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Statement of purpose

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 750–4,500 words, but longer pieces will 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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The Platypus Review

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SPECIAL ISSUE ON

IMMIGRATION AND THE LEFT

Neoliberalism, as the current organization of capitalism, promised to overcome the crisis of the Keynesian-Fordist states through the attainment of a free, cosmopolitan society. Yet, the weight of national borders continues to be felt.

While capital can easily move to a home where it is profitable, workers find their movement more stifled. From Brexit to the U.S. presidential elections, immigration has become unavoidable in political discourse: some politicians have promised comprehensive immigration reform, while others have considered the undocumented culpable for the decline of the nation's economy and sovereignty. In each case, a crisis of Neoliberalism is registered—but what is the meaning of the question to the Left and its attempts to change the world?

Famously, The Communist Manifesto says “the working men have no country.” The incessant drive to realize profit sends capital all over the world, uprooting established relations and dynamizing the global economy. Workers are forced to consider themselves internationally in the fight against capital. Further, immigration might even centralize the gravediggers of capitalism.

However, if this process is not grasped by the workers, it offers an opportunity for the capitalists to secure their reign. The precarity of immigrants can be exploited by the ruling class to split the proletariat and contain their political struggle—that is, unless there is a Left to lead.

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edited transcript of their discussion.

hosted a panel discussion entitled "Immigration and the Left" at the University of Houston. Moderated by Danny Jacobs of Playpus, the event posed three questions to the panelists: How has the Left approached the question of immigration historically? What opportunities for a renewed emancipatory politics exist in the immigrants' rights movement today? What role can left-wing civil and political organizations play in immigration politics? Three speakers addressed these questions: Alvaro Rodriguez, from the Communist Party, USA; Henry Cooper, from Proyecto Latino Americano; and Liam Wright, a veteran of Occupy Seattle and other social movements. What follows is an

Henry Cooper: The left is not "the left" that we hear from commercial media—Hillary Clinton and all that stuff. No. We are talking about all those grassroots organizations, political organizations that come from Marxism, and all the derivatives from this ideology, including, outside of Marxism, all our brothers and sisters from anarchism, and popular movements like the Zapatistas. As labor power, we have no country. We believe that we are all entitled to a free movement to work and develop our families where we think it is most convenient for us. Unfortunately, such free movement is not what we see in reality. Mobility is forced by the

Opening Remarks

May Day march demanding amnesty for immigrants in Los Angeles, 2006. The 2006 May Day protests, which took place in every major American city, opposed H.R. 4437. That legislation sought to increase penalties for illegally immigrating to the US and to classify undocumented immigrants as felons.



Alvaro Rodriguez, Henry Cooper, Liam Wright

Immigration and the Left

Party. Make no mistake: The campaign debate has nothing to do with real immigration policy, and everything to do with racism against people of color. In this forum, we want to address real immigration policy and to gain

directed towards the Democratic Party the Left fails.

Alvaro Rodriguez: I want to thank Playpus for the invitation to speak. The topic is certainly very timely, as we are days away from the presidential election on November 8. Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has made immigration the cornerstone of his campaign. It is a typical ploy by Republicans to use racism as a divisive tool to win elections. So Donald Trump is in step with what the Republican Party has done in the past; he's just cruder. But I am not sure that he is as crude as is possible today, because I just got an email right here from my congressman the title of which is "Safety of U.S. Citizens Must Come Before Criminal Aliens." This is a Republican establishment politician who ran practically unopposed, except for the Green

The Sensenbrenner Bill, as it was known, prompted the immigrant community in this country to organize as never before, to the point that, by April 2006, even the undocumented—the most vulnerable section of the community—were largely mobilized. Millions of people went to the streets to protest the bill. This demonstrated the power of organized labor, of organized communities, when people take to the streets by the millions. Here in Houston we had never before seen fifty thousand people on the streets of downtown. The police were scared! The police on their horses were afraid of being surrounded by thousands of people. So, when the Left works in conjunction with organized communities, we can rattle the establishment to the point that they withdraw those laws. At that moment they saw the power of the immigrant community and decided to apply what I call the “Terrorizer” policy. Instead of having one big law, they started enacting laws at the state level, expanding the power of local police over immigrant communities. When the Left works with the immigrant community you can have a real leftist policy. When the effort is instead

working class, so that they cannot lead a decent life. War likewise displaces refugees, who are most affected with Syria. from dictatorships like Honduras, hundreds of kids have been separated from their parents in order to survive. When they ask for political asylum in the United States, they are rejected. One of these policies was implemented by what the media in the United States considers "the Left," Hillary Clinton. The Left has always been on the side of the free movement of labor and the recognition of labor's rights and dignity in every country. However, we have to answer specific questions. What opportunities exist in the immigrants' rights movement today for an emancipatory politics? Opportunities are not going to be given. Immigrants have to organize themselves in the country where they reside, rather than help them gain citizenship.

In the 1970s and 2000s, due in part to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), many immigrants came from Mexico—around five to six million in a period of seven to eight years. This generated considerable discussion within the political establishment about how to control the flow. In 1996, when Clinton and Mexico implemented NAFTA, the work of the Republicans and the Democrats, they foresaw Clinton established the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) whereby undocumented immigration was criminalized. They were preparing to crack down on the immigration they intended should come.

For some five to six years the Bush administration did not implement IIRIRA. They deported around 5,000 to 30,000 immigrants a year—not that much compared to 2003 they attempted to make changes to existing immigration law further criminalizing undocumented immigrants as well as those that provided services to the immigrants. Teachers, physicians, and employers, and many others were going to be victims of the draconian bill.

economic system that strangles the development of the

the draconian bill.

Chicago, continued from page 2

in part economic, but it also put forward a liberal case against erecting a four hundred mile-long wall, which it characterized as the U.S. equivalent of the Berlin Wall.

In response to Ralph, what do you think about “kleptocracy” as a concept? “Oligarchy” seems to imply a legal aristocracy, in which wealth is protected through inheritance laws primarily in the service of certain families. Perhaps kleptocracy fits better for the Clintons—after all, these were the people using their non-profit foundation to hide illegal kickbacks given in exchange for privileged access to the State Department. The Crown family, which has substantial holdings in General Dynamics and was the 34th wealthiest family in the United States, lives in Chicago. Boeing and Caterpillar are based in Illinois. All of them get certain benefits, not because they are following the law, but because they are really good at breaking it.

JM: In Cook County alone, according to a study done at UIC, 1.1 million dollars are stolen every day from workers’ wages. At the national level, there is something like 330 billion dollars a year stolen from workers—and most of it from minimum wage workers! That is kleptocracy, quite clearly. The bottom line is not even at the bottom, it is three levels under. The economic crisis of 2008 revealed rampant kleptocracy. Some families were able to keep their business by stealing from the poorest of workers. That comes on top of the fact that, in the millions of jobs lost in the crisis, something like two-thirds paid significantly more than minimum wage. The new positions available in 2014 and 2015 mostly offer minimum wage. That is hardly a job “recovery.”

