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Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply “carrying on the fight,” but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

Submission guidelines

Articles will typically range in length from 750–2,500 words, but longer pieces will also be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to: review_editor@platypus1917.org. All submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

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darly along with the possibility of ending oppression. the working class, these theorists rule out class soli- fied in the *Communist Manifesto* remains. By deleting relation to production. But the power of workers' ident- workers, and baristas are rendered workers by their understanding that nurses, teachers, service and office the working class no longer exists. It ignores Marx's Over the last 30 years, academic theory has decided us—you either involve yourself or you don't. customized to the luxury of picking our battles. They hit military and marriage?" But we on the Left are not ac- rights?" I never would have said, "Oh, please, can it be the fights you want to have out there, in terms of LGBT that are far to the right. If anybody had asked, "What are we abandon the field of battle to people with politics. If the Left does not get involved in these struggles, develop solidarity on the ground. in Gaza. These are concrete examples of how you can apartheid Israel's actions following the flotilla massacre ment. This past June, LGBT contingents were protesting and Latino workforce solidatized with the LGBT move- Windows and Doors factory in Chicago. This largely black have the sit-in and factory occupation at the Republic May Day following the National Equality March. You also folks have been participating in mass demonstrations on ertheless, for the first time largearge contingents of LGBT don't tell" and DOMA [Defense of Marriage Act]. Nev- tion of sexual liberation to those issues—"Don't ask, The dominant forces unnecessarily narrow the ques- and Afghan brothers and sisters. are willing to gain rights behind the backs of our Iraqi transgender, and of whatever nationality—to say that we level of solidarity among people—whether gay, bisexual, accepted among people who aim to build the broadest passed with the repeal of "Don't ask, don't tell." It is un- were utterly uncritical of the military funding bill which you see the rise of conservative "Gay, Inc., who are in a moment when this movement is on the ebb, and We need to engage with others as they move Left. We these positions at the same time.

ing that nobody should serve in this miserable insti- the nation's largest workforce, while at the same think- eral government should not discriminate in the military, standard. But it is completely consistent to think the Fed- in the family or workplices are often held to a different terms of our exploitation. However, reforms like equality understand that the point of unions is to renegotiate the or fight for decent labor contracts, even though we all

whether we ought to involve ourselves in building unions I have not heard serious leftists today debate about aim only for the immediate demand. of battle to the people with the lowest-grade politics who make sense, as movements erupt, to abandon the field als, who drive the struggle into the ground. It doesn't always engaged in. Otherwise, we leave it to the liber- reforms is something revolutionaries and radicals have tween reformism and the fight for reforms. The fight for gays in the military, radicals need to distinguish be- as same-sex marriage and no discrimination against **Sherry Wolf:** With respect to reformist demands, such same-sex marriage constitutional. 50. It is not that big of a leap for the courts to declare today is getting quite large, especially for people under divided. Besides, public support for same-sex marriage the courts, for instance, even as public opinion remained of the states that repealed sodomy laws did so through to catch up, but this is not always the case. The majority they tend to be conservative and wait for public opinion plished. Others argue that courts don't work because convinced that little or nothing would have been accom- true, but if the courts had stayed on the sidelines, "I'm dence in which racial and gender groups who had sup- had to contend with a complicated civil rights jurispru- policies, whereas in the U.S., the LGBT movement has because they have benefited from simpler human rights countries, LGBT movements have gained more traction Republicans have dominated the federal bench. In other also been more assertive than courts in the U.S., where in these countries, and particularly in Canada, have religion is not as strong politically or socially. The courts in Canada, Northern Europe, and in Europe generally, some places than in others. The first factor is religion. other reasons why gay rights have advanced faster in should exaggerate the importance of the Left. There are tion than other parties. Nevertheless, I don't think we supportive of gay and lesbian rights and sexual libera- in most countries, the Left has tended to be more do both at the same time.

concerns, but the two aren't mutually exclusive. You can should promote identity politics at the expense of class identity politics displace class struggle. I don't think we sal than those values? There is also the concern that for equality and freedom. What could be more univer- interest of identity groups is not necessarily at odds with and identity politics are exclusionary. But promoting the often say the Left ought to stand for universal values, This gets at the internal politics of the Left. People

take care of their parents for a phase of their lives, for example, but do not remain in that role. Gay marriage could be one step on the road to a more inclusive family policy, and I think that's what we should see it as—an incremental step. At the same time, I don't think it is sensible to wait until a radical, comprehensive change in family policy comes about.

As for whether the struggle has progressed or not, I think that depends on how you look at it. Forty states have banned gay marriage, so by that reckoning it seems to be a failure. On the other hand, five states recognize gay marriage, five states have civil unions, and two states recognize out-of-state gay marriage. Ten coun- tries around the world recognize same-sex marriage, and about eight have civil unions. No one would have expected this 30 years ago. The main limit in the U.S. is the religious Right and fundamentalism. Capitalism does such a mobile society that there is concern about so- cial disintegration, and gay rights come to be seen as a threat to social integration. But the religious Right is the real culprit.

On the whole, the courts have played a construc- tive role in getting the issue on the agenda and forcing courts, as this created a horrible backlash. This may be action. Some say we shouldn't have gone through the fights to get the issue on the agenda and forcing states recognize out-of-state gay marriage. Ten coun- tries around the world recognize same-sex marriage, and about eight have civil unions. No one would have convinced that little or nothing would have been accom- plished. Others argue that courts don't work because they tend to be conservative and wait for public opinion to catch up, but this is not always the case. The majority of the states that repealed sodomy laws did so through the courts, for instance, even as public opinion remained divided. Besides, public support for same-sex marriage today is getting quite large, especially for people under 50. It is not that big of a leap for the courts to declare same-sex marriage constitutional.

that does not exist in other kinds of relationships. Adults usually do. There is a permanence to sexual orientation identity groups, generally, while gays and lesbians obvi- these other family groupings. These do not constitute I don't know how politically realistic it is to mobilize all agree with the the "beyond marriage" arguments, although unjust—polygamy, for instance. Nonetheless, I mostly deciding that some forms of family might be inherently of family when there are arguably ethical reasons for of whether we want a completely unrestricted definition of family when there are arguably ethical reasons for ognition and support. Of course, this raises the question parents, single parents, and so on, deserve social rec- kinds of families, such as adult children taking care of the primary qualification for rights and benefits. Other give notion of the family, rather than making marriage marriage as a civil status and striving for a more inclu- beyond marriage propose reducing the importance of range is a narrow focus. Organizations that want to go I sympathize with the criticism that same-sex mar- Civil Rights Movement. fit in to this legal framework, which is one legacy of the preference. It has been difficult for gays and lesbians to posedly "immutable" characteristics were given legal dence in which racial and gender groups who had sup- had to contend with a complicated civil rights jurispru- policies, whereas in the U.S., the LGBT movement has because they have benefited from simpler human rights countries, LGBT movements have gained more traction Republicans have dominated the federal bench. In other also been more assertive than courts in the U.S., where in these countries, and particularly in Canada, have religion is not as strong politically or socially. The courts in Canada, Northern Europe, and in Europe generally, some places than in others. The first factor is religion. other reasons why gay rights have advanced faster in should exaggerate the importance of the Left. There are tion than other parties. Nevertheless, I don't think we supportive of gay and lesbian rights and sexual libera- in most countries, the Left has tended to be more do both at the same time.

