguing that its fall is predicated on an inherent power gap lends an air of inevitability to the Left's current reversals. Pessimism and resignation, however, are not the attitudes radicals and popular movements should come away with. Indeed, the Left must appreciate the accomplishments of the Pink Tide's tenure. A balance sheet of the contemporary left's achievements reveals that even in a context of more limited potential, the Pink Tide managed to institute social and political reforms that granted needed

relief and influence to popular sectors and, more importantly, have genuine staying power. The resilience of these measures, with all their flaws, stems from the subaltern associational capacities developed during anti-neoliberal resistance. Even if whittled and compromised, their clientelistic consolidation gives them the ability to effectively counter attempts by the new right to eliminate these programs. The informal poor might no longer be willing to mobilize in defense of Pink Tide parties and politicians, but they will not sit by as elites strip away the meager welfare resources they fought to win.

In short, even when the Pink Tide lacked the structural leverage to push through proposals for economic democratization that the classical left thrust onto the agenda, their more orthodox neoliberal successors face enormous barriers to rolling back neo-corporatist reforms. The on-the-ground balance of organizational forces redounds in a sort of policy stalemate: although the Pink Tide reforms cannot be deepened, neither can they be completely gutted. Some might say that thin reincorporation is a fixture in the region's new political ecology. This perspective should allay concerns over the exaggerated threat of a neo-authoritarian hard right in the region. While far from satisfactory and certainly not the emancipatory project that many celebrated, the Pink Tide did erode the bases for the cruel and totalitarian form of market orthodoxy that reigned prior to its ascent.

Finally, comparing the Pink Tide to the classical Latin American left highlights the tough, yet indispensable, tasks arrayed before Latin American radicals. Neither generation got anywhere without amassing independent organizational resources. Their contrasting realities exposes the disadvantages of doing so without a solid structural foundation, yet it also demonstrates the inescapable necessity of building organizational strength for any radical challenge to elite power. Pitfalls abound, as reflected in the failed *Marea Socialista* campaign to build a radical and independent labor pole in Venezuela. Without a substantial presence in key economic sectors, it was eventually eclipsed by official Bolivarian labor confederations and, more fatefully, by the PSUV.

But opportunities are also plentiful. Argentine transit militants exploited track-worker safety disputes to bolster the organization of the subway system's service employees.<sup>57</sup> Bolivian neighborhood associations in the informal slums that ring La Paz remain strong, even while struggling to preserve their autonomy. Encouraging examples can also be found in non-Pink Tide countries. The MST, Brazil's Landless Workers Movement, rose to become the region's strongest mass movement, perhaps ever, thanks largely to a gradual and persistent accumulation of organizational resources among working communities and families from the economy's periphery. In Chile, students, from marginal structural positions, rapidly built up new associational capacities used to launch a movement that placed radical politics back on the national agenda after decades of neoliberal hegemony.

But these examples also show that while bolstering the movement's associational power is surely necessary, it is plainly insufficient. Comparing the Pink Tide to the classical Latin American left underscores the indispensability of organizing a base whose regular activities give it the capacity to disrupt the economic basis of ruling-class power. The Left's task, therefore, is not to forsake the movements that fueled the Pink Tide, but rather to develop linkages that might coordinate their mobilizations with the struggles of popular sectors that enjoy structural power. Once more, although neoliberalism disempowered vast working-class segments, market reform has not eroded the positional leverage of *all* workers. The change in growth model has shifted elites' profit strategies to new sectors and branches. These industries are now more scattered and isolated and employ less-skilled employees among immense informal surpluses. The relatively fortunate workers occupied in them face intense competitive pressures to preserve their jobs; unlike masses cast into informality and complete insecurity, they are not driven into resistance and protest.

Still, neoliberal production is not invulnerable. Current conditions

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57 René Rojas, "The Buenos Aires Subway Strike: A Window on Post-Collapse Labor Politics," *NACLA Report on the Americas* 47, no. 1 (2014): 14–19.

present elevated barriers for organizing its leading sectors, but once radicals find ways to build workers' associational capacities in these sectors, the Left will once again have its hands on a powerful and lasting lever for winning more transformative reforms. The ISI economy did much of the heavy lifting for us. Now, the Left must make the tireless, and far from glamorous, efforts to organize key nodes in business's profit strategies, and thereby unlock the enduring structural power of the neoliberal working class. Again, a series of working-class battles, less resonant perhaps than early Pink Tide cycles of protest, offer guidelines. Effective organization of fractured, atomized, and informalized workers in mineral extraction and export infrastructure, such as the painstaking unionization and coordination of subcontracted miners and dockworkers in Chile — the poster child of Latin American neoliberalism — point us in the right direction. The Left's task is to identify instances in which such successes might be replicated. ✎

**This essay examines the class dynamics, political rationale, and consequences of Brazil’s anti-corruption investigations and right-wing anti-corruption protests from 2013 to 2018. Since 2014, Brazil has been plunged into political crisis following Dilma Rousseff’s electoral victory; this political crisis has been driven by the largest anti-corruption investigation in Brazil’s history — Lava Jato (“Car Wash”). Led by previously obscure regional judge Sérgio Moro, Lava Jato has led to the indictment of almost the entirety of Brazil’s political class for corruption and the imprisonment of leading politicians and businessmen, including former president Lula da Silva. This essay makes the case that far from being a necessary step in ending Brazil’s culture of political impunity and endemic corruption, Lava Jato has been a politically driven process launched by a faction of Brazilian capital against the Workers’ Party (PT) and the party’s allies in business.**

# BRAZIL'S NEVER-ENDING CRISIS

BENJAMIN FOGEL

**B**razil faces a severe political crisis that threatens to undermine its democratic architecture. The key to this crisis is Operation Lava Jato (Operation “Car Wash”), the largest anti-corruption investigation in Brazil’s history. Since its inception in 2014, the investigation has uncovered a network of corruption involving billions of dollars across twelve countries and has resulted in more than three hundred indictments and a hundred convictions.<sup>1</sup> In particular, the imprisonment of the country’s most popular politician and front-runner, former president Lula da Silva of the center left Workers’ Party (PT), in April 2018 has more or less ensured that Brazil’s upcoming October 2018 elections will be a free-for-all. It seems almost certain that Lula will be prevented from running for election, and political confusion and uncertainty will reign. A recent poll indicates that over 40 percent of

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1 The ripples of Lava Jato have been felt internationally too. For instance, Peruvian president Pedro Pablo Kuczynski resigned after videos surfaced of congressmen accepting bribes on the eve of an impeachment vote, in the wake of accusations about Kuczynski’s former links to the Brazilian construction company Odebrecht.

Brazilians don't know who to support or will submit a blank ballot in the election. Jair Bolsonaro, a far-right politician who openly calls for a return to military dictatorship,<sup>2</sup> is leading the polls.

Lava Jato played a significant role in the downfall of another president, Dilma Rousseff, who was impeached in 2016, for “crimes of responsibility.” Dilma’s supposed crime was to utilize an arcane set of fiscal maneuvers known as *pedeladas* to pay for social spending.<sup>3</sup> She was replaced by her vice-president — the right-wing Michel Temer of the Brazilian Movement for Democracy Party (MDB)<sup>4</sup>, who currently enjoys an approval rating of 2 percent. Since coming to power in September 2016, Temer’s government has embarked on perhaps the most vicious austerity program implemented in any major economy. Political violence is also on the rise. Over forty activists have been murdered, including the socialist Rio city councilor Marielle Franco.<sup>5</sup> Brazilian democracy hangs in the balance and so far the Left has been unable to provide a clear strategy going forward.

How do we relate the corruption scandals to the broader political economy of Brazil? In this essay, I offer three main arguments: (1) anti-corruption politics has served as a primary strategy of the Brazilian ruling class to delegitimize center-left/reformist governments when

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2 Bolsonaro, a Rio congressman and former army captain, has been able to capitalize on the anti-political sentiments and deep conservatism prevalent among sections of Brazilian society. His politics are premised on capital punishment for criminals, racism, sexism, homophobia, nostalgia for military dictatorship, gun ownership, pro-life views, and virulent anti-leftism, all combined with a dose of neoliberalism. Bolsonaro, has been able to ride the anti-leftism wave unleashed by the anti-corruption protests to pose as a political outsider capable of renewing the broken political system and a morally degenerate society.

3 Ironically, one of the first moves of Temer’s disastrous reign was to change the law in order to sanction the same fiscal juggling for which Dilma was supposedly ousted.

4 In a desperate bit to rebrand themselves due to Temer’s unpopularity, the Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMDB) rebranded themselves as the Movement for Brazilian (MDB).

5 For further background on Marielle Franco, a black woman from a favela and her extraordinary political career, see her translated essay “After the Take Over,” *New Left Review* 110 (March–April 2018) and Juliana Neuenschwander and Marcus Giraldes’ obituary in the same issue.

center-right parties are unable to win elections and outright repression does not constitute a viable strategy; (2) political corruption is an endemic feature of Brazil, due both to the institutional structure of Brazilian politics and the particular trajectory of development in Brazil; (3) further, the PT's timidity and its attempts to triangulate and placate capital have created conditions for its undemocratic removal from power. I conclude by making the case for a left anti-corruption strategy centered on politicizing anti-corruption rather than on empowering the judiciary.

### LAVA JATO AND THE COUP

A phrase commonly used in Brazil in the context of the investigations of the major corruption scandal is *acabou em pizza* ("ended up in pizza"), the reference being to the all-too-familiar scenario where corrupt politicians and businessmen manage to evade punishment, getting only a slap on the wrist. Depending on who you ask, Lava Jato either signals a break with the culture of four hundred years of elite impunity, or an imperialist plot that seeks to return the country into the hands of the same backward elite that has ruled the country since 1500.

Lava Jato began with an investigation, led by a previously unknown local federal judge, Sergio Moro, into the activities of a businessman who had laundered money through his company. Investigators stumbled upon a much larger scandal involving the now notorious *doleiro* ("money launderer") Alberto Youseff and the state oil company Petrobras. The investigations moved higher up the ladder to center on the relationship between the construction sector and Petrobras, and the scandal became known as the *Petrolão*. They revealed that the PT as well as Brazil's other major political parties had used Petrobras contracts to channel money into their private coffers with the aid of the country's business elite. Major construction firms had offered bribes worth millions of dollars to Brazilian politicians to obtain construction contracts. While Lava Jato has implicated the majority of Brazil's political class to some extent or

the other, the media circus surrounding it has focused entirely on the sins of the PT and its allies.

Lava Jato and Brazil's political crisis is deeply connected to the events of June 2013, a month that saw the largest mass protests in present-day Brazilian history, stretched out across four hundred cities and involving over eight million people, making it the largest protest wave since the end of the dictatorship.<sup>6</sup> The protests began as a series of demonstrations against bus-fare hikes, led by the autonomist radical-left Free Pass Movement (MPL) in São Paulo, but after the governor, and PSDB's presidential candidate, Geraldo Alckmin<sup>7</sup>, ordered the police to suppress the protests, the movement quickly spread across the country. The protests initially had a distinct left-wing character, with the Homeless Workers Movement (MTST) and young left activists playing a significant role. However, as they gathered steam, the political character of the crowd changed and right-wing elements became increasingly visible.<sup>8</sup> The mainstream media, in particular Globo Network,<sup>9</sup> portrayed the protests as a movement against Dilma's government, depicting them only as an

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6 Ruy Braga and Sean Purdy, "A Precarious Hegemony: Neo-liberalism, Social Struggles and the End of Lulismo in Brazil," *Globalizations* 14, no. 4 (May 2018).

7 Alckmin is the establishment candidate going into October's elections. Already, he has the support of big capital, the mainstream media, and he has solidified an alliance with the coalition of corrupt right-wing parties that represent traditional landed elites misleadingly dubbed the Center (Centrão). However, he is an uninspiring candidate — so infamously boring that he is nicknamed *chuchu*; a watery, flavorless Brazilian vegetable. Alckmin faces a real chance of being outflanked on the right by Bolsonaro.

8 The first phase of the protests attracted students, young workers particularly in unorganized sectors, and workers with demands particular to their circumstances, such as bus drivers, health care workers, and truck drivers, as well as poor communities demanding increased access to public services or an end to the intense police violence. See Alfredo Saad Filho, "Mass Protests under Left Neoliberalism: Brazil June–July 2013," *Critical Sociology* 39, no. 8 (December 2013).

9 Globo holds an extraordinary degree of power in Brazil, controlling the media through its control of TV, and rights to foreign programming, soap operas, and football games. Globo has historically played a key role as the closest media ally of any dictatorship and has been able to even swing elections. A more sophisticated, socially liberal, and powerful (in Brazil) version of the Murdoch media empire, it manages to control the news agenda in the absence of any serious competition and a pliant state broadcaster.

expression of widespread disgust at Brazil's corrupt and dysfunctional political system, and downplaying the presence and demands of the Left. A general anti-political mood had characterized the agitation from the start. Images, shirts, and slogans associated with political parties were banned from the protests, reflecting the autonomist emphasis on spontaneity, horizontality, and a conviction that the crowd by its very nature is political.<sup>10</sup> In line with these principles, the MPL did not seek to impose a clear direction on the movement, opening the door for the Right to ride the wave of popular anger.

Dilma's government badly mishandled the protests, initially depicting them as part of a plot to undermine the government; this only fueled the anti-PT storm that was brewing. Although the government eventually pledged to commit R\$50 billion (around \$14 billion USD) to improving public transport, this proved too little, too late. Dilma had enjoyed a healthy approval rating of 57 percent before the protests; after the events of June 2013 her rating sank to a low of 31.3 percent. Additionally, June proved to be catalytic in the transformation of the Right, which became keenly aware that the general frustration with the PT and the anti-political sentiment could be the potential base for a swing in a more conservative direction. As it had often done in the past, the Right adopted the strategies and rhetoric of the Left for its own purposes. It was only in this context that Lava Jato could be portrayed as a redemptive and messianic project purging Brazil of systemic corruption central to the national malaise.

The Right, following Dilma's loss of popularity, went into the 2014 elections with full confidence that it would regain power through the candidacy of Senator Aécio Neves. Adroitly portrayed as a young, modern politician, the grandson of former president Tancredo Neves, became the great hope of the Brazilian establishment.<sup>11</sup> Despite the

10 See Andre Singer, "Rebellion in Brazil," *New Left Review* 85 (January–February 2014).

11 Neves is akin to A.J. Soprano of the TV series *The Sopranos*, a drug-addled, incompetent scion of a political dynasty. Neves has been repeatedly caught talking about his criminal behavior on tape including allegedly threatening to kill witnesses and soliciting cash bribes worth millions of dollars.

powerful political machine aimed against her, Dilma was still able to narrowly win the election in the second round by moving to the Left, by adopting a strong anti-austerity program and brandishing her own political history as a guerrilla in the armed struggle against the dictatorship. The PSDB did not take this well, declaring the results illegitimate and unsuccessfully demanding a recount. While Dilma might have won the presidency, the PT was badly hit in the legislature: a reactionary Congress was elected, making it virtually impossible for the PT to govern.<sup>12</sup> The PT thus found itself in 2015 governing an economy in free fall, while facing daily attacks in the media, an anti-corruption investigation implicating its allies and top leaders, and an opposition baying for its blood.

After failing to dislodge Dilma through electoral means, the Right adopted a different strategy, and unleashed a wave of popular mobilization against Dilma and the PT. In 2015, in the wake of daily Lava Jato headlines implicating key PT figures and their allies, thousands took to the streets, supposedly protesting the state of corruption in the country. The protesters began calling for Dilma's removal, branding the PT as a mafia that had captured the state. The media, in particular Globo, played a central role, calling on responsible citizens to take to the streets against a corrupt and illegitimate government. Major streets such as Avenida Paulista in São Paulo were closed as hundreds of thousands of mostly white and middle-class Brazilians flocked to the streets wearing football jerseys, faces painted in the blue and yellow of the Brazilian flag.

The anti-corruption protests drew together diverse social forces, including those calling for a new military dictatorship, fascist sympathizers, and even the legendary footballer Ronaldo. Regardless of the degree to which the political field was manipulated, a strong anti-corruption mood swept the country. Globo's relentless coverage of the demonstrations brought into the open previously taboo positions such

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12 The Congress reflected the conservative turn following the 2013 protests. Brazilian politics is said to be dominated by three political caucuses — “boi, bala, e biblia” or “beef (agribusinesses), bullets (pro-police, pro-dictatorship, pro-military groups), and Bible (evangelicals)”. The power of the “evangelical” and “bullets” caucuses significantly increased following the 2014 elections.

as support for military dictatorship. Lurking behind the smokescreen of popular anger were the murky right-wing movements like *Vem Pra Rua* (“Come to the Streets”) and the Movement for Brazilian Liberty (MBL).<sup>13</sup> Lava Jato and the resulting protests paved the way for the events of 2016, which saw Dilma removed through a soft “constitutional” coup.

Dilma’s fall was not inevitable, nor did it originate as a well-organized conspiracy masterminded by the United States, as some left elements have suggested. Rather, it was an ad-hoc response undertaken by a desperate political class that sought not only to stay out of prison, but also to reverse the results of an election it had expected to win. For instance, a recorded conversation between Romero Juca, the leader of the MDB in the Senate and other MDB politicians, revealed that he wanted Dilma removed so that Lava Jato could be choked off by her successor. Dilma was to be sacrificed in order to ensure the survival of Brazil’s political class. A new government under Temer’s leadership could pass a set of economic reforms instituting austerity for the foreseeable future, thereby calming the furies of the market.

The key architect of the impeachment process was Eduardo Cunha,<sup>14</sup> the Machiavellian former president of the Chamber of Deputies (who moonlighted as a popular evangelical radio host). With the support of the mainstream media and a faction of big capital, Cunha, a master of the political dark arts, was able to push through the impeachment process. On August 31, 2016, in one of the darkest and most miserable spectacles in Brazilian political history, Dilma was removed from office by a vote of 61–20 in the Senate.

Altogether, the political crisis has had profound effects across all sections of Brazil’s political class, including the radical left and the PT-aligned moderate left. Failing to find common ground, the Left has been riven by sectarian intrigues, moralism, and the search for political

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<sup>13</sup> The MBL, for instance, has links to the infamous Koch brothers. See Dom Phillips, “Brazil’s Right on the Rise as Anger Grows over Scandal and Corruption,” *Guardian*, July 26, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Cunha is currently in jail awaiting trial following charges related to concealing US \$40 million worth of bribes in Swiss bank accounts and witness tampering.

shortcuts. It has fallen prey to the same vicious trap of anti-politics and popular anger as the PT, letting opportunities for resurgence pass by while turning against itself. For example, a section of Brazil's radical left along with elements of the trade union bureaucracy joined the anti-corruption protests. Another faction argued that there was no difference between the PT and other bourgeois Brazilian parties, and that the Left should champion the line of "everyone out!"

The radical left has long identified itself as politically in opposition to the PT, following fourteen years of uninterrupted PT governance. As a result, it misread June 2013, believing that the PT was to be supplanted by a new kind of militant politics, with the result being that it was ill-prepared for the resurgence of the Right. Without a strong theorization of corruption, the Left was reduced to issuing platitudes about radical democracy, embracing the official anti-corruption politics, or simply joining in the calls for an empowered judiciary. The inability of the radical left to respond to the crisis intensified preexisting divisions on the Left.

The opposition to the coup became divided between two different organizations, the *Frente Povo Sem Medo* ("Front of People without Fear") led by the MTST, and the *Frente Brasil Popular* ("Popular Brazilian Front"), comprising organizations closely associated with the PT, such as the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) and the Central Union of Workers (CUT), Brazil's largest trade union federation. Notwithstanding several large protests against the coup and a successful general strike in April 2017 that involved more than forty million workers, the Left has been unable to block the majority of Temer's program. The PT, on the other hand, has proved itself to be largely either unable or unwilling to mobilize its own base. After years of political demobilization under the Lula and Dilma governments, it attempted to survive through shaky political alliances and endless legal imbroglios rather than an outright confrontation with the forces that removed it from power.

The imprisonment of Lula marks another stage in the coup. Short of

a miraculous appeal overturning his original conviction,<sup>15</sup> he will almost certainly not be able to run for office in the October 2018 election, due to Brazil's *Ficha Limpa* ("Clean Record") law, ironically introduced by the PT, barring those with convictions confirmed by the first appeal court from holding public office for eight years. The ruling was upheld in 2016, when Brazil's Supreme Court (STF) ruled that those convicted must serve their sentences immediately. Lula's defense had attempted to postpone his sentencing by filing procedural motions at the appeal court and petitioning for habeas corpus to the STF. The same court, by six votes to five, rejected Lula's motion on April 5, 2018, clearing the way for Lula's incarceration. Surprising everyone, in the minutes following the ruling, Moro announced that Lula had until 5:00 AM the following day to hand himself over to the federal police in Curitiba. For Moro, Lula had always been the great white whale that he had spent his career chasing. Like Captain Ahab hunting Moby Dick, Moro scoured the sea of corruption trying to find the opening to harpoon Lula.

There is something particularly symbolic about Moro imprisoning Lula, a former factory worker born in Brazil's impoverished northeast who didn't even finish high school. It was widely interpreted as revenge by the elite on a man who did not know his proper place in society. Lula refused to hand himself in meekly. Instead, he headed to the headquarters of the metallurgical workers' union in São Bernardo, an industrial suburb of São Paulo and the symbolic center of the Brazilian working class, Lula called on his supporters to join him there and over twenty thousand people, representing both the radical left and the PT, flocked to São Bernardo to show their solidarity with Lula. The police were forced to abandon their plans for his arrest that day. The next day Lula held a mass for his late wife Dona Marissa, after which he delivered one

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15 The charges that finally sank Lula, that he had accepted improvements worth US\$1.2 million to a beachfront property, did not originate from any hard evidence, but from the testimony of Léo Pinheiro, a former head of the construction company OAS, in return for a reduction in his sentence. For more on the weaknesses of the case against Lula see Mark Weisbrot, "Brazil's Democracy Pushed Into the Abyss," *New York Times*, January 23, 2018.

of the most important political speeches of his long career, declaring himself to be the embodiment of the struggle for social justice in Brazil rather than a mere politician. Lula had agreed to turn himself in after the speech, but his supporters refused to allow this. After PT leaders negotiated with the assembled crowd, the ex-president was literally carried on the shoulders of the masses to the police. Lula's popularity has only increased since his imprisonment. He still remains perhaps the only politician in Brazil with this type of popular legitimacy, and this despite the relentless propaganda war unleashed against him and his party over the last few years. It is clear that Lula is in prison for political reasons rather than for his alleged crimes. While Lula languishes behind bars, the establishment politicians including Temer, Alckmin, and Neves remain free.<sup>16</sup>

Despite being imprisoned, the PT has maintained that Lula remain their candidate and has the right to run the elections, but short of a judicial miracle and the complete reversal of precedent, given the clearly biased treatment Lula's case has received from Brazil's highest courts, he will be prevented from running for office. Unable to win an election on its own, the establishment has become increasingly reliant on legal strategies to weaken the Left; its electoral fortunes are dependent on the continued incarceration of Lula.

The likely scenario going forward will see Lula transfer his support to former São Paulo mayor Fernando Haddad, who is acting as Lula's vice presidential pick in tandem with the Communist Party of Brazil's (PCDOB) Manuela d'Ávila. The other major candidate in the center-left field is Ciro Gomes, a former minister of finance, as well as minister in Lula's first government and a former governor of the Northeastern state of Ceará. The radical left, on the other hand, has its own candidate in PSOL's Guilherme Boulos, the national coordinator of the MTST, who

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<sup>16</sup> In the months following his incarceration, a permanent encampment outside his prison in Curitiba has been set up, a rallying point for celebrities, militants, politicians, unionists, and others demanding his release. On several occasions since its inception, the camp has come under attack, including gunfire from right-wing forces.

Lula himself has identified as his potential political successor.<sup>17</sup> The PT stands a good chance of making it to the second round or winning the elections, due the continued popularity of Lula, but whether or not they will be able to actually govern in this chaotic political climate is another question. However, the events following June 2013 do not mark a new era in Brazilian politics. The Brazilian ruling class has on various occasions utilized anti-corruption movements to delegitimize and remove left governments, the subject for the next section.

### ANTI-CORRUPTION PROTESTS: PAST AND PRESENT

With more than a hint of cynicism and an even greater dose of historical revisionism, intellectuals, pundits, and politicians on the Right have promoted the myth that Brazilian corruption was systemized or even invented by the PT, and that therefore the party represents an aberrant anti-democratic force that Lava Jato must expunge. As Fernando Henrique Cardoso remarked in a 2017 speech at the Wilson Center, corruption before the PT's rise to power in 2002 consisted of "either individual acts or a mix of patronage with leniency, not a fundamental mechanism for a government to gain and retain power." The PT's alleged innovation was to systematize corruption so that it became a permanent form of governance. To disguise its own failings and belittle Lula's political triumphs, the PSDB created the comfortable fiction that corruption accounted for the PT's four successive electoral victories. Following this logic, PT corruption could be portrayed as an existential threat to Brazilian democracy. Further, Cardoso's argument continued, until the Lava Jato investigations and the anti-corruption movement, the "moral question" of PT's corrupt and anti-democratic character, which had seemed "to be a concern of the educated middle classes, has now become a concern of the people at large."<sup>18</sup> The implication was that

<sup>17</sup> See Aldo Cordeiro Sauda, "In Lula's Place," *Jacobin*, May 10, 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Fernando Henrique Cardoso, "Corruption and Politics: A Sociologist's View-

Lava Jato and the crusade of the enlightened few had awakened the masses from the political slumber induced by the PT and Lula's charisma.

These sentiments bear little relation to Brazil's political history. Since 1945, three Brazilian presidents have been removed from office, following major anti-corruption movements. In 1954, the former dictator turned democratically elected president Getúlio Vargas committed suicide in the wake of the *Mar de Lama* ("Sea of Mud") corruption scandal and a vicious campaign led by the right-wing editor and politician Carlos Lacerda. In 1964, similar forces played a key role in the civilian military coalition that toppled the reformist president João Goulart, leading to thirty years of military rule. Fernando Collor de Mello, a charismatic outsider from an oligarchical clan based in the northeastern state of Alagoas, who was elected in 1990 in the expectation that he would purge the state of corrupt civil servants, was impeached in 1992, following anti-corruption protests.<sup>19</sup>

Brazil's Second Republic, more commonly known as the Populist Republic, came into being through a military coup, which removed the then — dictator Vargas from power on October 29, 1945. It ended with another coup against the left-leaning president Goulart on March 31, 1964. The 1964 coup was justified by the military as a necessary measure to protect Brazil from communism and an incurably corrupt political class. Later, the most authoritarian measures enacted by the military dictatorship were justified as essential to rid the country of the malignant "diseases" of populism and communism, terms that carried strong associations with corruption. The anti-corruption rhetoric of the military regime proved to be mostly just that; corrupt politicians continued to prosper under the dictatorship. Furthermore, the military

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point," speech at Wilson Center, September 28, 2017.

19 The *Mar de Lama* scandal encompassed a number of accusations leveled against Vargas by his political enemies, in particular, the allegation that his victorious 1952 election campaign was financed by Argentina's Juan Peron. For more on these events see Daryle Williams and Barbara Weinstein, "Vargas Morto: The Death and Life of a Brazilian Statesman," in *Death, Dismemberment, and Memory: Politics of the Body in Latin America*. Lyman Johnson, ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004).

itself took advantage of the ample opportunities to utilize state power for its own benefit. Indeed, corruption under the dictatorship reached such high levels that it began to affect the military's cohesion and operational efficiency, leading military leaders to conclude that a return to civilian rule was necessary to save the regime from the same disease it sought to eradicate.

Far from being an innovation of the PT, political corruption has long been imbricated into the fabric of Brazilian politics. Its persistence is not caused by any peculiarities of Brazilian culture or national morality. Rather, it has been a central instrument in the elites' hold over political power.

### THE ROOTS OF BRAZILIAN CORRUPTION

In Brazil, influence-peddling and rent-seeking are “physiological” in nature, symptomatic of a chronic ailment afflicting the body politic. However, corruption in Brazil goes beyond the usual narrative of cultural deficiency; it reflects specific features of the national and international political economies. It is a systemic issue, not a product of the deficiencies of Brazil's political culture.<sup>20</sup> In particular, systemic corruption in Brazil is in large part a consequence of the political settlement entrenched in the 1988 constitution,<sup>21</sup> which was an outcome of the crisis facing the Brazilian ruling class during the tail end of the military dictatorship.<sup>22</sup>

In 1964, Brazil came under military dictatorship. The ideological fluidity and flagrant lack of party discipline that are institutionalized

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20 Barbara Geddes and Artur Ribeiro Neto, “Institutional Sources of Corruption in Brazil,” *Third World Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1992): 643.

21 Ibid.

22 I am utilizing the following definition of corruption: a covert exchange between a political market and a social or economic one, involving the illicit exchange of money or favors for privileged treatment. Corruption can also be conceived of as a political strategy, where influence is exerted over the state. Corruption emerges as a valid strategy for the ruling class or a particular faction of it, when their political representatives cannot take power and are unable to influence exert influence by other mean.

features of the Brazilian political system can be traced to the military dictatorship's manipulation of the political system from 1965, especially the attempt to shore up its position through the creation of two parties: the Alliance for National Renewal (ARENA), the official party of the government, and the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB). The government concluded that because opposition was concentrated in Brazil's largest urban areas, it could trade favors for support from the country's largely rural political machines. The military regime secured itself by ensuring that its supporters, particularly in the north and northeast, were overrepresented in the legislature.<sup>23</sup> Constitutional reforms passed in 1967 and 1969 freed the state's economic projects from any sort of oversight, further reinforcing patrimonialism. Sociologist Francisco de Oliveira observed that "No effort was made to do away with patrimonialism, or to resolve the acute problem of the internal financing of capitalist expansion, which had been the Achilles' heel of the previous constellation of forces."<sup>24</sup> The effect was to divorce morality and legitimacy from the process of power accumulation, underscoring corruption as a feature of the dictatorship's development strategy. The distribution of favors became necessary to pave the way for large-scale development projects, and the link between state officials and capitalists was strengthened as a result of the informal regulation of economic policy through backroom deals exempt from democratic management.<sup>25</sup> The smaller, poorer states of Brazil tended to be governed by oligarchical political machines that were pro-military and conservative in ideology and more than willing to exchange votes for favors.<sup>26</sup>

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23 Geddes and Ribeiro, "Institutional Sources of Corruption," 655.

24 Francisco de Oliveira, "The Duckbilled Platypus," *New Left Review* 24 (November–December 2004): 45.

25 Leonardo Avritzer, "The Conflict between Civil and Political Society in Post-Authoritarian Brazil: An Analysis of the Impeachment of Fernando Collor de Mello" in *Corruption and Political Reform in Brazil: The Impact of Collor's Impeachment*, eds Keith S. Rosenn and Richard Downes (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 123.

26 Thomas Skidmore, "Collor's Downfall in Historical Perspective" in *Corruption and Political Reform in Brazil: The Impact of Collor's Impeachment*, eds Keith S. Rosenn and Richard Downes (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 16.

In the latter half of 1970s, dictatorship in Brazil was on its last legs, plagued as it was by corruption scandals, poor economic performance, and a renewed opposition. The opposition to the dictatorship was divided between two camps: the official opposition, the Brazilian Democratic Movement or MDB (reorganized in 1979 as the PMDB, with almost all of the MDB in it), and the new, more radical movements and organizations. The MDB brought together just about as diverse an array of political tendencies as could be found in Brazilian politics: liberals, old-school conservatives, traditional political oligarchies, and even elements of the nationalist and communist left. The second camp was represented, among others, by Brazil's growing militant trade union movement, the radical left that had embraced the armed struggle as well as those who had rejected it, and the Catholic left grouped around liberation theology.