Ralph brings up an interesting topic with the *ejido*. After NAFTA, Mexico changed its constitution to allow for the sale of these lands. It could not be sold before; it belonged to agricultural communities. NAFTA turned these lands into private property, most of which came to be owned by large international corporations, particularly ones in the U.S. This led to the displacement of those who had communally owned and worked on the *ejido*. Before immigration to the U.S., however, there was a middle step: the *maquila* program. Most of the displaced agricultural workers in Mexico first ended up in the *maquila*—factories and plants close to the border. These had been around for some time, from the 1970s or the beginning of the 1980s. You pay workers six dollars an hour in the U.S., but if you move 200 yards south, you only have to pay 40 cents. After NAFTA, displaced farmers were absorbed in the *maquilas*, which became an even bigger labor market in Mexico. This drew people near the border, where they begin to see that in the *maquiladora*, life is not worth living—but 200 yards to the north, one could be making much more. People start crossing the border in increasing numbers, at which point President Clinton cracked down on border security with Operation Gatekeeper.

Hillary Clinton is paying for her deeds as Secretary of State. She supported the coup d’état in Honduras; six years down the road, fifty-thousand kids from Honduras and El Salvador show up at the border. These are the consequences of U.S. international policies, which are now a key part of the debate in immigration. It has become important for us to separate the two: Immigration is the natural movement of people looking for wealth and improvement of their conditions, while security depends on the international policies of the United States.

Q&A

Jorge, you evoked Lenin tonight, on the 99th anniversary of the Petrograd Soviet. Radicals of the Second International such as Lenin understood that working-class political organization constituted capitalism in a particular way. The political and organizational activity of the Left gives capitalism an acuity that it would not otherwise attain. Imperialism is the “highest” stage of capitalism precisely because there is a politically organizing working class making demands upon it. I bring this up as a preface to saying that neoliberalism might be useful as a category, but only inasmuch as it provokes recognition of the decay and decline of the Left. In part, we might trace this decline in terms of how the problem of international immigration has been racialized in the United States. Latinos have become a race, and in some respects are treated as such, but in others are not. The Democratic Party certainly wants to racialize them; it wants to treat Latinos as a racial constituency and organize them on that basis. This kind of racialized, machine politics is very different from how the Left, historically, sought to organize and lead the working class. How do we understand the decay of politics along with changes in capitalism in the last half of the 20th century?

JM: Neoliberalism is not a different kind of production system. It is a set of policies regarding how you organize production worldwide. This oversimplifies things, but basically, instead of having an agricultural South and an industrial North, steel is going to be produced by Sweden and China, for instance, while the United States is going to develop as a service-based economy. That is what neoliberalism looks like, with many consequences following from this new world order, in which oligarchies of various kinds call the shots. Outside the U.S., we are *Mexicanos*, *Salvadoreños*, *Brasileños*, *Chicanos*. There is no “Latino” outside of the United States. The famous theory of cultural interaction in the U.S. is the “melting pot.” Once you come to the United States, you become “American”—which is actually the name of two whole continents, of course—and you should forget about your language, your culture, and so on. Bullshit! Before Central American immigration to Chicago, the city was divided between Italians and Poles. Then the Irish came in large numbers and tried to get their share. That is the real history, but in popular culture it is all about “the melting pot.” I bring this up because the so-called immigration movement often wants to say, “Mexicans who come

here are not Mexicans anymore.” They should forget about being Mexican; they need to integrate into the system and become Americans. We should fight that idea. It is more like a salad: All of us are in the same bowl, but we are not exactly the same. Some of us are carrots, some are lettuce; each one of us has our own national and cultural background.

RC: The issue of race is complicated. For instance, consider wealthy Mexicans. Talk about kleptocracy! Yet they are not racialized. They are cosmopolitan; it is the worker who is racialized. So what is “race” when it gets muddled with these class distinctions and other issues? We might also ask: Who are the Trump supporters? Why are they supporting an oligarch? Are they all workers? They fear neoliberalism. They reject it, in ways not completely unlike how the Left rejects it.

When we look at places that are deporting or expelling people, you see long racialized histories, but they are bound up with class. In the Dominican Republic, the elites and leaders think of themselves as European and see the Haitians as African. Brexit is interesting: it is being denounced as racist, but a major factor there was getting rid of [white] Hungarians, Poles, and Romanians. So I get all confused, to be honest, with the role that race plays. It hooks itself onto all kinds of things that were not previously or innately racialized. In the U.S. there is racialization of Mexicans, let’s say. Globally, you tend to see racialization of the poor, specifically, but not the wealthy.

JS: Following up on what Ralph said, in terms of how complicated these issues are: The deportation machine in this country would grind to a halt without native Spanish speakers. The people on the front lines, organizing the deportation, are native Spanish speakers. It would be a big problem if there were not truly bilingual people willing to police immigration.