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Right. is superficial and potentially plays into the hand of the LGBT movement as fighting only for sexual freedom humanity solely to their sexual preferences. To view the have categories like "homosexual" that reduce their sexual mores might be labeled a pervert, but you don't sexual beings. A straight person who does not follow ans not only as sexual deviants, but also as exclusively The Right has always sought to portray gays and lesbi- about sex and overcoming a denial of sexual freedom. It should also be said that gay rights are not just can be subversive sexually without being political. of politics, because sex is private, for the most part. You sexual emancipation, they tend to deal with them outside identity, as such. If they do have grievances in the area of a broader movement because they don't have a sexual they tend not to reach out to gays and lesbians to form centuries. As for people who are not gay or queer, I think of a heterosexual majority that has oppressed them for than with other people, most of whom are seen as part themselves as having more in common with each other targeted by discriminatory laws, so they naturally see and a shared set of experiences, which includes being Why? Gays and lesbians obviously have a community ment, but not a broader sexual emancipation movement. However, it is true that we have a gay rights move- part devoted to emancipating women sexually. important role in the women's movement, which was in that was going on at the time, and lesbians played an early 1970s drew inspiration from the sexual revolution liberation phase of the movement in the late 1960s and non-gay groups also seeking sexual liberation. The gay think gays and lesbians have linked their cause to other Day instead of Sexual Freedom Struggle Day?" First, I sion has an interesting hook: "Why do we have Gay Pride **Gary Mucciaroni:** One of the questions for this discus-

Opening Remarks

On November 8, 2010, Platypus hosted a forum entitled "Which Way Forward for Sexual Liberation?" moderated by Jeremy Cohan at New York University. The panel consisted of Gary Mucciaroni, professor of political science at Temple University; Sherry Wolf, author of Sexuality and Socialism and organizer for the International Socialist Organization; Kenyon Farrow, executive director of Queers for Economic Justice and author of the forthcoming Stand Up: The Politics of Racial Uplift; and Greg Gabrellas of Platypus. What follows is an edited transcript of the event. Full audio is available online at <<http://www.archive.org/details/>

Gary Mucciaroni, Sherry Wolf, Kenyon Farrow, and Greg Gabrellas

Which Way Forward for Sexual Liberation?

Sexual Liberation, continued from page 1

Identitarian politics came to replace the working class, leading to an individualistic framework that accommodates the system and sees transformation in individual life choices. Pat Califia put it brilliantly: “We can’t fuck our way to freedom.”¹ I support people doing whatever they choose, but I do not think that is liberation. There are real material constraints on our lives.

Historical materialism holds its currency to this day: It is our social being that determines our consciousness, not our ideas that shape the world. We get up early, prepare lunch or get the kids off to school, go out to work—or to find work, more likely—then, after a long commute, we spend the next eight or ten hours doing soul-sucking labor, and we still have to worry about affording health care, child care, anything. These are not ingredients for sexually liberatory experiences in day-to-day life, they are ingredients for exhaustion.

Restructuring our individual lives does not challenge the status quo. Nor does the attempt to instill another sexual hierarchy mirroring bourgeois morality—“They say the missionary position is best, we say fist-fucking.” We have to go back to Wilhelm Reich and Alexandra Kollontai, who in the early 20th century insisted on the interconnection between the transformation of the material conditions of our lives and liberating our sexuality. It is not just LGBT people who are oppressed, or repressed, in society today, where the average length of sex is six minutes. We all have a fight for sexual liberation on our hands, which will not be won without the transformation of the conditions we work and live under. It’s impossible to extricate the struggle for sexual liberation from the larger material struggles against austerity measures, racism, Islamophobia, and all the noxious crap specific to the ruling class’s attempt to have its way.

Our fights and our demands for immediate rights—including leisure time to explore ourselves and our bodies, and to raise questions in a forum like this—cannot be disconnected. The current moment, though often described simply as a rightward shift in the U.S., is actually a politically volatile moment. We are witnessing a political polarization. Their side, obviously, is mobilizing its base. Our side is not as well organized. We have quite a bit of work to do. The 29 million people who voted for Obama in the last election and sat it out at the midterms are disgusted and disaffected. Many are absolutely terrified, and some of them are organizable. That’s the job of the Left: to give people direction, hope, and organization.

Kenyon Farrow: I don’t want to debate the utility of marriage itself. However, the use of same-sex marriage as a central issue in the LGBT movement, along with “Don’t ask, don’t tell,” is not a natural occurrence. Why this issue? Why now? Why is funding going into this issue and not others? In 2008, the 40th anniversary of Stonewall, marriage was widely proclaimed to be the next step for gay rights in a natural progression of politics, but this is ridiculous.

Sex and sexuality is seen as a private issue, but it is not. I don’t think the state or the community has the right to determine the sexual expression or identity of consenting adults. But the state and, sometimes, institutions like families and communities, try to control different kinds of sexuality or different racial or sexual groups. I have even found that, though it ranges from progressive to radical, the Left can be just as sexually conservative as the right, in terms of policing certain kinds of sexual expression. Either way, when a group’s sexuality is brought into question, it is public.

For example, the phrase “baby momma,” which targets single black and Latino poor mothers as “welfare queen” did in the 1980s, allows the state to demonize low-income women in order to remove welfare benefits from those women. Even saying “baby momma” brings a certain image to mind. The state operationalizes itself to target and control the sexual and reproductive rights of poor women, mostly black and brown. They are maligned in the press on the basis of their sexuality, how many kids they have, whether they know who the fathers are, and so on.

Another category today is the “sex offender,” or the “sexual predator.” Those legal definitions are not just about people who have committed acts of rape, child sexual abuse, or incest. It is being expanded to other criminal offenses involving sexuality. In Louisiana, women convicted of prostitution are now targeted with a 200-year-old “crime against nature” law. Though it was put on the books to target queers, this law is now being applied to prostitution charges, so that prostitutes can be designated as sex offenders by the state. This goes on their record, jeopardizing their access to jobs and to welfare for at least ten years. So, I challenge the idea that sex is private. For many communities, sexuality is policed and made very public.

If we are talking about the LGBT movement, which grew out of a sexual liberationist politics, the question for me is, Why hasn’t that movement made overtures to these communities? Certainly, in the black community, marriage has never solved the socioeconomic problems that the LGBT movement claims marriage will solve. For a lot of people, the narrative is that LGBT is white. One really has to think about what gay marriage would mean for black queer folks, particularly in low-income communities. Considering how race corresponds to access to material resources, it is unclear how same-sex marriage could work for black LGBT people. Given the widespread lack of health insurance among black people, or the fact that health insurance isn’t even an option for those trapped in low-wage jobs, getting married to a partner—same-sex or otherwise—does not ensure access to health care.

People argue that they’ve seen black, Latino, and poor people at protests. That may be true, but as executive director of an organization that does not do marriage work, I often hear LGBT funders question the validity of the work we do with the black community. Meanwhile we are in a national crisis of queer youth homelessness, yet no funding is rolling in to secure access to housing. Clearly, some communities do not have access to discussions about the privacy of their bodies and sexuality, or their reproductive rights and health. The fact that the movement is arguing that same-sex marriage will somehow address these issues across the board reflects a shallow understanding of the problem.

Greg Gabrellas: Two opposed, and seemingly irreconcilable, stances claim the mantle of a radical position on gay politics. Although occasionally dressed up in the language of class struggle, socialist parties of all stripes remain practically indistinguishable from mainstream liberal advocacy: support of same-sex marriage, the extension of hate crime legislation, equal pay, and civil rights. Against this allegedly assimilationist orientation, self-described queers demand more radical and expansive politics. Instead of lobbying for equality, queer politics aims to fight against “heteronormativity,” “white privilege,” and “the marriage-industrial complex” by dropping banners from megachurches and vandalizing the Human Rights Campaign. To the socialist Left, such activism appears counter-productive. To the queer activist, the demand only for equality amounts to accommodation and domestication.

