Beyond social democracy

Popular assemblies, confederal democracy, and internationalism

Howie Hawkins

Presumptive 2016 Green Party presidential nominee Jill Stein speaks with 'Black Men for Bernie' supporters of former Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders during the 2016 Democratic National Convention on July 27, 2016 in Philadelphia. (Getty)

THE RECENT PLATYPUS PANEL on the "Death of Social Democracy" raised the prospect of a socialist left whose approach is not focused on taking power in capitalist national states, whether through the electoral reformism of traditional Social Democracy or a Bolshevik-style armed seizure, but on building a grassroots-democratic, confederal, and internationalist counterpower that can replace capitalist nation-states with a truly democratic socialism. This prospect was only broached in the critique of Social Democracy. I would like to suggest some perspectives to fill out this prospect.

Jason Schulman began the panel with what are several essential starting points for any serious discussion of what socialists should do after the death of Social Democracy. I would summarize those points as follows:

- Traditional social democratic electoral reformism functions as the left wing of capital today. It cannot win or even defend old social-democratic reforms anymore. It rationalizes their rollback.
- Settling for a social democratic or New Deal welfare state under capitalism leaves the capitalist ruling class intact and in power through its control of the private economy and the capitalist state. That means welfare state reforms are not secure from repeal.
- Winning and securing progressive reforms will take disruptive direct action movements. Demonstrations, strikes, civil disobedience, and other organized disorder are needed to keep a socialist party's electoral campaigns and elected officials committed to the radical goal of socialism.
- The new socialist movement has to be internationalist in structure and action, not just with words and symbols, because capitalism is, more than ever, globally structured.
- A socialist movement cannot defeat the armed forces of modern capitalist states militarily. Socialists will have to win over the armed forces politically.

I was particularly glad to see Schulman make this last point. Winning over the ranks of the armed forces is an absolutely crucial strategic necessity for socialists. It has been rarely mentioned on the U.S. left since the Vietnam War, when some of us concluded that the most powerful way to resist the war, when our draft numbers were called, was to join the armed forces and organize within. The antiwar movement in the armed forces—including the important civilian-led GI coffeehouses that supported the soldiers' revolt against the war—is a historical example we must not forget. We need socialists in the ranks and among the officer corps who can lead resistance to imperial wars and repression of domestic socialist electoral and legislative gains. The 1973 coup against Allende in Chile and the 2002 attempted coup against Chavez in Venezuela both illustrate in different ways the importance of both a mass movement backing elected socialists and a base in the armed forces supportive of the movement or at least constitutional requirements for civilian rule.

Schulman uses the British Labour Party's Jeremy Corbyn to illustrate the limits of social-democratic reform as a national as opposed to international project. Christoph Lichtenburg and Brian Tokar use Bernie Sanders to point to other limits of social democratic reform. It seeks to ameliorate the problems of capitalism—inequality, imperialism, and so forth—rather than end them with a socialist alternative. Running as a Democrat, Sanders strengthened the Democratic Party by making the party look better than it is. Many disaffected progressives are now back in the party's pocket, where their votes will be taken for granted and their demands dismissed.

So far, so good. But what socialists should do with this analysis is where the panelists come up short. Their answers stop at brief formulas. For Schulman, it's building "a genuinely socialist anti-capitalist international." For Lichtenberg, it's building an independent mass party of the Left. For Tokar, it's a "movement of movements" replacing the nation-state with a "confederation of 'rebel cities.'" William Pelz suggests a similar approach in calling for a "third way" that is neither an electoral nor armed seizure of the capitalist nation-state, but the construction of a new political order modeled on the Paris Commune. Schulman also emphasizes the need for a new political order that replaces the capitalist state with a "genuinely democratic republic" where workers rule through "extreme democracy."

All of these formulas can be conceived as mutually compatible—and should be in my view. But in discussing how that might be done today, the panelists accept two premises that I think are wrong. One premise is that the U.S. never had a mass socialist or social-democratic movement. The other is that the Green Party is not, or is no more, a political tendency that can be a political vehicle for a new socialist politics.

America is not exceptional, the American Left is

One major fault of most American socialist thinkers is that they know more about European socialist history than American. The fact is that left third parties, led by socialists, drove the public policy debate and legislative agenda in the United States from the 1840s to the 1930s. It is only since 1936—when most of the Left and labor went into the Democratic Party under the leadership of the Communists' Popular Front policy of coalition with the "progressive" capitalists against the fascists—that we have not had an independent mass socialist or social-democratic left in America. The Left lost its voice and very identity as an alternative when it disappeared inside the Democratic Party, where self-described socialists became "progressives" who campaign for the election of liberals.

A small independent left has tried to revive independent left politics since the New Left of the 1960s. The so-called New Social Movements around ethnic, gender, and sexual liberation, community organizing, peace, and the environment, were largely absorbed by the Democratic Party and the non-profit industrial complex around it. These movements' elites have been integrated at the level of the professional classes, while their working classes are increasingly segregated into occupations and communities suffering

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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.