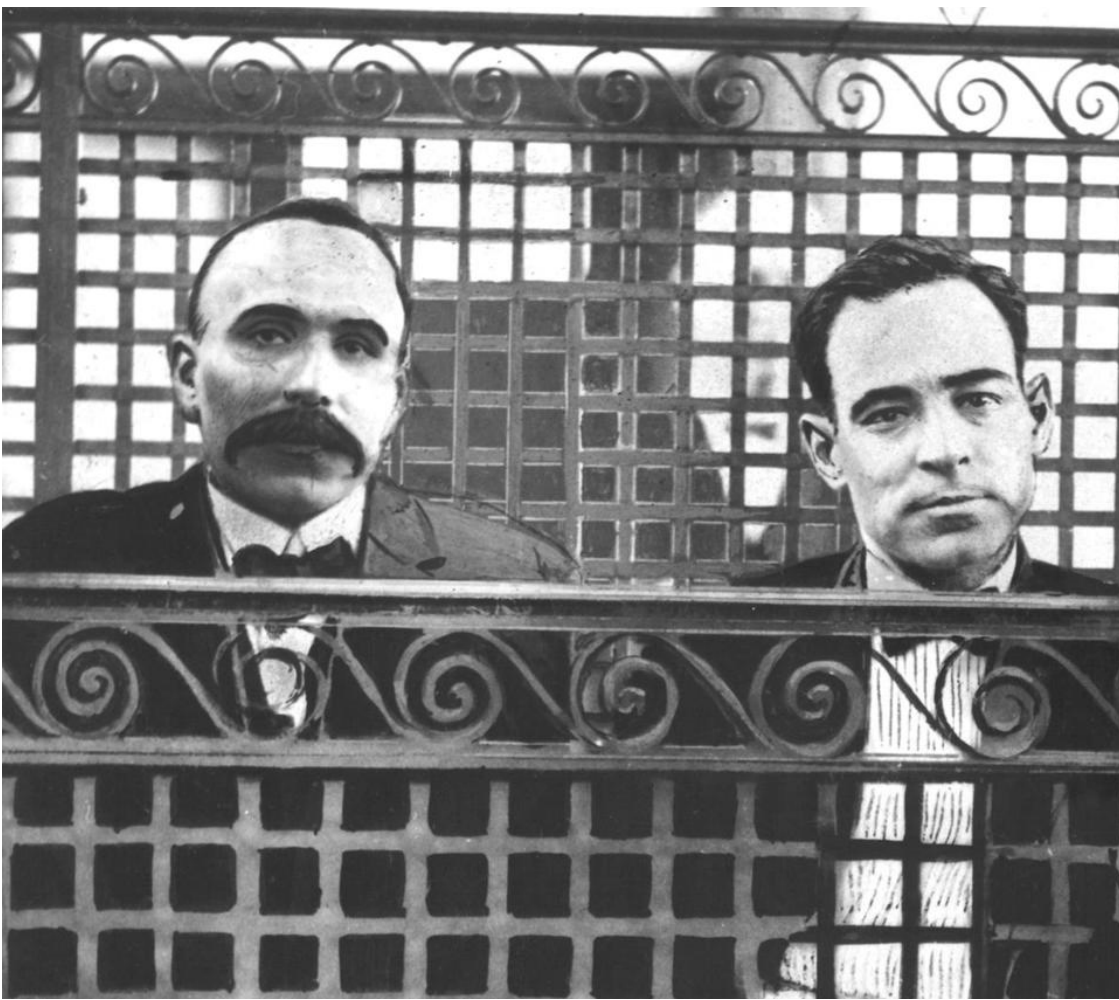
In terms of the concept of “neoliberalism,” the question seems to suggest it is helpful to the extent it identifies a pattern of capitalism in the late 20th and early 21st century. I feel like the Left is just waving a white flag: “Oh, it is all too confusing. They won. We do not know what to do.” Perhaps we should be seriously thinking about the resources that we still have within liberal institutions and seeing what the Left can do to mobilize them. This is not Russia or Egypt. We have elections. We have courts. There are creative ways to use them. If you just say, “Well everything is neoliberalism,” then it sounds like an unbeatable monopoly of the rich people. It is disempowering.

With the 2016 election we are seeing a renewed polarization of politics between the supposed “Left,” represented by Sanders, and the right, represented by Clinton. Trump obviously taps into people’s frustration with open borders. If we think seriously about it, though, Sanders does this too: A renewed emphasis on the welfare state and investment in public infrastructure would require a stronger state to function as a central planning agency, along the lines of what you had with the Keynesian or Fordist state. On the other hand, you have “neoliberalism”—for lack of a better term—seeking to dismantle the welfare state and its centralized apparatus. The thinkers associated with neoliberalism, Hayek and Friedman, considered themselves utopian with respect to what they saw as the “totalitarian state.” It appears today as though the “Left” wants stronger borders and a more centralized state, while the right wants to liberalize international mobility. What does that mean for us, politically, if the right is still invested in producing a world society, while the Left seems to have abandoned that project? Is Sanders therefore more right-wing than he appears—and has the Left given up on redeeming the utopian potentials of liberalism and capitalism?

JS: One response is that Sanders almost was the president because, presumably, if he had won the Democratic nomination, he would beat Trump. On the one hand, we feel as though we are on the precipice of something terrible, no matter what happens on Tuesday. Either Trump or Clinton will win. There is no good alternative, but it could have been really different. Obama won in 2008, but not as a neoliberal. He won on “change” and “hope.” He lied. It was a good bait and switch. Things may be really grim in our current moment, but that is just one cut at what is going on. I think we have to be open to the idea that there still are many different possibilities.

Ultimately, I endorse a real liberal agenda. If we want to have better public institutions and better politics, we need to think about cultivating the entire population as citizens, regardless of their legal status. Everybody is a citizen, which means, following Aristotle, that we all partake in the administration of justice. With public schools in Chicago, for instance, the problem is not just the existence of charter schools, but that some of the people appointed to run them have been convicted of embezzlement, receiving kick-backs, and so forth. The revolution could create new public institutions and put redistribution of wealth on the agenda, but how is it going to solve these problems of corruption? It seems like cultivating citizenship is a necessary bulwark against nepotism and kleptocracy.

JM: That is the most contentious point in the immigration movement. On the Left at least, we strongly believe that the path to citizenship is just a political trap. More than 80 percent of all immigrants who vote as naturalized citizens support the Democratic Party. When Democrats put forward an immigration proposal in which the “path to citizenship” is front and center, you are telling Republicans, “Let’s legalize 10 million people, 8.7 million of which are going to vote for me.” Obviously, the Republican’s response is, “Fuck you!” That is the response the Democrats knew they would get from the beginning, too, because then they get to accuse the Republicans of not getting on board with immigration reform. It is just a political game to both sides. Meanwhile, Obama keeps deporting people rapidly, even as his party keeps calling for a version of immigration reform that they know will not pass



Bartolomeo Vanzetti and Nicola Sacco in the prisoner’s dock in Norfolk (Massachusetts) Superior Court where they were convicted of first-degree murder on April 15, 1920. Their trial, which, through the efforts of communists, swiftly became an international cause célèbre in the 1920s, aroused such controversy because it was widely believed that they were being prosecuted for their Italian immigrant background as well as their political beliefs.

because it would be political suicide to the Republicans.

From the point of view of most immigrants in this country, citizenship is good in order to bring one’s family over here, and because it allows travel outside the U.S. for more than six months. But *voting*—between Republicans and Democrats? Are you crazy? It is the same thing we had for 80 years in Mexico, with the Revolutionary Institutional Party and the National Election Party representing the center and the right, respectively. Those were our options. We fought against that for *decades*. Now we are here and people tell us that we have to become citizens—so that we can vote for a Democrat or a Republican? Go to hell! We have been urging people to vote Green, but not because we believe in Jill Stein. We think that if the Green Party becomes an official registered party here, then there may be the chance for more electoral opportunities. We know that elections are not going to solve much of anything, but part of the political game on the ground is to participate in election processes and see if we can get some kind of advantage.

My prediction: Hillary Clinton is going to win with more than 300 electoral votes, and she is going to negotiate with the Republicans. It will be Bill Clinton all over again: Republicans deliver the platform and President Clinton signs off. That will be the case for healthcare too, by the way. Hillary Clinton would absolutely be willing to negotiate with the Republicans on Obamacare.

I want to go back to the question of neoliberalism and how we try to understand the present. Do we still live under capitalism? Or is it kleptocracy? How do those differ? The vast majority of people still have to sell their labor, to sell themselves as workers, in order to make a living. On the other hand, a lot of the things one would generally think of as being part of capitalism, or at least part of bourgeois society, or commercial society, do not exist, or no longer exist in the same way. Is it simply a result of political dysfunction? How do we account for this?