Despite apparent differences, both the socialist and the queer stances share unquestioned assumptions about sexuality and how it matters to the Left. For both, sexuality defines us as a minority dominated by a straight majority. The state, culture, and even language itself contribute to our shared experience of shame and otherness. Although socialists and queers disagree about what defense entails, they agree that it is the Left’s role to defend sexual minorities and their sexuality. Many see the defense of rights as fundamental, but even if not—“We’re here, we’re queer, so get used to it.” Give us tolerance, accept us for who we are, or at least leave us be. These are common slogans licensed by common-sense assumptions. But they are wrong, and, worse than wrong, they obscure the problem of sexual freedom and naturalize the incapacity of the Left to address its implications.

Sex is old, but sexuality is a distinctly modern phenomenon. Sexuality as a sphere of life distinct from all others only begins with the great revolutions wrought by capitalism. The accumulation of capital tore apart traditional ties, breaking the bond between peasants and their land, brutally forcing people into the labor market. Denied common land, peasants fled to cities seeking jobs. But with this change and attendant violence came the possibility of fashioning a sexual life free from the traditional community and its rigid customs. Terrified at the force and the freedom made possible by capitalist modernity, many sought order and restraint, hoping to control the sexual disorder proliferating around them. This was no conspiracy against the masses. As the development of capitalism wore on in the 19th century, with cyclic economic collapse following ever more destructive wars, many workers were confused and disoriented. Lashing out against the alleged destroyers of the family seemed a reasonable means to restore a better, if mythical, order of society. This was not simply a bad judgment, or a case of bad attitudes. Rather, it must be understood as a misrecognized attempt to master capitalism through social control.

The relationship between capital and sexuality goes deeper. Class rule before capitalism was a straightforward, brutal affair. But under capitalism, the abstract form of work itself constitutes domination. Wage laborers produce the very thing that dominates them. Thus, the form of the work is alienated—it is not our own. In way of response, we carve out wholly subjective space: sexuality, personal life, and marriage. It is not simply that our workaday selves are unhappy, or that some of us dislike our jobs. What matters is whether we make ourselves, and the conditions in which we live, or whether they are made for us. Capitalism is unique in that, while the combined powers of humanity make and remake the social world with ever increasing frequency, as capital continues its process of ongoing creative destruction, we make ourselves and our world only behind our own backs. Our sexuality is a way of trying to organize this confusion, to bring reason and dignity into human affairs. It doesn’t matter if this means faithful monogamy with vanilla missionary-style sex once a month, or wild orgies at the local bathhouse. What matters is its meaning: that it is ours—our pleasure, our pain, our selves.

Sexuality is a form that freedom takes under capitalism, but like all forms of freedom under capitalism, it remains incomplete. Early bourgeois philosophers like Hegel embraced sexuality in their own way. They recognized that modern marriage, as a union of free individuals, was in tension with the blind play of interests in civil society—a haven in a heartless world. Such a perspective on the emancipatory kernel of modern marriage was shared by those who advocated free love, an ideology that sought the reform of marriage by making divorce legal and abolishing the coverture laws that subsumed the rights of women under those of men. How could marriage represent a free union of individuals if one partner had the civil status of a slave? Not surprisingly, advocates of women’s rights were also largely advocates of civil rights for freedmen and opponents of child slavery. Both exponents of free love and politicians of free labor, before and after the American Civil War and Reconstruction, drew from a common stock of bourgeois political theory. Many, like Frederick Douglass, Victoria Woodhull, Wendell Philips and Sojourner Truth, made common cause in their long, reformist careers.

If sexuality emerged as a symptom of capitalism, then the revolutionary Left sought to push the symptom to its highest consciousness, seeking to expose through class struggle the contours of an otherwise opaque reality, along with its possibilities for transformation. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels sought to examine how sexual relations were transformed under capitalism while also sustained in their most oppressive forms, and how they might be superseded by a change in the mode of production. August Bebel, the cofounder and longtime chairman of the German Social Democratic Party, authored a landmark monograph on the close relationship between socialism and the struggle for gender rights.² He was also the first parliamentarian in history to champion the decriminalization of homosexuality. The Bolshevik revolution of 1917 decriminalized divorce, homosexuality, and abortion. Sexuality was not just one plank on the program, an issue dealt with by a multi-issue party. Rather, sexuality and its emancipation were understood to be intrinsic to the process of revolution itself. The Left exposed the bourgeois ideologists, the holdovers from free love, *not* for “privileging gender” over something called class. Instead, they criticized bourgeois spokespeople for being bourgeois—for evading the tasks of freedom by prescribing more abortions for the poor, rather than the

abolition of the system that made them poor.

The Left’s critique was not moralistic, but historical. Over time, the politics of free love had turned into its opposite. From a critique of the present order, looking toward a transformation of sexual relations, it became a defense of the ways sexuality remained unfree in the new order. This desire to cling to the past and avoid facing an uncertain future, this fear of freedom, has characterized both reform and revolution in the 20th century.

Today there is no Left in a position to make revolution, nor even to realize comprehensive social reforms. Although the contradictions of capitalism remain, they are now invisible, and seem unsolvable. Politics, once the vehicle to achieve self-knowledge, now just confirms us in what we already know. Sexual politics becomes a way of tolerating each other; radical activists create “safe spaces” and teach each other to be more “sex positive.” Sexual politics is a kind of compromise formation, formed by the recognition of the necessity for change when fundamental change is blocked. Hence its antinomical character: bourgeois rights versus radical queer freedom, same-sex marriage versus anti-marriage.

Radical queer activism seeks legitimization in the history of the 1960s, when revolution appeared to be in the air. But no revolution materialized, and proponents of liberation unreflectively drove their politics to their logical end point in accommodation and liquidation. The conster-nation about the mainstreaming of the LGBT liberation movement is beside the point. The liberationists of that movement did not supersede, but fell back upon old leftist formulations derived from Third World anti-colonial struggles, and demanded the abolition of the family as the simple and straightforward negation of the right-wing socialist, and later Stalinist, emphasis on preserving the integrity of the proletarian family.

But such activism does not, and cannot, overcome the situation that generates our need for family life in the first place—a situation that propels the contemporary movement for same-sex marriage. It is not the responsibility of the Left to be for or against same-sex marriage. The question of sexual freedom is not reducible to civil rights. The future of sexual liberation lies in the recovery of a Marxian approach to history: to understand ourselves and the history of the Left as an ongoing, unfinished attempt to change ourselves in the struggle for freedom, rather than simply the struggle to free what is already there. If we turn to history it must not be in an effort to find a usable past, ready-made, but in order to critique the impasse of the present.

The Left is handicapped by its history in ways that elude its grasp. The death of the Left in 1960s militancy was a peculiar phenomenon, and gay liberation must be understood within this context. As an entire movement self-destructs, no intellectual or political actor can escape the clutch of regression. Political discourse coarsens and petrifies, as analysis hardens into a set line. The gay liberation movement recognized this problem in its own way by attempting to elaborate a historically novel theory of liberation that would help alleviate the moralistic death grip of Cold War liberalism. But gay liberation as a political movement failed to raise historical consciousness—the contradiction of freedom and domination under capitalism—to the level of practical knowledge. To raise historical consciousness would have required the advance of an international socialist movement poised to make the revolutionary transformations necessary to achieve sexual freedom.