The opposition to the dictatorship culminated in an alliance between the two opposition camps through the *Diretas Já* ("Direct Elections Now") campaign. The dictatorship finally came to an end with the indirect election of the MDB candidate — Tancredo Neves, a solidly centrist former cabinet minister under Vargas. In a bizarre twist of fate, Neves died shortly after taking office, and was replaced by Deputy President José Sarney, a strong supporters of the military dictatorship and perhaps most the most visible face of Brazil's corrupt and backward political oligarchies.

After the fall of the dictatorship the MDB solidified its position as the party of the center, rejecting both the opportunity to incorporate the demands of the Left into its program and the calls by social movements for a new form of politics, for fear of alienating its patrimonial constituencies. The PT was founded in 1980 by the coming together of the Catholic left, the new trade union movement, Trotskyists, and those radicals who had survived Brazil's ill-fated armed struggle. By the mid-1980s it had become a major political force, drawing into its fold the new social movements, including the rural land movements

and the growing LGBTI and feminist movements — in effect, all those that the MDB had not incorporated. The transition to democracy was thus negotiated within a forum shaped by the authoritarian regime that had largely excluded Brazil’s powerful social movements and the PT.

While offering the Left a number of important concessions in terms of social rights, the 1988 constitution preserved the political system outlined above. The Left could boast about its victories in terms of social rights, but at the same time, the constitution preserved the political system created by the military dictatorship. By granting every state regardless of size a minimum of eight and a maximum of seventy deputies, the political system gave particular weight to the states that supported the dictatorship. As a result, the Brazilian political system is still held hostage to small local parties representing political machines that mostly exist to trade votes for favors. There was a distinct political logic behind this: the military and the bourgeoisie sought to insulate themselves from the dangers of a future left government by ensuring that any left government would have to deal with the corrupt political machinery if it wanted to get anything done.<sup>27</sup>

Brazil now has an open-list proportional representation system with no effective mechanism for party representation in the legislature. As a result, the political system is stuck in the swamp of party fragmentation, leading it to be characterized as “coalition presidentialism.” The system encourages voters to support candidates on the basis of their personal qualities, encouraging politicians to cultivate a direct relationship with voters rather than through a party. The president stands at the head of the political system that centralizes power in government and decentralizes power in the legislature, forcing the president to use

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27 My argument in this section draws from Gramsci’s conception of corruption. For Gramsci, corruption/fraud is a strategy deployed in circumstances when the hegemony of the dominant bloc appears fragile and the strategy of force carries significant risks. Corruption/fraud aims to ensure the demoralization and political paralysis of the opposition through corrupting its leadership through the covert mean or in cases of imminent danger openly, in order to sow chaos and disillusionment in the ranks of the opposition Antonio Gramsci, *The Selections From the Prison Notebooks*, (trans) Quentin Hoare (London, International Publishers, 1973), 215.

the power of the executive to bargain with a diffuse legislature. To form an effective governing coalition, the executive has to spread the benefits among its governing partners by handing over cabinet positions to smaller parties or by distributing economic benefits to governing partners. But how does this play out in practice? We will discuss in the final section of the essay how the PT adapted to the political system.

### EVALUATING THE PT

Lula had already run unsuccessfully for president three times before his landmark 2002 victory.<sup>28</sup> These electoral losses, in particular the experience of Lula's 1994 loss, led to a slow process of introspection for the PT. A faction within the party centered around Lula came to the conclusion that in order to win an election the party would have to professionalize and move to the center. The PT hired a top-notch PR team and Lula even began wearing suits. Unsavory alliances were struck with parties of the Right and the center, including with individuals like José Sarney who were emblematic of the corruption and backwardness associated with the military dictatorship. The party's message of "Lula, peace, and love" during the 2002 election was a far cry from the militancy of the party's early years. This long march to the center culminated in Lula's famous letter to the Brazilian people, written during the election, in which he assured investors and a nervous establishment that his government would adhere to macroeconomic orthodoxy.

It is undoubtedly true that the PT accomplished much during its fourteen years in power. It was able to lift over thirty million Brazilians out of poverty by raising the minimum wage levels, instituting cash transfers, eliminating hunger, and expanding access to education through the quota system and building new schools and universities in the poorest parts of the country. Infrastructure and new economic opportunities were brought to the most impoverished regions of the country. Under

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28 Lula narrowly lost to Fernando Collor in 1990 after a Globo-led smear campaign managed to swing enough support for Collor to win.

Lula, Brazil became a respected international actor, developing South–South relations and playing a crucial role in supporting the more radical projects of other Pink Tide governments in neighboring states like Venezuela and Bolivia. The PT accomplished all of this by committing to play by the rules: channeling income flows through transfers programs and labor-market reforms, and ignoring the extreme inequality in the distribution of assets. Due to the force of his personality, this distinct style of governance became personally associated with Lula’s supreme political talents, leading it to be referred to as *Lulismo*.

The PT’s political projects amounted to a form of weak reformism. The government was able to improve the living conditions of millions of Brazilians without fundamentally transforming the country’s political or economic system. By targeting specific population groups rather than pursuing universal programs, the PT was able to cultivate a personalized style of loyalty among the poor without increasing the taxation burden for the middle class or challenging the power of capital. *Lulismo* had a particular attraction for the Brazilian sub-proletariat, which is comprised of almost half the country’s population.<sup>29</sup> The PT created a form of politics that can be described as “hegemony in reverse,” wherein the dominated classes rule on behalf of the dominant.<sup>30</sup> The PT would represent the wretched of Brazil, but it would do so in a way that benefited the wealthiest and most powerful segments of the population too.

Defenders of the PT have argued that globalization and the consequent

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29 I am drawing here on the work of Andre Singer, who defines the sub-proletariat as precarious workers and those who eke out a living from the informal sector or are dependent on welfare. In his book, *Os Sentidos do Lulismo* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2013), Singer argues that the specters of inflation, the failure of armed struggle, and even industrial action haunt the political memories of the poor. The political psychology of the base illustrates *Lulismo*’s particular character, its extreme caution, its fear of conflict, and the specific targeting of these sectors of the population through social policy like the *Bolsa Família* program. The sub-proletariat desires an interventionist state to act on its behalf to reduce inequality, but also fears the instability that a radical and more confrontational style of governance could unleash.

30 Purdy and Braga, “A Precarious Hegemony.” According to Purdy and Braga, the PT’s hegemony can be conceived of in terms of the passive consent of the masses and the active consent located in the state of the trade union bureaucracy, the leaders of social movements, and the intellectual middle class.

changes in the international capitalist order undermined the possibility of a more inclusive developmental model. Brazil's transition to neoliberalism under Cardoso's two governments had gutted the manufacturing sector<sup>31</sup> and as a result economic growth became increasingly dependent on the finance and primary-commodity export sectors — in particular agribusiness. After losing millions of jobs and much of its social power during the 1990s, organized labor — the backbone of the PT — became committed to simply surviving rather than reversing neoliberalism.<sup>32</sup> The PT's governing strategy emerged out of its adaption to these economic conditions along with the political realities outlined earlier. However, the PT's model of governance went beyond political realism; it reflected the class interests that increasingly came to dominate the party.

The upper echelons of the PT — largely drawn from the bureaucracy of the trade unions that created the party — have become a distinct interest group within the party.<sup>33</sup> The *raison d'être* is to gain increased control over public funds in order to better its own economic lot and spread patronage through the political system to keep the party functioning. The PT's strategy of demobilization and professionalization led to its key cadre being drawn into the bureaucracy, severely damaging the once dynamic internal party culture. Branch-level organization was lost, internal democracy was weakened, and the internal party culture became increasingly dominated by rent-seeking and the exchange of favors. Furthermore, the economic strategy that the PT pursued in power abetted corruption. The attempts to foster alliances with large domestic capital through means both fair and foul, in particular, became the subject of the Lava Jato investigation.

The dominant Brazilian power bloc is divided between two factions

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31 In the decade 1999–2009, manufacturing declined from 19 percent to 10.91 as a percentage of GDP, bringing about a US\$90 billion trade deficit. This marks a steep departure from 1985, when manufacturing was 35 percent of the country's exports and yielded a trade surplus of \$8 billion.

32 For a fascinating account of how this changed the Brazilian working class and labor, see Ruy Braga, *The Politics of the Precariat: From Populism to Lulista Hegemony* (London: Brill, 2018).

33 See de Oliveira, "The Duckbilled Platypus."

of the bourgeoisie: large domestic capital and internationalized capital. Domestic capital is comprised of the owners of large firms in the manufacturing, construction, agribusiness and food processing, and shipbuilding sectors, while internationalized capital encompasses the local representatives of economic entities owned by foreign capital and domestic firms linked to or dependent on them, such as international banks, large consulting and accounting firms, international and transnationally integrated manufacturing firms, as well as mainstream media such as Globo and the country's most important newspapers like Folha de São Paulo.<sup>34</sup> Internationalized capital is politically represented by the PSDB and is allied to the upper middle class, meaning the owners of most of the private firms and small businesses, skilled professionals, and the upper echelons of the civil service<sup>35</sup> — notably judges, prosecutors, attorneys, and bureaucrats, all securely located in the top income bracket.<sup>36</sup> Judges and federal prosecutors, besides being fully autonomous, unaccountable, and not subject to any control of the federal government, also have a history of institutional hostility towards trade unions and social movements.

Over the course of its time in power, the PT became increasingly associated with large domestic capital, as reflected in its economic policy. Domestic capital's political goals include state support for its expansion abroad, particularly in the Global South, and aid in securing advantageous deals with international capital, as well as insulation from international competition in domestic markets.<sup>37</sup> Domestic capital has a contradictory relationship with neoliberalism in that it generally supports neoliberal labor markets and social policies for ideological reasons, but accepts that government intervention and basic welfare measures

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34 Armando Boito and Alfredo Saad Filho, "State, State Institutions and Political Power in Brazil," *Latin American Perspectives* 43, no. 2 (2016), 7.

35 Ibid.

36 Judges also receive all sorts of other benefits, including housing support, despite the fact that most judges are homeowners.

37 Boito and Saad-Filho, 2016, 6.

are necessary for social cohesion and political stability. While it often calls for “fiscal rectitude” and a dominant role for the private sector, it demands lower interest rates, increased state spending on infrastructure, and other protectionist measures. The goals represented by the PT’s economic policy, under the Lula and Dilma governments, focused on high levels of investment in infrastructure, regulatory changes, tax concessions, and public–private partnerships, reinforcing the position of the internal bourgeoisie. There was, additionally, strong support for domestic capital through foreign policy. The procurement policies of Petrobras were changed to support domestic production and import substitution in the oil and gas industries.<sup>38</sup> This however did not amount to a break with neoliberalism; the PT always sought to pursue neo-developmental policies within neoliberalism.

The PT’s alliance with domestic capital promoted corruption as a way to get around the constraints of a fragmented political system and to finance its electoral campaigns. For instance, the PT gave special backing to the notoriously corrupt construction sector, in which illicit exchanges had been regularized. In particular, the concessions and contracts awarded in the run-up to the 2014 FIFA World Cup and 2016 Rio Olympics became a major part of the Lava Jato investigation. Further, the PT’s support to the construction sector extended to enabling companies like Odebrecht to pay vast bribes to foreign governments — particularly in Latin America — in return for large contracts. While widespread corruption was hardly the sole domain of the PT, what the party did was to direct it towards an expansive economic strategy in a way that its rivals never did. The way in which the PT attempted to get around the constraints of Brazil’s political system can be best illustrated by dissecting the *Mensalão* (“Monthly Payments”) corruption scandal.

The 2005 *Mensalão* scandal centered on the revelation that the PT had been paying deputies and senators of smaller parties a monthly fee of around R\$30,000 (US \$12,000 at the time) in exchange for supporting

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38 Boito and Saad-Filho, 2016, 11.

the PT's legislation. The scandal implicated several of the party's leading figures, most notably Lula's chief of staff and the party's key strategist, José Dirceu,<sup>39</sup> leading to the latter's resignation. Also implicated in the scandal were finance minister and, later, Dilma's chief of staff, Antonio Palocci<sup>40</sup> and the party's president and treasurer, José Genoïno and Silvio Pereira, respectively.<sup>41</sup> The *Mensalão* was born out of the PT's attempt to avoid an alliance with the PMDB; the latter would have demanded cabinet positions and control over elements of public spending in return for its support. Compared to cliquing up with the PMDB mafia, bribing members of smaller parties to support the government appeared the lesser evil.<sup>42</sup> A section of the Brazilian establishment had always been hostile to the PT, and sought to use *Mensalão* to weaken the party. It targeted the PT's leading figures while leaving the PMDB and PSDB unscathed. *Mensalão* left the PT with little choice but to strike a deal with the PMDB to ensure the survival of its governing coalition, leading the PT down the road to the tragic events of Dilma's presidency.<sup>43</sup>

Internationalized capital's hostility to the PT stemmed from being excluded from power during the PT era. It strove to pursue an

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39 Dirceu was later found guilty of a multitude of charges, including corruption, racketeering, embezzlement, and money laundering, and sentenced to seven years in prison. He was also found guilty in 2015 on different charges of corruption and money laundering. Dirceu, a former guerilla was famously released from prison in exchange for the safe return of the kidnapped American ambassador. He later had plastic surgery to alter his appearance in Cuba and returned to Brazil to continue his political activity as an underground operative. He remains a legendary figure on the Brazilian left, who many regard as having sacrificed himself to protect the PT.

40 Palocci is currently serving twelve years in prison after being convicted for receiving bribes and illegal campaign financing.

41 For a detailed breakdown of the scandal and its aftermath, see Peter Flynn, "Brazil and Lula: Crisis, Corruption and Change in Political Perspective," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 8 (December 2005).

42 I am here drawing on Perry Anderson's argument in "Lula's Brazil," *London Review of Books* 33, no. 7 (March 2011): 3–22.

43 There had been a test run of the 2014 and 2015 protest movements of sorts in the *Cansei* ("I'm tired") movement, launched in the aftermath of the *Mensalão*. *Cansei* was a media-driven anti-corruption movement against the PT. The movement was launched during an economic boom, amidst the rollout of the PT's signature policies, meaning it had little potential for growth.

expansionist strategy, which, if implemented, would drastically weaken the power of the internal bourgeoisie. Sensing the time was ripe for a move against the PT, it strongly backed the coup. Internationalized capital relied on its alliance with the upper middle class to carry out its political and legal moves against the PT through Lava Jato. The agenda of internationalized capital has been taken up to vary degrees of success by Temer's government. This agenda includes opening up Brazil's oil reserves to international firms and the removal of protective tariffs forcing the construction sector to compete internationally. These had severe repercussions for the PT and domestic capital. Domestic profits were hit, the social base of the PT was severely weakened, and the class alliances the party had embraced were destroyed.

The political scientist André Singer in a recent essay in *Piauí* magazine<sup>44</sup> (Brazil's answer to the *New Yorker*), argued that Dilma's presidency represented a break from *Lulismo*. Dilma sought to expand the power of the judicial system to tackle corruption, along with attempts at political reform, the revival of the country's ailing manufacturing sector, and the pursuit of a more ambitious welfare agenda. Real interest rates were cut for the first time in decades and tax rebates were offered to stimulate production and reduce inflation. However, despite all of this, private investment did not pour into the country and never became a primary driver of economic growth.<sup>45</sup> The PT's economic strategy during this period, amidst a rapidly deteriorating economic situation, set the stage for a clash with internationalized capital. As a result of the Lava Jato investigations, the judiciary and federal police moved against state-owned enterprises (SOEs), other elements of the state aligned with the PT, and the internationalized bourgeoisie.

The upper middle class was the only social group that saw its economic position decline under the PT; hundreds of civil-service jobs

44 André Singer, "Do Sonho Rooseveltiano Ao Pesdolo Golpista: O Ascensão e o Declínio do Lulismo," *Piauí* 140 (May 2018).

45 Pedro Mendes Loureiro and Alfredo Saad Filho, "The Limits of Pragmatism: The Rise and Fall of the Brazilian Workers' Party," *Latin American Perspectives* (forthcoming).

“belonging” to it were given away to PT members belonging to trade unions and social movements. Additionally, the expansion of credit, rising minimum wages, and increased access to education threatened the privileged economic and cultural position of the upper middle class. As a result, this class was particularly hostile to the broadening of social citizenship under the PT. Complaints about having to pay domestic workers more after the PT introduced minimum wages in this sector, along with rants about the entry of the undeserving poor (and black) to Brazil’s elite public universities through quotas, became common. For these reasons, *anti-petismo* (“anti-Workers’ Party sentiment”) was, and remains, particularly strong amongst this demographic. Anxious about its economic and cultural position, the upper middle class became the most visible base of the anti-corruption movement.<sup>46</sup>

The Party of Brazilian Social Democracy, or PSDB, is the political representative of internationalized capital and the architect of Brazilian neoliberalism. The party, whose members are called tucanos, began its life when the center-left split from the MDB. The PSDB fully embraced neoliberalism in the 1990s under Cardoso. It has degenerated into little more than a mafia, differentiated from its rivals only by the extent of its pretensions. For years the party has drawn on Cardoso’s dwindling international reputation and academic prestige, and its close links to key Western think tanks, to portray itself as a party of the mature center battling to stay above the messy reality of Brazilian politics.<sup>47</sup> But much of the horse-trading and rampant corruption that characterizes Brazilian coalition governments was an innovation of the tucanos. For instance, the model described as sensible “coalition presidentialism” by Cardoso’s admirers in the West was constructed through alliances with the most backwards political forces in Brazil. Additionally, the

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46 Boito and Saad Filho, 2016, 15.

47 Over US\$2 billion earmarked for development went missing during Cardoso’s second term, including one scheme in which several million dollars went to the wife of the labor minister to finance a frog-breeding farm, though, needless to say, no frogs were spawned. It should also be noted several Odebrecht executives have testified that they illegally donated money to Cardoso’s two presidential campaigns.

tucanos endorsed wholesale bribery in order to change the constitution, allowing Cardoso a second term.

The PT capitulated to the pressures of capital. Dilma's austerity program, in response to the escalating economic crisis, was justified as necessary to secure credibility in order to lure investors back to Brazil and compensate for the expected expansionary impact of a lowered interest rate. Predictably, the reduction of public investment led to the sharp contraction of the economy as private sector investments failed to arrive. The external sector was badly hit by the decreasing Chinese demand for primary commodities and the eurozone crisis. The PT responded by passing more austerity measures — compounding the effects of the crisis that was already brewing — and appointing Joaquim Levy, a staunch neoliberal banker trained at the University of Chicago, as finance minister in a vain attempt to appease the furies of the market. The party bent over backwards to appease the interests of capital, but it was still not enough. Dilma did not have the political skills or the charisma of Lula to pass such measures through the increasingly hostile Congress.<sup>48</sup> By adopting austerity measures, the PT alienated its traditional base, while still failing to appease capital. The party's continued adherence to pragmatism led the PT towards the coup.

The PSDB had attacked the PT's neo-developmental policies as corrupt, inefficient, nontransparent,<sup>49</sup> and antidemocratic. But this met with little success until the crisis that followed the protests of June 2013 and Lava Jato. For internationalized capital and the upper middle class, any state intervention in the economy amounted to corruption, and welfarism amounted to bribing the poor for their votes. The upper middle class regards anything that obstructs the destiny of the most productive, moral, and deserving sectors of the population to take their rightful positions in society as a form of corruption. Anti-corruption politics became, as a result, a wholesale attack on the

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48 Singer, 2018.

49 In accordance with international anti-corruption policy, transparency has become the code for opening the economy up to the gaze of international investors.

PT's neo-developmental policies and social programs.<sup>50</sup> It is vital to distinguish the upper middle class anti-corruption rhetoric from the genuine anti-corruption sentiment of the working class. A left anti-corruption politics must break with the dominant anti-corruption rhetoric articulated by the upper middle class; it cannot seek to capitalize off an anti-corruption hysteria whipped up by the media.

The PT could have responded to the demands of the June 2013 protestors and channeled them selectively into their own agenda, but they were unable to because the faltering economy meant the government could no longer reconcile interests through public spending. As a result, the PT became increasingly politically isolated, struggling to maintain a working congressional majority through unsavory alliances with evangelicals and corrupt right-wing parties. These desperate attempts to maintain a majority further sullied the party's reputation.<sup>51</sup> The PT has maintained many of these same alliances, including its relationship with the MDB in local and state elections. The PT contributed to its own downfall by continuing to triangulate between its base and a political center, shifting further and further to the right.

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## CONCLUSION

During the Lula years, like so many other periods of rapid growth throughout the country's history, it seemed Brazil might live up to its promise as "the country of the future." A few years later, these same sentiments are unimaginable. Temer's government has undone decades of gains for the Brazilian working class and the poor, a large section of the public no longer has faith in democracy, and once taboo comments fantasizing about a return to military dictatorship are now common. And the Left, inside and outside the PT, is still struggling for answers.

The PT came to power promising to transform the political system, but instead adapted to it. It made no meaningful attempt during its time

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<sup>50</sup> Boito and Saad Filho, 2016, 23.

<sup>51</sup> Loureiro and Saad Filho, "The Limits of Pragmatism," 19.

in government to enact political or media reforms. If Salvador Allende represented one end of the spectrum of Latin America's experiments in left governments, in that it illustrated the limits of the democratic road to socialism, the PT strayed too far in the opposite direction. Despite the PT's continued attempts to placate the ruling class, it was still removed from power through a soft coup. The PT could have followed a different course in government, pursuing political reforms that would weaken its enemies, even if it was forced by circumstance to adhere to macroeconomic orthodoxy. Electoral reform could have reduced the power of corrupt political machines and media reforms could have ended Globo's monopoly. Even if these measures had meant some short-term electoral costs for the PT, they would have opened up future possibilities for left governments.

Instead of opening up new radical political possibilities, the PT's fall from grace has weakened the entirety of the Left. *Anti-petismo* cannot be separated from anti-leftism; as a consequence, like it or not, the PT is still seen as a party of the Left and its loss of legitimacy has severe consequences for the Left as a whole. A left strategy going forward has to go beyond the PT rather than against the PT. The party retains the loyalty of the majority of the working class, trade unions, and social movements, forces vital to any future left project. Crucially, this calls for left anti-corruption politics that must break with the political and moral logic imposed by the Right. The Left has to connect anti-corruption to a broader egalitarian program that tackles the foundations of corruption: in essence, inequality and elite power. Empowering the judiciary to tackle "corruption" more often than not empowers an unelected and unaccountable elite. It is for this reason that anti-corruption must be conceived of as a political rather than a legal battle. Relying on a legal system biased in favor of a particular class, as evidenced in the case of the PT, is dangerous for the Left. While judicial reform is necessary, political reform should be prioritized by the Left. Changes made to a flawed electoral system or campaign finance can do more than simply reduce levels of corruption; they can open new political horizons. ¶

**The historical experiences of state socialism in twentieth-century Eastern Europe have been vilified by the conservative right and largely rejected or ignored by the progressive, new left. Especially in the United States — with its long legacy of anticommunist hysteria — scholars and activists are hesitant to embark on critical reevaluations of the state-socialist past for fear of being labeled as “useful idiots” or apologists for authoritarianism. But present-day feminists can learn a great deal from the twentieth-century experiments with “really existing socialism.” Although the state-socialist countries of Eastern Europe never lived up to their rhetoric of full women’s emancipation, they integrated women into the labor force much earlier and at much higher rates than their counterparts in the West. The successes on these fronts leave a rich legacy upon which to build.**

# WHAT HAS SOCIALISM EVER DONE FOR WOMEN?

KRISTEN R. GHODSEE & JULIA MEAD

**O**n March 9, 2018, the *Financial Times* — not exactly a bastion of pro-socialist sentiment — had some nice things to say about Communism. In a special report on “Women in Technology,” *FT* discussed the reasons for large percentages of women in the tech sectors of Bulgaria and Romania.<sup>1</sup> When examining the European data, it turned out that eight of the ten countries with the highest percentages of women working in technology were former state-socialist countries where “the Soviet legacy” of promoting women in math, science, and engineering had created a social environment conducive to women’s success in these fields, even three decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Back in 2015, an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) health report revealed that six of the top ten countries with the highest percentage of female doctors were also on the other side of the former Iron Curtain.<sup>2</sup> An astounding three-fourths

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<sup>1</sup> Kerin Hope, “Bulgaria builds on legacy of female engineering elite,” *Financial Times*, March 9, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> OECD, *Health at a Glance 2015: oecd Indicators* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2015), 83.

of all doctors in Estonia were women, compared to only one-third of the doctors in the United States. Yet another report from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) found that, as compared to Western Europe, Eastern European countries had much higher percentages of women working in the fields of scientific research and development.<sup>3</sup> As recently as 2012, two-thirds of judges in Russia were women.<sup>4</sup> In all cases, the explanation for the disparity was the long history of state-socialist commitments to women's education and employment. Despite decades of feminist activism in the West, women in the former socialist countries still enjoy greater access to jobs in prestigious economic sectors.

Despite the data, it's still hard to have a conversation about what socialism might have gotten right. Two 2017 *New York Times* op-eds suggesting that twentieth-century Communism had done some good things for women were met with howls of outrage from *Fox News* and the troll armies of the alt-right.<sup>5</sup> The historical memory of twentieth-century state socialism is so contested that many leftists — anarchists and democratic socialists alike — try to run from it, lest they look like apologists for Soviet horrors.<sup>6</sup> Feminists, too, dismiss the achievements of women in the former Eastern Bloc because they were imposed from the top down and within a context of political autocracy.<sup>7</sup> More importantly, state-socialist women rejected the basic premise of Western liberal

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[http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/health\\_glance-2015-en](http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/health_glance-2015-en).

3 UNESCO, "Women in Science," UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Fact Sheet No. 43, March, 2017.

4 Ekaterina Ivanova, "Gender Imbalance in Russian Judiciary: Feminization of Profession," *Journal of Social Policy Studies* 13 (2015): 579-594.

5 Kristen Ghodsee, "Why Women Had Better Sex Under Socialism," *New York Times*, August 12, 2017; Helen Gao, "How Did Women Fare in China's Communist Revolution?" *New York Times*, September 25, 2017.

6 Kristen Ghodsee and Scott Sehon, "Anti-anti-communism," *Aeon*, March 22, 2018.

7 Nanette Funk, "A very tangled knot: Official state socialist women's organizations, women's agency and feminism in Eastern European state socialism," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 21 no. 4 (November 2014): 344-360; Kristen Ghodsee, "Untangling the knot: A response to Nanette Funk," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 22 no. 2 (May 2015): 248-252.

feminism: men and women should be treated the same. Socialists always believed that men and women were equal, but different, and that the state had a strong role to play in ensuring that women's reproductive biology did not disadvantage them.

During the early years of the Cold War, American leaders considered state-socialist promotion of women into the formal labor force evidence of Communism's mutation of God-given gender roles and its "unnatural" (and therefore evil) designs on the destruction of the family. American women might have been mobilized into production during World War II, but as the historian Elaine Tyler May has shown, they were shoved back into the kitchen as soon as the soldiers returned.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, Russia lost nearly 2 percent of its population in World War I and the Soviet Union lost a whopping 14 percent in World War II.<sup>9</sup> The other countries of Eastern Europe also lost hundreds of thousands of their citizens in the Second World War (Poland topped five million casualties) and sustained massive destruction to property and infrastructure. They couldn't afford to push women back into the kitchen.<sup>10</sup> War deaths produced labor shortages that created opportunities for women, which did not disappear after the demographic imbalances were corrected. The preservation of women's formal labor force participation — even in the face of precipitous declines in the birth rate — stemmed partially from an ideological commitment to women's emancipation rooted in the core theories of socialism and to women's own growing demands for economic independence from men. For example, in the late 1980s under Mikhail Gorbachev, Soviet leaders considered ways to reduce women's double burden of formal employment and family responsibilities. Researchers asked women

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8 Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

9 Nadège Mougel, "World War I Casualties," *REPERES*, 2011; Elizabeth Brainerd, "Uncounted Costs of World War II: The Effects of Changing Sex Ratios on Marriage and Fertility of Russian Women," National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, 2007.

10 "World War II Casualties," *REPERES*, 2011, trans. Julie Gratz.

in the USSR if they would stay home if their husbands could afford to support them; a full 80 percent said they preferred to work.<sup>11</sup>

The diverging policies of the two Germanys after 1949 also demonstrates how the East and West treated their women differently after the war. The West Germans returned to the traditional breadwinner/housewife model of the nuclear family (despite male labor shortages) whereas the East Germans required the formal employment of women to undermine the persistence of the patriarchal family.<sup>12</sup> This commitment to women's education and professional development characterized all socialist regimes to varying degrees. They also attempted to socialize women's domestic work through the building of communal cafeterias, laundries, mending cooperatives, and childcare facilities. Moreover, Communist parties introduced radical revisions to family law: ensuring the equality of men and women, liberalizing divorce, equalizing the treatment of legitimate and illegitimate children, and (in most, but not all, countries) guaranteeing women's reproductive rights.<sup>13</sup>

Did the state-socialist countries live up to their promises regarding women's emancipation? Did women in Eastern Europe enjoy greater levels of emancipation compared to their counterparts in the West? These are the questions we discuss in this brief overview of the situation of women in the state-socialist countries of Eastern Europe before 1989. Despite the authoritarian nature of these regimes, we believe that those concerned with promoting gender equity can learn from the experiences of Eastern Europe, because their top-down solutions (while never living up to all of their promises) did promote social and cultural changes that allowed women to better balance their

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11 Francine Du Plessix Gray, *Soviet Women: Walking the Tightrope* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 38.

12 Dagmar Herzog, *Sex After Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

13 Kristen Ghodsee, *Why Women Have Better Sex Under Socialism: And Other Arguments for Economic Independence* (New York: Nation Books, 2018).

personal and professional lives compared to their counterparts in the advanced capitalist West.

### HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT WE KNOW?

Across Eastern Europe today, a growing cohort of historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and gender-studies scholars are exploring how state socialism liberated women, trying to nuance the monolithic bleak image Westerners have of life behind the Iron Curtain.<sup>14</sup> Few of these scholars question that the socialist countries had some “women-friendly” policies that improved the material conditions of ordinary people’s lives. Instead, the debate focuses on the regimes’ failure to challenge patriarchal authority in the home and the lack of state support for women’s autonomy outside of their roles as mothers. Western scholars and some Eastern European feminists have also criticized these policies as a kind of “emancipation from above” that proved ineffective and, in the long run, detrimental because they undermined the emergence of grassroots women’s movements. In her 2015 article “How We Survived Post-Communism (and Didn’t Laugh),” Slavenka Drakulić explains:

Emancipation from above — as I call it — was the main difference between the lives of women under communism and those of women in western democracies. Emancipatory law was built into the communist legal system, guaranteeing to women all the basic rights — from voting to property ownership, from education to divorce, from equal pay for equal work to the right to control their bodies .... The formal equality of women in the communist world was observed mostly in public life and in institutions. The private sphere, on the other hand, was dominated by male chauvinism. This meant a lot of unreported domestic violence,

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<sup>14</sup> “Forum: Is ‘Communist Feminism’ a Contradictio in Terminus?,” *Aspasia: The International Yearbook of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European Women’s and Gender History* 1, no. 1 (2007); and “Ten Years After: Communism and Feminism Revisited” *Aspasia: The International Yearbook of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European Women’s and Gender History* 10, no. 11 (2016).

for example. It also meant that men usually had no obligations at home, which left women with less time for themselves. It was not only the lack of freedom — and time — that prevented women fighting for changes but, more importantly, a lack of belief that change was necessary. Someone else up there was in charge of thinking about that for you. And because change came from the powers that be, women were made to believe there was no need for change or room for improvement.<sup>15</sup>

Socialist states may not have fully delivered on their promises to women, and Eastern European women struggled under the double burden of formal employment and domestic labor. But there were real gains. The problem is how to document them in a measured way.