RC: There is a small working group I belong to, which includes a libertarian economist and three others, who lean more to the left. Among other things, we have been trying to figure out what an economy would look like that does not have the profile of capitalism as it does today. We cannot arrive at a consensus. I keep arguing for a deep sense of a commons, which is not derivable from the current left, which wants to believe in social action and social change. Maybe that sounds strange, but social action and social change imply that, while the marginalized might get something, somebody else has to give something up. That precludes the concept of the commons. For a truly radical left to have any traction you cannot divorce it from the current conditions and the resources we have available. We need to think about enormous climate change, refugees, and so on. At this basic level, in terms of natural resources, where is the world headed? Will various crises drive us to re-invent our economies? At the moment I do not see anything really emerging from the Left or from the right that really gets at this issue in a deep sense.

JS: Your question suggests that if we get the procedures and the institutions right, then our work is done, whereas I think that if the people running them operate in bad faith, it really does not matter what the rules are. That is why I turn to this idea of robust citizenship, so that the people who occupy whatever institutions we put up will bring with them a certain set of values and commitments, along with a level of integrity that we simply do not see right now. My research on misconduct by immigration judges has found that most of the misconduct is committed by a handful of bad immigration judges. It is similar in this respect to Chicago police misconduct. If it were the case that the procedures are terrible, the misconduct would be more evenly distributed. Maybe we have already had the revolution we need. Perhaps the existing rules are good enough, but we need to figure out how to change outcomes within the system already in place.

JM: I agree with Trump: The system is rigged. But it has been rigged from the Constitution. For 250 years the

system has been rigged. It is not broken; the system is working as intended.

JS: But what is “the system?”

JM: There are meetings like this, but among people with billions of dollars, who are thinking about 2020 and beyond. They have the money and power to execute those plans.

JS: But don’t they lose a lot too? Don’t their plans fail?

JM: No doubt. But again, to take just one example, you have a system that says, every ten years you are going to remap the districts based on census data, but then they allow gerrymandering block by block, even house by house. It is by design. The gerrymandering is often “correct,” legally.

Jacqueline Stevens, in your notion of citizenship, who counts? The traditional Marxist conception tried to think of political organization in terms of world citizenship, international workers, and global society. Politically, if we grant the existence of some sort of system named capitalism, in which elites have power, doesn’t the working class have to find ways to have power itself? Is that a form of politics that you find valid? For all panelists: How do you think of politics with regard to capitalism today?

JS: Empowering citizens to be more active in controlling government is political. There are definitely groups who are well funded and making plans, but they do not always win. Moreover, the Internet has removed many barriers to communication and to the sharing of information, which really changes the playing field in terms of organizing among leftists. These changes provide some new possibilities.

RC: I think the trope of revolution has had its day, in terms of social change, and has been replaced by the trope of catastrophe. There is a sense that material resources and material conditions are completely driving things now. It is not that the wind behind the sails of revolution has entirely ended, but that we have very strong international political powers jostling to maintain the status quo. Of course, the French Revolution and the communist revolutions were driven by material changes as well. I suppose my point is that there tends to be an idealization of the trope of revolution, whereas perhaps we need to start thinking more about material conditions and what kinds of dramatic changes there will be in those conditions. I do believe in a global politics of some sort. In the long run, we have to rethink the nation state in terms of global politics.

JM: Let me talk about the role of the Left and its failure. Four years ago, I became involved with this workers’ rights center in Chicago. In those four years we have passed an ordinance that threatens wage thieves with loss of their business license. Another law denies tax breaks if you have a history of stolen wages. We passed a new minimum wage in the city of Chicago; it is still far too low, but today it is \$10.50, whereas two years ago it was \$8.25. We passed earned sick time in the city of Chicago. At the state level, we passed the domestic workers’ bill of rights, so these workers earn minimum wage, are entitled to overtime, and are entitled to weekly rest.

What is the problem with this picture? The Left does not figure into any of this in a public way. This is all the work of non-profits, of allies, of “community social justice” this and that, including my organization. But it is the Left that is behind all of these organizations and all of these initiatives. Yet, nobody ever says, “The Left raised the minimum wage, the Left proposed and fought for this legislation.” It is high time that the Left comes forward and boldly says, “I am a worker, an organizer—and I am a socialist. I am part of the Left. We are the ones really driving these reforms.” **IP**

Transcribed by Efraim Carlebach, Louis Sterrett, and Tamas Vlaghy

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some clarity about it. The root source of the problems facing our new immigrants is capitalism itself, and its most current variant, neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is really just super-exploitative capitalism.

Henry talked a little bit about NAFTA, which caused a massive export of corn to Mexico. Due to mechanization, seventy-eight thousand Iowa farmers can produce more corn than three million campesinos. U.S. agriculture is dominated by multinational corporations heavily subsidized by the U.S. taxpayer. This placed Mexico at a huge disadvantage. Mexican subsistence farmers were driven from the land by U.S. taxpayer-subsidized exports. One-third of all corn in Mexico is imported from the U.S., rising from two hundred million dollars before NAFTA to three billion after. The campesinos are being forced to immigrate to the United States to perform cheap manual labor. This has resulted in the impoverishment of about ten million Mexicans. Unauthorized immigrants have increased from about three million before NAFTA to about eleven million today. Now, they are made into convenient scapegoats for racist, demagogic election politics by the likes of Donald Trump.

We need to build a movement for political and economic justice in this country. Bernie helped us and gave us a little shove in this direction recently. So what can you do? Certainly, you can join and become active in the Communist Party USA, some other immigrant rights group [there are several], or an organization like the Houston Area Progressives. You just need to get involved. And we all need to go out and vote. As Bernie said, “We need a political revolution.” Bernie came very close to winning even with the ruling class media refusing to afford him publicity. It is a lesson that we must learn: We can win with bold issues and demands, including new demands for a better economic system [socialism]. So even as a known and open democratic socialist, he was able to garnish thirteen million votes and raise a tremendous amount of money from small donations.

The popular reaction to the economic devastation caused by neoliberal policy has rendered capitalism itself politically unstable. This provides an opportunity for the Left to take the initiative. Our solution is not to hang a “keep out” sign on the Statue of Liberty’s torch. The solution is not to waste vast amounts of taxpayer money on a useless and environmentally destructive fence. Bush already built five hundred miles of it. Now Trump wants to build the rest of it.

The solution is to carry out comprehensive, worker-friendly immigration reform. We need legalization of all current undocumented immigrants, with as broad inclusion as possible—full labor and civil rights with a clear path to citizenship. We need changes in U.S. visa policies so ordinary working people who want to come here to live and work can do so without violating the laws or risking their lives. We need to avoid guest worker schemes that keep foreign workers in conditions of serfdom denied the right to defend themselves or to integrate into society. We must demand that immigrants have the same rights on the job and in their community that other workers have, so that they can join unions and fight for better wages and working conditions.