It was precisely this task that liberationist rhetoric evaded under its cloak of “group consciousness” and “group power.” It is precisely the task of any future Left to take up the call for sexual freedom, not as an identity politics, but as an emancipatory politics seeking to fulfill the highest promises of modern capitalist society and establish the material grounds for happiness. Far from prescribing the future, the Left must push on the limits of possibility under capitalism, without once reneging our responsibility to establish the necessity of political revolution. Engels had the right idea in his description of people in a free society: “Once such people appear,” he wrote, “they will not care a rap about what they today think they should do. They will establish their own practice and their own public opinion, conformable therewith, on the practice of each individual—and that’s the end of it.”³ It is up to the Left to abolish punitive morality and establish the grounds for human sexuality to flourish. To the proponents of both queer theory and gay domesticity, the Left must respond as Trotsky wrote of the Fourth International, against Stalinist counterrevolution in his day: The task is to sweep away “the quacks, charlatans, and unsolicited teachers of morals. In a society based upon exploitation, the highest moral is that of the social revolution.”⁴

Q & A

It’s hard not to think of the Civil Rights Movement when talking about gay rights. Even though poverty and segregation rates are as bad as they were in the 1960s, that was a period of radicalization. These struggles did not lead to international socialism, but clearly they were steps toward equality. Just because a given demand isn’t going to solve all the problems that motivate us, I don’t think we can be dismissive of those fights.

GG: I certainly would not dismiss those movements, especially the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power. Those movements went somewhere—namely, they helped pave the way to where we are in the present. Black Power was largely victorious as an ideology for thinking about race and community politics. As Sherry pointed out in her remarks, the Left largely acquiesced to conservative politicians who established policies punitive towards poor and working-class people in the name of “racial empowerment.”

The pressing question is this: What should define the Left’s basic orientation toward the world? For many decades, the Left’s answer has been to participate in social movements as they are, in hopes of using them as vehicles to build consciousness and lead the movement to something else. Socialist organizations have been attempting this strategy for decades. Why hasn’t it worked yet? I’m definitely sympathetic towards the possibility of a reinvigorated workers movement and socialist politics, but the Left has ceded so much ground that today it is incapable of formulating its basic orientation towards problems like sexuality.

SW: The role of people who aim to change the world, and not just think about radical ideas, is to engage with

real forces and struggles. We can’t get around the human material that capitalism has bequeathed to us. We can’t wait around for a more race-, class-, sex-conscious mass population to come about in order to move forward.

Two hundred folks in Boston, largely black and brown, who were initially fighting evictions largely out of their own self-interest, built a fertile movement that in some cases reversed the tide of foreclosures and evictions. Leftists in Chicago used that as a model and won a moratorium on evictions. Is it big enough? No. But this is where we are. Our job as radicals is to be involved in concrete struggles. I chafe at people who say, “I put the best four years of my education toward revolution and it hasn’t panned out.” We are looking at global forces and a Left that was obliterated in this country. A reborn Left will need us to get involved, sometimes in very partial reforms, in order to have an impact on them.

GM: I agree with what Sherry is saying about how we have to engage people on the basis of how they live their daily lives, in what may appear at first to be mundane struggles. That’s what people relate to, rather than doctrines and theories.

KF: I don’t distinguish organizing work from my work with shelters. I don’t feel like I have to divert from my politics. Otherwise it is patronizing; I would rather be blunt and say, “I’m not going to do that because it violates my politics.” You want to be involved where people are in their work and struggles, but at some point you have to make political choices. Projects of the mainstream LGBT community, like marriage, came from something. They’re not as spontaneous as they’re painted. There was funding and strategy that set these things up in a particular way.

There is a lot research around relationship configuration and HIV risk. I’ve heard the argument that what the U.S. needs is same-sex marriage, as this will go some way to decreasing HIV risk among gay men. I think, “Tell that to the married woman in South Africa.” You have to question those kinds of politics creeping their way into supposedly objective research. I say, “Let’s talk about you, rather than my community that you feel is problematic.”

One part of my political approach is to engage critical thinking about popular culture on my blog. I focus on the stuff people are actually being informed by, to raise questions about sex in a way that is not being dealt with by dead white man theory.

How do you see the last 20 years? In terms of sexual issues as well as general inequality, do you see it as offering progress or as a period of defeat or stasis?

SW: I’ve been an organized socialist since I was 18, and I have never seen a larger audience for left-wing politics and theory than in the last year. The number of people who are finding Marxists.org and reading things is great. It is a welcome development because superficially reading news items and taking action has shown itself to be insufficient. This generation is facing a lifetime of couch surfing and debt. This is not a game. The early lifestyle politics typical of the social justice movement 15 years ago are falling by the wayside and class politics are now back on the agenda.

GM: I think there has been a lot of progress in the last 20 to 40 years in terms of sexual politics, but much less so in the area of material, class struggle. I’m glad to hear that things might be improving, but I grew up in a time when unions were much stronger than they are today. Sexual politics have gotten a lot more progressive—just look at the sexual revolution and the changes in family law over the last 30 years. But on the economic side, the inequality keeps getting worse. The efforts of the Left to organize can’t keep up with that. If this latest catastrophe in capitalism that began with the 2008 crash doesn’t reconstitute the Left, I don’t know what could.

GG: When we talk of the past 20 years, I think that certainly no substantive gains by the Left have been achieved, but something of great importance has been lost: its basic orientation towards freedom. The failure to take stock of a very long period of degeneration on the Left is indicated by the gay liberationist writings themselves, much of which was Third Worldist and infected by Stalinist, conservative ideologies throughout the 1960s–1980s. That this goes unrecognized as a history of self-defeat bespeaks a failure to take ownership of history as something the Left has been active in making. As Adolph Reed, Jr. once wrote, “the opposition must investigate its own complicity.”⁵ That’s something the Left has failed to do. If we are going to change the circumstances in which politics operate, we have to begin by investigating how we ourselves have been complicit in maintaining those circumstances, in the past and present.

The problem with the Left in the 1960s and 1970s was not the tepidity of demands, but the legacy of McCarthyism. There weren’t a lot of radicals around to help get these movements off the ground, because the Left had been largely wiped out. Today, I have conversations with people who don’t support marriage equality struggles and I tell them how radicalized the movements are. They say, “Fine, but that’s not how I want to spend my time.” It seems like an impasse. Are we trying to convince people to do things they don’t want to do? How do we work together to ensure that we do not separate movements?

SW: There’s certainly no dearth of things that need to be fought for. I have zero interest in pounding away at someone who says, “Sorry, it’s just not my issue.” Whether you want to throw yourself into it to a certain degree is another question. People gravitate towards the kinds of activism that makes sense to them. The massacre of the flotilla brought together people who never imagined themselves getting involved in the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement in Israel. It’s great. Arabs and Jews have been building this movement. People who were only involved in that have now encountered activists with broader politics on the Left. Muslim activists are side-by-side with LGBT activists outside of Fox News. When has that happened? Never! That’s a step forward.

There is racism and Islamophobia among the LGBT movement, as there is homophobia among the religious. Politics bridges these divides. That’s why I think teach-ins and educationals, in a moment like this, are as important as mobilizing people on the streets.

KF: Well, I’m never going to a same-sex marriage march. I don’t want to cross that political line. But there is the

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The front page of the *Hindustan Times* from 28 October, 1947.

right to form their own nation-state. The desire and right to fight for a separate nation-state are given in their feeling that they are different from Indians, and this would be so even if they were not oppressed by the Indian state and enjoyed all democratic rights [which, of course, is not the case at present].