We can start by comparing legal codes. On paper, state-socialist countries look much better than Western countries on women's issues and family entitlements for much of the Cold War. The Soviet Union established full legal equality for women in 1917 whereas the United States still has not ratified the Equal Rights Amendment to the constitution.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, almost every other country in the world has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), often called the women's bill of rights. The United States joins Iran, Palau, Somalia, Sudan, and Tonga as a member of the handful of nations that have not yet ratified a treaty that took effect in 1981.<sup>17</sup> The Bulgarian constitution actually guaranteed Bulgarian mothers the right to maternity leaves. Of course, there is often a vast chasm between *de jure* and *de facto* equality. Laws mean little if they are not enforced.

As a second tactic, we can examine the archival records of state-socialist women's committees — organs of the state responsible for

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15 Slavenka Drakulić, "How We Survived Post-Communism (and Didn't Laugh)," *Eurozine.com*, June 5, 2015.

16 Editorial Board, "Illinois should ratify the Equal Rights Amendment," *Chicago Tribune*, April 13, 2018.

17 Lisa Baldez, "U.S. drops the ball on women's rights," *CNN.com*, March 8, 2013.

women's political issues — and the minutes of Politburo meetings to search for evidence that women's rights were being promoted in the highest levels of government. This is the tactic taken by the historian Wang Zheng in her excellent study of the All-China Women's Federation.<sup>18</sup> But even if one can get access to all of the relevant archives, there remains the problem of intention: Did Communist leaders really care about women's lives? Or did they merely want to use women to further state interests like increasing the birth rate or making the workforce more productive? Transcripts of mere words cannot tell us about intentions.

Interviews with women who grew up under state socialism in Eastern Europe have also provided complex accounts of the past. Of course, oral history has many known methodological problems including nostalgia for lost youth and personal (and often subconscious) assumptions of what interview subjects think their interviewers want to hear. An American interviewer might get a different answer than a local interlocutor, for instance. And when Eastern European women describe positive aspects of the past, they often make their assessment in direct comparison with their situation in the present. In Ghodsee's extensive research in post-socialist Bulgaria, she has found that those who would count themselves as among the "losers" of the political and economic changes (those socially marginalized due to ethnicity, age, class, or gender) are most likely to provide positive reports of the social security and economic stability of the pre-1989 era.<sup>19</sup> Alternatively, those who have benefitted the most from the changes, especially the new urban elites, are most likely to share their memories of the horrors of Communism. Indeed, as Liviu Chelcea and Oana Druța have argued, post-socialist elites deploy a type of "zombie socialism" to prevent popular resistance to the violence and misery of contemporary klepto-capitalism:

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18 Wang Zheng, *Finding Women in the State: A Socialist Feminist Revolution in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1964* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016).

19 Kristen Ghodsee, "Red Nostalgia? Communism, Women's Emancipation, and Economic Transformation in Bulgaria," *L'Homme: Zeitschrift für Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 23-36.

The obsessive references to the socialist past have had constitutive powers, creating a particularly strong version of neoliberalism. Zombie socialism arguments have become a convenient and strategic ideological device for furthering social dumping, increasing inequalities, and reducing support for redistributive policies. In this sense, in its post-1989 negation, socialism continues to be extremely relevant: the usage of spectral and mythological representations of socialism has, for the winners of transition, the capacity to preempt social justice claims and to structure political relations in the allocation of wealth.<sup>20</sup>

In other words, negative tales of life before 1989 are used to justify current economic outcomes, which the “winners” of transition are loathe to change, lest they lose their newfound wealth and privilege.

A similar methodological problem haunts public-opinion surveys about the past. For example, a 2013 poll of 1,055 adult Romanians found that only a third reported that their lives were *worse* before 1989: 44 percent said their lives were better, and 16 percent said there was no change. These results were gendered in fascinating ways: 47 percent of women believed that state socialism was better for their country, but only 42 percent of men reported the same. Similarly, whereas 36 percent of men claimed that their lives were worse before 1989, only 31 percent of women believed that their personal life was worse off under Communism than under democracy.<sup>21</sup> Romania, ruled by the dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu, was once one of the most brutal regimes in Eastern Europe, but, today, it is one of the poorest countries in the EU. It is difficult to tease out whether respondents remember their lives under socialism in a more positive light because their lives are so hard now. At the end of the day, oral histories and public-opinion surveys about the past — whether positive or negative — are difficult to use as

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20 Liviu Chelcea and Oana Druța, “Zombie socialism and the rise of neoliberalism in post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 57, no. 4-5 (2016): 521-544.

21 INSCOP Research, “Barometrul,” November 2013, <http://www.inscop.ro/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/INSCOP-noiembrie-1sTORIE.pdf>.

definitive sources of truth on their own.

One final strategy is to review the scholarship that was produced before 1989 — both by researchers in the Eastern Bloc countries and by Western academics interested in learning from (or discrediting) the purported achievements of women under state socialism. Both of these possible avenues have their own drawbacks; the Eastern Bloc countries were more likely to exaggerate their achievements and play down their shortcomings whereas the Western scholars probably did the reverse. But reading between the lines of these sources might allow us a glimpse of the truth, particularly if we combine a critical reading of this scholarship with other evidence gleaned from legal codes, archival sources, oral histories, and public-opinion surveys.

Taking into account all of these thorny methodological issues, what can we say about the realities of women's lives under Communism? Some things were good, some things were bad, and a lot of things depended on who you were, when you grew up, and where you lived. All women lived under authoritarian regimes and, to a greater or lesser extent depending on the year and the country, faced the realities of consumer shortages, travel restrictions, curtailed political freedoms, and the caprices of the domestic secret police. But despite these very real downsides, state-socialist governments supported women's rights in ways that dramatically improved the material conditions of hundreds of millions of women's lives, giving them opportunities for personal advancement and economic independence from men long before the West caught up.

## HISTORICAL ROOTS OF THE WOMAN QUESTION

Twentieth-century state-socialist regimes formulated their policies on women's emancipation based on three key texts: August Bebel's *Woman and Socialism* (1879), Friedrich Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884), and Lily Braun's *Die Frauenfrage* (*The Woman Question* [1901]). From these texts, state socialists drew

three core ideas: first, the institution of bourgeois monogamous marriage existed to preserve private property (men needed faithful wives to produce legitimate heirs). This reduced women to chattel. Second, women would only truly be free if they worked beside men in a socialist society in which all workers shared the fruits of their labor through collective ownership of the means of production. Third, the state had to support women as mothers, providing resources to help them combine their work and family lives. Although there was a vibrant feminist movement across Europe and in the United States at this time, socialists distinguished themselves from what they called “bourgeois feminists” by insisting that mere legal equality was not enough. Rather than just trying to win the right to vote, attend university, and enter certain professions, the socialists wanted the state to actively intervene on behalf of women. They feared “bourgeois” feminism would not help working women and preferred to organize alongside men to radically reshape society for all workers, not just for upper-class women.

In theory, socialism would free women from patriarchal domination by educating them and fully incorporating them into the paid labor force. With their own professions, women would no longer have to marry for money and rely on men for their every need. Braun built on the ideas of Bebel and Engels by attending to women’s special needs as mothers. She argued that since motherhood was a service to society as a whole, the state should compensate women for their child-rearing labors. Ideally, this would enable women to be both mothers and workers. Much of the state-socialist program for women’s emancipation was set down in Copenhagen at the second International Socialist Women’s Conference in August 1910.

The Bolsheviks tried to enact some of the ideas of these socialist theorists. In December 1917, the new Soviet government passed two sweeping decrees replacing church marriage with civil marriage and liberalizing divorce. In October 1918, the Soviets passed a new family law that undid millennia of patriarchal and ecclesiastical authority over women’s lives. The new “Code of Laws concerning the Civil Registration

of Deaths, Births and Marriages” rejected legal and traditional practices that made women the property and dependents of their fathers or husbands. The Church lost its control over marriage and divorce. This code elevated women to the juridical equals of men, allowing married women to gain complete control over their own wages and property. The Soviet Union also abolished the legal category of illegitimacy so that all children were considered equal.<sup>22</sup> In those heady days after the Revolution, the Bolsheviks believed that they could instigate the withering away of the traditional family with a handful of radical administrative decrees.<sup>23</sup>

But Soviet leaders, especially Alexandra Kollontai, the Commissar of Social Welfare, understood that even if women worked outside of the home, their domestic duties did not disappear. To support women’s emancipation, the state began to build a vast network of communally run laundries, cafeterias, clothes-mending cooperatives, and children’s homes. The idea was that once liberated from the soul-crushing drudgery of housework, women would enter the public sphere on equal terms with men, pursuing their education, careers, and personal relationships as they wished. The Eighth Congress of the Communist Party adopted a resolution to increase its work among women in 1919.<sup>24</sup> That same year, Kollontai helped to establish the *Zhenotdel*, a special women’s section within the Central Committee of the Communist Party.<sup>25</sup> Then, in 1920, the Soviet Union became the first European country to legalize abortion on demand during the first trimester.<sup>26</sup>

22 “Code of Laws concerning the Civil Registration of Deaths, Births and Marriages – October 17, 1918,” (English translation), <http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1917-2/the-new-woman/the-new-woman-texts/code-of-laws-concerning-the-civil-registration-of-deaths-births-and-marriages/>.

23 Wendy Goldman, *Women, The State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy & Social Life, 1917-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

24 Beatrice Brodsky Farnsworth, “Bolshevism, The Woman Question, and Aleksandra Kollontai,” *The American Historical Review* 81 no. 2 (April 1976): 292-316, 296.

25 Elizabeth Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

26 Alexandre Avdeev, Alain Blum, and Irina Troitskaya, “The History of Abortion Statistics in Russia and the USSR from 1990 to 1991” *Population* 7 (1995): 452.

Looking back from our perch in the twenty-first century, it is hard to understand how radical these legislative reforms were in the late 1910s and 1920s. In terms of women's rights, they were unprecedented; no country in the world had such emancipatory policies toward women. Unfortunately, this early utopian vision of abolishing the family and liberating women proved unrealistic. The fledgling Soviet state — trying to cope with years of war, internal conflict, and famine — lacked the resources to pay for the socialization of all of the work women used to do in the home for free. Public laundries, canteens, and childcare facilities proved too expensive for the floundering Soviet economy. But more importantly, the provisions of the 1918 family law hurt, rather than helped, many Russian women.

Working women did not earn enough to support their families without a male breadwinner. Liberalized divorce laws meant many men abandoned women when they got pregnant, and the alimony laws proved difficult to enforce. Sex outside of marriage led to hundreds of thousands of unwanted children. The state lacked resources to care for these red orphans, which produced armies of homeless street urchins in the major cities. The 1920 liberalization of abortion allowed women to control their fertility, but then precipitated a massive plunge in the birth rate. As was well documented by the historian Wendy Goldman, the hasty attempt to abolish the family ultimately caused the suffering of millions. By 1926, many women, especially those in rural areas, clamored for the return of the old laws. The provisions of the original 1918 family code were slowly reversed. Stalin abolished most of them altogether in 1936.<sup>27</sup>

## BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN

The early failures of Soviet women's emancipation and Stalin's return to the traditional nuclear family have colored many accounts of women's rights under state socialism in Eastern Europe. But labor shortages and

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<sup>27</sup> Goldman, *Women, The State and Revolution*.

the infamous Five-Year Plans necessitated women's participation in the USSR's workforce, so Stalin remained committed to women's education and employment even as he outlawed abortion and discouraged divorce. The historian Anna Krylova has traced the slow integration of Soviet women into the military and the emergence of new egalitarian ideals of femininity throughout the 1930s.<sup>28</sup> For the most part, however, the Soviet government never lived up to its commitment to socialize domestic work. Even after Stalin's death when the government re-liberalized abortion, Soviet women were still being encouraged to have children and labored under a heavy double burden, best captured by Natalya Baranskaya in her controversial novella *A Week Like Any Other*.<sup>29</sup>

The situation was slightly better in the countries of Eastern Europe, which started on their paths to state socialism after World War II. Although devastated by war, most of the countries of Eastern Europe were more industrialized in 1945 than Russia had been in 1917, when it had a largely feudal economy composed of illiterate peasants. Their relative development meant that postwar Eastern Bloc countries had more resources to enforce their first laws establishing equality of the sexes and the means to promote women's education and employment. Of course, there was a lot of variety among these countries — Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland were more urban and developed than the mostly rural nations of Bulgaria, Romania, and Yugoslavia — but they all instituted some version of the socialist program for women's emancipation laid out in Copenhagen back in 1910 and tested in the early years of the Soviet Union.

These policies led to a rapid increase in the percentage of women working outside of the home across the socialist bloc. In 1950, the female share of the total labor force was 51.8 percent in the Soviet Union and 40.9 percent in Eastern Europe compared to 28.3 percent

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28 Anna Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat: A History of Violence on the Eastern Front* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

29 Natalya Baranskaya and Emily Lehrman, "Week Like Any Other," *Massachusetts Review* 15, no. 4 (Autumn 1974): 657-703.

in North America and 29.6 percent in Western Europe. A quarter of a century later, women made up 49.7 percent of the Soviet Union's workforce and 43.7 percent of that in Eastern Europe compared to 37.4 percent in North America and 32.7 percent in Western Europe.<sup>30</sup> More importantly, despite the many hardships, women in the Soviet Union reported that they enjoyed their work. In a 1968 study of 421 Soviet women, 58 percent of those surveyed reported that they were "very happy" with their work. When asked why they worked, most said that they wanted the extra income for their families, but they also reported that they enjoyed the sociality and collectivity of working because it gave them an opportunity to get out of the home and meet other people on a daily basis. One-third of women found their work "interesting," and 35 percent claimed that they wanted "to feel useful to society."<sup>31</sup>

Doubters may suggest that Soviet citizens felt political pressure to report that they loved their jobs under Communism, so it is worth noting that this finding was replicated in a survey of former Soviet citizens who willingly immigrated to the United States. In the study, "Politics, Work, and Daily Life in the USSR: A Survey of Former Soviet Citizens," James R. Millar and his team interviewed a random sample of 2,793 men and women between the ages of twenty-one and seventy who had emigrated to the United States between January 1, 1979 and April 30, 1983 (from a total population of 33,618). The interviews (funded with monies from the Department of Defense, the CIA, and the State Department) asked respondents a wide variety of questions to help the US government better understand the quotidian experiences of average Soviet citizens. The Americans were shocked by the high rates of job satisfaction claimed by people who were otherwise dissatisfied enough with their lives to flee their homeland. "Jobs were reported as the most satisfying aspect of life in the Soviet Union," Millar writes in

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30 International Labor Organization, "Women in Economic Activity: A Global Statistical Survey (1950-2000)," A Joint Publication of the International Labor Organization and INSTRAW, 1985.

31 Barbara Wolfe Jancar, *Women Under Communism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 182.

1987, reflecting on the fact that 25.5 percent of his sample reported being “very satisfied” with their jobs and an additional 37.7 percent claimed they were “somewhat satisfied.”<sup>32</sup> This means that more than 63 percent of former Soviets felt satisfaction with their previous working lives, a finding which was gendered in striking ways: “Most interesting of all is the very strong degree of women’s satisfaction with their jobs, and this in the face of high male job satisfaction, too. Whatever the reason, wage discrimination and job segregation, which have been shown to prevail in the USSR as elsewhere in the industrialized world, do not seem to have taken the satisfaction out of women’s jobs in the USSR.”<sup>33</sup>

In her 1978 book, *Women Under Communism*, political scientist Barbara Wolfe Jancar found evidence of similarly high levels of job satisfaction in Eastern Europe. Jancar reported this comment from a conversation she had with a teacher in Yugoslavia: “If you have a job, you have security, your pension, your future. Then, if you get a divorce, you know you will have something on which to live. Besides, no one can stay home with the children the whole day. It’s so boring. And all you have to talk to are your neighbors. If they work, there is no one. Your friends are at work.”<sup>34</sup>

Indeed, other surveys conducted across the region before 1989 confirmed the idea that even if their husbands could support them, women wanted to work at least part time. The problem was that in many countries, women were forced to work full time, and women’s income was necessary to meet a family’s needs. Women were also concentrated in sectors of the economy that weren’t paid as well as those dominated by men. Men and women did receive equal wages if they held the same positions, but women were often funneled into agriculture and light industry or concentrated in white-collar and service professions such

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32 James R. Millar, ed. *Politics, Work, and Daily Life: A Survey of Former Soviet Citizens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 33, 45.

33 Millar, *Politics, Work, and Daily Life*, 51-52.

34 Barbara Wolfe Jancar, *Women Under Communism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 182.

as law, medicine, accounting, and teaching. Men went into mining, construction, engineering, and other physical or technical jobs more highly esteemed in the planned economy. Finally, the state-socialist policy of granting women extended maternity leaves — and the fact that mothers were almost always the ones to stay home when children were too sick to attend school — meant that men were more likely to be promoted into higher managerial and executive positions. Men were only imagined as workers, not parents, but women were always seen as both workers and mothers.<sup>35</sup>

The circumstances of women's employment varied from country to country. And it is important to remember that wage disparities meant less in countries where basic needs were subsidized and there was little to buy with disposable income. Although women were concentrated in less well-paid sectors of the economy, their jobs guaranteed them access to housing, education, health care, paid vacations, kindergartens, and their own independent pension funds. Furthermore, in some countries women could retire five years earlier than men in recognition of women's domestic labors. State-socialist leaders conducted countless surveys showing the uneven distribution of housework and tried to convince men to lend a hand. As early as the 1950s, the East German government began encouraging men to take a more active role in the home,<sup>36</sup> and the Bulgarian women's committee attempted to reeducate men and bring up a younger generation of boys willing to help with domestic tasks.<sup>37</sup>

But Politburo decisions and magazine articles couldn't easily undo entrenched gender roles, and women were so burdened by the dual tasks of formal employment and housework that they began having fewer children. Faced with the prospect of population decline (and

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35 Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Gender After Socialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

36 Herzog, *Sex After Fascism*.

37 Kristen Ghodsee, "Pressuring the Politburo: The Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement and State Socialist Feminism," *Slavic Review* 73 no. 3, (Fall 2014): 538-562; Kristen Ghodsee, "Rethinking State Socialist Mass Women's Organizations: The Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement and the United Nations Decade

accompanying labor shortage), most women's committees pushed for the expansion of socialized childcare, laundries, and cafeterias. The idea was that if the state relieved women of some of their housework, women would have the time and energy to raise more children (Romania was an outlier here in that it also reversed a previously liberal abortion law). The success of socialization varied widely across Eastern Europe. Urban dwellers were more likely to use public laundries and kindergartens than people who lived in the country, and all populations were suspicious of the quality of the food served in public cafeterias. Then there was the social expectation that mothers should cook for their families, an expectation that many women embraced. Even if groceries were difficult to procure — one might have to go to four different shops to get everything for a meal — women still enjoyed cooking and found pride in the preparation of a fine dinner. Across the bloc, women also complained about the service in the public laundries, and would only bring their bedding in for washing, preferring to do their family clothes at home (contrary to Western stereotypes about the lack of household appliances, 77 percent of homes in the Soviet cities of Leningrad and Kostroma had washing machines in 1966).<sup>38</sup>

Finally, there was the issue of childcare. State-socialist governments endeavored to create a kindergarten spot for every child, and some countries got close to this goal. Crèches were available for babies from ages one to three, but these were less popular. Fearing their children would receive inadequate attention in the crèche, many women preferred to stay home while their children were so young. The time spent on maternity leave came with a job guarantee and counted as labor service toward the accumulation of the woman's pension (unlike in the United States where a woman who leaves the labor force to care for children makes no contributions to her Social Security). The quality of the state-provided childcare varied, but it was subsidized, widely available, and utterly accepted as normal for mothers to leave their

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for Women, 1975–1985,” *Journal of Women's History* 24 no. 4, (Winter 2012): 49–73.

38 Jancar, *Women Under Communism*, 50.

children at kindergarten. One Romanian woman recalled:

My mother was not particularly interested in children and relied on state provided daycare, which I attended starting at the age of two.

I remember zero indoctrination of any kind.

I remember excellent snacks and meals.

I remember dedicated staff and a very safe environment.

I remember a day long play environment, with arts & crafts & stories & outside play.

I remember naps in cribs/beds with fresh sheets and blankets ... (rather than US plastic mats on the floor).

I remember practicing folk dances and learning poems for biannual assemblies, etc. Then I went to elementary school where I also remember zero indoctrination. True, I left at 9 just short of becoming a pioneer, which I was really looking forward to. Then I came to freedom in the United States, where I was required to stand up and recite the pledge of allegiance every day.<sup>39</sup>

Of course, not every child would report such a rosy memory of their kindergarten experience, but that is probably true everywhere in the world. What is key here is that the socialist state committed itself to providing universal, subsidized childcare for all working women and that it was normal for children to attend. Women felt no social pressure to stay home.

State-socialist governments also actively encouraged women and girls to study science and engineering. The Soviets were so successful at identifying and training their brightest women in technical fields that the United States felt compelled to do the same. After the 1957 launch of Sputnik, the United States Congress passed the 1958 National Defense Education Act (NDEA), which specifically included funds for the encouragement of women's education in math and science. In 1961, John F. Kennedy established the first Presidential Commission on the Status

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<sup>39</sup> Personal communication from a listener of Doug Henwood's radio show, "Behind the News." Email from Doug Henwood, August 20, 2017.

of Women, citing national security concerns; American leaders feared that the Reds were winning the space race because they had double the brain power.<sup>40</sup> By 1970, 43 percent of Romanian students enrolled in engineering institutes were women, as were 39 percent of all engineering students in the USSR and 27 percent of students in Bulgaria. About one in five engineering students in Yugoslavia and Hungary were women in that same year.<sup>41</sup> In 1976, women earned only 3.4 percent of bachelor's degrees in engineering in the United States.<sup>42</sup> Because of their command economies, state-socialist countries could guarantee full employment to all graduates in their fields of expertise (although not always in the most desirable location). Nevertheless, it is probably safe to say that there were more women employed in engineering in the Eastern Bloc countries in 1975 than there are in the United States in 2018. After her research trips to study women's issues around the Eastern Bloc in the mid-1970s, Jancar reported: "The Communists' achievements in providing education for women were among the benefits of the system most frequently mentioned by the women I interviewed. One of the most frequently expressed beliefs was that only under 'socialism' were women able to work or be educated in significant proportions. Even those who had lived and worked for a while in the West were of the conviction that socialism alone had liberated women."<sup>43</sup>

The difference of American and Soviet women's attitudes toward professional life was best captured in a quote reported by the economist Norton Dodge, who visited the USSR in 1955, 1962, and 1965 to examine the role of women in the Soviet economy. At a conference on women in the Soviet Union at Bryn Mawr College in May 1968, Dodge shared

40 John F. Kennedy, Executive Order 10980—Establishing the President's Commission on the Status of Women, December 14, 1961, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=58918>.

41 Jancar, *Women Under Communism*, 20.

42 Catherine Hill, Christianne Corbett, Andresse St. Rose, *Why So Few? Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics* (Washington: American Association of University Women, 2010), 9.

43 Jancar, *Women Under Communism*, 195.

his recollections of a meeting in Moscow with Olympiada Kozlova, the director of the Engineering-Economic Institute. She had attended a conference on peace at Bryn Mawr several years earlier, and was shocked to find that during the breaks, the American attendees chatted about their husbands and their husbands' various jobs. "Here in the Soviet Union," Kozlova had told Dodge, "when we women get together, we talk about what we are doing, not what our husbands are doing!"<sup>44</sup>

Dodge's report is typical of many of the Cold War comparisons of life under Communism and life under capitalism in that it contrasts the Soviet Union and the United States as shorthand for entire economic systems. So far, we have been implicitly doing the same. But this presents a few sticky issues. Firstly, there are cultural differences. The United States and the USSR did not have a shared history, language, or dominant religion. In fact, Cold War leaders used these dissimilarities to stoke mistrust of the Other on either side of the Iron Curtain. Perhaps even more significantly, the United States and the Soviet Union had vastly different levels of wealth: the US was rich, the USSR was poor. Some scholars have even argued that it was the difference in wealth that accounted for most of the differences between the twentieth-century superpowers, rather than their differently organized economies or ideologies.<sup>45</sup> To get a better sense of what socialist states did for women compared to their democratic capitalist contemporaries, we will look at Austria and Hungary. Not only are they geographic neighbors, they had a shared history for the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This meant similar trade regimes, legal codes, and cultural norms. After World War II, Austria and Hungary found themselves on either side of the East-West divide, but their historical and cultural variables remained constant. This brings us as close as possible to isolating the effect of socialist policies on women's rights and participation in public life.

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44 Donald R. Brown, ed., *The Role and Status of Women in the Soviet Union* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1968), 58, endnote L.

45 Kate Brown, *Plutopia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

## AUSTRIA AND HUNGARY: A COMPARISON

There's an episode in the seventh season (from winter 2018) of the popular BBC drama *Call the Midwife*, set in 1963, in which the Turners — an east London doctor, his ex-nun-turned-secretary wife, and their three children — hire an *au pair* from Hungary. They expect her to be a dour woman, beat down by the dull oppression of Communism. She shows up in a miniskirt. She is not what they expect, but she radiates confidence and they love her. As is wont to happen in a television show about midwifery, the *au pair* becomes pregnant. When she finds out, she asks a doctor “How can I get an abortion?” She is told that she can't. “But in Hungary, abortion is legal up to twelve weeks,” she protests, perplexed. “This isn't a Communist country,” says the doctor. “We don't just give out abortions.” And that's that. The *au pair* attempts a self-induced abortion and nearly dies in a vegetable garden. She is found, rushed to the hospital, and, once recovered, shipped back to the continent.<sup>46</sup>

This is a rare representation of a woman from an Eastern Bloc country in popular culture — not as mannish and defeated, but rather as *more* independent and accustomed to *more* rights than her “free” Western peers. But how would things have gone if she had stayed closer to home, perhaps working as an *au pair* for an Austrian family? The two states have a shared history as the seats of the Dual Monarchy prior to the First World War. They shared a similar legal code until World War I, but even in the interbellum period as Austria and Hungary were consolidated as nation states, Hungarian law borrowed much language from its Austrian neighbor.<sup>47</sup> During the Second World War, Hungary was nominally an axis power, while Austria was annexed by Germany in the infamous *Anschluss*. Both countries lost about 5 percent of their 1939 population in the war, and both Vienna and Budapest were bombed

46 Heidi Thomas, *Call the Midwife*, directed by Claire Winyardem, Series 7, Episode 3 (February 4, 2018; London: BBC), television program.

47 Lajos Vékás, “The Codification of Private Law in Hungary in Historical Perspective,” *SI Annales U. Sci. Budapestinensis Rolando Eotvos Nominatae SI* (2010).

to rubble. But as Cold War divides calcified, Austria had the aid of the Marshall Plan to rebuild. Hungary did not, and they needed all hands on deck to rebuild, including women's.<sup>48</sup> As sociologist Éva Fodor has written, in Hungary “the male worker and stay-at-home housewife family was neither economically nor politically feasible after World War II.”<sup>49</sup>

Emerging from the war in the second half of the twentieth century, Austria and Hungary were separated by the Iron Curtain (although, unlike between East and West Germany, the border became increasingly permeable over time)<sup>50</sup> and the major difference between the states was a difference in their political economies: communism versus capitalism. Hungary, like its Eastern neighbors, implemented a socialist gender regime in which women gained legal equality and entered the workforce en masse. According to Fodor, “Gender, or precisely ‘masculinity,’ served as a more useful resource for access to authority in capitalist Austria than in state socialist Hungary: women experienced a higher degree of exclusion from the dominant class in Austria than in Hungary.”<sup>51</sup> In other words, femininity was less of a liability in public life in Hungary than in Austria. The Hungarian socialist state invested in women's emancipation, offering education and employment training, public childcare, cafeterias in the workplace, maternity leave, and abortion access.

In neighboring Austria, however, women remained in the home for the first three postwar decades. The emergence of a grassroots feminist movement happened in a similar fashion to the United States. The 1970s brought second-wave feminism to Austria, or, as it was called there

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48 Nigel Swain, *Hungary: The Rise and Fall of Feasible Socialism* (New York and London: Verso), 49.

49 Éva Fodor, *Working Difference: Women's Working Lives in Hungary and Austria, 1945-1995* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 33.

50 Michael Gehler and Maximilian Graf, “Austria, German Unification, and European Integration: A Brief Historical Background,” Cold War International History Project, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars no. 86 (March, 2018): 4, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/austria-german-unification-and-european-integration-brief-historical-background>.

51 Fodor, *Working Difference*, 25.

the “New Feminist Movement.” In 1975, a new family law was passed: women no longer needed their husband’s permission to work outside the home.<sup>52</sup> This was a full generation after women’s participation in the workforce was normalized — in fact, required — in Hungary, regardless of how husbands felt about it. The 1975 Austrian family law also stated both parents were to have equal legal possession of their children.<sup>53</sup> Prior to 1975, fathers were solely responsible for decisions affecting children and women were legally obligated to follow their husband if he moved, effectively making the wife another of her husband’s children. Even on the most symbolic level, the Hungarian state granted women emancipation far before Austria: the 1952 Hungarian family law gave women the right to keep their birth name upon marriage. Austrian women could not do the same until 1995.<sup>54</sup>

Three years after the 1975 family law, the governing Austrian social-democratic party created two new positions for state secretaries in charge of women’s concerns, one for “working women” and one for “general women’s issues.”<sup>55</sup> The year 1979 also saw the creation of the Austrian Equal Treatment Act, which prohibited gender-based discrimination in the labor market. Because state-socialist Hungary had a command economy rather than a free market economy, labor market discrimination was not a central issue. The Hungarian socialist state was more concerned with ensuring that women’s biological and social differences from men (pregnancy and child-rearing) could be accommodated in the workplace, rather than acting as if they did not exist. State-socialist leaders recognized that women have different roles from men. This may raise the hackles of a liberal feminist observer; however, as Fodor argues, party leaders used the difference principle

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52 Fodor, *Working Difference*, 168.

53 Fodor, *Working Difference*, 113.

54 Fodor, *Working Difference*, 170.

55 Birgit Sauer, “What Happened to the Model Student? Austrian State Feminism since the 1990s” in *Changing State Feminism*, eds. Joyce Outshoorn and Johanna Kantola (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 41.

to include women rather than exclude them.<sup>56</sup> Without acknowledging that women faced a set of challenges in formal employment that men did not, how could they ever be fully incorporated?

The statistics bear out this difference. With a bump from a 1953 law requiring that women make up 30–50 percent of newly trained workers, the percentage of women in the labor force skyrocketed. In 1949, 35 percent of Hungarian women were employed outside the home. By 1970, 65 percent were, and two out of every five workers were women.<sup>57</sup> In the immediate postwar moment, Austrian women worked outside the home at about the same rate as their Hungarian sisters: in 1951, 35 percent of Austrian women were engaged in paid work. Two decades later, however, only 31 percent of Austrian women worked for wages.<sup>58</sup> Hungarian women also enjoyed increasingly lengthy maternity leaves throughout the regime. By the late 1960s, women could take up to three years of paid maternity leave.<sup>59</sup> Austrian women, meanwhile, could only take one year, unpaid, although some women received unemployment benefits during this time.<sup>60</sup> Without a state-socialist regime of workplace quotas, investment in women's education, and legal gender equality, Austrian women's participation in public life, at least insofar as it can be indicated by formal employment rates, actually regressed in the 1950s and 1960s.