We need change in the U.S. trade and foreign policies so that the development of the economies of poorer countries are no longer determined by multinational corporations or U.S. government interference. We need to suspend all deportations of undocumented immigrants. We need to cancel the secure communities in 287G programs, which delegate immigration enforcement roles to local police, including the Harris County Sheriff’s Department, as well as the requirement for employers to use E-Verify to check up on legal status of workers. It is cruel and irrational to be deporting people now who may well qualify for legalization when legislation is passed. We need to revise immigration enforcement procedures to the highest standards of fairness and due process.

Liam Wright: Thanks to Platypus for putting this together. I do not experience the oppression that immigrants all too often experience. What I have to say is based on study and political experience, and it is tentative.

At present we are frustratingly impotent to accomplish the political goals we have before ourselves. We have eleven million undocumented people in this country. And while Trump is a terrifying know-nothing who whips up potentially violent hatred, it is Obama who deported more immigrants than any president in history.

At the same time, the face of immigration is changing. In the 1990s and 2000s, it was mainly Mexican workers who were coming here because they were being displaced by NAFTA. Today, it is largely Central American immigrants fleeing violence.

I moved to Houston to help develop a southern left political strategy, and I started doing research in the Rio Grande Valley. The Rio Grande Valley is sort of an anomaly in the United States not because it is majority Latino, but because it flows in the shadow of the border, and the wall, and all the contradictions that come with that; including massive poverty, a police state, and the need to resist as a matter of course if you are an immigrant.

We volunteered at a church called Sacred Heart Church, a Catholic church that does a lot of work with the undocumented. It helps them get food, clothes, get where they are going, etc. Working with them, I had the opportunity to interview some people coming through. A Salvadoran immigrant who had just arrived that day said he had traveled from San Salvador to Guatemala, from Guatemala across the river, and then through Mexico. He and his family had to stay in a storage container, a giant metal box, with dozens of other people fainting from malnutrition and heat exhaustion. At one point in his journey, his sister-in-law got separated because she wanted to keep on moving.

Later he heard that her guide tried to rape her. Think about the desperation and necessity drives people to go through this ordeal. Toward the end of his journey, he got separated from his wife and one of his sons. When I spoke to him, he was exhausted, he began crying because he did not know where they were, and they were the whole reason why he came to the U.S. He told us that, “The gangs in El Salvador are out in the street. They do not care if they see police or someone from the government; they just go out and kill people. They’re everywhere.” He told us that his son decided to become a part of one of these gangs, that people joined gangs to keep themselves and their family safe.

Trump says that the people being sent here are rapists and criminals. In fact, they are desperate people whose governments have been destabilized, in part by U.S. intervention. Their right to inclusion, to respect and full rights, should be a given.

This country was founded upon the twin crimes of the genocide of indigenous people and the kidnapping of Africans from their homeland to use for slave labor. Ever since that time, there has always been a population that has been legally excluded, and that exclusion has been backed up with violence.

Full rights and inclusion can be accomplished for everyone without the dissolution of what it means to be “American”; without the deconstruction, the dismantling of political, economic, and state institutions and the reconstitution of what it means to have a polity that includes everyone currently within our borders. I suspect we will need a contemporary constituent assembly, to redefine what it means to be included on the basis of the most oppressed and exploited, to have a democracy and economy that serves the goal of universal equality—for everyone. We need to not be afraid to forcibly assert universalism on the basis of the most oppressed.

I was in Seattle when a state of emergency was declared and riots shut down the city. I am relatively proud of that. At the same time, the most successful socialist projects combine electoral efforts with the work of the social movements. This is true in Greece with SYRIZA, in Spain with Podemos, and in Venezuela with the Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela and Chavismo. Even the Zapatistas are running a presidential candidate. This is from a quasi-anarchist revolutionary group in Mexico. The shape and form of revolutionary politics are changing. We need to embrace these explosive political aspirations and not shy away from the raw or violent potential of people saying, “No, I will not be oppressed anymore.” When people riot in Baltimore and Ferguson, we need to say that it’s right to rebel.

If we go looking to support the “lesser of two evil” candidates, if we just try to touch things up around the edges or pose micro-reforms, we’re going to fall prey to inertia. Our mission right now is to figure out how to get rid of the situation whereby we have to decide between Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump, or some other Democratic congressman or senator that is really fundamentally opposed to our interests. It is this situation that produces the fascist sentiments that are at the base of Donald Trump.

Young people have a particular role to play. I would like to see us get much more organized here on campus. You can see who people are voting for, whether Jill Stein or Bernie Sanders. The questions of how we will structure our society and who should be included are being rethought by our generation. We must engage that and work actively to build movements among a broad spectrum of young people who want to work to change the world.

Responses

HC: Obama’s voter turnout declined from 2008 to 2012 and, after what happened with Bernie Sanders, Hillary Clinton is not going to have a more votes than Obama. We need a candidate that we can trust. I believe that candidate is Jill Stein. But the Green Party has to change its attitude and aim to win this election, because we have, according to the numbers, all the possibility to be the majority on the Electoral College. But this is not going to be the answer for immigrants. They still have to independently mobilize all the grassroots organizations, like they did in 2006.

AR: We have to be able to get out of the false dilemma posed by the institutionalized, two-party system of capitalism. Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders are not wrong when they say the system is rigged. But an independent approach to policy is not something you can come up with in the middle of the night, it has to be developed working with people since people only learn from their own experience. A lot of people found out from their own experience what kind of party the Democratic Party actually is by being inside at the national and state conventions. The labor movement is still important: the oil workers here in Houston could shut down the whole country. The civil rights movement is extremely important because racism is still the most divisive of all the tactics used by capitalism. To build unity on the Left, we have to recognize that not everybody is going to come to the same place at the same time.

LW: We have to race to catch up to with the struggle of immigrants, like the strikes of people in immigration detention centers or the recent prisoner strikes. These are the most precarious people and they are putting their lives on the line for basic rights. We can identify sections of the people that are the most disenfranchised and oppressed like this and we effectively catch up to them, acting similarly to what Lenin recommends in *What is to be Done?*, where he talks about bringing social democratic politics into the economic struggle. Electoral strategies need to grow out of these movements. The Greens increasingly seem like they might be able to do this. This is opposed to what is often the case right now with the major unions in this country

serving as the shock troops of the Democratic Party rather than fighting for their members’ interests.

Q&A

All of you have expressed that there’s this ideal that you should be able to go where you want, but we do not see this in society. And yet, this should be some sort of contradiction that could be mobilized or expressed politically, as a route for breaking through the inertia. This seemed to be an idea that you were converging on.

HC: This refers to what Alvaro was saying about the capitalist system. What they promote is that you are free to travel and go wherever you want, but the actual conditions are limited by the borders of the nation-state. But you have the privilege if you are a capitalist with a lot of money. That opposes directly the spirit of internationalism and solidarity of the working class. The mobility that we see, by the hundreds of thousands or the millions, is a forced mobility. Now, they invented this drug war, but we know the drug dealers colluded with governments in order to create this state violence.