However, even in terms of a dogmatic application of Lenin's formula, there is a problem here. Minority communities in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir, who constitute around one third of its population, wish to remain with India,²³ and some of these, like the Ladakhis, would themselves constitute "nations" according to Stalin's definition. So Kashmiri "self-determination" would come at the expense of another "nation" or entail further partitions on ethnic lines. It is revealing that supporters of a Kashmiri state do not even ask themselves why Ladakhis—who belong to an ethnic and religious [Buddhist] minority, and cannot therefore be accused of Hindu majoritarianism—so emphatically reject "freedom" from India. This suggests that these communities feel safer in secular India than they would in a separate Kashmir that they fear would be Islamist. Surely this calls into question the monolithic Kashmiri "identity," as a result of which "Kashmiris don't see themselves as Indian?"

Left supporters of Kashmiri Azadi reply that Geelani would probably shift over to support for an independent Kashmir under popular pressure, and this is conceivable. What is not conceivable, however, is that he would abandon his Islamist vision for Kashmir, which is shared by many others, as the slogans chanted in demonstrations suggest.²⁴ But he is only one current out of many, the answer goes: "Let a Constituent assembly decide what the people want!"²⁵ This is dangerously naïve, not least because theocrats do not believe in constituent assemblies. When the Left in Iran (the largest in the Middle East) jumped on Khomeini's bandwagon, they no doubt had the same illusion. But Khomeini used a broad-based popular movement against the Shah to come to power, and then proceeded to decimate the Left. As Maziar Behrooz, the author of *Rebels with a Cause: The Failure of the*

Left in Iran, points out, the loss of women's rights was the most palpable consequence of the Islamic Revolution.²⁶ A similar outcome in Kashmir cannot be ruled out if a section of the Left in India insists on jumping on the Islamist bandwagon by inviting Geelani to be the spokesperson of "Azadi" and describing him as "the tallest, most respected leader of the Kashmiri independence struggle."²⁷ If this is true, what does it say about the Azadi movement?

Another position on the Left rejects identity as a basis for secession and sees democracy as the only justification for it. By contrast with the first tendency, which provides unconditional support to any group claiming to fight for the right to national self-determination, the second group provides support that is highly conditional and selective. Conditional on the premise that a separate state is demanded by the vast majority of the population in the territory claimed, and on the promise that it will result in less oppression and bloodshed, and in greater freedom, equality, and democracy. Selective in the sense that even where the vast majority want to be free of foreign occupation, as in Afghanistan, reactionary, authoritarian groups like the Taliban would not be supported. "Self-determination" should mean the right of people to determine their own lives, and the Taliban most emphatically does not stand for that. There are groups in Afghanistan like the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, which have chosen the courageous option of fighting against both the U.S./NATO occupation and the Taliban, and it is such groups that should receive support. Tamil democracy activists decided they had to oppose *both* the Sri Lankan state *and* the LTTE: a difficult and dangerous option, but the only one that allowed them to fight for democracy and workers' solidarity.

The requirement that socialists of the oppressed country maintain complete unity between organizations of the proletariat in the oppressed and oppressing "nations" has been complied with by hundreds of thousands of workers in the Jammu and Kashmir Trade Union Centre, which is affiliated to the New Trade Union Initiative, an independent Left trade union federation with its headquarters in India.

The NTUI, in turn, supports the demands of Kashmiri workers.²⁸

Moving Forward

While Indian socialists are under no obligation whatsoever to support Kashmiri "self-determination" based on appeals to "identity," there is a more elementary meaning of "azadi" expressed in numerous fact-finding reports and the better newspaper reports from Kashmir—namely, freedom from oppression by the Indian state—and they are duty-bound to support this demand. One atrocity after another without any justice in sight is a recipe for barbarism.²⁹ The heart-rending appeal to the people of India by the father of one of the boys killed by Indian security forces recently—"Please feel our pain"³⁰—should lead to a broad-based campaign demanding the repeal of legislation that allows the security forces to commit human rights abuses with impunity. The Left should spearhead the campaign in India for the punishment of security force personnel who have committed such crimes, including those with command responsibility. Such a campaign must also press for a drastic reduction of the presence of security forces, the release of political prisoners, and freedom of movement and trade across the LoC.

The campaign should include the demand for the demilitarization of Kashmir *on both sides of the LoC*. Demanding demilitarization on the Indian side alone is neither realistic nor even desirable, if it facilitates the activities of foreign militants like those who killed Lone. Such a campaign would require working with socialists in Pakistan-administered Kashmir and Pakistan itself as demanded by the principle of internationalism. If it is successful, and the military and militants on both sides of the LoC back off, the people of Jammu and Kashmir would have the space and opportunity to discuss, debate, and negotiate among themselves to see if they can agree on a vision of Kashmir that is accepted by the overwhelming majority.

To sum up: The section of the Indian Left demanding unconditional support for the right of the Kashmiri "nation" to self-determination, in the sense of secession from India, remains narrowly India-centric (although anti-India, not pro), and fails even to acknowledge that Kashmir will not be "free" if India withdraws because it is also occupied by Pakistan. Moreover, such unconditional support requires that Islamist elements also be seen as worthy of support, ignoring their extreme right-wing character, or the fact that they stand for a Kashmir as oppressive as the present dispensation.

By contrast, a more internationalist section of the Left sees that the imbroglio in Kashmir is part of the tragic legacy of Partition, and cannot be resolved unless that whole legacy is addressed. It rejects "identity" as the basis for state-formation, and insists that a viable Kashmiri state must convince its minorities in advance that they will enjoy security, equality, and democratic rights; sacrificing democracy to "self-determination" is surely a contradiction in terms. Undoing the damage done by Partition would involve a sustained drive to eradicate Hindutva, Islamism, and communalism in India, Paki-

stan, and Kashmir; it would include the difficult and dangerous struggle to establish a secular, democratic state in Pakistan. In addition it would require a critique of nationalism and militarism throughout the subcontinent. A South Asian Union with open borders, based on equality and democracy both within and between its constituent states, would create a context more conducive to the resolution of the Kashmir dispute than the current situation, and this is a goal that socialists throughout the region can work towards.³¹ | **P**

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8. A transcript of this resolution is available online at <<http://www.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=46661742857&topic=12204>>.
9. See <<http://www.jklfworld.org/jklf%20history.html>>.
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12. "BJP slams Kashmir interlocutors for Pakistan remark," <<http://headlinesindia.mapsofindia.com/burning-issues-news/kashmir/bjp-slams-kashmir-interlocutors-for-pakistan-remark-66389.html>>.
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"Kashmir" continues below

Sexual Liberation, continued from page 3

issue of lopsided funding, which I've brought up before. I can't get the same kind of funding that others do. Organizations that provide funding say, "Nobody cares about people on welfare," but they are funding marriage. There are many communities not being engaged. They may not have exposure to political theory, but I think they are interested politically. I prefer thinking about those folks. The gay marriage people find a black minister to talk on camera about support for same-sex marriage. Half the black community doesn't go to church. Nobody at all is talking to the people that have a stake in sexual liberation because of the way they are targeted by the state. That is the crux of the issue.

GG: I think this is a conflation of roles. In the contemporary imagination, an activist is someone with a dosage of political education who goes out and talks with people about issues. They try to connect struggle A with struggle B. But I don't see, for example, what queer activists have to gain in terms of advancing a project of social freedom by supporting a strategy of sanction. I don't see what the Palestinian people have to gain by the queer activists' uncritical support of strategies and political forces that are right-wing. This idea of the activist is misleading. The point of the Left, at least as Marx saw it, was not simply to "be the movement," but to provide a ruthless criticism seeking to clarify the most radical potential of the movement.

It's simply untrue to say that there were hardly any radicals, revolutionaries, or Marxists in the 1970s. There were tons of Marxist-Leninist cadres of all types. When they weren't trying to organize, they were having debates about whether or not Mao was dead. You can't let these radicals off the hook. Their political approaches were wrong or misguided in a number of ways. The roots of those problems stretch back in history and involve a lack of social imagination, or at least a lack of clarity. We need to recover that imagination. Regarding sexuality, the Left's imagination of freedom has been reduced to merely breaking taboos about having sex and saying dirty words in public.