Of course, working Hungarian women had the same domestic responsibilities as Austrian women who did not work for wages. There were still dirty clothes to wash, meals to cook, and children to look after, and deeply ingrained ideas about gendered work could not be rewritten as quickly as the family code. In response, the Hungarian state undertook a massive expansion of public childcare facilities. From

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56 Fodor, *Working Difference*, 35.

57 Lynne Haney, *Inventing the Needy: Gender and the Politics of Welfare in Hungary* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2002), 33.

58 Fodor, *Working Difference*, 112.

59 Fodor, *Working Difference*, 171.

60 Fodor, *Working Difference*, 167.

1953 to 1965, the number of state-run crèches nearly quintupled. New kindergartens were also built, but at a slower pace (throughout the 1950s, the number of kindergartens increased by 40 percent). There were crèches and kindergartens in residential neighborhoods and in workplaces, so women could choose if it would be more convenient to drop off their children before or after the commute.<sup>61</sup>

As discussed in the previous section, sending children to kindergarten was extremely common. In fact, Hungarian state kindergartens were in such high demand that by 1965 there were only spaces for half the children whose families wanted them to attend.<sup>62</sup> In an attempt to further alleviate the double burden, many workplaces operated canteens where workers could eat during the day and shops where they could purchase subsidized groceries. Large workplaces (those with more than four thousand employees) operated clinics where workers could see a doctor, get medicine, and even obtain baby food and milk for nursing mothers.<sup>63</sup> In Austria, on the other hand, day care was largely a nonissue until the 1980s. This was not because there was an abundance, but rather, because few Austrian women were in the workforce. In fact, Éva Fodor argues that the Austrian state was invested in keeping women *out* of the workforce in this time period.<sup>64</sup>

Given the vastly different attitudes toward women's labor force participation, it should not come as a shock that there were more women in positions of authority in Hungary than in Austria. In 1972 in Hungary, working men were between two and three times as likely to be managers as working women. The same year in Austria, working men were more than five times as likely as working women to be managers — and many fewer women were in the workforce at all. Taken together, Hungarian women were much more likely than their Austrian peers to hold positions of authority in working life. Perhaps even

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61 Haney, *Inventing the Needy*, 38.

62 Ibid.

63 Haney, *Inventing the Needy*, 42.

64 Fodor, *Working Difference*, 112.

more importantly, given the nature of the centrally planned economy, Hungarian women were also more likely to hold positions of authority in state administration than Austrian women. In 1972, Hungarian men were about twice as likely as women to hold position in state administration. At the same time, Austrian men were four times as likely to have positions in state administration as women. In fact, by the end of state socialism, in 1988, Hungarian women were more likely than men to work in the state bureaucracy.<sup>65</sup> Of course, women were largely excluded from the most inner circles of party leadership, but they did have some authority among the rank and file.

And, finally, Austria and Hungary differed greatly in terms of access to abortion. In short, *Call the Midwife's au pair* wouldn't have fared much better in Austria than she did in Britain. In Hungary, as in most state-socialist countries, abortion was relatively available. Although officially medically regulated immediately after the war, in practice there were few barriers to abortion between 1945 and 1949.<sup>66</sup> With the consolidation of Communist power in postwar Hungary, however, abortion was criminalized. Partly under Soviet pressure, partly as Soviet mimicry, and partly in response to postwar labor shortages, Hungary imposed Stalinist restrictions on abortion until 1956. Liberalized access to abortion was a demand of the '56 revolution, and from 1956–1973 Hungary had one of the most progressive abortion policies in Europe. But by the late 1960s the birth rate began to decline, as it did in countries across the bloc. In 1973, over the protests of the Hungarian women's committee, social scientists, and students, the state introduced limits on who could get an abortion. Thanks in large part to the efforts of the women's committee, abortion was not broadly prohibited as it was in neighboring Romania.<sup>67</sup> It was now restricted to certain types of women deemed by the state either unfit or exempt

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65 Fodor, *Working Difference*, 66.

66 Susan Gal, "Gender in the Post-socialist Transition: the Abortion Debate in Hungary," *East European Politics and Societies* 8 (1994): 256-286.

67 Fodor, *Working Difference*, 31.

from having children: unmarried women, those who had already done their reproductive duty and had at least two children, older women, women in poverty, or those for whom pregnancy would present health hazards.<sup>68</sup> Abortion committees were instituted to enforce these restrictions; however, the criteria were lenient enough that most women who wanted or needed an abortion found a way to get one.

Meanwhile, abortion was not even made legal in Austria until 1974 and, as in the United States, that law governs abortion to this day.<sup>69</sup> That law permits abortion in the first three months of pregnancy and requires that it must be performed in a public hospital by a physician. As the *Call the Midwife* example illustrates, in the mid-twentieth century, many Western states considered access to abortion indicative of Communist immorality even as women in their own countries sought dangerous illegal procedures. From a contemporary perspective, however, it is clear that state socialism granted women reproductive autonomy much earlier than capitalism.

And ironically, in a society based on the ideal of the collective, autonomy — or at least independence — is what's at stake with the other state-socialist programs for women as well. As Katherine Verdery has argued, and other scholars have echoed, state socialism made men and women equally dependent on the state.<sup>70</sup> The state effectively replaced men as the breadwinner. Once women no longer depended on their husbands for their basic needs of food, shelter, and medical care, they gained a measure of control over their own lives, even in regimes where political rights were curtailed. Is this not one of the foundational goals of feminism, to provide women with a measure of control over their own lives? In Austria, the legal reforms instituting women's rights were the result of feminist activism, the sort of bottom-up, grassroots

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68 Gal, "Gender in the Post-socialist Transition," 264.

69 "Abortion Legislation in Europe," The Law Library of Congress, Global Legal Research Center, January, 2015, <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/abortion-legislation/europe.php#austria>.

70 Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

agitation that many have argued is necessary for any real feminist agenda. They were not codified until thirty years after the equivalent laws in Hungary, however. And the so-called “top-down” socialist model of women’s emancipation undertook the project of socializing domestic labor that has yet to be replicated under capitalism.

### AFTER 1989

So, what about now, when free markets reign supreme? As we approach the thirtieth anniversary of the Berlin Wall’s fall, the former Eastern Bloc countries remain stubbornly in transition. These days, Hungary is in the international spotlight for its extreme right-wing government and xenophobia more often than its promotion of women in the workforce. Between the postwar establishment of canteens in the workplace and the twenty-first-century headlines decrying Europe’s “little dictator” and premier “illiberal democracy,” Hungary — along with the rest of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union — experienced one of the most profound economic and social changes in the modern era.<sup>71</sup> Overnight, constitutions were rewritten, major industries were privatized, and lifetimes’ worth of accomplishment lost their meaning. Free markets, as it turned out, were not just for fossil fuels and cigarettes. Women’s bodies could also be bought, sold, and used as advertisements to sell consumer goods. Post-socialism ushered in a bustling, and exploitative, sex industry as well as previously absent sexualized marketing campaigns.<sup>72</sup>

As markets began to take an interest in women, the state stopped doing so. As many have argued, the transition period saw women’s

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71 Branko Milanovic, “For Whom the Wall Fell? A Balance Sheet of Transition to Capitalism,” *Global Inequality*, November 3, 2014, <https://glineq.blogspot.de/2014/11/for-whom-wall-fell-balance-sheet-of.html>.

72 Libora Oates-Indruchová, “Transforming and Emerging: Discourses of Gender in the Czech Culture of the Transition Period” in *Advertising: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies* 3, ed. Iain MacRury (New York: Routledge, 2012).

retreat from the workforce.<sup>73</sup> Absent the vigorous initiatives to include women in the workplace, many returned home. Although, as Ghodsee has argued, men were also hit hard by the changes, and many women may have fared better in the post-1989 service-industry labor market than their husbands because of the specific nature of the education and experience they had under Communism. Under state socialism, women tended to pursue university studies and were funneled into white-collar professions that were paid less than the manual labor and technical jobs that attracted men. This pre-1989 occupational segregation in fields like law, banking, medicine, academia, and tourism actually helped women after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Since capitalism values white-collar over blue-collar work, women were initially better positioned to succeed in newly competitive labor markets because of the human capital they had acquired under state socialism.<sup>74</sup>

But women's advantages were quickly eroded by the dismantling of the once-generous social safety net and government attempts to force them back into the home. In the countries of Central Europe, for instance, new political leaders embraced policies of what has been called "refamilization." As public enterprises were auctioned off to private investors or simply closed down, the government could no longer maintain its commitment to guarantee full employment to all citizens. Since the private sector wasn't creating jobs fast enough to make up for the jobs lost in the public sector, unemployment grew dramatically. At the exact same moment, hundreds of day-care centers closed, and women lost access to affordable childcare. Some states compensated for the closing of crèches and kindergartens by extending formal maternity leave provisions for up to four years. But these new leaves paid less than the old ones under Communism, and women were not

73 See for example: Jacqui True, *Gender, Globalization, and Postsocialism: The Czech Republic After Communism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Gender after Socialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?*.

74 Kristen Ghodsee, *The Red Riviera: Gender, Tourism, and Postsocialism on the Black Sea* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

guaranteed their jobs back, essentially forcing mothers back into the home.<sup>75</sup> For politicians, these policies helped reduce unemployment rates and saved money. Eastern European women now freely provided the care for which the state once paid.

Meanwhile, in Austria, the incorporation of women into the workforce and the institution of women's rights continued along the path laid out in the 1970s, although with slowing momentum. In 1994, these efforts were given a boost from the European Union's effort to incorporate a gender analysis into each of its new programs.<sup>76</sup> This method, called gender mainstreaming, tends to focus on equality between men and women, rather than on state accommodations for women's roles as mothers. It has also been criticized for diffusing state responsibility for gender equality to such a degree that no organization has appreciable power to enact policy.<sup>77</sup>

Despite the seeming totality of post-socialist transition — or, as it is known in the region, “the changes” — some legacies of state socialism's investment in women's emancipation live on. According to statistics from the European Union's Eurostat database, the pay gap between men and women, though still existent, is smaller in Hungary than in Austria.<sup>78</sup> Hungarian women earn 86 forints for every 100 a man does while Austrian women earn 79.9 cents to an Austrian man's euro. The most striking statistical comparison is in childcare: just over 12 percent of Hungarian babies under three years old are enrolled in formal

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75 Steven Saxonberg and Tomas Sirovatka, “Failing Family Policy in Post-Communist Central Europe,” *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis* 8, no. 2 (2006): 185–202.

76 “History of Gender Mainstreaming at international level and EU level,” Gender-KompetenzZentrum, Humboldt-Universität Berlin, January 2, 2010, <http://www.genderkompetenz.info/eng/gender-competence-2003-2010/Gender%20Mainstreaming/Bases/history/international/index.html/>.

77 Barbara Einhorn, “Citizenship, Civil Society and Gender Mainstreaming: Contested Priorities in an Enlarging Europe” (presentation, Pan-European Conference on Gendering Democracy in an Enlarged Europe, Prague, Czech Republic, June 20, 2005).

78 “Gender pay gap in unadjusted form by NACE Rev. 2 activity – structure of earnings survey methodology (earn\_gr\_gpgr2)” in “Gender equality,” Database, Eurostat, accessed May 17, 2018, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>.

childcare while only 5.6 percent of Austrian babies are. This modest difference becomes extreme when children are slightly older. Nearly three-quarters of Hungarian children between three years old and the minimum compulsory school age attend formal childcare, while only one-quarter of Austrian children do.<sup>79</sup> One likely explanation for this discrepancy is the state-socialist culture of socialized crèches and kindergartens. Because kindergartens were subsidized and widely available, it became normal for parents to send their kids there while they worked. Now, those children who grew up attending crèches and kindergartens run by the socialist state have their own children. Their experience did not leave them scarred; rather, these parents raised going to day care are choosing the same for their children.

## CONCLUSION

What are the stakes of studying women's emancipation under state socialism in Eastern Europe, and why even bother? Europe's twentieth-century experiment in socialism is receding quickly into the rearview mirror of history, but we'd be wrong to let it disappear entirely. Although the socialist state never fully eradicated patriarchy in the home, or explicitly dealt with issues of sexual harassment or domestic violence, it did strive to provide (to a greater or lesser extent depending on the era and country) some semblance of social security, economic stability, and work-life balance for its citizens. The radical lesson is that the state intervened and did some good things on behalf of women, things that markedly changed their lives — day cares, abortion, canteens, etc. Feminist activism, the way it looks in the West with painted signs and rallying cries, did not achieve these things. Bureaucrats did.

This may feel like a bleak lesson: how can we rally for state feminism

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79 "Children in formal childcare or education by age group and duration - % over the population of each age group - EU-SILC survey (ilc\_caindformal)" in "Gender equality," Database, Eurostat, accessed May 17, 2018, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>.

when our states are headed by the likes of Viktor Orbán and Donald Trump? But maybe, just maybe, it could feel like a bright lesson. As feminists frequently at our wits' end, we must realize that there are more, and better, options. Consciousness raising, pamphlets, performance art, marches, and hashtag campaigns will not bring about the kind of permanent progress that most women need. Changing minds and hearts is not our only goal; we must also change the role of the state. The feminist demands we make can be radical in the true sense of the word: they can get to the root of the problem. It has become increasingly clear that the barriers to women's full participation in public life are not failures of individual willpower. We have leaned in, stepped up, and hung on, but our grit has amounted to very little. Without state support and an ambitious program of wealth redistribution — whether this is through increased taxation or from the profits generated through social ownership of public enterprises — women will continue to perform the unremunerated care work for capitalist societies, which will only increase as the baby-boomer generation enters old age.<sup>80</sup>

Few would argue that life under socialism in Eastern Europe was good, generally. Consumer shortages and travel restrictions circumscribed many lives. At various times, in various places, political violence cut lives short and fractured families. And yet, by most every measure, women had a degree of education, economic independence, and legal standing that their Western peers would not have until much later and, once won, always seem on the verge of losing. Reviewing the limited successes of the state-socialist past is in no way a call to recreate the failed experiments of the twentieth-century Eastern European regimes. But we must be able to take stock of their accomplishments for what they were, to learn from them, and to move forward.

The historiography of women's lives under state socialism — and the historiography of state socialism generally — is deeply political. As

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80 Malcom Harris, *Kids These Days: Human Capital and the Making of Millennials* (New York: Little Brown, 2017); Gabriel Winant, "Not Every Kid-Bond Matures," *n+1* 30 (Winter 2018).

we have each argued elsewhere, those who oppose any project of collective action or redistribution of wealth dredge up the boogeyman of zombie socialism to preempt any socialist movement before it begins.<sup>81</sup> This is true, also, of those would keep women from power. Since the nineteenth century and the solidification of the state as we know it, women have had a particular interest in seeing that the state use its power on their behalf. This is still true today.

In the United States, women make up the majority of the Democratic Party, and the majority of women lean Democrat.<sup>82</sup> Although it's a far cry from democratic socialism, to many people the Democrats represent the ideal of government working in the interests of people, of public services, public education, and public safety nets. If Social Security is gutted, it will be women who take care of elderly relatives. In the absence of affordable childcare, it is women who stay home to watch the kids. And this is why, at scale, women's emancipation and socialism pose a dual threat to both the wealthiest and most powerful (who are loathe to part with their billions, and, it must be noted, are mostly men) and the most reactionary (those who spend their days sending women rape-threats online and their nights marching with torches in nouveaux-Klan rallies). If journalists at the *Financial Times* and screenwriters at the BBC can assert the benefits of state socialism for women — whether these be in the large percentages of women working as engineers or in more liberal policies regarding reproductive rights — it is high time that feminists engage with the evidence and do the same. ✎

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81 Julia Mead, "Why Millennials Aren't Afraid of Socialism," *Nation*, January 10, 2017; Ghodsee and Sehon, "Anti-anti-communism."

82 "Wide Gender Gap, Growing Educational Divide in Voters' Party Identification," Pew Research Center, March, 2018, <http://www.people-press.org/2018/03/20/wide-gender-gap-growing-educational-divide-in-voters-party-identification/>.

**Public sector unions are bloodied and on the defensive. In a historic decision, the Supreme Court has imposed a right-to-work regime on public employment nationwide, and the post-crash austerity drive is still taking its toll. In this environment, public sector unions face two main paths forward: increasing their dependence on government employers, or joining forces with the emergent political alternative on the Left.**

# PUBLIC SECTOR UNIONS AFTER JANUS

CHRIS MAISANO

**I**t is no secret that the US labor movement is mired in a seemingly endless decline. The overall rate of unionization reached its peak in the early 1950s, when roughly one-third of the workforce was organized. Today, the rate is 10.7 percent, the lowest level in a century. But a focus on the overall rate masks important differences in the fates of private and public sector unions, which are governed by separate legal regimes. Unionization in the private sector has plummeted from roughly one-quarter in the 1970s to a harrowing 6.5 percent today. By contrast, public sector unionization has remained fairly constant, hovering around 35 percent since the early 1980s. Local government unionization still tops 40 percent, and some states and cities boast Nordic rates of public employee union membership.<sup>1</sup>

This split between private and public sector unions has had dire consequences for the labor movement as a whole. It prevented the consolidation of a truly national labor movement and put the two sectors on

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1 Barry T. Hirsch and David A. Macpherson, *Union Membership and Coverage Database*, [www.unionstats.com](http://www.unionstats.com).

fundamentally different developmental paths. As private sector unions eroded, public sector unions were increasingly vulnerable to political and ideological attack.<sup>2</sup> A day of reckoning was bound to arrive, and it finally did in the shape of a recent Supreme Court case called *Janus v. American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees*.

On its face, *Janus* took up the arcane question of “agency fees” and their constitutionality in state and local government employment.<sup>3</sup> The plaintiff, a former Illinois child-support worker named Mark Janus, argued that such fees violated his First Amendment right to free speech and free association. Backed by a constellation of right-wing legal outfits, he claimed that collective bargaining in the public sector is inherently political, and that public employees should not be required to pay dues or fees to an organization whose political activities they disagree with. Therefore, the public sector “agency shop” that prevailed in Illinois and many other states must be abolished and replaced with a so-called “right to work” regime in public employment nationwide.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, *Janus* and the string of cases leading up to it was never really about free speech. The ultimate goal of the groups that bankrolled these cases is to frustrate working-class organization, strengthen the hand of employers, and undermine support for the public sector. Some

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2 Alexis N. Walker, “Labor’s Enduring Divide: The Distinct Path of Public Sector Unions in the United States,” *Studies in American Political Development* 28 n. 2 (2014): 175-200.

3 Before the *Janus* decision, twenty-two states allowed public employees covered by collective bargaining agreements to opt out of union membership but required them to pay an “agency fee” in lieu of union dues. Also known as “fair share” payments, these fees only covered collective bargaining costs and other “non-ideological” services that nonmembers were entitled to and were intended to mitigate the free-rider problem that a system of non-mandatory payments creates. More on the distinction between “ideological” and “non-ideological” activities below.

4 A “right to work” legal regime is one in which union membership is voluntary, and nonmembers are still covered by collective bargaining agreements even though they are not required to pay the union for bargaining costs. This is also known as the open shop, as distinguished from other arrangements like the closed shop, the union shop, and the agency shop. The *Taft-Hartley* amendments to the National Labor Relations Act permit states to pass right to work laws, which cover private and public sector workers alike. Twenty-seven states had right to work laws on their books at the time of this writing.

of the justices deciding the case could barely conceal their agreement with this brazenly partisan political agenda. In a particularly testy moment in the oral arguments, Anthony Kennedy let the mask of impartiality slip when he asked the defendant's lawyer a very pointed question: "I'm asking you whether or not in your view, if you do not prevail in this case, the unions will have less political influence; yes or no?" The lawyer replied in the affirmative, prompting Kennedy to snap back: "Isn't that the end of this case?" Counsel gamely tried to steer the argument back to the question at hand, but to little avail. The stakes were clear, and the union's defeat may as well have been announced on the spot.<sup>5</sup>

At almost every turn in their opinion, the conservative justices portray public employee unions as a parasite upon the body politic, a malevolent force responsible for grievous offenses against free speech, free association, and fiscal rectitude. Therefore, in their view, none of the various arguments in favor of the agency shop could possibly justify the continued maintenance of compelled speech and political usurpation. The open shop must rule.

This stark panorama of union malfeasance is, to put it mildly, curiously out of step with the actually existing balance of political forces. The *Janus* decision represents the successful culmination of a years-long judicial campaign against public employee unions and punctuates a relentlessly bruising period for organized labor as a whole. Since the crash of 2008, anti-labor forces have brought the open shop to a majority of states, restricted the scope of public sector collective bargaining, and enacted "paycheck protection" laws compelling unions to obtain express authorization from each member before deducting dues. These attacks have gone farthest in Republican-dominated states, but unions have not fared particularly well in heavily Democratic states either. In recent rounds of contract negotiations Democratic governors

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5 Transcript of Oral Argument at p. 54, *Janus v. American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees*, Council 31 (2018) No. 16-1466. [https://www.supremecourt.gov/oral\\_arguments/argument\\_transcripts/2017/16-1466\\_gebh.pdf](https://www.supremecourt.gov/oral_arguments/argument_transcripts/2017/16-1466_gebh.pdf).

and mayors have driven a hard bargain, offering wage increases at or below the historically low rate of inflation and winning concessions on health benefits and pensions. Far from being on the march, unions in the public sector and in general are bloodied and in retreat before a wide-ranging bipartisan attack.

Labor's enemies have also taken advantage of the financial crisis to launch an assault on the public sector itself, imposing a brutal austerity program at all levels of government. Today there are roughly 670,000 fewer public employees than there were in 2010, and the share of public employment in total employment (just below 15 percent) has reached its lowest level since 1957.<sup>6</sup> Public education systems have been singled out for attack, and the results have been nothing short of devastating. According to the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, overall funding for public schools had not yet recovered to pre-recession levels in twenty-nine states as of 2015 (the most recent year for which data is available). Seventeen of those states cut their education budgets by ten percent or more, including two (Florida and Arizona) which cut per student funding by a shocking 25 percent.<sup>7</sup>

It is no coincidence that many of the states which cut education funding to the bone — Arizona, Kentucky, North Carolina, Oklahoma, West Virginia — were recently swept by a wave of public school strikes that may well continue into 2019. Striking school workers won a number of impressive victories that push back against both the anti-union offensive and the austerity drive. In West Virginia, strikers won a 5 percent wage increase for all state employees, defeated a proposed charter school expansion, protected seniority provisions, and killed a paycheck-protection bill.<sup>8</sup> Oklahoma workers won a modest increase in school funding and raises for teachers and support workers, and in

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6 Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis and US, "Government Employment in Context," FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, August 17, 2015.

7 Michael Leachman, Kathleen Masterson, and Eric Figueroa, "A Punishing Decade for School Funding," *Center for Budget and Policy Priorities*, November 29, 2017.

8 Jane McAlevey, "The West Virginia Teachers Strike Shows that Winning Big Requires Creating a Crisis," *Nation*, March 12, 2018.

Arizona strikers won a remarkable wage agreement that will increase their pay 20 percent by 2020.<sup>9</sup> Strike leaders have made it clear that their fight won't stop here. Many fundamental issues remain unresolved, from taxes and funding levels to health insurance coverage. Labor unrest will continue to roil Republican-dominated states, and if simmering discontent in the big urban school districts boils over the strike wave could become a truly national phenomenon.

These strikes are one of the most remarkable developments in contemporary US politics and have quickly taken their place in the pantheon of great American labor struggles. They showed that *Janus* and the new attacks that are sure to follow don't have to be a death sentence for the labor movement, and that popular support can still be galvanized behind public employees engaged in socially disruptive strike activity.

Even so, there is little doubt that labor's long crisis has entered a new and highly dangerous phase. Barring an unexpected reversal of labor's political fortunes, it seems likely that the open-shop drive will soon turn from the public sector to the private sector, where the unionization rate is already perched on the brink of irrelevance. The further loss of members and revenue will trigger an organizational crisis in many unions, some of whom have already begun to slash budgets and cut staff.<sup>10</sup> In the midst of all these pressures the labor movement will grapple with a series of momentous strategic decisions, decisions that will do much to shape the direction of the movement for years to come.

How unions respond to this will determine the labor movement's future in the United States. Currently, two paths seem available to it — statization and politicization. Recent events have showcased tendencies in both of these directions; the question of which one will predominate will largely be answered by the strength of left-wing currents inside the unions and in the broader political context.

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9 Bryce Covert, "Will Red-State Protests Spark Electoral Change?" *Nation*, July 5, 2018.

10 Rachel M. Cohen, "After *Janus*, the Country's Largest Public-Sector Union Takes Stock of Its Movement," *Intercept*, July 5, 2018

## STATIZATION

The core of the statization strategy is to substitute the support of government employers for what the unions once did for themselves, namely generating revenue and organizing workers. It can be seen as the public sector version of the private sector labor-management partnerships that have reduced unions to the status of junior partner (at best). By increasing the reliance of union organizations on the employer instead of the membership, such an arrangement threatens to turn public employee unions into little more than wards of the state. Of course, this has been a tendency in the labor movement ever since unions became enmeshed in the legal-bureaucratic apparatus of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and state-level collective bargaining systems. But the extremely difficult environment unions confront today may well push them even further in this direction.

MAISANO

For public employee unions, statization would essentially mean their transformation into “company” unions primarily reliant on government employers, not the voluntary loyalty of their own members. Public sector unions in states and cities dominated by the Democratic Party will likely be the most susceptible to these pressures as traditional forms of legal-institutional support come under continued attack. Indeed, Democratic politicians and liberal academics have already stepped forward with a range of proposals ostensibly aimed at supporting and rebuilding the labor movement but which would result in very perverse effects if implemented.

The leading advocate of direct reimbursement is University of California law professor Aaron Tang, who makes an extensive case for its implementation in the paper “Life After *Janus*.”<sup>11</sup> His proposal revives an idea first mooted in 2016, when Democrats in the Hawaii state legislature introduced a bill that would fund public employee unions directly out of the state treasury. That bill was intended to mitigate

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11 For a summary of the argument, see Aaron Tang, “There’s a Simple Way to Neutralize *Janus* – If State Legislators Have the Will,” *In These Times*, June 27, 2018.

the effects of another case, *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*, which would have brought the open shop to the public sector even earlier if not for the unexpected death of Antonin Scalia. Tang argues that state governments should simply provide direct funding for public employee unions' collective bargaining costs, on the grounds that the unions perform a function analogous to public defenders in the legal system. His proposal has quickly gained a following, including in New York, where Democratic legislators are pushing a bill that would allow unions to replace agency fees with reimbursements in collective bargaining agreements with employers.<sup>12</sup>

Other proposals would make it more difficult for union members to actually drop their union membership. This is one aspect of a bill that Democratic governor Andrew Cuomo recently signed in New York, where public employee unions can now limit the time period in which members can leave the union. Workers were previously allowed to do so at any time, but now this is only permitted during a specific window defined by the union, such as a thirty-day period leading up to the anniversary of hiring date.<sup>13</sup>

These types of measures discussed above would help to stave off financial and membership losses among public sector unions, at least until they are struck down by a court in the post-*Janus* legal landscape. They are unobjectionable from a purely formal or bureaucratic standpoint — which is precisely why they are coming from academics and politicians, and why some union officials are receptive to them. From the standpoint of a labor activist, however, they are highly contradictory. They are geared exclusively at keeping union organizations alive and do so in a manner that would simultaneously hollow out the unions' mobilizational resources.

But as Chris Brooks of *Labor Notes* has pointed out, unions in the

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12 Max Parrott, "Gottfried's *Janus* Workaround Reopens Labor Debate," *City & State*, July 10, 2018.

13 Erin Durkin, "Cuomo Signs Bill That Gives Unions More Power to Recruit Members Despite Supreme Court Case," *New York Daily News*, April 12, 2018.

private sector are barred from entering into these kinds of arrangements precisely because “the point of that bar is to keep unions independent and out of control of the boss. Direct reimbursement would make unions more vulnerable to employer domination.”<sup>14</sup> It would also create a perverse incentive for even pro-union workers to stop paying dues. If the union will receive employer funding to make up for a loss in voluntary dues payments, why not give yourself a little raise by keeping the money in your pocket? By further reducing labor’s reliance on its own members, these arrangements may even work against the goal of keeping union organizations alive in the longer term. Cynicism and disillusionment among workers are likely to increase as their putative representatives are brought into an even closer relationship with employers. The ceding of managerial prerogative already makes it too easy to cast unions as an arm of the boss; funding them directly out of the employer’s pocket would only serve to complete the picture.

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The adoption of measures like direct reimbursement would represent a new development in the practice of labor movement opportunism. Because of the difficulties inherent to labor organization, unions are routinely subject to strong structural pressures to make themselves as independent of their own members’ voluntary participation as possible. The agency shop was one way of accomplishing this; direct reimbursement and related measures would be another. With the agency shop abolished in the public sector, state actors and union leaders alike are looking for new arrangements that would significantly reduce labor’s independence from the employer-state, as well as the need for unions to win and maintain the loyalty of rank-and-file members. In that sense, statization raises the disturbing prospect of a unionism without workers.

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<sup>14</sup> Chris Brooks, “Beware the Quick Fix,” *Jacobin*, July 28, 2018.

## POLITICIZATION

The alternative is a thoroughgoing politicization of the labor movement, and its reconsolidation on an energized and mobilized membership base. This kind of militant politicized unionism would represent a sharp break with the last forty years of labor strategy, which was grounded in a spurious distinction between “political” and “nonpolitical” types of action. The unions’ main defense in *Janus* and the cases leading up to it was that outside of direct spending on candidates and lobbying, their activities are fundamentally not political. This distinction was a major aspect of the Supreme Court’s reasoning in *Abood v. Detroit Board of Education*, the 1977 case that originally recognized the constitutionality of agency shops in the public sector. In a unanimous decision, the justices drew a line between “ideological” and “non-ideological” forms of union activity. In their view, public employees covered by union contracts could not be compelled to pay for narrowly defined ideological causes that they did not agree with but could be compelled to fund ostensibly non-ideological activities such as collective bargaining, contract administration, and grievance handling.<sup>15</sup>

This argument, however, could easily be rejected as resting on a distinction without a difference. Indeed, the very justices who drew this line recognized its questionable tenability in the *Abood* decision. Writing for the majority, Potter Stewart conceded that because public employee unions exist to influence government decision-making, their activities could be properly understood as political. Elena Kagan insisted on this distinction between political and nonpolitical activity in her *Janus* dissent, but the conservative majority found it to be less than persuasive.<sup>16</sup> While it was understandable for unions to rely on

15 *Abood v. Detroit Board of Education*, 431 US 209 (1977). A transcript of the opinion can be found at <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/431/209>.

16 *Janus v. American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, Council 31*, 585 US \_\_ (2018). A transcript of the opinion can be found at [https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/17pdf/16-1466\\_2b3j.pdf](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/17pdf/16-1466_2b3j.pdf).

this argument in their legal defense of the agency shop, the reasoning behind it was remarkably weak and reinforced the narrowest conceptions of unionism possible.