AR: We do not have a crisis of immigration in this country. We do have a human rights crisis, but the issue is mainly a political football in the electoral arena. In Europe, it is the same thing: a huge migration of people from Syria, and other areas of the Middle East, that has created a political crisis, a crisis exploited by the nationalist Right. Whether it is in France, or in Britain with Brexit, or elsewhere in Europe, racism is used by the political right. Donald Trump uses immigrants as scapegoats for why workers in this country are losing their jobs, why the country has not progressed, why the middle-class is dwindling. Immigrants are the scapegoat for ills that ought be laid at the feet of the neoliberalism that has prevailed since Reagan and Thatcher. Neoliberalism was basically a shift from the New Deal that was created back in the 1930s and 40s towards super-exploitation and deregulation. Now Hillary and others are talking a new game: they call it “inclusive capitalism.” They recognize how unstable the present order actually is. The Bernie and Trump phenomena go against the political stability that the capitalist system wishes to have. So there is an opportunity, because they are going to try to scale back neoliberalism. They say they want to increase wages. The ruling class at this point is more willing to accept that. In fact, even multinational corporations have been pressured into it, including Wal-Mart, McDonalds, and so forth. Where do you think a lot of the undocumented workers are working? At McDonalds and Wal-Mart where they receive low pay and endure terrible working conditions. We need to continue to be involved in those economic struggles.

LW: I suspect that nowhere has this ideal of a mobile and cosmopolitan worker ever existed. With the forcing of the peasants off the land to work in the factories and workshops in the cities, compelled migration existed at the very birth of capitalism. Look at the most exploited people today: it is not just immigrants, but poor African-Americans, people in prison, even students increasingly enslaved to debt that restricts their mobility. There’s an entire layer of society affected by the questions of immobility. This is not a new problem.

What implications would the guest worker program have on your organizing efforts? Would it divide the working class even further?

HC: It has already been done with the Bracero Program from 1942 to 1964. It was implemented because during World War II there was a need for labor, but it was extended all the way to 1964. It used guest workers as scabs. They did not receive the minimum wage, Social Security, or other retirement benefits that they were promised. It was a scam. With the situation in Mexico—the killings and disappearances—it is likely that workers would come under a guest worker program.

AR: We are definitely opposed to guest worker schemes. So is the labor movement, because that keeps foreign workers in conditions of serfdom without the right to defend themselves or integrate themselves into society. Guest workers are here but without rights.

LW: Capitalism finds ways to mitigate problems without solving them, creating further and further fractions among working class people, granting some minor privileges over others. This is one of those cases. It will not touch the fundamentals of the problem.

This came up in Trump and Hillary’s debate. Can the challenge of immigration be solved through democratic means? Thinking about Germany and Merkel letting refugees in, if she had put that decision to a vote, it would have been voted down in Germany. What do you think about super-national forms of political union as necessary for resolving these kinds of issues? Should we be imagining forms of power that are larger than nation-states, or are we just in Alex Jones’s nightmare? Does the problem necessitate super-national organizing?

HC: In Baja, California we have ninety-six thousand workers under slavery conditions farming the products that Driscoll sells in the United States. Everybody would get scared if they had open borders suddenly in the state of California.

AR: Talking about open borders is basically just giving a weapon to the ultra-right. It is not a practical question for the Left at this time.

LW: Are we talking about the European Union, the Soviet Federation, or a post-capitalist state that would deal with these questions? Are we suggesting it as a reform to the U.S. system? It is interesting, but has little

bearing on what we are doing. Right now, talk of open borders is just speculation, dreaming.

Hillary Clinton is not going to guarantee a better situation for us. She refers to blacks as “superpredators” and we all saw what she did with the Middle East, Benghazi, and Honduras. So, as leftist organizations, why would you ask or tell people to vote for Hillary?

AR: Hillary is not going to be using the immigration issue in a similar way to Trump. She’s looking for a different agenda. We can persuade her into some kind of comprehensive immigration reform irrespective of what you think about her as far as Syria goes, or her being a neoliberal, or her being in the pocket of Wall Street. Wall Street also wants comprehensive immigration reform since they do not want to see major disruptions to the supply of cheap labor. Whether that reform happens or not depends on the composition of Congress. We do not want to witness the rise of the alt-right, which carries a whiff of fascism. Right here in Houston we saw armed white supremacists come out against the NAACP and the Anti-Defamation League. It has to be an anti-Trump vote. But it is up to your own conscience. Hillary’s a very defective candidate, obviously. I was very favorable to Bernie Sanders in the primaries, but he did not get to be the candidate. Capitalism does not offer us “good” alternatives.

LW: As far as Hillary Clinton goes, her particular brand of politics—corporatist neoliberalism—is part of what creates the white hatred and the virulent proto-fascism we see among Trump’s social base. You can go back and look at the Weimar Republic. It was very much the same. This is completely counterintuitive. Of course, I find Trump a violent, disturbing, disgusting figure, but I do not believe in voting for the Democratic establishment.

I will be voting for Jill Stein. Sanders clearly has a strategy of trying to create a Left current within the Democratic Party and has shown that there is more possibility for that than I expected a year ago. The Green Party is offering a different answer. By voting for Stein, we help open up more room for discussion in the national discourse. She’s got a program that is further to the left than some Marxist parties’. She calls for an end to deportations and the disbanding of the immigration detention centers. And she’s reaching millions of people with it.

HC: In its last national convention the Green Party decided that it has to move more to the left by declaring itself to be anti-capitalist. They see socialism as one of the options for the American people and determined that Jill Stein was the best candidate. We realize that this is an opportunity to present the American people with a set of ideas that started with Bernie Sanders. It can help without creating false expectations that the election of Jill Stein is going to be the solution to all our problems. If there were some other candidate from a coalition of socialist organizations with the possibility to raise awareness, I would be working there—with the Socialist Worker’s Party, the Communist Party, the Socialist Alternative, whomever. But there’s not. It is Jill Stein that is the one that has created this opportunity, and I am calling on people to vote for her.

Closing remarks

HC: Yes. The situation with immigration today is this: The owners of all these companies are happy with the system, with eleven million undocumented people they can exploit. Consequently, regardless of electoral politics, it is necessary to organize among all these undocumented workers in order to gain their rights. One example of this is the workers of the Immokalee area in Florida, living under slavery conditions. They have been able to organize a union of about fifty thousand people. That is the situation. We have to fight against the system, regardless of the electoral calendar.

AR: You need to get involved, whether it’s with the Left, like the Communist Party, or with the organizations that are fighting for immigrant rights, or civil rights, and so forth. Immigration is a common thing that we can move on together. We just do not have enough people engaged. So, we certainly encourage you become engaged, in this issue and other issues of the Left, because there are plenty of problems.

LW: I want to end with a note of possibility, not necessarily optimism, but possibility. Folks are getting “woke,” you know? In the US and around the world, if you look at if you look at the different political struggles against oppression and for equality, people will not accept the same answers that they have for a long time. They are demanding other options. I think that by us entering into this assertively and aggressively—again, especially the young people—we can help to shape that discussion in a way that creates better possibilities for the future. Anyone who wants to work on that project, I want to talk with you. Let’s change the world.