SW: I think people living in this country, an empire financing the wholesale destruction of the Palestinian people, actually do have a stake in solidarizing with Palestinians and activists fighting against apartheid Israel. I am interested in winning over LGBT activists and people in the same way the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa in the 1980s radicalized a whole generation of people like me.

How should the Left respond to an issue like homophobia in Third World Countries?

KF: I don't know about the Left broadly, but I have struggled to determine ways to support work happening in the Caribbean and Africa, for instance. I have heard from people in those regions that foreign solidarity people get the attention and funding, while the people with fewer resources and less access to media are ignored. Outside organizations get the glory, especially when those organizations are white-elite identified NGOs. Even though

they are trying to help, they fuel those states' claims that gayness is white. It can actually further homophobia. So I build relationships with organizations that reach out to me, and I try to figure out what kind of support I can offer from the outside. I figure out how to move resources or get press for them outside the country.

SW: I agree with Kenyon. That dynamic of NGO-ization plays into the hand of elites in Uganda, who say that homosexuality is a white, imperial abomination being imposed on Africa. The role we play here is to stop collusion of our own government in these things, while the role of the Republicans and the right-wing in this country is to be the architects of this noxious legislation in other countries.

GG: I disagree. Right-wing ideologies aren't simply exported from the United States. Reaction to capitalism is global. We can't let the right wing in other countries off the hook simply because they receive funding from religious or fundamentalist organizations, or because they have been propped up by the U.S. government.

The Left over the past half-century has been hobbled by nationalism, even when dealing with issues of equality here in the U.S. I think the gay rights movement is profoundly implicated in this narrow focus. But the hardcore, sectarian Left has also undermined itself through an inverted nationalism, which assumes that everyone else's nationalism is progressive and good, as long as it's opposed to American nationalism. There are homophobic discourses and politics the world over. If our only way of trying to counter this is by supporting struggles operating in conditions that are extremely regressive politically, in which free speech and basic civil liberties like freedom of expression are suppressed, then the Left will not actually be able to deal with a problem like homophobia in Third World countries.

To me, the only way to even begin to address this problem is from the perspective of international socialism. If that perspective seems hopelessly utopian, then we still need to think about what would it actually take to realize worldwide the minimal reforms that gay activists take for granted. It would take a lot more than the strategies that have been pursued by gay and queer radical organizations.

KF: You should not assume that de-racialized international solidarity, of the kind you have just described, Greg, is neutral. You can't assume that, just because you have a particular political orientation, your strategy is what people need. There is homophobia that exists in a range of places around the world. People are working under conditions formed by massive amounts of racism and imperialism from political, missionary, and NGO organizations. For an outside organization to say, "This is our political bent, buy it or kick rocks," is completely ridiculous.

Why is the Left so silent on supporting global transformations, while conservatives are willing to rush to Uganda, for instance, to maintain order?

SW: The American Left is tiny and multifaceted. Opposition to various ongoing wars is one focus of the Left. But

we're talking about such small numbers that what the Left has to do in this country, right now, is grow. Unless we have a critical mass, we cannot have a decisive impact internationally.

GG: The problem cannot be reduced to the question of the Left becoming big enough. At different points in time, the Left has been large enough. Its small size and marginal status are neither accidental nor incidental. The question is: What has brought us to where we are today, and what has been the role of the Left in that history? From the 1960s through to the present, the Left has supported cause after cause that ultimately leads to its own liquidation. It throws support to various right-wing nationalist regimes. It runs completely counter to the interests of sexual freedom, or any kind of freedom, for that matter. What is needed is a thorough reconsideration of this history and, with it, reconsideration of what the Left is. Until then, the way forward for the Left remains unclear, as does the reason for people to commit to being leftists in the first place. | **P**

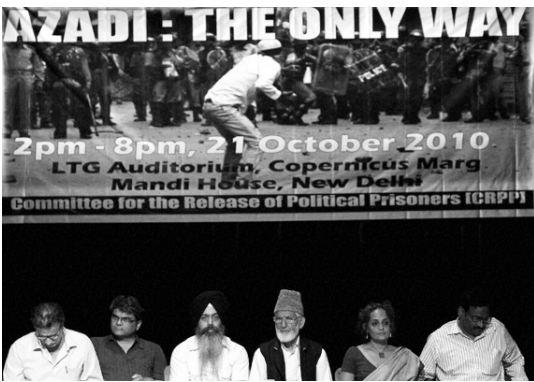
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31. There has been a movement—variously called People's SAARC, South Asian People's Summit and, most recently, the South Asian People's Assembly—committed to creating a South Asian People's Union free of all forms of discrimination, exclusion and domination both within and between countries, opposed to militarism and with freedom of movement within the region. Such a development would help to create a context in which the Kashmir dispute could be resolved, and would also facilitate cross-border workers' organizing in the South Asian region. See "Special Report on Assembly Toward Union of South Asia," *Union Power* (April 2010) <<http://ntui.org.in/union-power/april-2010/>>.

Kashmir, Socialists, and the Right to Self-Determination

Rohini Hensman



Panelists at “Azadi (Freedom): The Only Way,” including Arundhati Roy and Syed Ali Shah Geelani, held in Delhi in October, 2010.

THE BLOODSHED IN KASHMIR beginning in June 2010 gave rise to a heated debate in India concerning the causes of and possible solutions to the conflict. A meeting on 21 October in Delhi organized by the pro-Maoist Committee for the Release of Political Prisoners was entitled “Azadi (Freedom)—the Only Way.” Interpreting “azadi” as shorthand for “the right to self-determination,” the keynote speakers—writer-activist Arundhati Roy and Syed Ali Shah Geelani of the Islamist Tehreek-e-Hurriyat—argued that the only solution to the dispute in Kashmir was freedom for Jammu and Kashmir from India.¹ Others at the conference, such as Varavara Rao, speaking for the Communist Party of India (Maoist) and its sympathizers, concurred. But Kashmiri members of the Hindu Right invaded the conference, staging a protest and later bringing charges of sedition against the speakers. At around the same time, a parliamentary delegation was sent to Kashmir, followed by the appointment of three civil society “interlocutors” by the Indian government to speak to and obtain the opinions of all sections of the population in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir.

Is “Azadi” indeed the only way to resolve the dispute over Kashmir? It is imperative that socialists should have a clear position on this issue, challenging all the various contending nationalisms with politics that offer the most scope for a socialist movement to develop.

Lenin and Luxemburg on the Right to Self-Determination

The debate between Lenin and Luxemburg on the right to self-determination erupted in the first decade of the twentieth century, with Luxemburg questioning the inclusion of point #9 in the program of the Social Democratic Labor Party of Russia, which granted all national-

ities the right of self-determination, including secession. While approving of point #7, which granted full legal equality to all citizens without distinction of sex, religion, race, or nationality, and point #8, which granted the various ethnic groups the right to schools conducted in their own languages at state expense and the right to use their languages at assemblies and in all state and public functions, she insisted that the attitude of socialists to nationality questions should depend on the concrete circumstances of each case, which would also change with time. She pointed out that all ancient civilizations were extremely mixed with respect to nationalities, and quoted Kautsky to the effect that the great Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim cultures were not national but international; therefore, stating that all “nationalities” had the right to form their own states was impractical. Most important, she pointed out that, “In a class society, ‘the nation’ as a homogeneous socio-political entity does not exist. Rather, there exist within each nation, classes with antagonistic interests and ‘rights’... There can be no talk of a collective and uniform will, of the self-determination of the ‘nation’ in a society formed in such a manner,” and in cases where the interests of the proletariat were directly opposed to those of the “nation” (for example, Jewish workers versus Zionist nationalists), the formula could result in imposing on workers the will of the ruling class.² However, she conceded that socialists were duty-bound to oppose all forms of oppression, including that of one nation by another.