In practice, labor's insistence on distinguishing between "ideological" and "non-ideological" forms of activity has both narrowed the scope of electoral contestation and displaced struggles over workplace power and control. As Will Bloom has argued, this approach "instills in union members a sense that their relationship with their union is simply economic and transactional," and has inhibited the development of the kinds of class consciousness that might have sustained a meaningful fight-back against the anti-labor assault that culminated in the *Janus* decision.<sup>17</sup>

Now that the Supreme Court has encouraged public employees to free-ride on their coworkers' dues payments, it is incumbent upon unions to prioritize the creation of collective identities over strictly economic goals — or better yet, to redefine workers' economic interests in political terms. One of the most difficult and frustrating aspects of the right-to-work debate is that anti-union forces have consistently made their case on political grounds (free speech, free association, etc.) while labor's defenders have generally couched their arguments in the bloodless language of microeconomics (i.e., the free-rider problem). Even if one were interested only in advancing workers' most utilitarian interests, these cannot effectively be served unless they are pursued through fundamentally political forms of collective action. This is especially true in an environment where union membership is strictly voluntary. In such a context, workers must understand that membership is valuable in itself, and that the advancement of individual interests requires a certain level of collective sacrifice, solidarity, and discipline. Technical fixes like direct state reimbursement of union costs only reinforce the individualistic logic of the anti-union drive and undermine the development of collective

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17 Will Bloom, "Unions are Political," *Jacobin*, July 3, 2018.

identities that will only become more important in an era of ever-increasing organizational insecurity.<sup>18</sup>

The recent wave of public education strikes highlighted the crucial importance of the questions. Demands for wage increases were linked with demands that resonated with the public at large, and strikers consistently articulated their grievances in broadly political terms. West Virginia strikers explicitly drew upon the language and philosophy of the Civil Rights Movement to justify illegal action in the pursuit of justice. Arizona teachers waged their fight under the banner of “Red for Ed,” which has spread to other states and turned into a broader movement for the defense and expansion of public education. And in every case, this intensely politicized approach to labor action was driven by a militant minority of local union leaders and unofficial rank-and-file networks, not the upper layers of union leadership.

Considering the political-institutional context, the leading role of rank-and-file militants should not come as a surprise. All these strikes took place in right-to-work states where public sector unions are institutionally weak and politically isolated. Membership rates in these states are far lower than those in California, Illinois, and New York, and their unions’ capacity to organize members for workplace and political action has largely been hollowed out. This very weakness, however, played an important role in making these grassroots insurgencies possible. In the absence of formal collective bargaining relations and a union bureaucracy capable of disciplining the membership, workplace grievances can quickly escalate to the kinds of mass political mobilization we witnessed last spring.

There is a limit, however, on what strike activity and workplace organizing can accomplish on its own. As Sam Gindin has argued, it is not likely that labor’s revitalization will emerge from a dynamic

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18 For a theoretically rich discussion of these issues, see Claus Offe and Helmut Wiesenenthal, “The Two Logics of Collective Action: Theoretical Notes on Social Class and Organizational Form,” *Political Power and Social Theory* 1 (1980): 67-115.

that is strictly internal to the unions.<sup>19</sup> Decades of union security have atrophied the muscles of collective action and inculcated the notion that “the union” is an external entity that provides services to demobilized and individualized dues-payers. Fortuitously, however, the deinstitutionalization of labor unions is occurring at the same time as a resurgence of left-wing politics in the electoral arena and the larger society, particularly among younger workers. Whatever its limitations, the Bernie Sanders campaign set off a political dynamic that is putting ideas of socialism and class struggle right at the heart of mainstream political discourse. Nowhere is this clearer than in West Virginia, where Sanders swept all fifty-five counties in the state’s 2016 Democratic Party primary election. The Sanders phenomenon primed the state for class politics, and many of the key rank-and-file leaders of the West Virginia school strike built their personal and political relationships through the campaign.<sup>20</sup>

A recovery of the types of collective action that characterized public employee unionism in its formative period will depend upon a broader environment defined by a high level of politicization of class struggle. In the absence of strong left-wing movements and political parties, it is likely that unions will succumb to the kinds of structural pressures that make it rational to substitute external guarantees of support for the voluntary loyalty and collective action of union members.<sup>21</sup> As such, any attempt to counterpose party-political action and labor organization in the current moment should be rejected both practically and theoretically. With the level of social organization at historic lows, electoral insurgencies will play an important role in rebuilding those capacities. As Catarina Principe and Dan Russell argue, the “political alternative must help create its own social base”

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19 Sam Gindin, “Rethinking Unions, Registering Socialism,” in Leo Panitch, Greg Albo, and Vivek Chibber (eds.) *Socialist Register 2013: The Question of Strategy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012): 26-51.

20 Eric Blanc, “The Lessons of West Virginia,” *Jacobin*, March 9, 2018.

21 Offe and Wiesenthal, “The Two Logics of Collective Action,” 106.

and promote the re-politicization of labor organizations whose members have long been demobilized.<sup>22</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The big bang of public sector organizing occurred during the last great period of political tumult, the long 1960s. The unionization of public employees is routinely overshadowed by the black freedom struggle, the anti-war movement, and the New Left, but it was thoroughly intertwined with all of them. Black and women workers have always been disproportionately employed in the public sector, and their struggle for unionization was inseparable from the demands for racial and gender equality raised by the civil rights and feminist movements. Public employee unions opposed the war in Vietnam, and many of the New Left's young cadres went into education, social services, and other public sector occupations after leaving the campus. The unionization of public employees likely would have happened regardless, but the movement drew much of its élan and its personnel from the political currents swirling around it. It is easy to forget that many of the most epochal moments of the period took place in a labor milieu, from the 1963 March on Washington to the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr amidst the Memphis sanitation workers' strike.<sup>23</sup>

The militant early history of public employee unionism offers a rich vein of experience for those looking to re-politicize the movement today. One of the most effective and influential organizations of the period was the Social Service Employees Union (SSEU), an independent union of New York City social workers that broke away from AFSCME District Council 37 (DC 37) in the early 1960s. SSEU had scores of socialists, New

22 Catarina Principe and Dan Russell, "Asking the Right Questions," *Jacobin*, August 26, 2015.

23 William P. Jones, *The March on Washington: Jobs, Freedom, and the Forgotten History of Civil Rights* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014); Michael K. Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King's Last Campaign* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008).

Leftists, and civil rights activists in its ranks who joined with more traditional trade union militants to build a remarkable vehicle for politicized public employee unionism. In the winter of 1965, it waged an illegal strike that shut down New York’s welfare department for a month and led to the creation of the city’s modern collective bargaining system. Until its reabsorption into DC 37 in 1969, SSEU consistently fought to put the level and quality of public services on the bargaining table and built political alliances with welfare recipients to represent their demands. Its radical approach to unionism was inseparable from the larger political context, and it waned as the New Left and Civil Rights Movement went into decline.<sup>24</sup>

The task of today’s new radicals is to strengthen the links between the “political revolution” launched by the Sanders campaign and the growing mood of discontent in labor’s remaining ranks. This is the only way to resuscitate the lost tradition of militant and democratic public sector unionism, and to avoid the twin dangers facing these currents: reversion to a narrow electoralism on one hand, and the lure of the quick fix on the other. ✎

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24 For more on the SSEU and the big wave of public employee unionization, see Joe Burns, *Strike Back: Using the Militant Tactics of Labor’s Past to Reignite Public Sector Unionism Today* (Brooklyn: Ig Publishing, 2014).



**Richard Lachmann's informative autopsy of corruption in the counterinsurgency complex traces America's staggering defeats in Afghanistan and Iraq to a lack of equipment, domestic will, and local partners. This essay responds that the Pentagon retains the capacity to physically decimate revolutionary movements but suffers from a chronic shortage of political authority abroad. Power, in the Arendtian sense, has only come when US administrators deferred to the local society, as they did in Germany and Japan. Such deference in the greater Middle East is functionally inconceivable for today's policymakers. Citizens in the prime sites of US militarism repudiate Washington's interventions. Hence, US soldiers and Marines continue trying to impose Washington's designs through force — and in vain — but not for lack of material, training, homeland support, or foreign cronies. Not only is the phenomenon of military defeat broader than the variables Lachmann identifies; its political-economic constituents extend beyond the neoconservative-neoliberal clique he fingers for the Afghanistan and Iraq wars.**

# THE LIMITS OF MILITARY COUNTERREVOLUTION

JASON BROWNLEE

America's recent wars in South Asia and the Middle East have inflicted extraordinary physical damage and wreaked seemingly endless havoc. Operations in Afghanistan and Iraq during 2001–2014 totaled \$1.6 trillion.<sup>1</sup> Once long-term veterans' care, disability payments, and other economic effects are included, estimates rise to \$4–\$6 trillion.<sup>2</sup> Related reports count over one million Americans wounded in Afghanistan and Iraq, in addition to nearly seven thousand killed.<sup>3</sup> A conservative tally of local civilian casualties in these countries reaches the hundreds of thousands. Mass destruction has not brought political order to Kabul, Baghdad, or (if one adds the 2011 Libya war) Tripoli.

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1 Amy Belasco, *The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2014).

2 Neta C Crawford, *US Budgetary Costs of Wars through 2016: \$4.79 Trillion and Counting* (Providence, RI: Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs, Brown University, 2016).

3 Jamie Reno, "VA Stops Releasing Data On Injured Vets as Total Reaches Grim Milestone," *International Business Times* (2013). <http://icasualties.org/> All subsequent data on US casualties in Afghanistan and Iraq come from this source.

Dictatorship has been followed by civil war and interstate conflict among regional powers.

These conflagrations present a historic opportunity for correcting US policy, but mainstream critiques have been stunningly myopic.

At the peak of government, foreign policy learning remains more self-exculpatory than self-reflective. The cutting-edge diagnosis is that proper “counterinsurgency” requires a more serious political commitment than what Washington made in 2001–2016. Take, for example, the argument of President Donald Trump’s Deputy National Security Adviser Nadia Schadlow.<sup>4</sup> In her 2017 book, *War and the Art of Governance: Consolidating Combat Success into Political Victory*, Schadlow faults civilian and military leaders for ignoring history and not learning that they must bridge the gap between conquest and governance.<sup>5</sup> Her remedy: US leaders must utilize “ground forces” not only to wage war but also to “set a foundation for the development of longer-term strategic outcomes.” This approach, when “done well,” can produce stable democratic allies such as Germany and Japan; when “done poorly,” it leads to fiascoes like Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>6</sup> While she condemns historical amnesia, though, Schadlow barely mentions Vietnam or, more recently, how US leaders pondered America’s failure there as they hatched the abortive 2010 troops surge in Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup> With wildly tendentious recall, she then blames the gap between firepower and authority on a lack of technical erudition — a conclusion not unlike the Vietnam War autopsies she fails to cite.<sup>8</sup>

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4 Schadlow, a protégé of National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster, stepped down in April 2018, after three months in her new post, when Trump replaced McMaster with John Bolton. Cristiano Lima, “Deputy national security adviser resigns as Bolton takes over,” *Politico*, April 11, 2018.

5 Nadia Schadlow, *War and the Art of Governance: Consolidating Combat Success Into Political Victory* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2017): 220.

6 *Ibid.*, 272.

7 Michael Hastings, *The Operators: The Wild and Terrifying Inside Story of America’s War in Afghanistan* (New York: Penguin, 2012): 132.

8 Schadlow, *War and the Art of Governance: Consolidating Combat Success Into Political Victory* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2017): 14-15.

The inclination to fault the execution of US regime change wars, rather than their conception, extends well beyond Trump’s councilors. Barack Obama, who famously called Operation Iraqi Freedom a “dumb war,” was unwilling to repudiate the premise that the United States should try and “consolidate” its battlefield victories into overseas rule.<sup>9</sup> The Afghanistan surge was Exhibit A, but there was also Libya. Reflecting on his role in catalyzing a civil war by intervening in Libya in 2011, Obama remarked:

[W]e [and] our European partners underestimated the need to come in full force if you’re going to do this ... it’s the day after Qaddafi is gone ... At that moment, there has to be a much more aggressive effort to rebuild societies that didn’t have any civic traditions.<sup>10</sup>

In 2016, he told documentarian Greg Barker: “[T]he lesson we learned from Iraq and Afghanistan is that, in the absence of our willingness to govern these areas, often our intervention doesn’t solve the problem and in fact can make it worse.”<sup>11</sup>

Such a “lesson” would hardly deter advocates of the next invasion. On the contrary, regime change hawks can tote Schadlow’s book and vow — sincerely but unoriginally — “This time, we’ve got to govern.” Scholarly critics of US foreign policy tend to be more insightful than Beltway intellectuals. But even their theories can be deceptively reassuring.

In the fall 2017 issue of *Catalyst*, Richard Lachmann identifies many pathologies in America’s military apparatus. In particular, he provides a well-researched discussion of how military-industrial corporatists siphon US tax revenue and foreign resources. While usefully tracing such corruption, his article understates the scope of the problem behind

9 Barack Obama, “Transcript: Obama’s [October 2, 2002] Speech Against The Iraq War,” *National Public Radio* (2009).

10 Thomas L. Friedman, “Obama on the World,” *New York Times*, August 8, 2014.

11 *The Final Year*, directed by Greg Barker (2018).

America's latest wars. Specifically, Lachmann underestimates just how willing and capable US officials have been at putting American bodies and revenues into lethal ground operations and profligate overseas occupations that enrich local and foreign capitalists.

In this response, I situate Lachmann's criticism in a larger reinterpretation of the record of US military interventions that reflects the enduring difference between military power and political power. America has failed at imposing its preferences in South Asia and the Middle East not for lack of enormous human and economic commitments, but despite them. My argument underlines many of Lachmann's points, takes issue with certain claims, and provides *Catalyst* readers an alternative to the worldview of Schadlow, Obama, and leading interventionists.

Lachmann contends that the United States has failed to achieve its objectives in Afghanistan and Iraq because US military forces have not had the domestic support, the armaments, and the overseas partners necessary to defeat insurgencies. Fearing domestic outrage over casualties, US officials have been reticent to order troops to work or fight closely with Afghans and Iraqis. Pentagon welfare has funded big-ticket, less-needed projects like the Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II (an air-to-air fighter) and siphoned spending from weapons that are used against Taliban or Islamic State fighters. Finally, while US officials and private contractors profited from military occupation, their crony capitalism excluded and alienated the local elites they needed as partners. Lachmann suggests in closing that the United States went nearly thirty years after Vietnam before launching an "invasion or counterinsurgency war." Therefore, another such operation is not likely in the near future.<sup>12</sup>

Lachmann frames his article as a counterargument to Niall Ferguson and like-minded imperialists. But much of it reads like a variation on Ferguson's theme that "Americans are unwilling to pay the financial or

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Lachmann, "The US Military: Without Rival & Without Victory," *Catalyst* 1, no. 3 (2017): 147.

human cost of maintaining their empire.”<sup>13</sup> Lachmann does not dispatch the premises to which Ferguson and fellow interventionists subscribe. Instead, he faults the Pentagon for not marshalling the resources to accomplish the task. His essay implies that foreign military occupation and “counterinsurgency” are viable, so long as US officials surmount certain technical problems. (The term counterinsurgency has been employed as a euphemism for counterrevolution that, in the words of Eqbal Ahmad, “serves to conceal the reality of a foreign policy dedicated to combating revolutions abroad and helps to relegate revolutionaries to the status of outlaws.”)<sup>14</sup>

Lachmann maintains the United States can win its counterinsurgency wars (i.e., counterrevolutionary wars) under three conditions: 1) if the US government neutralizes or ignores Americans’ aversion to US casualties and sends its servicepersons further into harm’s way; 2) if the Pentagon receives enough money to buy its soldiers and Marines the tools for decimating indigenous revolts; and 3) if America’s viceroy share the spoils of occupation with local intermediaries who can control the general population. Further, Lachmann’s closing argument implies that if the US government overcame these challenges and waged counterinsurgency appropriately (or avoided it completely), the United States would deter Russia and regional powers from spreading into nearby countries.

While I agree with many elements of Lachmann’s account, I disagree with his diagnosis of the US “record of military defeat since the end of the Cold War.” America is not losing wars because of glitches in its counterinsurgency apparatus. Rather, the United States has suffered staggering costs with limited gains because imposing US preferences through force has long been, and remains, normatively and politically bankrupt. Recent interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan again exposed this deficiency; they did not produce it.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>14</sup> Eqbal Ahmad, *The Selected Writings of Eqbal Ahmad* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006): 36-37.

There was no historical basis for expecting firepower would produce influence; that violence would yield control. When it comes to the United States provoking and besieging indigenous movements for self-rule, armed supremacy has periodically concealed — but never filled — a void of authority.

The United States has enjoyed supremacy of arms over indigenous nationalist movements since 1898, when US forces took the Philippines and Cuba from Spain. The capacity to physically decimate revolutionary movements never went away, even in Vietnam and other quagmires. Meanwhile, political power, in the Arendtian sense of mobilizing people toward shared goals, has persistently eluded US commanders.<sup>15</sup> This is the “governing” authority that Schadlow and Obama dream of in better-designed, future wars.

Historically, the power to govern has only manifested when US officials surrendered primary control to the local society, as they did in Germany and Japan. Such deference in South Asia and the Middle East is functionally inconceivable for today’s policymakers. Citizens in Afghanistan, Iraq, and most nearby countries repudiate Washington’s interventions. If seriously consulted, they would demand the United States withdraw or radically retrench its forces. Hence, US soldiers and Marines continue trying to impose Washington’s designs through force. That they have done so in vain does not mean they have wanted for materiel, training, contact with their targets, or local cronies.

### AMERICAN EXPERIENCES WITH VIOLENCE AND POWER

America’s unrivaled levels of military spending and its prolonged series of defeats looks less puzzling if one recalls the ontological distinction Hannah Arendt drew between violence and power. Violence is the

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<sup>15</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1970).

application of force to inflict physical damage; power mobilizes human bodies to accomplish shared goals. Violence can eliminate power but not replace it:

The head-on clash between Russian tanks and the entirely nonviolent resistance of the Czechoslovak people is a textbook case of a confrontation between violence and power in their pure states... Violence can always destroy power; out of the barrel of a gun grows the most effective command, resulting in the most instant and perfect obedience. What never can grow out of it is power.<sup>16</sup>

Often a surfeit of violence belies a lack of power. Looking at Vietnam, Arendt wrote “the allegedly ‘greatest power on earth’ is helpless to end a war, clearly disastrous for all concerned, in one of the earth’s smallest countries.”<sup>17</sup> A half-century later, the description fits US campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, “graveyard of empires.”

Arendt’s insights help make sense of what Lachmann calls the “dichotomy between unparalleled [US] military advantage over all rival powers and a virtually unblemished record of military defeat since the end of the Cold War.”<sup>18</sup> America’s “military advantage” is an advantage in violence, in destructive capability, like the Soviet Union’s advantage over Czechoslovak protesters. Its record of “military defeat” is a record of political defeat. It is a defeat in the contest for power, like the United States’ defeat in Vietnam. (For the purpose of maintaining this distinction, I will refer to violence as “military power” and to the Arendtian sense of power as “political power.”)

America’s most infamous defeats have often followed a string of battlefield “victories.” Lachmann rightly notes the United States “failed to achieve its objectives in Iraq and Afghanistan.”<sup>19</sup> However, that failure

16 Ibid., 52-53.

17 Ibid., 86.

18 Lachmann, “The US Military: Without Rival & Without Victory,” 117.

19 Ibid.

came after US forces overwhelmed enemy platoons and claimed their territory. In Afghanistan in 2001, US forces won the Battle of Mazar-e-Sharif, the Battle of Kabul, and the Battle of Kandahar. In Iraq in 2003, they triumphed in the Battle of Najaf and the Battle of Baghdad, leading President George W. Bush to trumpet the end of “major combat operations.” Americans soon learned these military successes did not cinch the political task of establishing self-sustaining, peaceful governments in Kabul and Baghdad.

Further examples of military power and political weakness can be found in Obama and Trump’s interventions. US forces and local surrogates won the Battle of Tripoli and the Battle of Sirte (in Libya 2011), as well as a second Battle of Sirte (in 2016) against the emerging threat of Islamic State (IS). Other tactical victories against IS include the Nangarhar Offensive (in Afghanistan 2016), the Third Battle of Fallujah and the Battle of Mosul (in Iraq 2016–17), and the Battle of Raqqa (in Syria 2017). The peak of military power and political impotence came when the US Air Force reportedly killed several dozen IS fighters in Nangarhar, Afghanistan in April 2017 with the GBU-43/B Massive Ordnance Air Blast. Carrying the power of eleven tons of TNT, the “MOAB” (aka, “Mother of All Bombs”) is one of the most destructive conventional weapons in the Pentagon’s arsenal.<sup>20</sup> That violent spectacle belied Trump’s desperation to stabilize Afghanistan by sending thousands of more troops.<sup>21</sup>

America’s ample overseas capacity for physical violence and its shortage of political power is vivid in the post–Cold War period, but hardly new. Earlier experiences in East and Southeast Asia, for example, presaged today’s patterns.<sup>22</sup> Between 1898 and 1975, the United States

20 Spencer Ackerman and Sune Engel Rasmussen, “36 Isis militants killed in US ‘mother of all bombs’ attack, Afghan ministry says,” *Guardian*, April 14, 2017.

21 Missy Ryan, “As advisory role grows in Afghanistan, so does risk to U.S. troops,” *Washington Post*, November 28, 2017.

22 Similar patterns can be found in US counterrevolutions in the Caribbean and Central America. See Minxin Pei and Sara Kasper, *Lessons from the Past: The American Record on Nation Building* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003); Christopher J. Coyne and Steve Davies, “Empire: Public Goods and Bads,” *Econ Journal Watch* vol. 4 (2007); Greg Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop: Latin*

applied historic levels of military power against the people of the Philippines, Japan, and Vietnam. But the US government also discovered that decimating these countries was simpler than subduing them. In order for US diplomats and generals to exercise authority, they needed to compromise with the people they had recently been killing. In effect, they had to submit to the societies they sought to mold. Where US administrations deferred to indigenous ideas about independence and self-determination (in the Philippines and Japan), they were able to follow military victory with varying levels of political success. Where they did not make such concessions (in Vietnam), the devastating application of US weaponry could not stop the drive toward national liberation.

After the United States defeated Spain in 1898, US presidents William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt refused to recognize the new Philippine Republic led by President Emilio Aguinaldo. US forces targeted Aguinaldo and his followers in a vicious campaign of mass execution and torture.<sup>23</sup> The Philippine-American War of 1899–1902 killed tens of thousands of Filipinos outright while contributing to the deaths of some hundred thousand more, in a conflict-related cholera epidemic.<sup>24</sup> Force of arms brought the archipelago country under American control, as a US territory. In the decades that followed, however, the governors-general sent from Washington found themselves relying on the same indigenous administrative class McKinley and Roosevelt had rejected. Land redistribution and elections amplified the power of Aguinaldo’s fellow “*ilustrados*” (educated ones).<sup>25</sup>

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*America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).

23 Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Stuart Creighton Miller, *Benevolent Assimilation: The American conquest of the Philippines, 1899-1903* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982).

24 John M Gates, “War-Related Deaths in the Philippines, 1898-1902,” *Pacific Historical Review* 53, no. 3 (1984): 375-76.

25 Ruby R Paredes, ed. *Philippine Colonial Democracy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Southeast Asian Studies, 1988).

Eventually, an ex-rebel and Aguinaldo protégé, Manuel Quezon, led the country toward becoming a semi-autonomous commonwealth (in 1934) and a free nation-state. US administrators were impelled to work with Quezon and his fellow oligarchs, effectively striking the *modus vivendi* they had earlier fought to avoid.<sup>26</sup>

Japan is described by intervention advocates as the high-water mark of US “nation-building,” but that narrative inverts the historical record. The occupation of Japan from 1945 to 1952 showcased not the reach of US influence, but its boundaries. The grim backdrop to reconstruction, of course, was Japan’s near-total demolition. During World War II, the United States laid waste to sixty-seven Japanese cities with fire bombs, all before dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>27</sup> However, in Japan (unlike in the Philippines and Iraq), the end of the war meant the end of fighting. There was no “insurgency” to counter; US servicepersons suffered no postwar combat fatalities. Even in such favorable circumstances, US officials did not try to build a new nation or a new state. Instead, they refurbished indigenous institutions and reemployed their former foes. America’s suzerain of the Pacific, General Douglas MacArthur, retained the emperor as a symbolic figure, revived the Japanese parliament, preserved some 99 percent of Japan’s bureaucracy, and allowed conservative parties to retake control of government. America’s efforts in Japan certainly compare favorably to its mixed legacy in the Philippines and the debacle that would follow in Vietnam.<sup>28</sup> But success was predicated on local qualified personnel and social traditions that supported an orderly government.<sup>29</sup>

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26 Benedict Anderson, “Cacique Democracy in the Philippines: Origins and Dreams,” *New Left Review* I/169 (1988).

27 “The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara,” directed by Errol Morris, Sony Pictures Classics, 2003.

28 Jason Brownlee, “Can America Nation-Build?,” *World Politics* 59, no. 2 (2007): 324-25; John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999).

29 John W. Dower, “A Warning From History: Don’t Expect Democracy in Iraq,” *Boston Review* (2003).

America's experience in Vietnam could not have been more different than its project in Japan. In Vietnam, the US government would not peacefully acquiesce to the popular wish for independence. Instead, US commanders followed the Japanese and French empires in a doomed bid for geopolitical control. After French forces withdrew from Vietnam in 1954, the White House tried in vain to shore up the "Republic of Vietnam," a puppet regime led by the aristocratic Ngo Dinh Diem and, after his assassination in 1963, a succession of military dictators.<sup>30</sup> Simultaneously, the Department of Defense tried to weaken the communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam. US bombers dropped an estimated 4.6 million tons of ordnance (over 50 percent more than what all Allies in World War II had dropped) in the country's north and south.<sup>31</sup> In addition, the Pentagon deployed some nine million servicepersons. At the peak of fighting in 1968, over half a million US men in uniform were serving in the country. Even as the American force grew, though, so too did the resistance of Ho Chi Minh and his fellow revolutionaries. One of the hottest zones of the Cold War, Vietnam subdued a military juggernaut at a devastating price. Estimates from the government of Vietnam count 2 million civilians and 1.1 million soldiers, of both north and south, killed.<sup>32</sup>

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### SEARCHING FOR EFFECTIVE COUNTERREVOLUTION

The record of these cases indicates the limits on American power are more severe than Lachmann acknowledges. Even at the apex of its post-WWII influence, the United States was not "able to ... select the governments of countries it dominated, or at least remove governments

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30 James M Carter, *Inventing Vietnam: the United States and State Building, 1954-1968* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

31 Robert Buzzanco, *Masters of War: Military Dissent and Politics in the Vietnam Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

32 <https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War>

it did not like, [and] defeat all major Third World national revolutions.”<sup>33</sup> Rather, the country’s political and military emissaries always worked interdependently with the societies they were charged with governing. The more they compromised — and the less “counterinsurgency” they attempted — the more successful they were.

It is important to grasp this larger pattern if one wants to dispel the bromides of Schadlow, Ferguson, and other interventionists. These hawks do not infer from the Philippines, Japan, and Vietnam a set of enduring structural constraints, which will shape the efforts of even highly talented, well-equipped occupiers in future missions. Instead, they see a record of good and bad choices. The best methods (see Japan) can be emulated. The worst practices (Vietnam) can be avoided to deliver better outcomes the next time. This approach also provides a self-reassuring explanation for failure. When an intervention goes awry, it was because of lousy execution, not fatal assumptions.

In US policymaking, this mindset is pernicious and strongly bipartisan. After first supporting the Iraq War, many liberal commentators and Democratic Party politicians blamed the ensuing fiasco on poor planning by the Bush administration. Their explanation for Iraq’s implosion was that Bush had not listened to the State Department, had not deployed the half-million troops that would have stabilized Iraq, and had not sent a more qualified proconsul than Paul Bremer. Under Obama, mainstream liberals continued to believe in the political viability of counterinsurgency wars. They supported a larger increase in the number of uniformed personnel sent to Afghanistan, which failed to impart a stable government in Kabul, defeat the Taliban, or deprive non-state militants of a safe haven. The same crowd endorsed regime change in Libya in 2011, then, after civil war engulfed the country, rued the absence of a stabilizing US-EU occupation.<sup>34</sup>

The temptation to treat America’s wars as a technical challenge

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33 Lachmann, “The US Military: Without Rival & Without Victory,” 147.

34 Robert Parry, “Democrats Are Now the Aggressive War Party,” *Consortium News*, June 8, 2016.

is pervasive and the rebuttal must be equally thorough. I address Lachmann's thesis point by point but my basic claim is this: When locals don't want to be ruled and Americans don't want to stop ruling, there is no technical panacea for the contradictions of military counterrevolution. Specifically, there is no way to force an independence-yearning population to accept US dominance through the methods Lachmann's article implies: 1) by deploying more-skilled, better-equipped soldiers, 2) by minimizing troop losses and rallying support at home, or 3) by paying off more local cronies. All three of these approaches were tried with the Afghanistan and Iraq wars (including during both "surges"). They had little effect swinging events in the promised direction.

### MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL WELFARE

Lachmann devotes nearly half the article to "the conflicting requirements of the military-industrial complex and of winning wars in the early twenty-first century." The gist is that "US troops arrive with the wrong weapons and without the extensive training needed for counterinsurgency."<sup>35</sup> Much of the section lucidly traces corporate welfare in the defense budget. It does not establish, however, that these inefficiencies limit military power in the field.

The article's first tables illustrate that the US military has far outspent OECD countries and, "[t]he American military has not had to restrict war plans in the post-1945 era due to budget constraints."<sup>36</sup> When it comes to counterrevolution, though, Lachmann feels that the Army and the Marine Corps have been hamstrung. Perverse incentives drive officers and corporate CEOs to waste money on the F-35, a jet meant to fight other jets, not for stopping rebels with IEDs. The point is valid and the waste Lachmann describes has reached satirical levels. Private lobbyists and their partners in Congress have not just developed unneeded

35 Lachmann, "The US Military: Without Rival & Without Victory," 121, 35-36.

36 *Ibid.*, 119.

warplanes, they have also foisted hundreds of M1 Abrams tanks on the Army that the top brass does not want.<sup>37</sup>

While highlighting the profligacy of US defense spending, Lachmann risks misgauging the scope of money thrown at the Pentagon. There is little basis to believe that, on the battlefield, the personnel fighting America's wars are underfunded.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, it would be unreasonable to infer that US soldiers and Marines would wield more political power if fewer resources went to the F-35 and more money went to counterrevolution. In terms of military capability, it does not matter if the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter is “the most expensive weapon in development” — unless we assume that spending on that fighter drains money away from soldiers and Marines and impairs their ability to apprehend or shoot people. Given the size of the Pentagon budget, it would be a stretch to make that assumption. The National Liberation Front in Vietnam did not win because US forces ran out of bullets or bombs. Similarly, Taliban and Sunni Arab fighters have not persisted because US forces wanted for night-vision goggles, vehicles, and bullets to maim and kill them. As I describe below, they possessed the materiel for pursuing up-close, lethal missions.

According to Lachmann, US servicepersons lack not just gear, but expertise. Again, one can question whether it makes sense to fault the Pentagon for not gathering the “extensive training needed for counter-insurgency.”<sup>39</sup> US operations in Afghanistan and Iraq have employed countless local interpreters, as well as top academics, and they have been spearheaded by the nation's leading warrior-scholars.<sup>40</sup> It strains

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37 Marjorie Censer, “The end of the tank? The Army says it doesn't need it, but industry wants to keep building it,” *Washington Post*, January 31, 2014; Al Madrigal, “Tanks but No Tanks,” in *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. Comedy Central, 2013.

38 Of course, this does not imply that the US government sufficiently funds services for military personnel after they return home. See David Finkel, *Thank You For Your Service* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2013).

39 Lachmann, “The US Military: Without Rival & Without Victory,” 135-36.

40 Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory: The American Occupation and the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy to Iraq* (Henry Holt and Company, 2005); Noah Feldman, *What We Owe Iraq: War and the Ethics of Nation Building* (Princeton University Press, 2004).

credulity to imagine that the secret to future success lies in recruiting more figures in the mold of David Petraeus or, from an earlier time, Roger Hilsman.