HC: I have one solicitation: We brought a letter that we are going to present to the Mexican Consulate demanding any answers about the forty-three students who disappeared two years ago. They have killed two more students over the last three weeks on the anniversary of the forceful disappearance of these students. We have the letter over there. If you want to sign it, that

Immigration and the Left

A panel discussion at the University of Illinois at Chicago

Jorge Mujica, Ralph Cintron, and Jacqueline Stevens

On November 7, 2016, the eve of the U.S. presidential election, the Platypus Affiliated Society hosted a panel discussion entitled “Immigration and the Left” at the University of Illinois at Chicago [UIC]. Moderated by Joseph Estes of Platypus, the event posed three questions to the panelists: How has the Left approached the question of immigration historically? What opportunities exist in the immigrants’ rights movement today for a renewed emancipatory politics? What role can left-wing civil and political organizations play in immigration politics? Three speakers addressed these questions: Jorge Mujica, seasoned activist and the Strategic Campaigns Organizer for Arise Chicago; Ralph Cintron, professor of English and Latino and Latin American Studies at UIC; and Jacqueline Stevens, professor of Political Science at Northwestern University. What follows is an edited transcript of their discussion.

Opening remarks

Jorge Mujica: I do not want to talk too much about the debates and the election, but I will say that Donald Trump is not such a novelty. He reflects what this society is all about. We could already see racism and proto-fascism in rampant incarceration, for example, which the Democratic Party also played into: Under Obama’s administration, some three million people were deported in only eight years. Basically, Trump is threatening us with reality. He cannot do much more beyond what the Obama administration has already done.

Regarding the so-called immigration movement, first I would point out that it is dominated by huge organizations with a lot of money, even if they have “non-profit” status. They keep on the good side of the Democratic Party. This includes organizations like We Are America, FIRM, and the National Council of La Raza, whose two big contributors are the U.S. Army and the Chamber of Commerce. Obviously, there is no Left here.

Then there is another echelon with the local organizations. These are also part of the corporate non-profit machinery that, in the end, obeys the directives of the Democrats. In 2007, when the Democratic Party said, “Do not march,” these organizations followed and dutifully repeated, “Do not march.” When people came out in May of 2007, it was because of a raid on the discount mall in Little Village, Chicago, one week before May Day, which inspired people to act despite what the Democrats said.

Next there are the disgruntled activists. In this group I would place the Dreamers, the young people who started fighting in opposition both to the Democratic and the Republican Party. They even took legislative offices and picketed Luis Gutiérrez, who is supposed to be the champion of immigration in the House of Representatives. This is a faction of people who became incredibly disenchanted with the other structures and organizations in this so-called immigration movement.

Finally, we have small sub-groupings of left activists who try to present a different perspective. What might this perspective be? I would like to say: “Revolution, revolution, revolution!” But that is not true. Even on the Left, the discussion around immigration is about what kinds of legislative actions may be taken in order to solve administrative problems, things like increasing the number of visas given to international workers—I prefer the designation, “international workers,” instead of “immigrants,” or “undocumented workers.”

In 2006 when Congressman George Sensenbrenner’s legislation came out with the intent of criminalizing everybody, the popular slogan on the side of the marches was, “We are not criminals—we are workers!” It did not say, “We are students,” or, “We are fathers and mothers.” The slogan, which was not made up by the leadership, was, “We are not criminals. We are workers.” That is what I think the Left has tried to put at the center of the immigration debate.

At my job for a workers’ center, we are helping a group of workers who are being dismissed by a company in the middle of a union election, on the pretext that they lack the proper immigration papers. The elections are scheduled for November 18th; today the factory locked out nearly one hundred workers. What is the problem and what is the solution, here? Obviously, in the practical sense, people need papers. What people want is to be recognized as *workers*: “Let us work. We came to this country to work.” That is the end of it. If Hillary Clinton negotiated with the Tea Party just to give work papers to these people—not a “path to citizenship,” or anything like that, just permission to work—the majority of the immigrant community would be happy.

Now, at the same time, we assume that immigrants are international workers. Regardless of the status they have, or whether you have papers, you are a worker. Being a citizen does not make much difference when you are paid so little, or when your wages are stolen. Changing your name or your immigration status does not necessarily alter your working conditions. After the so-called “amnesty” of 1986, according to some studies, only 15 percent of the people who underwent legalization saw any improvements in their working conditions. Each person counts, of course, but that means 85 percent of the people who suddenly became legal permanent residents did not improve their living conditions. Papers do not mean increased wages, improvement in housing, better transportation, or good schools. The trends that affect every poor U.S. citizen, every worker in the United States, are conditions that affect immigrant workers, international workers.

That is more or less the perspective we uphold.

First and foremost, international workers are exactly that: workers. Most of them would be satisfied if they obtained a paper that allows them to work in peace, to travel back and forth across the border, and that would be the end of it. Our role, as the Left, is to go beyond that and say, “Your citizenship status is not going to change these working conditions.”

Ralph Cintron: I do ethnographic fieldwork in and around Humboldt Park, primarily with Puerto Ricans, so I have spent a lot of time with undocumented workers. I began by studying the tensions between Puerto Ricans and Mexicans in Chicago, though over time I became interested in topics like affordable housing, which seems to be an underpinning concern for nearly everyone. Even if these remarks offer some rather abstract readings of immigration, I want to stress the fact that they stem from my experiences doing fieldwork.

First, regarding how this event was framed, I am not too sure we really know what “neoliberalism” means. It is not a term I particularly want to mobilize. It seems to refer to a lot of things at once. There is some very good work that analyzes neoliberalism as a major factor in immigration issues regarding, for instance, trade agreements like NAFTA. In many other instances, however, I am not sure what a word like “neoliberalism” really offers.

I would frame the issue differently, based on the work of William Walters. Deportation and exile are ancient practices. They seem to be about the power and authority of the sovereign, whatever that might be. Is the sovereign a king? Is the sovereign the nation state? Is the sovereign the people? It does not make a damn bit of difference. Historically the sovereign, regardless of its form, is invested in things like deportation, exile, or population transfer. Let’s go to an interesting moment in English history: the 1662 Poor Laws. The problem there was labor crossing parish boundaries, not national borders. The question remains: What is being protected? The local labor force, the local economy, and the local elites. All of the practices we are now complaining about on a global level have a long human history. They existed before we came up with the term “neoliberalism.” There is something fundamental about the politics of movement. Any state, whether neoliberal or a Keynesian, will want to regulate labor, especially when it comes to immigration.

In Borneo, native populations customarily have owned forested lands. The state exerts its ownership because the native population does not have private property rights. In the case of Borneo, the state then began to lease or sell the land to Japanese lumber companies who are interested in making plywood, which means that the native people are being displaced. Their customary rights lose out to a world system of global property rights. This topic has really interested me lately. When we look at indigenous populations, to what extent is this shift from customary property rights to private property landholdings happening on the part of the state, first of all, but then also on the part of companies, and so on?