In 1914, Lenin responded by claiming that, “Carried away by the struggle against nationalism in Poland, Rosa Luxemburg has forgotten the nationalism of the Great Russians, although it is *this* nationalism that is the most formidable at the present time. It is a nationalism that is more feudal than bourgeois, and is the principal obstacle to democracy and to the proletarian struggle.” He continued, “Whether the Ukraine, for example, is destined to form an independent state is a matter that will be determined by a thousand unpredictable factors. Without attempting idle ‘guesses,’ we firmly uphold something that is beyond doubt: the right of the Ukraine to form such a state.” Yet at the same time he conceded to Luxemburg that, “the important thing for the proletariat is to ensure the development of its class. For the bourgeoisie it is important to hamper this development by pushing the aims of its ‘own’ nation before those of the proletariat. That is why the proletariat confines itself, so to speak, to the negative demand for recognition of the *right* to self-determination, without giving guarantees to any nation,

and without undertaking to give *anything at the expense* of another nation.”³ In other words, the proletariat recognizes the right of every nation to self-determination, but does not guarantee to support the exercise of that right in any particular case, especially if it happens to be at the expense of another nation. Surely Luxemburg’s formulation, that the attitude of socialists to nationality questions should depend on the concrete circumstances of each case, is clearer and more sensible!

Lenin’s confused (and confusing) formulation was made worse by his implicit acceptance of Stalin’s later monocultural definition of a “nation”: “*A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.*”⁴ Such a formulation suggests that socialists should support the right of any group with a common language, territory, economic life, and culture to secede and form a separate state.

This is the confusion that led many socialists, including Trotskyists, to support the right of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to form a separate Tamil state in Sri Lanka, regardless of the fact that it led to massacres, the ethnic cleansing of Muslims and Sinhalese, the murder of socialists, and tore apart workers who had successfully put up a united resistance to a predatory state in 1953.⁵ It is also what prevented Indian Communists from mounting a principled campaign against Partition, as we shall see.

In Lenin’s more mature formulation of 1916, he linked the right of self-determination to the struggle for democracy and against colonialism and national oppression. He explained,

[J]ust as socialism cannot be victorious unless it introduces complete democracy, so the proletariat will be unable to prepare for victory over the bourgeoisie unless it wages a many-sided, consistent and revolutionary struggle for democracy....The proletariat of the oppressing nations... must demand the right of political secession for the colonies and for the nations that “its own” nation oppresses....The Socialists of the oppressed nations, on the other hand, must particularly fight for and maintain complete, absolute unity [also organizational] between the workers of the oppressed nation and the workers of the oppressing nation....[And in the case of] the semi-colonial countries, like China, Persia, Turkey, and all the colonies... the bourgeois-democratic movements have either hardly begun, or are far from having been completed. Socialists

must not only demand the unconditional and immediate liberation of the colonies without compensation—and this demand in its political expression signifies nothing more nor less than the recognition of the right to self-determination—but must render determined support to the more revolutionary elements in the bourgeois-democratic movements for national liberation in these countries and assist their rebellion—and if need be, their revolutionary war—against the imperialist powers that oppress them.⁶

Luxemburg did not realize the importance of supporting bourgeois-democratic revolutions in the colonies, but she did agree it was necessary to oppose the oppression of one nation by another. Lenin, initially preoccupied only with counteracting nationalism in oppressing countries, eventually took on board Luxemburg’s fear of the danger of supporting reactionary, anti-socialist, and anti-democratic forces in oppressed countries, and conceded that unity between workers of the oppressed and oppressor nations must be maintained.

Is this debate at all relevant today, in a largely decolonized world? There are still countries like Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine where socialists must demand immediate and unconditional liberation, but even in these countries, support should be given only to the “more revolutionary elements in the bourgeois-democratic movement for national liberation.” As for secession from a bourgeois-democratic state, one might speculate that where a community is being persecuted in such a state, the preferred option for socialists would be to wage a united struggle against the political forces perpetrating that persecution, supported by socialists internationally; only where such a struggle is impossible might it be necessary to support the right to secede, and even then, support should be given only to a group that stands for democracy. Both Luxemburg and Lenin would have been aghast at the thought of socialists supporting the nationalism of a fascist group like the LTTE. Let us not forget that both were opposed to *all* forms of nationalism, which posit a false unity of interest between workers and capitalists, while inducing workers to kill and die fighting workers of other nations in the interests of their own ruling class. Nationalism that is linked to a particular ethnic, linguistic, or religious group is even more reactionary, because it destroys solidarity between workers within a country as well. Its forcible homogenization of those within the group

“Kashmir” continues below

Kashmir, continued from above

and “othering” of those who are different make it a fertile breeding-ground for fascism.

The most important conclusion is that interpreting “the right to self-determination” as the right to form a separate nation-state, and then converting support for it into a timeless imperative, valid for all time and in all circumstances, is completely un-Marxist. At a certain point in history, around a hundred years ago, it was proclaimed—and challenged—as a way of combating nationalism among the workers of oppressor nations. The common ground shared by Lenin and Luxemburg, which socialists can still stand on today, comprises opposition to nationalism and oppression, and support for all those struggling for democracy and workers’ solidarity.

Independence and Partition

The Kashmir issue cannot be adequately addressed without grappling with the Left’s own history, since at critical junctures key fractions of it more or less actively supported the demand for partition of British India into two states, India and Pakistan (later divided into Pakistan and Bangladesh), and it is from this that the question today derives. A detailed analysis of the causes of Partition is beyond the scope of this article, but some observations can be made. Initially, leaders of the dominant anti-imperialist organization, the Indian National Congress, allowed dual membership with the Hindu Mahasabha or Muslim League. Only in December 1938 did it reverse itself and characterize these organizations as “communal.”⁷ Both the Hindu Mahasabha and Muslim League believed that Hindus and Muslims constitute separate nations, and eventually both helped organize the bloodbath that preceded Partition. While Congress ideology was secular, it neither recognized the danger nor did enough to combat it. Indeed, Gandhi’s ambiguous attitude towards mixing religion and politics might have contributed to it. Using images like “Ram rajya” [the mythical golden age during the reign of the Hindu god/king Ram] to rouse the Hindu masses, and support for Khilafat [a movement led by reactionary clerics for restoration of the Sultan of Turkey as Caliph following Turkey’s defeat in World War I] to rouse Muslims, he might have reinforced the fascistic forces that still plague India and Pakistan to this day. Such politics conspired with the British attempts at encouraging communal divisions.

What about the Communist Party of India? It rejected the reactionary “two-nation” ideology, but got fatally confused by the “right to self-determination.” In the resolution passed by its Central Committee in September 1942, it declared that:

Every section of the Indian people which has a contiguous territory as its homeland, common historical tradition, common language, culture, psychological makeup and common economic life would be recognized as a distinct nationality with the right to exist as an autonomous state within the free Indian union or federation and will have the right to secede from it if it may so desire.... Thus, free India would be a federation or union

of autonomous states of the various nationalities such as the Pathans, Western Punjabis [dominantly Muslims], Sikhs, Sindhis, Hindustanis, Rajasthanis, Gujaratis, Bengalis, Assamese, Biharis, Oriyas, Andhras, Tamils, Karnatakis, Maharashtrais, Malayalees, etc....