As much as Lachmann criticizes waste in the military-industrial complex, his discussion implies that (even) more money — for counterinsurgency weapons and specialists — would deliver better results in places like Afghanistan and Iraq. An alternate reading would be that the US armed forces have been very successful at getting the hardware and people they request for fighting purposes. Despite being showered with resources, they have failed to achieve the political results that foreign policymakers envision.

### CASUALTY TOLERANCE

Just as Lachmann misjudges the scope of funding and training for US counterrevolutionary forces, he underestimates the willingness of politicians and officers to send US servicepersons on dangerous missions.<sup>41</sup> Historical evidence supports Lachmann's claim that the American public does not tolerate high levels of casualties. This perspective, however, did not dramatically rise after the end of the Cold War, as he contends. The concerns Americans have today about losing their men and women in uniform were present in the Vietnam era as well. Opinion surveys during the Korean, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq wars reveal a consistent, logarithmic pattern: with each tenfold increase in US military deaths (from ten to one hundred, from one

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Thomas E Ricks, "Officers With PhDs Advising War Effort," *Washington Post*, February 5, 2007.

41 Lachmann's claims about US presidents deferring to the military are also debatable, but less germane for the present discussion. He claims, for instance, that the 2003 Iraq War was "the single occasion when civilian officials were more eager to fight a war than the generals." Lachmann, "The US Military: Without Rival & Without Victory," 125. Prominent counterexamples would include the 1990-91 Iraq War and the 2011 Libya War. Bartholomew Sparrow, *The Strategist: Brent Scowcroft and the Call of National Security* (New York: Public Affairs, 2015); Michael Hastings, "Inside Obama's War Room," *Rolling Stone* (2011).

hundred to one thousand, etc.), the public's approval of US involvement dropped by 15 percentage points.<sup>42</sup> This correlation is remarkably robust given the recent upticks in media coverage and troop veneration described by Lachmann.<sup>43</sup> Overall, decades of polling data do not indicate Americans were previously cavalier about servicemembers dying, then after the mid-1970s became unusually intolerant of soldiers dying. Throughout the post-WWII period, the public has harbored qualms about uses of force that imperiled Americans. Meanwhile, the policymaking elite has, just as steadily, ignored those qualms and pursued high-risk warfare.

Surveys of elites in government and the private sector establish that these figures tend to be significantly more hawkish than ordinary Americans. Chicago Council on Foreign Relations polls in 1998 showed that “opinion leaders” were more than twice as likely as members of the general public to favor a unilateral response to an international crisis (44 percent vs. 21 percent). They were also more inclined to send US troops if Arab states attacked Israel (69 percent vs. 38 percent), North Korea invaded South Korea (74 percent vs. 30 percent), or Iraq attacked Saudi Arabia (79 percent vs. 46 percent).<sup>44</sup> Analyzing decades of such data, Benjamin Page and Marshall Bouton concluded that regular citizens tend to be more focused on “security of domestic well-being, especially job protection” and “year after year ... have been less eager

42 John E Mueller, “Trends in Popular Support for the Wars in Korea and Vietnam,” *American Political Science Review* 65, no. 2 (1971): 366; Gary C. Jacobson, “A Tale of Two Wars: Public Opinion on the U.S. Military Interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (2010): 606. The sheer number of casualties the United States suffered in Korea and Vietnam (over ninety thousand killed) exceeds, by an order of magnitude, losses in Afghanistan and Iraq (nearly seven thousand killed).

43 Lachmann, “The US Military: Without Rival & Without Victory,” 137-39.

44 Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, *American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy, 1998: Part 1: Opinion Leader Survey* (Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, 2000), 90, 104; *American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy, 1998: Part 2: General Population Survey* (Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, 2000), 151, 68. See also, Dina Smeltz et al., *United in Goals, Divided on Means: Opinion Leaders Survey Results and Partisan Breakdowns* from the 2014 Chicago Survey of American Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy (Chicago, IL: Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2015), 11-14.

than decision makers to commit US troops to major combat abroad, where loved ones may become casualties of some official's geopolitical calculations."<sup>45</sup> This gap in attitudes extends to actual policy, where the top military authorities have not balked at deploying their men and women into the kinds of hazardous missions Lachmann recommends. Casualty tolerance, among the nation's decision-makers, cost Americans dearly in Iraq and Afghanistan.

### SURGES AND LOSSES

The US government's aversion to incurring casualties hampers its counterrevolutionary wars, according to Lachmann. This reluctance to imperil service members has isolated US forces from vital indigenous allies, "reducing the possibilities of accumulating the intelligence and local goodwill necessary for winning counterinsurgency wars." The result is a disengaged, undermanned presence and a precipitous retreat.<sup>46</sup> Lachmann also figures that the media's coverage of US combat fatalities has forced the use of less proximate, less discriminating methods of violence, e.g., rockets and missiles, rather than rifles and mortars. This "risk transfer warfare" is supposed to keep US casualties low but "at the cost of increasing the deaths of civilian noncombatants ... [and] further angering the local population."<sup>47</sup>

Recent history from Iraq and Afghanistan shows US presidents and generals bucked public disapproval of the wars and ordered soldiers and Marines into the very kinds of dangerous, close encounters with civilians and combatants that Lachmann argues are "necessary for winning counterinsurgency wars." In particular, the Bush and Obama national security teams seized on "clear-hold-build" as a method for

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45 Benjamin I Page and Marshall M Bouton, *The Foreign Policy Disconnect: What Americans Want from Our Leaders but Don't Get* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 241.

46 Lachmann, "The US Military: Without Rival & Without Victory," 120.

47 *Ibid.*, 141.

bringing US troops into contact with local Iraqis and Afghans, presumably the kinds of engagement Lachmann favors.<sup>48</sup> This approach took many lives without eliminating armed opposition to the governments in Baghdad and Kabul.<sup>49</sup>

As US forces pioneered clear-hold-build and disseminated it from 2005 to 2009, they exposed themselves to some of the heaviest fighting of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. In 2005 then-colonel H.R. McMaster devised the approach as he sought to gather intelligence and allies in the northwestern Iraqi town of Tal Afar.<sup>50</sup> In 2007, Bush ordered twenty thousand additional troops to Iraq and sent counterinsurgency guru Petraeus to expand McMaster's model. The work of US troops intensified as they sought to apply clear-hold-build in the recalcitrant Sunni Triangle. The surge peaked with a total of around 170,000 by the middle of June 2007. April-June had been the deadliest quarter for US military forces in Iraq (331 killed) and 2007 would be the deadliest year for them (904 killed).<sup>51</sup>

These losses confound any claims that Bush and the Pentagon were afraid of putting more men and women into combat. Notwithstanding the sacrifices that were made, the uptick in violence did not grant the United States a new ability to shape events. US military and Iraqi civilian deaths declined in subsequent years, feeding debate over whether the surge had reconciled Sunnis and Shias or simply produced a temporary détente.<sup>52</sup> As it happened, Obama's attempt to replicate

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48 David H Ucko, "Beyond Clear-Hold-Build: Rethinking Local-Level Counterinsurgency after Afghanistan," *Contemporary Security Policy* 34, no. 3 (2013).

49 Lachmann discusses the Iraq surge but does not reconcile its empirics with his argument that US wars would be more successful with better-trained, more-engaged forces on the ground. Lachmann, "The US Military: Without Rival & Without Victory," 142.

50 George Packer, "The Lesson of Tal Afar," *New Yorker*, April 10, 2006.

51 "Timeline: Invasion, Surge, Withdrawal; U.S. Forces in Iraq," *Reuters*, December 15, 2011.

52 Stephen Biddle, Jeffrey A Friedman, and Jacob N Shapiro, "Testing the surge: Why did violence decline in Iraq in 2007?," *International Security* 37, no. 1 (2012); Nir Rosen, "The myth of the surge," *Rolling Stone*, March 6, 2008.

this shift in Afghanistan suggested events in 2007–8 had had more to do with relations among Iraqis than with the addition of two US divisions protecting/battling the locals.

By January 2009 Americans were starting to tire of war in Afghanistan, but Obama took office set on reversing the Taliban's gains.<sup>53</sup> To execute a new strategy, he tapped General Stanley McChrystal, a West Point graduate and former Green Beret who had overseen clandestine missions at the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) from 2003 to 2008. JSOC is credited with capturing Saddam Hussein and killing Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, secretive assaults that differ from the "risk transfer warfare" Lachmann describes.<sup>54</sup> Defense Secretary Robert Gates claimed McChrystal's appointment would help the administration get "fresh thinking, fresh eyes on the problem."<sup>55</sup>

Fresh thinking soon yielded a familiar approach. In December 2009, Obama announced he would send an additional thirty thousand troops to Afghanistan. The aim was for US forces to clear the Taliban from "eastern and southern Afghanistan" then "hold and build" those areas.<sup>56</sup> Just as the plan was getting underway, Obama replaced McChrystal with Petraeus, in one of the war's most melodramatic turns.<sup>57</sup> Notwithstanding the spectacle, McChrystal's exit did not disrupt the flow of soldiers into and across Afghanistan.<sup>58</sup>

The McChrystal-Petraeus period lasted from mid-2009 to mid-2011 and involved some of the fiercest fighting in America's longest war. The death toll for US service members went from 317 in 2009 to a peak of

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53 Chris Good, "When and Why Did Americans Turn Against the War in Afghanistan?," *Atlantic*, June 22, 2011; Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010).

54 Jeremy Scahill, "JSOC: The Black Ops Force That Took Down Bin Laden," *The Nation*, May 2, 2011.

55 M J Stephey, "The New US Commander in Afghanistan," *Time*, May 12, 2009.

56 "In the Taliban's Grip [map]," *New York Times*, December 2, 2009.

57 Michael Hastings, "The Runaway General: The Profile That Brought Down McChrystal," *Rolling Stone*, June 22, 2010.

58 Dan Murphy, "General Petraeus and General McChrystal: same policy, different face?," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 24, 2010.

499 in 2010, then to 418 in 2011 and 310 in 2012. In total, more than twice as many Americans lost their lives in Afghanistan during Obama's first term than perished in that country under George W. Bush.<sup>59</sup>

In summary, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars involved numerous junctures when US presidents and generals could have behaved in the ways Lachmann ascribes to them: bowing to public opinion, refusing to risk more troops, and insulating servicemembers from harm. Instead, they maintained the longstanding trends by which US elites are more hawkish and more tolerant of casualties than average citizens. The conductors of these wars overrode the public's weariness and caution; they embraced more aggressive counterrevolutionary measures; and they increased the scope and hazards of ground intervention.

### TRANSNATIONAL LOOTING

Regarding the economics of counterrevolution, Lachmann suggests an especially ruinous form of "plunder neoliberalism" cost the United States potential victories.<sup>60</sup> Essentially, crony capitalism overseas funneled wealth to US firms while depriving Afghan and Iraqi elites their expected share of the lucre. These disgruntled compradors then stood aside (or joined in) as militias targeted the occupation.

Lachmann's account both condemns neoliberal plunder and suggests that more corruption, among high-level Afghans and Iraqis, might have helped Americans buy partners and steer events. Plunder neoliberalism "robs local elites of opportunities for enrichment that were available to their Cold War counterparts in Vietnam and elsewhere,"<sup>61</sup> a statement that implies White House collaboration with Diem was a model to emulate:

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59 Nearly 75 percent of US military fatalities in Afghanistan in 2001-2016 occurred on Obama's watch.

60 Lachmann, "The US Military: Without Rival & Without Victory," 146.

61 *Ibid.*, 143.

[In Afghanistan and Iraq] private firms ... are able to import employees and goods and ... bypass the local politicians, landowners, and businessmen with whom corrupt American officials in Vietnam had to deal. Thus, privatization removes the paths through which the US government in Vietnam, Korea, and elsewhere in the twentieth century offered stable and enduring opportunities for local collaborators to enrich themselves.<sup>62</sup>

The putative result is “a zero-sum redistribution” that serves American CEOs by depriving local elites and motivating them toward “allying with insurgents, or at least standing back and allowing insurgents to push the US out of Iraq and Afghanistan ...”<sup>63</sup> Had those same elites been allowed to partake in the plunder, so the logic goes, counterrevolution would have been more successful. Such an argument is implausible and the underlying account is incomplete.

Lachmann draws attention to one component of wartime profiteering: foreigners ripping off the indigenous population. He does not discuss other components, though, and he thus understates the scope of the graft.

The mass and inequitable transfer of wealth did not amount to a sweeping expropriation of the Afghan and Iraqi owner classes: occupation made segments of the population rich — or, typically, richer. These money flows did not, contrary to Lachmann’s contentions, turn the affluent against the US occupation or make them indifferent to Taliban and Sunni Arab fighters. Unsurprisingly, many aristocratic Afghans and Iraqis supported counterrevolution. In short, Lachmann’s framework merits significant revision. The plunder was not a zero-sum conflict between US and non-US elites but a rip-off, by those elites, of ordinary citizens. It was cross-border upward redistribution — transnational looting — with winners and losers in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the United States. The process shifted resources from workers and

62 Ibid., 144.

63 Ibid.

taxpayers, in all three countries, to top figures in government and the private sector, also in all three countries.

Figures on the US missions in Afghanistan and Iraq show far more loot was available than even what Lachmann describes, particularly relative to earlier occupations. The US spent roughly \$53 billion total on reconstructing Japan and Germany during 1946–1952. The price tag of Iraqi reconstruction for 2003–2012 was \$213 billion, mostly covered by the Iraqi government (through oil sales), and \$61 billion (29 percent) paid for by the United States.<sup>64</sup> US reconstruction projects in Afghanistan are ongoing. By the end of 2014, the cost to American taxpayers was \$109 billion, more than the total Americans spent on the sixteen countries of the Marshall Plan during 1948–1952 (\$103.4 billion, adjusted for inflation).<sup>65</sup> These comparisons to post-wwii expenditures do not even include offensive military operations. On top of the main Pentagon budget, military spending for Iraq and Afghanistan in 2001–2016 approached \$1.6 trillion.<sup>66</sup>

Where did these titanic sums go? Only a sliver materialized in infrastructural improvements. Ten years after US forces invaded Iraq, the public power grid was supplying Iraqi households only six to eight hours of electricity per day and millions of Iraqis had only two hours of potable water per day.<sup>67</sup> One former US ambassador to Iraq observed, “There were many development problems, and we didn’t get much in

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64 Catherine Lutz, *Reconstructing Iraq: The Last Year and the Last Decade* (Providence, RI: Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs, Brown University, 2013), 2. Nina Serafino, Curt Tarnoff, and Dick K Nanto, *US occupation assistance: Iraq, Germany and Japan compared* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress Congressional Research Service, 2006), 1. These figures are in 2013 constant dollars.

65 John F Sopko, *Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction: Quarterly Report to Congress* (Arlington, VA: Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction, 2014): 5.

66 Crawford, *US Budgetary Costs of Wars through 2016: \$4.79 Trillion and Counting*, 6-7.

67 Lutz, *Reconstructing Iraq: The Last Year and the Last Decade*, 3; R. Jeffrey Smith, “Waste, fraud and abuse commonplace in Iraq reconstruction effort,” Center for Public Integrity (2013).

return for the \$50 billion-plus that we spent.”<sup>68</sup> Fifteen years on, Afghanistan also suffered from severe utility shortages and had struggled to productively absorb the post-2001 injection of money. “We, along with other international donors, put too much money, too quickly, into too small an economy, with too little oversight — all of which contributed to the problem,” rued the special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction.<sup>69</sup>

As rents gushed chaotically through Afghanistan and Iraq, firms and officials with access could make a killing from neoliberal plunder.<sup>70</sup> First in line were Bush-friendly US companies like Bechtel, Halliburton, and DynCorp, which snatched no-bid contracts for Iraq and made off with tens of billions of dollars.<sup>71</sup> Even these excess profits, though, amounted to a small fraction of the total amounts at play. While enriching American contractors, the US government also rained dollars upon many Iraqis and Afghans.

### “MONEY IS AMMUNITION”

As with clear-hold-build and the surges, the record of events in Iraq and Afghanistan resembles Lachmann’s prescribed counterfactual: US policymakers have already done what Lachmann recommends they should have done. Massive reconstruction and military spending from the US Treasury benefited American firms, but also enriched Afghan and Iraqi capitalists. While waging counterrevolution, the Pentagon instructed its soldiers to liberally bribe potential and actual insurgents.

68 Stuart W Bowen, *Learning from Iraq: A Final Report from the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2013): 29.

69 John F Sopko, “The United States Mission in Afghanistan: A View from SIGAR” (paper presented at the Prepared Remarks of Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction for the Sanford School of Public Policy, Duke University, Durham, NC, March 23, 2017).

70 Naomi Klein, “Baghdad Year Zero,” *Harper’s Magazine*, September 2004; Sarah Chayes, *The Punishment of Virtue: Inside Afghanistan After the Taliban* (St. Lucia, Queensland, Australia: University of Queensland Press, 2006).

71 Lutz, *Reconstructing Iraq: The Last Year and the Last Decade*, 5.

These cash flows mitigated fissures between US and local elites (as Lachmann expected). They did not, however, empower the US occupation or end the civil wars.

Like the troop surge, the Pentagon's brainchild regarding economic payouts was born in Iraq and then moved to Afghanistan. While serving in Iraq in 2003–4, Petraeus began having US soldiers dispense cash among Iraqi civilians. He later claimed that “money is ammunition ... Once money is available, the challenge is to spend it effectively and quickly to rapidly achieve measurable results.”<sup>72</sup> The Army codified this philosophy in the “Money as a Weapon System” (MAAWS) approach and the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP). CERP gave a pecuniary core to McMaster's clear-hold-build. \$4 billion of CERP funds in Iraq helped convince Sunni Arab militants to curb their attacks at the peak of the US military presence.<sup>73</sup> The model was adopted in Afghanistan. A 2009 manual on MAAWS-Afghanistan stated, “CERP funds provide Commanders with a non-lethal weapon system for high payoff projects and services.”<sup>74</sup> Once more, the key service the United States could buy was safety from local assailants.

In Iraq US companies dominated logistics and transport for the US military, but in Afghanistan the Pentagon depended on a non-American consortium, Host Nation Trucking (HNT), for those services. As a congressional subcommittee reported, HNT comprised “eight Afghan, American, and Middle Eastern companies” and handled “over 70 percent of the total goods and materiel distributed to US troops in the field, roughly 6,000 to 8,000 truck missions per month.” HNT's work, under a \$2.16 billion contract, was essential to US missions. Without it, the Pentagon would have needed to invest more of its own manpower into the task: “The HNT contract allows the United States to dedicate

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72 David H Petraeus, “Learning Counterinsurgency: Observations From Soldiering in Iraq,” (2006), 4.

73 Smith, “Waste, fraud and abuse commonplace in Iraq reconstruction effort.”

74 U.S. Forces Afghanistan, *Money as a Weapon System Afghanistan* (MAAWS-A) (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government, 2009): 5.

a greater proportion of its troops to other counterinsurgency priorities instead of logistics.” But there was a snag. The reason HNT could be such a reliable supplier, the reason the US government could delegate vital support to the consortium, was that HNT compensated the Afghans that US forces were supposed to be suppressing: “[O]utsourcing the supply chain in Afghanistan to contractors has ... had significant unintended consequences. The HNT contract fuels warlordism, extortion, and corruption, and it may be a significant source of funding for insurgents.”<sup>75</sup>

For Afghans who got their hands in the till, neoliberal plunder could be a windfall. While the HNT contract lined pockets across the countryside, elites at the core lived like tycoons. Two of the main contractors for HNT were the Watan Group, led by cousins of President Hamid Karzai, and NCL Holdings, run by the son of Minister of Defense General Abdul Rahim Wardak. These companies reaped tens of millions in US contracts (an estimated tenth of which went to paying off insurgents that would otherwise target their convoys).<sup>76</sup> The war turned the president’s brother Ahmed Wali Karzai into the de facto ruler of southern Afghanistan and helped him accrue “\$250 million a year from ... various businesses” (until his murder in 2011).<sup>77</sup> Meanwhile, another member of the presidential family, Mahmoud Karzai, drew millions from the Kabul Bank on outrageously generous terms, and contributed to the bank’s near-meltdown in 2010.

The financial crisis surrounding Kabul Bank illustrates how much the US occupation enabled local elites to cheat their fellow Afghans and US taxpayers simultaneously. Established in 2004, the private Kabul Bank was the main receptacle for US reconstruction funds. It also served as a virtual ATM for well-connected Afghans, like Mahmoud Karzai, who could obtain loans with no fixed repayment date and zero

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75 Majority Staff, “Warlord, Inc.: Extortion and Corruption Along the U.S. Supply Chain in Afghanistan,” (Washington, D.C.: Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, 2010): 2.

76 Aram Roston, “How the US Funds the Taliban,” *Nation*, November 11, 2009.

77 Peter Bergen, “Hamid Karzai: Afghanistan’s bridge-building president or just a corrupt pol?,” *Washington Post*, 2016.

interest. As these loans crept toward \$900 million, Kabul Bank scrambled for deposits from ordinary Afghans to remain solvent.<sup>78</sup> When the veritable Ponzi scheme came to light in 2010, concerned depositors rushed to withdraw their money.

Keen to preempt a total run, the Central Bank of Afghanistan bailed out the Kabul Bank, transferring \$825 million to cover what Mahmoud Karzai and other kleptocrats had pocketed. “It was a glaring example of how the greed of a small cabal of relatives and political and business cronies had stolen from both poor Afghans and the US government,” wrote the *Washington Post’s* Joshua Partlow. “The scope of the fraud was enormous: the bailout represented 5 to 6 percent of the country’s GDP.” The emergency measure cost Afghan taxpayers, but the primary funder of the Afghan economy, the United States government, effectively bore the lion’s share of the Central Bank’s expenses.<sup>79</sup>

In Iraq, politicians and businesspersons have done just as well as their Afghan counterparts. While Sunni Arab fighters could pursue CERP funds, Shia and Kurdish leaders in the country’s center and north could tap petroleum rents that dwarfed what the Pentagon could offer. In this respect, the main “zero-sum” redistribution was from tens of millions of ordinary Iraqis, who were entitled to a share of their country’s wealth, to Shia powerbrokers in Baghdad and Kurdish bigwigs in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Even after decades of devastating war and sanctions, Iraq currently has nine times the GDP, and eight times the GDP per capita, of Afghanistan.<sup>80</sup> Where Afghan profiteers scooped up tens of hundreds of millions, their Iraqi counterparts absconded with billions. During the premiership of Nouri al-Maliki (r. 2006–2014) “billions

78 Alissa J Rubin and Rod Nordland, “Kabul Bank Is Portrayed as a Private A.T.M. for Afghanistan’s Elite,” *New York Times*, March 29, 2011.

79 Joshua Partlow, *A Kingdom of Their Own: The Family Karzai and the Afghan Disaster* (New York: Knopf, 2016): 236.

80 <https://countryeconomy.com/countries/compare/afghanistan/iraq?sc=XE34>

of dollars ... [were] embezzled from state coffers ....” Nepotism even afflicted the Integrity Commission, whose mission was curbing abuse.<sup>81</sup> Well-connected Iraqis pocketed state funds with impunity and sent an estimated \$40 billion of laundered money out of the country each year.<sup>82</sup> In northern Iraq, the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government has become the dynastic fiefdom of Masoud Barzani.<sup>83</sup> Barzani — along with relatives such as his son (and KRG intelligence chief) Masrour Barzani and his nephew (and KRG prime minister) Nechirvan Barzani — have controlled tens of billions of dollars from KRG oil sales and, through those revenues, countless civil servants and judges.<sup>84</sup>

There is little question that the United States has done grievous harm to the Afghan and Iraqi economies, but transnational looting has not excluded local magnates and their flunkies.

Contrary to Lachmann, neoliberal military occupation did “offer paths to wealth for elites” in the subject countries.<sup>85</sup> Often these paths led to US coffers. The United States put more money in Iraq than it invested in its most successful cases of nation-building. Expenses for the ongoing war in Afghanistan have long since topped the costs of the Marshall Plan. Much of this Pentagon welfare transferred existing and future tax revenues to US weapons manufacturers and contractors. At the same time, the White House and the Department of Defense did not neglect their local clients. In Afghanistan, they even helped them retain their ill-gotten fortunes.

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81 International Crisis Group, *Failing Oversight: Iraq's Unchecked Government* (New York: International Crisis Group, 2011): ii, 9-10.

82 Lutz, *Reconstructing Iraq: The Last Year and the Last Decade*, 6.

83 Greg Muttitt, *Fuel on the Fire: Oil and Politics in Occupied Iraq* (New York: Random House, 2012): 293-94.

84 “Dream on Hold,” *Economist*, July 9, 2016; Erin Banco, “The curse of oil in Iraqi Kurdistan,” *GlobalPost Investigations* (2017).

85 Lachmann, “The US Military: Without Rival & Without Victory,” 146.

## COERCION NOT HEGEMONY

Counterrevolutionary wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have again exposed what violence can and cannot accomplish. US intervention forces can end dictatorships but not civil wars; they can uproot armies but not militias; they can deliver constitutions but not prosperity; and they can impose compliance but not submission. With a surplus of military force, and a shortage of political power, the United States exercises coercion but not hegemony.

It is difficult to square this reality with Lachmann's closing tale of global assent to American dominance. He writes, "The US's offer to serve as policeman of the world has been accepted by a majority of the world since 1945, and almost the entire world after 1991."<sup>86</sup> Is that so? The share of the world that supported the Non-Aligned Movement, anticapitalist and anti-imperialist revolutions, and non-American alternatives during the Cold War would likely disagree. In recent years, international dissent has been particularly stark.

Thus far in the twenty-first century there is considerable opposition to American "policing." After worldwide protests slammed the approaching US invasion of Iraq in early 2003, the *New York Times* described "world public opinion" as a second "superpower."<sup>87</sup> This rival power is especially strong in the areas of South Asia and the Middle East targeted by US counterrevolution. In 2005, 69 percent of respondents in five Arab countries listed the United States as the greatest threat to them.<sup>88</sup> Polls in 2006 showed that 62 percent of Shia Arabs and 92 percent of Sunni Arabs in Iraq supported "attacks on American forces."<sup>89</sup> These trends dispel any notion that the United States could defer to indigenous social forces, as it had in Japan, and still pursue occupation

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86 Ibid., 147.

87 Patrick E Tyler, "A New Power In the Streets," *New York Times*, February 17, 2003.

88 72 percent of respondents selected Israel. 3 percent identified Iran as the greatest threat to them. Shibley Telhami, "America in Arab eyes," *Survival* 49, no. 1 (2007): 116.

89 Ibid.

and counterrevolution. Surveys in 2008, 2009, and 2010 showed Arab respondents prioritized the US withdrawing its military from Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula, plus ending its support for Israel.<sup>90</sup>

More broadly, a WIN/Gallup International poll of sixty-six thousand people across sixty-five countries in 2013 found that a plurality of the people interviewed (24 percent) considered the United States the biggest threat to world peace.<sup>91</sup> Four years later, 35 percent of some forty-two thousand respondents across thirty-eight countries considered US “power ... a major threat to our country.”<sup>92</sup>

Large portions of the world have not accepted America’s pretention to “policeman of the world”; they have repudiated it. Armed rebels in US-occupied countries present one facet of this larger disquiet with American militarism. Any critical treatment of counterrevolutionary wars must approach it in that light — as an archaic and globally despised imposition, rather than a rusty machine that needs a tune-up.

Lachmann’s prescriptions would not change the pattern of results in American counterrevolutionary wars. Yet they imply the exact opposite: victory is within reach. The notion that (even) better equipment and training, (even) more casualty-tolerant policymakers, and (even) better-paid local partners would have improved the course of the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts is an alluring fallacy. It suggests that the right recalibrations could help a future invasion — for instance, in Iran — succeed. Lachmann neither advocates nor anticipates such a war. But, paradoxically, his modest critique of US interventionism amounts to “lessons” that hawkish commentators could cite when claiming the next war will be nothing like Iraq.

As for the likelihood of such a conflict, I do not share Lachmann’s

90 2010 Annual Arab Public Opinion Survey (College Park, MD: University of Maryland with Zogby International, 2010).

91 The distant second and third choices were Pakistan (8 percent) and China (6 percent). WIN/Gallup, “WIN/Gallup International’s annual global End of Year survey shows a brighter outlook for 2014,” news release, December 30, 2013.

92 Jacob Poushter and Dorothy Manevich, “Globally, People Point to ISIS and Climate Change as Leading Security Threats,” news release, August 1, 2017.

apparent confidence in American restraint. US officials continue to try and bludgeon their way to hegemony — in ways that have alarmed the world. Therefore, it strikes me that the problem to interrogate is not “How can America fix its war machine?” but “Why do America’s leaders keep launching wars? And under what conditions will they stop?” I pose these questions to encourage an alternate debate beyond the present exchange. I suspect the answers will be found in a combination of political economy and social mobilization.

The costs of war have been astronomical but diffuse. The rents of war have been equally astronomical, yet they are concentrated among groups that shape policy. Further, as evidenced in the Obama and Trump eras, these groups extend beyond the neoconservative clique Lachmann primarily faults for the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. These broader circles of lawmakers, corporatists, and pundits show no sign of consequentially registering the human costs of US wars. Hence, it would be naive and ahistorical to think that a nationally costly, privately profitable “defeat” like Afghanistan or Iraq would deter US elites from pursuing another counterrevolutionary war. The lessons they internalize may be the exact opposite: launch overseas military intervention as often as market opportunities and domestic constraints allow.

If the smart money is on dumb wars, then meaningful course corrections will not emerge from the self-admonitions of a well-heeled policymaking class — only from concerted public pressure. ☞

*Note: The author holds sole responsibility for the arguments expressed here. He thanks Mary Papadopoulos and Robert Vitalis for commenting on an earlier version of this essay.*



**I review the evidence for, and Brownlee's critique of, my argument that misspent money, growing aversion to American casualties, and neoliberal policies doomed recent US invasions and occupations. I then look at the role of geopolitics in shaping both US war policies and the effectiveness of mass opposition to American wars. I interrogate Brownlee's use of Arendt's distinction between military and political power and argue that he and Arendt are wrong to assert that military success is inherently untranslatable into political rule. Finally, my analysis provides the basis to evaluate the role that public opinion and mass movements, which get pride of place in Brownlee's critique, might play in deflecting or weakening future US interventions.**

# THE MAKING OF US MILITARY DEFEATS

RICHARD LACHMANN

**O**ne difficulty in writing about American decline is getting the tone right. A danger is that one can come across as regretful of the United States' loss of ability to control other countries. That unfortunately is the way Jason Brownlee read my article, as offering ammunition, albeit inadvertent, for imperialists looking to build support for the next American war by arguing that the US military has learned the "lessons" of Afghanistan or Iraq and therefore will be more effective in a future war in Iran or wherever. Brownlee accurately identifies the three factors that I see as most important in explaining America's failure, over the past fifty years, to win any sustained war: misallocation of generous Pentagon budgets, aversion to American casualties, and neoliberal plunder policies that undermine the bases for enlisting sufficient local allies of an American occupation. Brownlee describes these three factors as "glitches in [the US] counterinsurgency apparatus," and suggests that my article implies that if these factors were overcome, the United States could win such wars. In fact, my analysis finds that the three factors are not mere glitches, or even changeable

policy preferences. The United States lost wars, not because civilian or military leaders failed to learn “lessons” from past wars, but because structural constraints make it impossible for the United States to fight wars any differently from the way in which it did in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq. For that reason, the United States will never be able to win counterinsurgency wars, or indeed any sort of war except perhaps for large-scale conventional wars of the sort that US weapons are designed to fight.