What I have described might be called “neoliberalism,” but then I would say that property rights are at the core of neoliberalism. So why not start there, with ownership and possession. Who is owning and who is possessing? On what basis do we consider these ownerships and possessions? On what basis does that become a right to expel populations? That is a large thesis, however, so I will end my remarks here.

Jacqueline Stevens: I share with Jorge the concern that the immigration movements we see right now are not very radical. I also agree with Ralph’s criticisms of the concept of neoliberalism. What I want to address is the question of what the Left has invested in the concept of neoliberalism. Why have we adopted that framework? What might an alternative framework look like?

The Left’s investment in the concept of “neoliberalism” comes from the Marxist idea that the basis of economic inequality is found in one’s relation to the means of production and the discourses that are generated therefrom. We are part of a society in which market values supposedly cloak everything; this explains why we are immobilized as a population and unable to challenge political institutions and change economic inequality. Marx has this perspective largely because he sees the development of capitalism as eclipsing the centrality of the state in the constitution of inequality. Under feudalism, the state is establishing the status relationships that denote ownership of land. Inequality thus comes from the king. With the development of new technologies, however, those kinds of prerogatives from political society are attenuated and then eclipsed by the market, by who owns the means of production.

But is Marx actually right about this? Even in the United States, one of the most mobile countries in the history of the world, it is still the case that 50 to 80 percent of inequality is based on intergenerational transmissions of wealth, not the accumulation of income over your life. According to Marx’s theory, wealth being maintained through families is what we should see in feudalism, not in capitalism, under which accumulation is supposed to be “virginal,” with each generation creating its own wealth. To the extent that our political institutions are still maintaining inequality based on familial transmissions of wealth, there is a disparity between what is actually happening and the claims put forth by a Marxist analysis of economic

inequality. This does not mean that inequality is not based on capitalism, but that there are many sources of inequality, including sources that exist largely outside of one’s relation to the means of production. Within developing societies, inequality based on state-mediated transmission of wealth within family structures is even more dramatic. One economist at Berkeley estimates that 90 percent of inequality in the poorest countries stems from these transmissions. If this is an important source of inequality, then an analysis of capitalism in its “neoliberal” phase is not going to be very helpful.

What are the alternatives? In part, we need to be a little more case specific when we are talking about political inequality, and not just having these knee-jerk responses that pull concepts off the shelf. We need to have more granular and specific contextual analysis of power. Chicago has the highest sales tax in the country, and Illinois has the third-highest property tax in the country, yet the public services here *suck*. The transportation system is bad, the schools are terrible—what is going on here? It is not capitalism, really. Partly, it is just greed, but even more so, it is kleptocracy: the ability of certain families and individuals to use money and influence through a variety of networks, including even things like “non-profit” organizations, in order to affect the concentration of wealth.

The institution at which I work, Northwestern University, recently built a \$150 million party house for its trustees on the shore of Lake Michigan, using a bond from the State of Illinois. What is impeding our ability as citizens to control that kind of wealth? It is not just capitalism. There is a lot of obscurantism surrounding these financial instruments. As activists, scholars, and citizens, we need to be more attentive to these abuses of power and more active in confronting them. A very broad discourse about neoliberalism is not going to be too helpful in that struggle.

Responses

JM: It is not only the relationship to the means of production, but also the relationship to the way wealth is accumulated and therefore distributed, or

was acquired, but also what we are going to do now, as *Mexicanos*, living in the United States. I blame the U.S. for impoverishing Mexico, for extracting the minerals and the natural resources. But I want a share of that; I am not going to immigrate to a *poorer* country. However, once I am in the U.S., what is my role? What am I doing here? I do not own the means of production; I just want to work. That is my role and I want certain rights while I work.

When workers think about money, they think about how many hours they will work. With employers, they think, “How am I going to extract another dollar from someone else?” That is the basic relationship. Workers know they are not going to be rich; they know there is no American Dream for international workers. They still want to work in peace and to be part of our big system of production. Whatever wealth comes their way, they are going to share, through remittances to Mexico, and they will continue being poor. What we try to stress with workers is that, regardless of your country, regardless of your immigration status, you are just pure working class. That is it. You have to unite and fight as part of the working class.

RC: I agree with what Jacqueline has said about inheritance, intergenerational accumulation, and transfer of wealth. Piketty makes similar arguments regarding France and England. This is why, for me, a term like “oligarchy” has resonance. [The manuscript that I am trying to finish right now has, as part of its title, the “Oligarchic Condition.”] Some places, such as Russia, have what we might call “purebred oligarchs,” but it seems that we have something like that in the U.S. We have oligarchic figures. Aren’t the Clintons such figures? Trump seems to be, as well. So what we really have is a face-off between two oligarchs, or two oligarchic families. The same could be said of the Bushes, as well. At a broader level, the more pernicious thing to figure out is the larger system linking together wealth and power. This is why I have moved away from “oligarchy,” as such, and try instead to consider this problem in terms of an “oligarchic condition.” One of the things that I appreciate, from the fieldwork perspective, is that real people would never use the

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not distributed. I cannot avoid thinking about Lenin, here: The superior face of capitalism is colonialism. Everybody talks about the boom following the Second World War: the GI bill, owning houses, and having industrial jobs. Nobody remembers that this was the period during which Latin America was being spoiled, controlled, and dismantled by the United States. The wealth coming to the United States from Latin America was immense. The U.S. protected its access to this wealth by supporting the 1954 coup d’état against Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán in Guatemala and the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza García in Nicaragua.

The state protects wealth within certain national borders *for its citizens*. Those who want to come and share that wealth are barred from it, even when that wealth came from their country in the first place! Hence the regulation of the labor force, deportation, and fortification of the borders. The sovereign state means exactly that: “I am protecting my wealth, however I acquired it, for my own citizens.” That is the beginning of nations: “Only if you were born in the United States do you have the right to enjoy our public benefits.”

Our response has to address not only how that wealth

word “neoliberal.” There has to be a strategy, here: Start with what the workers are saying and doing, with how they conceive of their world, and work up from there. That is one of the reasons I do not like the overuse of the word “neoliberal.” It is coming from Harvey and other post-Marxists. It is coming from the top down. It would be better to dig in, to get underneath. In that spirit, I would be interested to hear from Jorge about the *ejidos*, lands used communally for farming in Mexico, and how an old model of peasant socialism changed in the wake of property appropriations and displacement. How did workers who moved here as a consequence view these disruptions?

JS: Related to this point is the fact that the Republican establishment and big business want open borders. There was an article in the *Wall Street Journal* in 1984 that proposed amending the United States Constitution by adding five words: “There shall be open borders.” The 1986 Amnesty Bill under the Reagan administration took up this demand. Its argument was