Such a declaration of rights in as much as it concedes to every nationality as defined above, and therefore, to nationalities having Muslim faith, the right of autonomous state existence and of secession, can form the basis for unity between the National Congress and the League. For this would give to the Muslims wherever they are in an overwhelming majority in a contiguous territory which is their homeland, the right to form their autonomous states and even to separate if they so desire. In the case of the Bengali Muslims of the Eastern and Northern districts of Bengal where they form an overwhelming majority, they may form themselves into an autonomous region in the state of Bengal or may form a separate state. Such a declaration therefore concedes the just essence of the Pakistan demand and has nothing in common with the separatist theory of dividing India into two nations on the basis of religion.⁸

Thus a dogmatic application of Lenin’s confused formulation regarding the right to self-determination combined with Stalin’s definition of a nation led the CPI to praise the “just essence of the Pakistan demand” instead of resolutely opposing the formation of a nation on the basis of religion.

The Kashmir Dispute

At Independence, there were hundreds of Princely States that were given the option of joining either India or Pakistan. Jammu and Kashmir, which was contiguous with both, was one of them. Soon after the formal declaration of independence on August 14–15, 1947, tribesmen invaded and started looting and killing non-Muslims. Since the majority of its population was Muslim, it was expected to join Pakistan, but its Hindu ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh, signed an instrument of accession to India. This allowed the Indian army to enter the state to chase out the invaders. In 1948, the UN called for an immediate ceasefire and a plebiscite under its own auspices to allow the people of Jammu and Kashmir to decide for themselves whether they wanted to be part of India or Pakistan. The plebiscite never took place, at first because Pakistani forces did not withdraw, later—and repeatedly—because India refused to cooperate. So hostile military forces of the two countries remained facing each other across the Line of Control [LoC], and the state of Jammu and Kashmir has remained occupied and divided, with blatant violations of the democratic rights of its people by both occupying powers. From the late 1980s, the security forces in Indian-administered Kashmir have had a shameful record of rape, torture, and murder. The impunity imparted by laws like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, the Jammu & Kashmir Public Safety Act and the Disturbed Areas Act has

encouraged such criminality by making it all but impossible to prosecute security force personnel who commit these crimes, while the high density of these forces on the ground also increases the likelihood of human rights violations.

One response by Kashmiris has been to fight for a separate state, independent from both India and Pakistan; for example, the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front was formed in 1977, with the agenda of creating a secular, democratic, federal, independent state of Jammu and Kashmir.⁹ But this movement in general, and the JKLF in particular, are badly divided, with allegations that its leaders are flirting with or even controlled by the intelligence agencies of Pakistan and India.¹⁰

Indian nationalists, most vociferously represented by the Sangh Parivar but also present among sections who claim to be more liberal, are undoubtedly a major part of the problem.¹¹ Their assertion that Kashmir is an integral part of India—as though India’s national boundaries are god-given and any questioning of them is blasphemy—serves to mask from view the horrific atrocities committed against Kashmiris by the Indian security forces. Their allegation of sedition against speakers at the Azadi meeting for questioning this dogma, and their hysterical outburst against the government-appointed interlocutors for suggesting that any solution to the problem requires the involvement of the government of Pakistan, make it clear that they are not open to argument.¹² Pretending that Kashmir is not disputed territory and simply breathing fire and brimstone at anyone who acknowledges the conflict is a manifest, if semi-conscious, strategy of those who seek to perpetuate that conflict.

The Pakistani nationalist stance mirrors the Indian nationalist one. Thus Kashmiri separatists of Pakistan-administered Azad Kashmir “were kept away from the process of elections by a stipulation of Act 74, which states: ‘No one can contest elections of any kind in AK without taking oath of allegiance to Kashmir’s accession to Pakistan’... Because of this clause nationalists of Azad Kashmir were kept away from the elections and Pakistan has built a strong pro Pakistan structure which aims to minimize the influence of nationalists in all walks of life.”¹³ As in the case of the Indian nationalists, there appears to be little concern for the democratic rights of Kashmiris.

Kashmir and the Indian Left

The Left itself in India has no unified position on Kashmir. This became clear in the course of the debate that followed the meeting on “Azadi.” The keynote speaker invited to represent the Kashmiri people at this meeting was Syed Ali Shah Geelani, whose politics has all the elements of ethno-religious nationalism. As Yoginder Sikand points out in a recent article on Geelani’s book, *Kashmir: Nava-e Hurriyat*, for Geelani “Muslims are a community/ nation (*qaum*) wholly separate from the Hindus.”¹⁴ Sikand continues,

[Geelani] equates India with Hindus, overlooking the fact that India’s Muslim population outnumbers that of Pakistan. He projects Muslims [as he does Hindus] as a monolithic, homogeneous community, defined by a singular interpretation of religion, and bereft of cultural, ethnic and other divisions. He depicts Muslims as radically different from Hindus,

and as allegedly having nothing at all in common with them.¹⁴

This is an extreme right-wing ideology, which, as Geelani himself recognizes, shares the “two-nation” theory with Hindutva.

This reactionary authoritarianism is underlined by the activities of another member of this tendency, Asiya Andrabi, and her organization Dukhteran-e-Millat, members of which have thrown acid and paint in the faces of women to force them to wear the veil. Andrabi warned separatist leader Abdul Ghani Lone of dire consequences for asking foreign Islamist militants to stay out of Kashmir, and urged militants to take action against him.¹⁵ When Lone was murdered by Pakistan-backed militants,¹⁶ it is not surprising that his son Sajjad blamed the ISI¹⁷ and Geelani was chased away from his house.¹⁸ Other Kashmiri separatist leaders were terrorized into silence. Only very recently has this silence been broken, with open admissions that separatist leaders who were earlier claimed to have been killed by the Indian state were actually murdered by militants.¹⁹

How could anyone on the Left provide a platform to someone with such a reactionary agenda as Geelani’s [a mirror image of Hindutva], or even share a platform with him as Arundhati Roy has done? Why should he be considered a leader of the Kashmiri independence struggle *at all* when he colludes with one of the states [Pakistan] occupying Kashmir, given that just across the LoC, the main enemy of Kashmiri nationalists is the Pakistani state? Indeed, in the statements of the pro-Maoist section of the Indian Left, there is not even an acknowledgement of the Kashmiris on the other side of the LoC fighting for freedom from Pakistan, nor is any attempt made to extend solidarity to them or to Pakistani socialists fighting against Islamism. This is what allows them to associate the slogan of “Azadi” with someone like Geelani, who, from the standpoint of Kashmiris across the LoC, stands for their continued enslavement.²⁰ Roy, questioned about sharing a platform with someone implicated in killings of other separatists, justified it with the bizarre argument that even Nelson Mandela, who was serving a 27-year jail sentence imposed by the Apartheid state when in 1977 that same state murdered Steve Biko, was somehow responsible for the latter’s death!²¹ It did not occur to her that silencing by murder and terror those whose views are different is the hallmark of authoritarian politics. Nor does this writer recognize the Orwellian aspect of killing leaders protesting against foreign interference in the name of “freedom” and “self-determination.”

The premise of the section of the Stalinist Left that associates itself with Geelani is unconditional support for all parties fighting for the right of nations to self-determination in the sense of secession, regardless of their politics, and acceptance of Stalin’s definition of a nation: “The root of the Kashmir conflict is not oppression but identity. Kashmiris don’t see themselves as Indian.”²² Thus “nation” is defined in terms of “identity,” presumably encompassing a common language, territory, economy, culture, and history, as in Stalin’s definition. According to this view, the people of Kashmir constitute a nation, and are therefore entitled to self-determination, defined as the

“Kashmir” continues on page 4