Brownlee also asserts that US victories in counterinsurgency (or as he labels them, counterrevolutionary) wars are unattainable. However, instead of focusing as I do on structural impediments to adopting different military or foreign policies, Brownlee argues that counterinsurgencies are inherently unwinnable (presumably by other present-day imperial powers as well as the United States) because such wars are “normatively and politically bankrupt.” Drawing on Hannah Arendt’s distinction between “violence [which] is the application of force to inflict physical damage; [and] power [which] mobilizes human bodies to accomplish shared goals,” Brownlee believes that only when “US administrations deferred to indigenous ideas about independence and self-determination (in the Philippines and Japan), were they able to follow military victory with varying levels of political success.” In contrast, the United States in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq sought to remake those countries’ social relations and political economies while bypassing the wishes and interests of indigenous peoples.

Brownlee is clear in describing the consequences of those two different sorts of post-conquest policies but he doesn’t offer an explanation for why US officials adopted one approach after World War II and belatedly in the Philippines while pursuing policies doomed to failure in more recent wars. He suggests that mass opposition in the United States or worldwide is the only force today that could block future US counterrevolutionary wars. However, Brownlee never identifies the factors that pushed the United States to be more deferential at the end of World War II toward enemies who had been utterly vanquished. Nor

does he explain why the United States shifted strategy in the Philippines towards conciliation decades after the insurgency had been militarily defeated.<sup>1</sup> In neither of those historical moments was there enough mass opposition to US foreign intervention to account for those milder American policies.

Brownlee and I thus offer different answers to three key questions: why does the United States fight wars and conduct occupations as it does, why do those wars end in failure for the United States, and what forces are most likely to prevent future American-initiated wars. For Brownlee, US war policy is and will be determined by a clash of self-interested American militarists and mass opposition. He sees the ambitions and methods of American militarists as unchanging and doomed to failure (except in rare, unexplained cases where the United States conducted conciliatory occupations). The key variable in his analysis is the extent of American and international opposition to US wars. I think if we want to explain America's varying approaches to, and success in, foreign occupations we need to look more closely at the structural forces that shape US military capacities and meld that with a deeper understanding of other countries' geopolitical interests and capacities (a factor neglected both in my original article and in Brownlee's response, and which I address here).

I begin by reviewing the evidence for, and Brownlee's critique of, my argument that misspent money, growing aversion to American casualties, and neoliberal policies doomed recent US invasions and occupations. I then look at the role of geopolitics in shaping both US war policies and the effectiveness of mass opposition to American wars. I then return to Brownlee's use of Arendt's distinction between military and political power and argue that he and Arendt are wrong to assert that military success is inherently untranslatable into political rule. Finally, my analysis will provide the basis to evaluate the role

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<sup>1</sup> Julian Go, *American Empires and the Politics of Meaning: Elite Political Culture in the Philippines and Puerto Rico during U.S. Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

that public opinion and mass movements, which get pride of place in Brownlee's critique, might play in deflecting or weakening future US interventions.

## MONEY

Brownlee misunderstands the problem with Pentagon misspending, presenting my argument as a trivial claim that US soldiers didn't have enough bullets in Vietnam. Rather, I show that the vast majority of America's current military spending and planned future increases, such as those voted by Congress in the 2018 federal budget, are almost entirely devoted to high-tech weapons utterly unsuited for counterinsurgency warfare. The factors I identified in my article — the power of for-profit defense firms and of the banks that supply them with capital, the career paths open to military officers and their interest in securing post-retirement jobs with defense contractors — ensure there will be no change in military spending priorities.

Weapons are developed and purchased over years, often decades. Bush's Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld had a valid point when he said, to excuse the lack of armored vehicles for troops in Iraq, "You go to war with the army you have, not the army you might want or wish to have at a later time." As long as military spending is concentrated on high-tech weapons, the US military will lack what is needed for wars like those in Afghanistan and Iraq. High-tech weapons can be adapted to kill fighters and civilians, but they can't be used for the more nuanced tasks essential for building a successful occupation and preempting or defeating insurgencies. For example, Ian Roxborough shows that the deployment of mines by Saddam Hussein's forces at the outset of the war prevented the arrival of relief supplies, fatally poisoning the atmosphere in Iraq against US forces. He sees that as one of the crucial causes of the defeats suffered by the United States after its initial success.<sup>2</sup>

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2 Ian Roxborough, "Iraq, Afghanistan, the Global War on Terrorism, and the Owl of Minerva." *Political Power and Social Theory* 16 (2004).

Had the US military invested in cheap minesweepers rather than the multi-billion-dollar vessels preferred by naval officers and military contractors, the mines could have been removed to allow the rapid arrival of relief supplies. However, minesweepers couldn't be bought in the time between the decision to go to war and the invasion regardless of the size of the Pentagon budget. Such a procurement decision would have needed to have been made years in advance.

Similarly, when I write about the mistraining of US soldiers I do not suggest that the problem can be solved by bringing on more civilian or military "defense intellectuals." Rather, what would be needed are career paths that encourage low-level officers to spend their careers learning and practicing counterinsurgency. But no rational officer would want to do that since making such a choice within the actually existing American military-industrial complex would stymie their career and also block opportunities in retirement to earn the big bucks working for defense firms they once interacted with as officers charged with purchasing and evaluating their weapons. As a result, when the United States fights counterinsurgency wars, both commanding and line officers are temporarily diverted from careers on weapons systems to spend brief tours in combat theaters. The commanders of US forces in Afghanistan each served a year or less before being replaced.<sup>3</sup> There was little more stability in Iraq with four commanders over the five and half years of occupation from May 2004 to the end of 2009. During such short tours of duty the commanders in Iraq and Afghanistan didn't have time to develop and implement strategies. Instead they depended on slogan-filled manuals like one written by David Petraeus, which was used in both wars.

The US defeats in Iraq and Afghanistan are notable because the insurgents in both countries did not have allies who offered them extensive weaponry. Iranian aid to Iraqis and Pakistani help for the Taliban paled in comparison with what the United States offered to the

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3 The one exception was John Allen who served nineteen months from July 2011 to February 2013.

Afghans in their war with Soviets, or Russia in the nineteenth century when the Afghans fought the British. And of course, all that aid was far less significant than what the Soviets and China did for the Vietnamese and Korean communists, or in an earlier era what the French did for the revolutionaries in the thirteen colonies.

Expensive high-tech weapons boost officers' careers and pad defense firms' profits regardless of whether or not they are ever used. However, their very existence and the overwhelming advantage they seemingly give the United States against its opponents creates an arrogant belief that the United States can prevail over any opponent in the world. This contributes significantly to the tendency, rightly highlighted in Brownlee's analysis, for US civilian and military leaders to commit US troops to wars around the world. Because defense firms and military officers have the power to perpetuate current spending priorities, the delusion of US omnipotence, which Noam Chomsky critiqued half a century ago,<sup>4</sup> also remains unshakable.

In addition, civilian and military planners view the United States' technological advantage as the way to meet the imperative (discussed below) of minimizing American casualties. Technology also encourages the delusional belief that enemies can be surgically removed from civilian populations thereby avoiding the need to station American soldiers permanently among occupied peoples or to win locals' loyalties with actual developmental aid programs. Reliance on technology is the ideological linchpin that leads American elites to believe they can square the circle and win wars while keeping most American soldiers safe and looting and restructuring occupied countries. Technological advantage thus provides ideological coherence to imperatives that in fact cannot be reconciled with the actual reality in the lands the United States invades. As Brownlee rightly notes, the key reality is that people do not want their lives and their governments controlled by self-interested outsiders, and as I showed in my article occupied peoples have

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4 Noam Chomsky, *American Power and the New Mandarins* (New York: Pantheon, 1969).

the ability to neutralize many of the advantages American soldiers supposedly derive from their high-tech weaponry.

Of course, casualty aversion and neoliberal plunder are propelled by their own structural forces, which I now review.

### CASUALTY AVERSION

Elites in the United States are significantly more eager to fight wars than the rest of the American public, as Brownlee correctly notes. He argues that divide was as true during Vietnam as it is in more recent wars. Brownlee cites a statistical analysis showing that public support for Korea and Vietnam dropped logarithmically as casualties rose, i.e., “with each tenfold increase in US military deaths (from ten to one hundred, from one hundred to one thousand, etc.), the public’s approval of US involvement dropped by 15 percentage points.”<sup>5</sup> However, a later study, which incorporates polling data from more recent wars, finds “a similar pattern for the Iraq War, but with a steeper rate of decline” in Americans’ support.<sup>6</sup> This is precisely my argument, that the constraints on US war planners are more severe now. They either need to win very fast (as in the one-hundred-hour Gulf War) or find a way to fight long wars with a much lower rate of American casualties than in past wars because in the twenty-first century the American public’s support for any war drops well below a majority when the number of US dead reach two thousand, whereas majority support was lost in Korea and Vietnam only when casualties topped twenty thousand.

I identified a complex of cultural and institutional forces, largely generated within the military and by civilian proponents of war, which will sustain and deepen casualty aversion for the foreseeable future. Brownlee doesn’t challenge that evidence but instead argues that public

5 John E. Mueller, “Trends in Popular Support for the Wars in Korea and Vietnam,” *American Political Science Review* 65, no. 2 (1971).

6 Gary C. Jacobson, “A Tale of Two Wars: Public Opinion on the U.S. Military Interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 4, (2010): 605.

support doesn't matter, that elites will fight wars and put US troops at risk even after public support has evaporated. As evidence, he points to the 2007 "surge" in Iraq. He accurately notes that 2007 was the deadliest year of the war for American troops in Iraq. However, the 2007 total was only 10 percent above that of 2006, and just 6 percent more than in 2005 or 2004. The surge was designed to be short term and Bush kept that promise. The number of US dead in 2008 was a third of 2007.<sup>7</sup>

Brownlee accepts the US military's description of the surge as "clear-hold-build." Only the first word of that slogan is accurate. The United States, as Brownlee notes, used massive violence to clear resistance fighters along with civilians from targeted areas. However, US troops did not remain to hold or build since the surge was designed to allow the withdrawal of the twenty-thousand "surge" soldiers sent to Iraq by the time Bush left office. Those troops who remained in country spent most of their time on highly secure bases. They did not stay in villages and towns.

Obama's Afghanistan surge lasted longer. It took five years, until early 2014, for the number of US troops in Afghanistan to fall back to the level it was at the end of the Bush administration.<sup>8</sup> However, the surge troops in Afghanistan were pulled back to safer positions well before their withdrawal. US war deaths in Afghanistan peaked in 2010 and by 2013 were below the pre-surge total in 2008.<sup>9</sup> Of course, for the 4,500 Americans who died in Iraq, or even the four who were killed recently in Niger, casualty aversion didn't matter, but we need to recognize that fighting a war with limited casualties is different from ones in which the ceiling is higher by factors of ten or one hundred.

Certainly the American public would have blocked any surge had it been able to decide on military policy in Afghanistan and Iraq without

7 "Iraq Coalition Military Fatalities By Year" <http://icasualties.org>

8 Quarterly totals of US troops in Afghanistan and Iraq can be found in: Heidi M. Peters, Moshe Schwartz, and Lawrence Kapp, *Department of Defense Contractor and Troop Levels in Iraq and Afghanistan, 2007-2017* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2017). <https://news.usni.org/2017/05/03/rep25471>

9 "Afghanistan Coalition Military Fatalities By Year" <http://icasualties.org>

elite manipulation. Both surges were elite projects. However, elites did not have a free hand. They had to promise and deliver on schedule ends to both surges regardless of whether strategic objectives had been achieved. In both countries the surges were failures. The seeming diminution of the insurgency in Iraq turned out to be, as I explained in my article, the result of payoffs to Sunni tribal leaders (spun by the Pentagon as the “Sunni Awakening”) and a series of locally negotiated “temporary ceasefire[s] with the Mahdi army, [but] publicly described [by the US government] as a unilateral stand-down by its leader Muqtada al-Sadr.”<sup>10</sup>

Obama’s Afghan surge was a total failure and the puppet government in Kabul remains unable to control much of the country beyond the capital and is in constant danger of being overrun even as US troops remain. Holding and building depends on successfully recruiting local allies, agents, and puppets. There simply never were enough US soldiers in either Iraq or Afghanistan to do that work, and the rapid drawdowns of troops after both surges made the Pentagon’s stated policies impossible to implement. We therefore need to understand why the United States failed to win local support in Iraq and Afghanistan even more spectacularly than in Vietnam or early twentieth century Philippines, and in dramatic contrast to Korea and to the lands the United States occupied at the end of World War II.

LACHMANN

## PLUNDER NEOLIBERALISM

Brownlee offers an important qualification to my argument when he notes that the United States spent as much on reconstruction in Afghanistan, and twice as much in Iraq, as it did on the Marshall Plan (adjusting for inflation but not for the relative size of the US federal budgets or GDP in the 1940s vs. the twenty-first century). Brownlee rightly notes that the amount of money that flowed into Iraq and Afghanistan, even after most of it went to US firms, allowed for top officials in both countries

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10 Michael Schwartz, *War Without End: The Iraq War in Context* (Chicago, Haymarket, 2008): 268 and passim.

to enrich themselves at levels beyond what previous American puppets had pocketed in Vietnam or Korea. Much of that “aid,” in keeping with the financialization of the global economy, was in the form of funding for national and private banks. Not surprisingly, bank fraud was a key source of enrichment for top-level Afghans and Iraqis, as Brownlee shows in his discussion of the private Kabul Bank, which was bailed out by the Central Bank of Afghanistan with US government funds. Such fraud neither needs nor enriches any but the few high officials who control those banks. And of course, financial engineering and fraud do as little to create jobs or develop economies in occupied lands as they do in core capitalist countries.

Little of the aid money trickled down to lower-level officials and almost none to ordinary citizens. As Brownlee and I both note, almost no actual reconstruction was accomplished in contrast to earlier American occupations, including Vietnam.<sup>11</sup> Most significantly, the occupation created few jobs for ordinary Iraqis and Afghans, because little money made it past crooked American contractors and top-level Afghan and Iraqi officials. Even a robust jobs program would have done little to make up for the annihilation of stable government jobs that occurred when Paul Bremer and his successors refused to let government-owned enterprises reopen unless and until they were privatized. In addition, the Coalition Provisional Authority dismissed Iraqi military and civilian state workers en masse at the outset of the occupation.

If US occupiers and their local puppets are to be successful in suppressing opposition to their rule and in sustaining direct or indirect US dominance, they need to recruit a large enough cadre of administrators, skilled civilian personnel, and soldiers. That requires the local government’s revenues to be spread relatively widely in order to support a sufficiently large corps of supporters. Past US-installed dictators (Thieu and Ky, Mobutu, Marcos, and others) spread their ill-gotten gains, if only to ensure that their underlings didn’t turn on them and

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<sup>11</sup> Douglas C. Dacy, *Foreign Aid, War, and Economic Development: South Vietnam, 1955-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

kill them. The downward flow of corruption explains the seeming paradox of dictators who steal billions but after their deaths or overthrows leave little trace of their fortunes. Either we need to assume that poorly educated military officers become dictators somehow figured out how to launder money with a level of skill that has outwitted the combined talents of the world's investigative agencies or in fact that most of the loot was turned over to subordinates, leaving the ruler just enough for palaces at home and Paris shopping trips.

Present-day American puppets, like Karzai in Afghanistan and al-Maliki in Iraq, got rich enough to ensure their willingness to betray their countrymen in service of the United States. However, the graft did not extend far enough down and, more crucially, US aid did not create or sustain enough decent jobs to secure loyalty at lower levels. As I made clear, neoliberal plunder policies compounded this problem by destroying many more jobs in former government enterprises than even a successful developmental occupation and puppet regime could have created. The money that did flow downward, as Brownlee notes, went to Afghan warlords and to Sunni and Shia militia leaders in Iraq. Such localized and ad hoc payoffs did not provide bases of support for the central governments in the two countries because there was no expectation that the payments would continue in the long term (and certainly not to the same people over time) and the money went almost exclusively to armed men who had limited connections to or leverage over other Afghans and Iraqis who also were opposed to the US occupation and who became fonts of yet other armed resistance movements.

I don't want to imply that all people or even a majority in an occupied country need to be aided or even have their pre-occupation income or employment maintained in order to prevent an insurgency. Successful imperialists mix violent repression with inducements. Britain was able to rule India even though a majority of Indians were materially worse off at various points during the colonial regime than they had been before the British arrived. The British in India crushed

rebellions without restraint, but also used inducements to enlist existing Indian elites to govern and to extract revenues that flowed to Britain. British rule created a large cadre of officials, capitalists, and landowners who gained in wealth and prestige during the colonial era. These Indians had material and status interests that well into the twentieth century were best preserved by continued British rule and so they provided capable and loyal service to the empire. Brownlee is correct that the United States, Britain, and other occupying powers carried out imperial rule largely by co-opting existing indigenous elites and their institutions. Britain certainly followed that model, with only a few thousand non-military Britons stationed in India and even fewer in most of its other colonies.

Cooperation with local elites requires the imperial state to control and discipline its agents in the colonies to limit corruption and rapaciousness to levels that make it possible for enough local collaborators to prosper. Thus the British government nationalized the private East India Company (EIC) following the 1857 Indian Rebellion (aka Mutiny). The 1857 Rebellion was an urgent indicator to the government in London of the dangers of unchecked private EIC corruption. Of course, after the nationalization Britain and Britons continued to enrich themselves at the expense of Indians, but in ways that sustained the acquiescence of a fairly broad-based and stable Indian elite that did most of the work of suppressing the masses who were most severely harmed by imperial exploitation.<sup>12</sup> What needs explanation is why the British government was able to discipline its agents in India and in much of the rest of its empire, while the US government has failed to do the same with its agents in Iraq and Afghanistan. Why are the two empires different and

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12 The literature of the British Empire in general and on British imperialism in India is vast. Excellent overviews can be found in Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism, 1850-1983* (London: Longman, 1984) and John Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012). I offer an extended analysis of the British Empire in Richard Lachmann, *First Class Passengers on a Sinking Ship: Elite Politics and the Decline of Great Powers* (London: Verso, forthcoming): chapter 6.

why has the United States lost or given up that disciplinary capacity since the postwar period when, as Brownlee notes, it established collaborative rule in Germany, Japan, and elsewhere?

### REALPOLITIK AND MASS MOBILIZATION

Why was the US government so stupid and self-defeating in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan while it showed more restraint in Korea and after World War II? Why did the United States shift strategy in the Philippines? Brownlee notes, but does not attempt to explain why, the United States adopted different strategies at different historical moments. There are three factors that determine American imperial policy, as well as those of other great powers past and present: (1) the metropolitan government's capacity to discipline its own elites, (2) geopolitics, and (3) resistance in occupied lands.

Governments are able to see their geopolitical interests and devise policies to attain them. However, national interests are not the same as the specific interests of particular elites. What was good for the EIC was not good for the greater interests of the British Empire. Similarly, what is good for military contractors and officers, oil companies, or corrupt officials is not good for the broader US interests in controlling other countries, minimizing federal budgetary pressures, and creating geopolitical stability under US hegemony. It would take us far beyond the scope, and the space limitations, of this reply to trace the contingent chains that widened and narrowed opportunities for capitalists and others to assert their particular interests against their nations' general interest in sustaining geopolitical dominance and imperial rule. The rising power of financial capitalists in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain and in the United States since the 1980s,<sup>13</sup> US military officers' growing resources and autonomy and deepening links to defense contractors, the ability of narrow elites to capture federal agencies and

13 Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (London: Verso, 1994).

control portions of the national budget<sup>14</sup> all undermine the capacity of a central government to set, finance, and carry out a coherent geopolitical strategy. Conversely, the linking of British landlords and capitalists and of US national and local-level firms within political party systems, which also had to respond directly or indirectly to mass demands, in the eighteenth and twentieth centuries respectively, created bases for tying together divergent elites and committing their resources to coherent domestic and foreign policies. The timing of shifts in British, US, and other great powers' foreign policies are related to changes in the dynamics of domestic politics and states' capacities to discipline capitalists and their own agents.

A great power or hegemon's capacity to achieve its interests also is limited by other global or regional powers. When rival powers press into regions where another power already exercises control, imperiums can be forced to modify their aims within countries in order to build stable alliances to fend off rival powers. Britain offered a series of concessions to Indians when concerned with Russian thrusts into south Asia in the nineteenth century and when Britain needed to ensure a supply of Indian troops in the two world wars. Thus, if we want to know why the United States changed its policy in the Philippines in the 1930s we can find the answer in Japan's rising capacity to project power in East Asia. The United States needed to secure its base in the Philippines and to do so had to make concessions to local elites. Similarly, the perception, more than the reality, of a challenge from the Soviet Union in the late 1940s and 1950s led the United States to offer concessions in Europe and Japan (and later in South Korea) to secure the loyalty of those allies.

Brownlee's mention of the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government offers a revealing counterfactual. He accurately notes that corrupt Kurdish officials looted oil revenues that could have gone to support ordinary Iraqis throughout the country. However, those officials engage in old-style theft and not plunder neoliberalism. In addition,

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14 Richard Lachmann, "From Consensus to Paralysis in the United States, 1960-2012," *Political Power and Social Theory*, 26 (2014).

Kurdistan also benefitted from US willingness to grant Kurdish officials a high degree of autonomy. A number of strategic and geopolitical considerations motivated US policy in Kurdistan. First, because that region had won a significant measure of autonomy after the Gulf War, the United States did not see itself as facing an entrenched Baathist regime and so didn't try to remake the ministries and government-owned firms in Kurdistan. Second, the United States had a misguided notion of the role that Iraqi Kurds could serve as a thorn in the side of Iran which long has sought to repress separatism among their Kurds. Third, there was the still unfulfilled hope that the Kurdistan Regional Government's contracts with US and European oil companies could be used as leverage to propel privatization of oil production in the rest of Iraq. The United States thus for a combination of reasons both deferred to local Kurdish rulers, which Brownlee posits was necessary and sufficient to prevent an insurgency, and held back from imposing neoliberalism, which I identify as one of three factors that prevent the United States from pacifying countries it invades and occupies.

Of course, governments can miscalculate their military advantage and thus miscalibrate the needed level of concessions. Germany's unexpectedly quick victories in the early years of World War II led the Nazis to assume (largely correctly) that they could brutalize occupied Europe with little strategic consequence but also led to the fatal errors of declaring war on the Soviet Union and then the United States. Similarly, when the US government believed it had contained the Soviet Union and China (and when President Kennedy discovered that the "missile gap" he had made his main issue in the 1960 presidential election actually was vastly in favor of the United States) it became more demanding and aggressive in Vietnam.<sup>15</sup> The United States also increased its control over countries firmly in its grasp in the 1960s with, for example, a wave of military coups in Latin America. The end of the Cold War ushered in a new era of US arrogance and miscalculation,

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<sup>15</sup> Gareth Porter, *Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

compounded by America's unprecedented technological and financial edge (discussed above) over any and all conceivable military rivals. The sense that the United States did not have to consider challenges from geopolitical rivals anywhere in the world led to aggressive moves in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya. While the United States was largely correct about Russian and Chinese geopolitical weakness and passivity, it ignored both the significance of regional powers such as Pakistan and Iran, and of popular resistance.

Brownlee rightly highlights popular forces as the most vocal challengers to US imperialism. He challenges my claim that "The United States' offer to serve as policeman of the world has been accepted by a majority of the world since 1945, and almost the entire world after 1991."<sup>16</sup> His counterevidence is the extent of "international dissent," such as the Non-Aligned movement of the Cold War era, poll results showing that majorities in the world see the United States as the greatest threat to world peace, and the massive worldwide demonstrations in 2003 in opposition to Bush's planned invasion of Iraq.

Brownlee is correct that US geopolitical hegemony has been rejected on the levels of popular sentiment and of non-aligned governments' verbiage. However we need to ask if any of that opposition prevented or limited US aggression. Unfortunately, the evidence for the efficacy of nonviolent opposition is weak. Popular resistance led the Turkish parliament to block the government from offering permission for US troops or aircraft to use Turkey as a base for the war in Iraq. The French government responded to strong popular opposition to the planned Iraq War by vetoing a Security Council resolution that would have given UN imprimatur to the US invasion. Most European governments and Canada publicly opposed the war, but those sentiments had no effect on their broader military alliances with the United States. Only Turkey's decision had a material effect, albeit minor, on US war plans.

The most effective form of opposition remains violent resistance.

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16 Richard Lachmann, "The US Military: Without Rival and Without Victory," *Catalyst* 1, no. 3 (2017): 147.

The Vietnamese success, at the horrible cost of three million dead, in defeating the United States was followed by two decades of only proxy wars and minor invasions. The Afghans and Iraqis haven't yet forced total withdrawals by the United States, but the number of American troops and their range of action have been greatly reduced by the armed insurgents' sacrifices and victories. It remains to be seen if American defeats in its current wars will forestall further wars. Americans' rising intolerance for their own soldiers' deaths suggests it will be hard to fight future wars with significant numbers of US ground forces. Of course, that doesn't preclude the use of drones and bombers, but the strategic value of such weapons for maintaining US hegemony is limited.

### ARENDR AND GRIM REALITIES

Hegemony, by the United States today as it was for Britain and other great powers in the past, ultimately is based on armed force that precludes alternatives and so forces both indigenous elites and non-elites to make plans based on continued colonial rule. We have analyzed the structural conditions that make it increasingly difficult for the United States to sustain or impose hegemony with military force. However, we should not assume that military power necessarily couldn't be converted into the sort of political power that is the foundation of hegemony under conditions that the United States no longer can produce. Brownlee is correct that in some cases, such as in the ongoing Afghan and Iraq wars, "often a surfeit of violence belies a lack of power." Extreme US violence in Iraq and Afghanistan, like in Vietnam before, eventually became vengeful rage at looming defeat rather than a strategy for victory. Brownlee however never defines what he means by political success, and therefore he leaves unspecified what degree of control the United States today, or other imperial powers past and present, could achieve.

Arendt's simplistic contrast of violence and power ignores the reality of imperialism, which often mixes the two. Indeed, Arendt's example, which Brownlee cites, of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968,

shows the efficacy of violence in achieving power. The Soviets were able (in Arendt's and Brownlee's terminology) to violently destroy Czechoslovak political power, removing the reformist government headed by Alexander Dubček. In addition, the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia was a case of successful counterrevolution, installing a new power, the anti-reformist, repressive, and subserviently pro-Soviet Husák government, which ruled for twenty years until the 1989 Velvet Revolution. Perhaps most Czech citizens regarded the Husák government as illegitimate, but it didn't matter. Husák was able to elicit enough consent to rule and to compile a record of economic growth better than most other countries in Europe, east and west, during those two decades.

Hegemonic powers offer something to at least some of the people in the lands that they dominate. Conquered peoples weigh the limited benefits they can obtain from submitting to foreign rule against the costs of resistance. Brownlee puts the focus on the former: if rulers offer concessions then occupied peoples forego armed resistance. My contribution is to add attention to conquerors' ability to impose violence on those who refuse to accept the terms of domination. However, for such violence to be an effective basis for rule rather than just vengeful, ordinary people in imperial countries have to supply the soldiers needed to conquer and hold direct and indirect colonies and in so doing risk being maimed or killed. It also, as we have seen, requires elites to subordinate their particular interests to the general interest of their imperium. The US government no longer has the capacity to demand either sort of sacrifice.

Popular opposition and protest within the United States matters but mainly in a contingent and indirect way. Protests, during Vietnam especially, delegitimized the US military, which responded by fetishizing prisoners of war and honoring American soldiers for protecting each other's lives more than for killing enemy fighters.<sup>17</sup> Those moves, which

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Lachmann and Abby Stivers, "The Culture of Sacrifice in Conscript and Volunteer Militaries: The U.S. Medal of Honor from the Civil War to Iraq, 1861-2014" *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 4, no. 3 (2016).

made sense as a way of finding honor in a lost war and of diverting attention away from the military's failures and war crimes in Vietnam, intensified the American public's attention to the well-being and safety of their own soldiers, even though those soldiers were volunteers rather than conscripts and increasingly drawn from narrow demographic, geographic, and class segments of the United States. These developments, as I explained, limit the ways in which and the intensity and duration with which the United States can fight wars. That has constrained the US military more than mass protests within the United States or abroad and more than the objections voiced, but backed with little meaningful action, by other governments around the world. The small role that American or European moral revulsion plays in blocking US warfare is disheartening, although the post-Vietnam focus by anti-war Americans on the deaths and suffering of US soldiers (while ethically ambiguous) does pressure the Pentagon to adopt policies that make future US wars less likely to succeed even if they don't reduce civilian or insurgent casualties in invaded countries.

Foreign protests have no direct influence on the US government, and only matter when they sway their own governments to resist US demands. Unfortunately, despite massive protests, none of America's European allies did anything more than voice opposition or withhold troops from the Iraq invasion, while in other ways (like allowing the use of American bases on their territories) facilitated the Iraq War. And those censorious allies joined the United States in later interventions in various African countries and in sales of weapons to brutal regimes. Turkey, where opposition to the Iraq War has been almost unanimous from the beginning, is the main exception, banning the use of Turkish land and air space by the United States during the Iraq War. However, the Turkish government was motivated by its own regional geopolitical interests as much as by deference to its citizens' opposition to the United States.

Of course, the concern over American casualties only has a causal effect when and where occupied peoples are willing and able to put their

lives at risk in large enough numbers over a long enough time to force total (Vietnam) or partial (Iraq, Afghanistan) US withdrawal. Occupied people's ability to engage in extended armed insurgency varies over time and place and should be the analytic focus for those who want to understand or encourage effective resistance to US imperialism and if we want to know whether decline will lead to less US aggression, where other neo-imperial powers will be able to replace the United States, or if civil wars (often manipulated by outside powers) will become ever more the dominant form of twenty-first-century wars.

US capacity to wage counterinsurgency war will not increase for all the reasons I've identified here and in my original *Catalyst* article. There no longer are lessons that US militarists have the capacity to act upon to improve their abilities to win counterinsurgencies. That is the essence of hegemonic decline. ☞



**Bashir Abu-Manneh's monograph raises critical questions as to the relationship of art to political struggle and revolutionary hope. Palestinian realist novels offer a paradigmatic narrative of the rise and subsequent defeat of emancipatory endeavor as aesthetic expression responding to the actuality of conflict, armed revolt, and the trauma of loss. As such, the realism of Palestinian writing challenges the political pessimism and anti-realism that typifies much postcolonial criticism. The review explores the possibilities and achievements of realism in the context of current theoretical critique, focusing upon the uniquely materialist specificity that characterizes the realist tradition.**

# WRITING HOPE: POLITICS & THE NOVEL

PAM MORRIS

Bashir Abu-Manneh

*The Palestinian Novel: From 1948 to the Present*  
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016)

“A person can only be born in one place. However, he may die several times elsewhere; in the exiles and prisons, and in a homeland transformed by the occupation and oppression into a nightmare. Poetry is perhaps what teaches us to ... use words to construct a better world, a fictitious world that enables us to sign a pact for a permanent and comprehensive peace ... with life.”<sup>1</sup> Is this dream of the great Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish, to be understood as merely that — a utopian dream? Or can fictitious worlds move us towards the realization of material improvements in human life by means of testimony to suffering and inequality and by inscribing a vision of change and hope? Certainly the writers discussed by Bashir Abu-Manneh in *The Palestinian Novel* respond to such questions in the affirmative.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in, “Memoriam to Mahmoud Darwish 1942–2008” in *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, November 2008.

*The Palestinian Novel* is an important and timely book, introducing a tradition of very fine novels that may be unfamiliar to many readers. *The Palestinian Novel* is also, in some respects, a controversial book. It engages in those current intellectual debates as to the political and epistemological limits and possibilities of committed art. The four major writers whose novels form the substance of Abu-Manneh's study were fully immersed in the political and cultural movements for Palestinian liberation. Abu-Manneh offers a lucid mapping of their literary achievements onto the complex, entangled history that produced it: the Palestinian political struggles and geographical dispersals from 1948 to the present. The novel emerged as the dominant Arab literary form during this period and, Abu-Manneh claims, it provides the best entry point into the "structures of feeling" of those who participated in — or simply endured — the conflicts, loss, suffering, and dispossessions. As the novels testify, much was at stake during this time for Palestinians but also, potentially, for the world order. In the early years of the struggle, many Palestinians saw themselves as spearheading a movement for democracy and equality without confinement to any particular national boundaries.

Abu-Manneh argues that the response of many Palestinians to the *nakba*, the catastrophe of dispossession by the Israelis in 1948, was to articulate a revolutionary optimism in the potential of collective action to win back freedom and self-determination. Liberty was to be regained through armed struggle but also through cultural renaissance. There was recognition that, to an extent, the catastrophe laid bare divisions and social problems within Arab society itself, particularly the inequality and subordination of the working-class poor and of women. Freedom, crucially, had to encompass wider emancipatory aims than territorial reclamation; it had to embrace the rights and needs of all peoples. For this reason, the Palestinian struggle in its early years was understood by those involved not as nationalistic, but as a universal liberation movement.

This optimistic humanist belief structures the early writing of all

four of the major Palestinian writers who form the substance of this study. Together, their novels span the entire period from the *nakba* of 1948 to the present. Jabra I. Jabra, who lived from 1919–94, was central to the project of cultural renaissance after 1948. His protagonists are intellectuals, prepared to sacrifice themselves for the cause of the downtrodden. The inequalities and violence suffered by women are also held up to shame in Jabra’s fiction. Ghassan Kanafani, 1936–72, was assassinated by an Israeli bomb at the age of thirty-six. Abu-Manneh claims that, like Franz Fanon, Kanafani combined a theoretical, political, and cultural focus that enabled him to understand the national struggle for freedom as, at the same time, humanist and universal. In his relatively long short story, *Returning to Haifa* (1969), he offers the first fully humanized portrait of a Jewish character in Arabic literature.

Emile Habiby, 1922–96, who was an active communist party leader and a member of the Israeli Knesset, experienced firsthand the contradictory exigencies of those Palestinians who remained within Israeli jurisdiction after the *nakba*, their lives necessarily comprising resistance and compliance. Saeed, the protagonist of Habiby’s novel, *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessoptimist*, is the archetypal little man, bullied and exploited by Jewish employers and officials, getting by with a mixture of cowardice and self-deception. Yet Saeed’s narrative survival, as teller of his own story, Abu-Manneh suggests, implicitly claims the capacity of the downtrodden to imagine and produce their own freed reappearance.

Sahar Khalifeh, born in 1941, writes from within the context of the 1967 occupation. She shares with Kanafani an ideal of collective emancipation, understanding this in specific terms of class and women’s subordination and more broadly as a universal aspiration for all humankind. She argues that “If you want to deny this belief [in universal equality] in the Israeli then you are not trying to find a human solution.”<sup>2</sup> Her novel, *We are No Longer Your Slaves*, is Palestine’s first

2 Peter Nazareth, “An Interview with Sahar Khalifeh,” *Iowa Review* 11, no. 1 (Winter 1980): 82; quoted in *The Palestinian Novel*, 119.

feminist work of fiction. In *Wild Thorns*, women's right to self-determination is asserted and the majority of characters are working class while the old Palestinian class system is condemned. As fitting epilogue to his detailed discussion of the work of these four writers, Abu-Manneh gives an account of Elias Khoury's encyclopaedic novel, *Gate of the Sun*, which encompasses the whole tragedy of the post-*nakba* Palestinian experience. It is an astounding fictional achievement and testimony to the active power of memory and imagination as an energy directed towards the future.

The aim of *The Palestinian Novel*, however, is not simply to present the fiction within the prevailing conditions of its time of production. Abu-Manneh's object is wider and more ambitious: it is to investigate the complex relationship between political struggle and revolutionary hope, on the one hand, and literary form and aesthetic choices, on the other. The Palestinian novel arises out of conditions quite specific to the Palestinian conflict in its various stages from 1948 to the present. How do these geographical and historical specificities inform and, to an extent, determine novelistic practice? What is the relationship between fictional worlds and actuality? Can imaginative accounts offer forms of knowledge unavailable to other kinds of writing? And how do these artistic practices by Palestinian novelists speak to literary and political concerns within a wider geographical context?

The writing of Marxist critic György Lukács provides the classic account of the influence of historical processes upon literary forms. Lukács, Abu-Manneh suggests, puts forward a materialist interpretation of the European realist novel that can illuminate Palestinian novels at both the historical and aesthetic levels. Classic literary realism, Lukács argues, emerges from the revolutionary moment inaugurated by the French Revolution. For writers of that period, the processes of historical change were lived experiences, not abstractions, and their work articulates, in form as well as content, the energies and struggles of class conflict released by the revolution. Unlike earlier noble-born literary heroes, the characters represented in realist fiction are "types,"

Lukács claims, only fully understandable in terms of the social forces impinging on their lives.<sup>3</sup>

For Abu-Manneh, this mapping of novelistic form onto transitional historical moments offers a useful model for recognizing similar critical moments in the trajectory of the Palestinian novel, where a transformation in novelistic practices arises simultaneously with traumatic historical events. Despite the exile, dispossession, statelessness, and occupation that became the Palestinians' conditions of existence after the Israeli conquest of their land in 1948, revolutionary optimism remained alive. The extent of the catastrophe was such that renewal seemed for many the only option. It was not just the external enemy that needed to be overcome but the forces of backwardness and oppression of their own *ancien régime*. Palestinian writers saw their literary and cultural activities as part of that wider struggle for justice. It is out of this common optimism that the realist Palestinian novel emerged and came to prominence.

The four writers discussed in Abu-Manneh's study identify fully with the political and cultural conflicts of the post-*nakba* period, active in journalism, cultural leadership, political party organization, and armed mobilization. The characters they create in their fiction, Abu-Manneh argues, fully conform to what Lukács termed "types" to indicate protagonists who embody all the contradictions and dynamics of their time. In the novels of Jabra I. Jabra, the main characters are intellectual rebels, offering themselves as leaders to the masses. In the works of Kanafani, *Habiby*, and Khalifeh, though, the protagonists are from lower down the social scale, Khalifeh representing a prostitute as spokesperson for the outcast and humiliated. In that sense, the Palestinian realist novel extends the notion of "type" in more radically egalitarian directions. Their characters give voice to those previously regarded as too inarticulate and socially unaware to be represented as subjects, writing them as agents in their own lives, rather than merely victims and passive sufferers.

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3 György Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. by Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1962), 34–5.

Concomitant with the presentation of characters as “types” is the implicit epistemological claim that, largely, we can comprehend people and their world. No serious realist writer ever suggests that total knowledge of any person or of any society is available. There is, however, an assumption that, partial although it must always be, people can be understood and the world in which we live comprehended. Furthermore, human beings are able, in varying degrees and capacities, to communicate that understanding to each other by means of the inexhaustible variety of speech and writing available, including fiction. This is the foundational assumption of literary realism. It is also the founding epistemological condition of the possibility of community, of a shared world. Indeed, egalitarian growth of an empirical belief in a common life as opposed to a divinely ordered universe originates at the same moment as the realist novel. In *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*, critic Raymond Williams picks out as the central achievement of that realist tradition the exploration of “the substance and meaning of community .... What community is, what it has been, what it might be.”<sup>4</sup> This focus seems to translate with equal urgency and insight into literary writing, like that of Palestinian novels, engaging with today’s world where loss of community through dispersal, resettlement, and exile is the daily lived experience of so many.

The optimistic belief in the agency and knowledge of ordinary people to shape their world for the better was lost in 1848, as reactionary power was reestablished throughout Europe. With this restitution of the *ancien régime*, the realist novel also loses its dynamic force, argues Lukács. Post-1848 novelists turn towards subjective perspectives, political disengagement, and artistic alienation. The cultural dominance of literary realism succumbs to literary modernism. In subsequent work by writers like Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett, and James Joyce, isolation, failure of communication, and loss of coherence become the aesthetic and narrative norms. Community gives way to subjective individualism.

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4 Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (St. Albans, Herts.: Paladin, 1974), 11.

Lukács's wholesale dismissal of these new modernist aesthetics is a matter of controversy. There are, though, undoubted parallels between the historical crisis of revolutionary hope in the Europe of 1848 and that of the destruction of Palestinian aspirations for a new democratic order of freedom after 1967, which saw the stunning defeat of combined Arab forces by Israel.

The failure of Arab military power was followed by political realignment towards America and away from communist Russia. Reactionary, authoritarian regimes entrenched themselves across the region, led by the conservative Saudi monarchy. Saddam Hussein consolidated a repressive government in Iraq and Arab populism was increasingly deflected into religious authoritarian conformity. In 1970, King Hussein of Jordan crushed the Palestinian resistance fighters within Jordanian territory. In the Oslo Accords, signed in 1993 between the Israelis and the PLO at Camp David under American auspices, there was for the first time recognition by Palestinians of the state of Israel. While the PLO, as sole Palestinian signatory, consolidated its position as the legitimate voice of the Palestinian people, very little of substance was gained from Israel in exchange. After Oslo, Palestinian aspirations narrowed down to a state solution rather than the earlier broader hopes of a wholly new democratic social order. And increasingly throughout this period, oil wealth became the determining factor of national and international politics.

As with European writers, the Palestinian literary response to this destruction of hope is a transformation in form. The erstwhile realists turn to modernist techniques, such as subjective perspectives, fragmentation of character, and a tonality of disintegration. In Jabra's late novel *The Other Rooms* (1986), written in Baghdad during the Iran-Iraq war, a nightmare of suffering is the protagonist's only reality. Abu-Manneh, however, does not see this stylistic transformation as a total retreat from revolutionary hope. Instead, he turns to Theodor Adorno's defense of writers like Kafka and Proust against Lukács's accusations of political defeatism.

The self-referentiality of modernist art, Adorno asserts, is not simply a retreat into art for art's sake. The experimental newness of modernist art ensures its non-contamination by the relentless global forces of bureaucratization, cultural manipulation, and consumer capitalism. The fragmentation of identity presented in modernist writing is the only means of resistance available to artists against the repressive, consumerist conformity of the modern world order.<sup>5</sup> Adorno thus relates stylistic transformation, like Lukács, to the sociopolitical world from which it emerges. The self-proclaimed autonomy of art, for Adorno, is a means of resistance to overwhelming repressive social forces. In this sense, writers remain true to the negative actuality of postrevolutionary reaction, refusing easy consolations, while retaining spaces for hope through aesthetic nonconformity. It is this insight, Abu-Manneh suggests, that helps recognize that even in their later narratives of loss and of a world without meaning, Palestinian novelists sustain in their writing fissures and intimations of hope.

The quarrel between realism and modernism can perhaps be partly reconciled by recognition that each form is responding to the world in which it is being produced, albeit obliquely in the case of modernism. No such compromise seems possible with the far more radical challenges to the epistemological premise of realism, made since the 1970s, by post-structural and postmodern thinking. Post-structuralism asserts the wholly determining force of language in generating the total system of meaning by which we experience reality. Words and the value structures inhering in them mediate the only access to reality available to us. We never know "things in themselves," but only through the words our language system offers. Novels, from this perspective, cannot convey knowledge about an external world, they can only provide rearrangements of the words used in linguistic systems to map meaning onto the always unattainable otherness of reality beyond words. In so doing, novels offer confirmation and reassurance that we

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5 *Aesthetics and Politics: Debates between Bloch, Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin, Adorno*, trans. editor Ronald Taylor (London: Verso, 1980), 151–195.

know our world and how it works; in this way, realism stands accused of bad faith, of sustaining the consensual status quo as just naturally the way things unalterably are. Likewise, the grand narratives of the Enlightenment proclaiming the universal progress, freedom, justice, and reason of humankind — which implicitly structure the plots of so much realist fiction — are themselves ideological systems, abstract ideals nonexistent beyond words. Within this totalizing epistemological skepticism of postmodernism, the articulation of hope becomes extremely fraught, if not impossible.

The exposure of the precarious foundations of narratives of liberation and democratic hope may seem to be upheld epistemologically by linguistic determinism and empirically by the failure currently to be seen across the world of so many political struggles for equality. Nevertheless, this widely dominant post-structural ideology is itself open to the charge of perpetuating, by its pessimism, the very world order that it condemns. The more human reality is held to be nothing but a surface of signs, the less critical purchase there is upon the actual material conditions of life for the many excluded from the surpluses of consumption, those for whom the most basic physical needs are unavailable. This is the challenging interface where theory meets praxis, lived experience. As Abu-Manneh asserts, “Suffering is too real, too multiple, to pretend that the grand narrative of freedom and emancipation is irrelevant today.”<sup>6</sup>

This is where *The Palestinian Novel* enters current controversy. Postcolonial studies have, since around the 1990s, tended to subscribe to the epistemology and ideology of postmodernism with the rejection this entails of grand narratives of individualist freedom and ideals of universal liberty. Instead of the autonomous individual subject, they favor ideas of hybrid identities, dispersed subjectivity, and the un-boundaried status of the migrant. The capacity to play across multiple identities is a form of freedom to be desired rather than a Western, bourgeois ideal

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6 Bashir Abu-Manneh, *The Palestinian Novel: From 1948 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 168.

of individualism. The characters represented within novels discussed by Abu-Manneh provide a dramatic challenge to such optimism. Their lives are shaped by loss, physical suffering, and personal deprivations.

In Emile Habiby's novel, *The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist*, Saeed describes a host of "ghostlike" figures, exiled from homes demolished by the Israelis.<sup>7</sup> It is a scene comparable to Dante's depiction of doomed souls in *The Inferno*. Such radical loss of identity provides a bitter counterpoint to any celebration of the liberty to be gained by dispersed selfhood. In Sahar Khalifeh's novel *Sunflower*, Khadra, a prostitute, declares of Israeli prison guards, "They hit me the bastards. I spit at them .... The father beats, the husband beats, the Jews beat, beatings on top of beatings. God knows that beatings by Jews are better, at least you feel respectable."<sup>8</sup> It would surely be a travesty to read this depiction of hard-won integrity skeptically as offering readers a comforting fiction of self-autonomy?

As well as deconstructing belief in the individual as a stable, knowable identity, post-structuralism radically challenges similar notions of the state and the nation. Perceptions of the geographical stability and unity of the state are undermined, postcolonial critics claim, by the porousness of national borders with respect to flows of capital, commodities, people, information, and disease. The myth of national identity masks the multiple actual identities, opinions, classes, races, and religions, many of them conflicting even within the same person, that constitutes the actual diversity of the population. Viewed in this way, the state and nation need to be understood not as natural, unambiguous, enduring entities but as fluid and multiple clusters of forces — administrative, disciplinary, military, and ideological. Recognition of the fictionality and pretense that underlies the apparent solidity and permanence of the state is a necessary and welcome overturning of

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7 Emile Habiby, *The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist*, trans. S. K. Jayyusi and T. Le-Gassick (Northampton, Massachusetts: Interlink Books, 2003), 23.

8 Sahar Khalifeh, *Abbad al-Shams* [Sunflower] (1980), English trans. in *The Palestinian Novel*, 132.

undue reverence to its authority and of the grand narratives of national exceptionalism that too easily foster nationalistic belligerence. “We will become a people,” the poet Mahmoud Darwish says, “when we learn that we are not angels, and that evil is not the prerogative of others.”<sup>9</sup>

It is noteworthy that Darwish uses the pluralized communal concept of “the people,” not that of a unitary “nation.” There are, nevertheless, problems arising from a decentered perception of nation states. As Marxist geographer David Harvey points out in *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom*, “The militarized fence that separates much of Mexico from the United States, or, even more heinously, the wall built to separate Israeli from Palestinian territory, are very tangible things that exist in absolute space.”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, they inflict very material harm and suffering on actual embodied people. As Harvey concludes, “The relational critique of absolute forms (such as the state) may be entirely justified, but the solution to the problem cannot be to ‘conceptualise the state’ into oblivion.”<sup>11</sup>

It can seem rather like a case of being damned if you do and damned if you don’t. The ideology of the autonomous subject, exceptional above all other living creatures by fact of possessing a rational capacity for freedom of choice and action, undoubtedly privileges the hierarchy of mind over matter, spirit over the body. In turn, this belief underpins the inequalities of gender, class, race, and nations, projecting a lack of rationality as a natural and justified cause of subordination. Similar ideologies, equating rational capacities with inherent superiority, are used to proclaim the uneven virtues of nations in terms of scientific and technological development and of rational systems of law and of individual freedom. The grand narrative of human exceptionalism has facilitated an exploitative and instrumental view of the rest of the

9 Mahmoud Darwish, *A River Dies of Thirst*, trans. Catherine Cobham (Beirut: Saqi Books, 2009), 60.

10 David Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 267.

11 David Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism*, 281.

material world in which we live that has led to the environmental crises now threatening the life of the whole planet.

The post-structuralist critique of myths of individualism, of national sovereignty, of the elevation of intellectual or spiritual identity above materiality, has radically challenged the conceptual structures of repressive systems that function to discipline and curtail the lives of vast numbers of people worldwide. Even so, these systems survive. Corporate, international capitalism has no problem coexisting with postmodernism; it, too, celebrates a world without national borders, a world of constant flux and unstable meanings. Consumerism offers endless fantasies of self for purchase across the globe. Whether multiple identities are fake dreams for consumption or playful pastiche mocking conventional boundaries of self, they equally lose sight of the actual materiality of embodied life and the physical needs that sustain it.

If theory is to articulate possibilities of hope that the world we share can be more sharing, then it needs to reconnect to the materiality of the means of life. The tradition of realism is founded upon empirical epistemology, a belief in the capacity for shared knowledge of the actuality we live within. It is this sense of shared reality that constitutes a common world, a community. It may be that realism can produce forms of imaginative knowledge to facilitate this reconnection of thought with praxis. This entails acceptance of realism's claim that we can communicate about our shared world, while incorporating that empirical belief with a more skeptical post-structural awareness of the capillary mechanisms of power inscribed in the words we use and the way we use them. It follows from the realist epistemological assumption that as the world undergoes change, so it will demand new methods of communication. The whole tradition of realism as a form has been one of experimentation and change. Realist writing which only serves up a comforting narrative that meets readers' social expectations is simply enfeebled realism.

Powerful narratives do not give us static pictures of life; they are not true or accurate in any one-to-one mapping of the world. What

they do, at their most imaginatively incisive, is foreground aspects of reality that go unnoticed, that are so familiar that we overlook them. More politically, they “redistribute the perceptible” as Jacques Rancière says, bringing to light what is hidden in full view. They dislocate a sense of what is just “natural,” unchangeable. In this way, they provoke a dissensus, a dismantling of the consensual way of ordering how we perceive the world and how we evaluate it. Sahir Khalifeh’s representation of a prostitute, someone outside of any social status, as capable of imparting knowledge, can be understood as just such a rupturing of consensual norms.

The realist novel, as Lukács taught us to appreciate it, reveals the underlying historical processes of change and conflict that constantly remake the world. Novels achieve this by making these invisible forces tangible and specific. Historical forces equally determine the current world. So, too, do geographical forces. Abstract terminology, however, allows the actual experience of those caught up in processes of spatial change to be glossed over. Words such as “resettlement” and “dispossessed” can hide rather than highlight the hidden individual and communal lives encompassed by such terms. The specificity of realist writing can substantiate the lived experiences of loss and dislocation suffered by numerous peoples caught up in conflicts of space and place.

Raymond Williams’s notion of the “structures of feeling,” as articulated in fiction, offers a productive recognition of the particularity of novelistic empiricism. “Feeling” in this context refers not to personal emotion but to general, multilayered, residual, and current complexes of affective, intellectual, and embodied responses to sociocultural experience. These feelings may be of insecurity or of well-being, optimism or fearfulness, familiarity or strangeness, repulsion or affection, and much more. Such structures are frequently substantiated in and evoked by the physical: forms of landscape, types of building, religious, ceremonial, and popular spectacles, music, but equally they are interwoven with habitual incidentals such as domestic sounds, birdsong, and weather. Despite such apparent inconsequential aspects, structures of

feeling contribute pervasively to the experiential affiliations that bind communities at all levels. Understanding the force of these feelings provides insights into the energies and passion of patriotism, nationalism, religious belief, and forms of popularism. Williams stresses the embodied, physical presentness with which these structures of feeling make their impact upon conscious being. He declares, “We have to find other terms for the undeniable experience of the present: not only the temporal present, the realization of this and this instant, but the specificity of present being, the inalienably physical.”<sup>12</sup> It is this embodied immediacy that realism is able to convey.

David Harvey opens his book, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, with a discussion of Raymond Williams’s realist fiction as offering imaginative insights into the structures of feeling imprinted in actual places. Harvey aims for a materialist understanding of the politics of place and space that recognizes the local has to be apprehended globally and the global through the local. In *Spaces of Hope*, he writes, “Human beings have typically produced a nested hierarchy of spatial scales within which to organize their activities and understand their world ... matters look differently when analyzed at global, continental, national, regional, local, or household/personal scales.”<sup>13</sup> It may be, as Harvey suggests, that the realist novel is particularly able to convey the complex structures of feeling arising from these interconnecting geographical scales: the local with the national, the household with the global.

In Jabra I. Jabra’s novel, *Hunters in a Narrow Street*, the Palestinian narrator, Jameel, already an exile in Baghdad from Israeli occupied Jerusalem, witnesses a shockingly brutal “honor” killing of a young woman by her brother. Ironically, just before this violent event, a European friend has been enthusing at the “authenticity” of the filth and passion in the street compared to the artificiality of Europe. For Jameel

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12 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 168.

13 David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 75.

and his friend, Adnan, the young woman's murder arises from the "vicious meshes of tribal tradition."<sup>14</sup> A little later, Jameel experiences a more lyrical sense of tradition evoked by place as he walks along the expansive, unhurried flow of the Tigris river through the city carrying "the memory of civilisations thousands of years old."<sup>15</sup> Over the page, Adnan exclaims, "For seven hundred years we have struggled with an ungenerous soil."<sup>16</sup> When his European friend protests that modernization and progress are being felt in Arab society, he replies, "Well you can see for yourself. We're caught in the web of power politics, oil politics, East and West politics."<sup>17</sup> It is difficult to think of another form of writing other than that of the realist novel able to bring so economically into view, the interconnected local, regional, national, global, and temporal plays of power and influence, and to do so as an experience of presentness, as the felt immediacy of complex and conflicting structures of feeling.

Earlier in Jabra's novel there is an account of refugees fleeing the Israeli forces: "They carried their rags and their bundles, and buried their children unceremoniously under the olive trees."<sup>18</sup> It is an image viewed almost nightly on television screens. But the world is rarely very curious about what is in those bundles, rarely asks what are those things the dispossessed try to preserve and what networks of culture, values, ceremonies, and memories — what structures of feeling — are gathered within those rags of a way of life? Critical analysis largely shares this lack of interest in the material objects that constitute our shared life. To an extent, this arises from idealist subordination of the material world to the mental and spiritual realm. For postmodernists, commodities constitute the endless circulation of pastiche, simulacra,

14 Jabra I. Jabra, *Hunters in a Narrow Street* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1996), 46.

15 *Hunters in a Narrow Street*, 57.

16 *Hunters in a Narrow Street*, 58.

17 *Hunters in a Narrow Street*, 59.

18 *Hunters in a Narrow Street*, II.

and repetition that constitutes late capitalism. Marxist analysis tends to focus upon things negatively as commodity fetishism, the fantasy projection of desire onto consumer goods. For critic Roland Barthes, the plethora of things in realist novels are to be understood skeptically as “reality effects,” there to convince the unsuspecting reader that writing can convey actuality.<sup>19</sup> Critical discourse needs a richer response to realism’s insistent attention to the fabricated “thingness” of the material world.

Recognizing that things are active agents within human life provides an egalitarian undermining of individualistic exceptionalism based upon assertions of mind over matter. Physical objects speak of human dependency as well as mastery. This revision of values facilitates rethinking the subject-object relation to recognize that things perform many crucial functions, including organizing and substantiating public and private feelings, constitutions of identity, and relationships across space and time. Bruno Latour argues vigorously for a renewal of realism against the postmodernists’ anti-empiricism. “What if [post-structural] explanations resorting to power, society, discourse have outlived their usefulness?” he asks.<sup>20</sup> Reinvigorating what he terms a stubbornly robust form of realism requires recognition of the relations of equality between objects and people. “Things are much more interesting, variegated, uncertain, complicated, far-reaching, heterogeneous, risky, historical, local, material and networky than the pathetic version offered for too long,” he declares.<sup>21</sup> Latour takes from Heidegger the term “gathering” to indicate the way things bring together in their actual material substance networks of people, institutions, social structures, processes of production and distribution in continuous, horizontal chains of connections.

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19 Roland Barthes, “The Reality Effect” in Tzvetan Todorov, *French Literary Theory*, trans. R. Carter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 11–17.

20 Bruno Latour, “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam: From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern” in Bill Brown, *Things* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004), 155.

21 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 21.

Perhaps one of the most important of these activities performed by things is the substantiation of a shared material world; we know our common world because we share, use, and handle the common things of that world. The ubiquitous presence of things is constitutive of the materiality of our lives. They provide the evidential minutia, the reiterative practices, of physical, bodily being, reminding us of the embodied basis of common life. Objects produce or facilitate the warp and weft of the activities of personal and familial life, of a public sphere, and of institutional customs. Without the ordinary things that accompany almost all aspects of life, the processes of living and community are almost inconceivable.

The language of the Palestinian novels that Abu-Manneh discusses in his study is dense with things. The experiential reality of loss is substantiated by the specificity of novelistic attention to the things of common life. In the novels, Israeli settlers who replace the original inhabitants are often themselves poor and without possessions; they therefore simply take over whatever is there. The novels register the strange unease this causes them as if they become caretakers of the lives of others. In Elias Khoury's *Gate of the Sun*, a Palestinian woman, Umm Hassan, returns to her old home and finds everything as it was — even down to the jug she had used for water. Seeing her recognize it, the Jewish woman who now lives in the house insists she takes it away with her.<sup>22</sup> But Umm Hassan does not want it. It is part of the material fabric of a life which she no longer owns. The two women in this story speak to each other without bitterness as they drink the coffee the Jewish woman provides. Throughout the novels, coffee is offered as a ritual of welcome and hospitality to whoever enters the home. In narratives of such continuous dispossession, the question implicitly arises what happens to structures of feeling that sustain reciprocity, neighborliness, and ties of community when women no longer have even their coffee cups to perform the act of sharing?

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22 Elias Khoury, *Gate of the Sun*, trans. Humphrey Davies (London: Vintage Books, 2006), 97.

Another recurrent reference in all of the texts is to olive trees. Refugees turned out of their homes find shelter under their branches. Their dead are buried amongst them. Olive trees constitute the main source of income for the majority of Palestinian families. Olive trees, however, are far more than the major means of production, although they are that too. Olive trees are “gatherings,” holding together complicated networks of relationships, customs, ceremonies, and values across time and space. Palestine has some of the world’s oldest olive trees, some dating back thousands of years, and their capacity to survive and fruit within their harsh terrain substantiates for Palestinians a sense of their own resilient identity, the ability to endure and survive. For many families, the trees are passed down from generation to generation, constituting a visible and tangible history. The harvesting of the olives in October is an occasion when the extended family return home to help gather in the crop along with neighbors and friends. Important ceremonies like weddings and baptisms are planned to coincide with the olive harvest. The mass destruction of olive trees by the Israelis, lamented in the novels, implicitly points to the multifaceted properties of things in generating and sustaining whole ways of life and community identities.

Novels also register the specificity of structures of feelings and power networks inhering in the fabricated infrastructure and commodities of modern technology. Israeli espousal of Western scientific production, especially that of weaponry, ensures their military domination of the Palestinians. But it has a wider implication; technology is instrumental in the way peoples and nations understand themselves and project their identity abroad. Technological knowhow provides the Israelis with justification for their conquest of land in terms of improved productivity, based upon more “progressive” agricultural knowledge; on “superior” education and legal and administrative structures, as opposed to “hidebound, inefficient” traditionalism. For the Palestinians, defeat by superior technical force brought feelings of failure, inadequacy, and even a sense of deserved disenfranchisement. At the end of the 1967 war, when the joint Arabs armies had been completely

defeated, the Israelis opened up the borders between the territories they controlled so that displaced Palestinians could travel back and visit the places where they had previously lived. One such returning exile in Kanafani's story, *Returning to Haifa*, exclaims bitterly, "This is part of the war. They're saying to us. 'Help yourselves, look and see how much better we are than you, how much more developed. You should accept being our servants.'"<sup>23</sup>

Jacques Rancière's expression "redistribution of the perceptible" aptly focuses upon the egalitarian novelistic stylistics that heeds the political and social significance of what would otherwise be insignificant, disregarded as beneath the dignity of literature. Like Lukács, he associates this aesthetic transformation with the upheaval of values caused by the French Revolution. Unlike Lukács, Rancière does not understand the literary regime initiated by democratic struggle as terminating in 1848. Rather, he traces a continuous process from Balzac to Flaubert to Conrad and Woolf and beyond. Following the revolutionary tumults that saw the demolition of inherent, unquestioned belief in authority across political, religious, class, and cultural domains, he argues that a new aesthetic regime broke free from traditional artistic decorum. Sweeping aside the old hierarchical verisimilitude in which only a few are deemed noteworthy in speech and action, a new egalitarian writing ensued in which anyone can say anything and any aspect of the world is worthy of literature.

"A tide of beings and things, a tide of superfluous bodies" surges through the text of *Madame Bovary*, claims Rancière.<sup>24</sup> He sees this shattering of the policed boundaries of the culturally and aesthetically proper as enacting a stylistic counterpart to the refusal of ordinary working people to stay within the scope of life and ambition previously allotted them. The egalitarianism of the new literary regime is radical

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23 Ghassan Kanafani, *Palestine's Children: Returning to Haifa and Other Stories*, trans. Barbara Harlow and Karen E. Riley, with introduction and biographical essay by G. Kanafani (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2000), 151.

24 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Literature*, trans. Julie Rose (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), 39.

in its refusal of any hierarchies: mind over body, the human over other life, ideas over things. Rancière, in effect, sets out a new, wholly materialist, epistemology. The redistribution of the perceptible, he proclaims, enacts a dissensus; it radically reconfigures the sensible world as an egalitarian, horizontal continuity beyond any possible completion. It is a dynamic, interwoven fabric in which all materiality whatsoever participates, it is “the great democracy of sensible co-existences.”<sup>25</sup> This is not utopianism in a normal sense of the term; it does not look to the future but to a re-recognition of the world we presently inhabit. It entails a materialist understanding that a shared world is not an option or a choice to be made; it is the necessary condition of our being as embodied creatures.

Novels do, of course, comply with and sustain disciplinary and ideological structures that repress. Equally, they assert an egalitarian recognition of the multiply physical here-ness of place as lived, and of the potent agency of things in every aspect of existence. By means of this specificity, they extend imaginative knowledge towards communities that may be unfamiliar, disregarded, or even disliked. They enlarge recognition of the “the great democracy of sensible co-existences.” Abu-Manneh’s *The Palestinian Novel* offers access to just such a body of work, whose stylistic particularity inscribes the inherent egalitarianism of lived existence. In common with other robust realist writing, these stories undermine divisive forms of human exceptionalism whether of nations, religions, individual, gender, or peoples. In their encompassing materialism, such novels impart knowledge and the structures of feeling of a multiply shared world. They articulate, thereby, structures of hope. ✎

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25 Jacques Rancière, *The Lost Thread: The Democracy of Modern Fiction*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 13.

## NOTE TO CONTRIBUTORS

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