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from steadily growing economic inequality, hardship, and isolation from opportunities. The Green Party is the only independent political party initiative coming out of the New Left movements to have sustained itself for more than three decades over many election cycles. But despite hundreds of local elected officials and some notable presidential runs by Ralph Nader, it has not been strong enough to date to force the two-corporate-party cartel to respond to its demands.

A brief review of the 1840s to 1930s period of independent left politics is in order to show that America is not exceptional in having had no significant socialist or labor party. It is the American left that is exceptional in having abandoned independent politics in the 1930s.

In the antebellum period, a direct line of activists formed Workingmen's parties, then the Liberty Party, the Free Soil Party, and finally the Republican Party. This political lineage, which included many Red '48er exiles from failed democratic and social revolutions in Europe of 1848, helped make slavery ("free men"), land reform ("free soil"), and cooperative production ("free labor") issues the Whigs and Democrats could not avoid., Marx and Engels' in *The Communist Manifesto* identified the National Reform Association, the principal land reform organization, as their allied "Agrarian Reformers in America." The National Reform Association's secretary, Alvin Earle Bovay, gave the Republican Party its name at a party convention in 1854 in Ripon, Wisconsin, which grew out of the utopian socialist community of Ceresco. The Republicans, of course, rose from third party, to second party, to first party over the course of the 1854 to 1860 elections.[1]

After the Civil War, a series of populist farmer-labor parties—Labor Reform, Greenback-Labor, Anti-Monopoly, Union Labor, People's—made the money question the central issue as both the Democratic and Republican parties became hard-money, gold-standard parties. In opposition to private bank notes backed by the deflationary gold standard, the populists demanded an expansionary monetary policy in the form of a democratically controlled public currency of U.S. notes, or greenbacks, in order to grow the money supply in concert with the growth in commerce.

Capitalist enterprises were shifting from family dynasties to corporate forms whose share ownership cut across an increasingly class-conscious capitalist class, interested in replacing cutthroat competition with shared monopolies. The Money Trust was one of many shared monopolies the populists fought, including the railroads, the telegraph and telephone companies, and the farm equipment manufacturers and suppliers.

The populists fought back with a cooperative and socialist counter vision. One of the bibles of the movement was Laurence Gronlund's *The Cooperative Commonwealth: An Exposition of Modern Socialism* (1884), which popularized in the American vernacular, before Marx's *Capital* was translated into English, Marx's analysis of surplus value, of the nature of exploitation, and of capitalism's tendencies toward monopolization and overproduction crises. The populists called for government ownership of railroads, telegraph and telephone utilities, a federally-backed "subtreasury plan" to underwrite farmers' cooperatives, labor reforms like the eight-hour day, and democratic demands like black voting rights and the direct election of Senators.

The populists ran to win, not just protest. In the 1878 mid-term election in the wake of the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, the Greenback-Labor Party won over one million votes, 14 seats in Congress, and many state and local offices. The Greenbackers transcended post–Civil War sectionalism by receiving, for example, 34.4 percent of the vote in Maine and 23.8 percent of the vote in Mississippi. They followed that up with a presidential campaign in 1880 in which candidate James Baird Weaver ran to restore Radical Reconstruction in the South in the face of the armed militias of the Democratic Party whose slogan was "white supremacy."[2] Weaver won only 3.3 percent of the presidential vote in 1880, but would go on to win nine percent, over one million popular votes, and 22 electoral votes as the People's Party presidential candidate in 1892.

These farmer-labor populist parties were the American counterparts to the rising socialist parties in Europe. Their peak votes of over one million in 1878 and 1892 were comparable to the German and French socialist parties of that era. Those million vote peaks for an independent left were hit again by Socialist Party candidates Eugene Debs in 1912 and 1920 and Norman Thomas in 1932. The class-conscious struggles and strikes of slaves, labor unions, and farmer's organizations from the Civil War on through the whole Gilded Age were more massive and militant than their counterparts in Europe, and faced more violent opposition from corporate goons and state militias.

The People's Party famously committed political suicide by cross-endorsing in 1896 the Democrat, William Jennings Bryan. Bryan completely discarded the populist critique of corporate capitalism and its vision of economic cooperation. With the backing of the silver mining trust, notably mine owner and newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst, Bryan promoted the free coinage of silver while discarding the populists' radical program of a democratically-controlled public Greenback currency, black voting rights, and public ownership of railroad, telegraph, and telephone industries.

In the wake of the People's Party demise, former populists and other socialists then formed the Social Democratic Party of America in 1898, which became the Socialist Party of America in 1901. Hundreds of Socialists were elected to local, state, and congressional offices over the next few decades. The Socialists made labor rights, social insurance, and public enterprise unavoidable topics in elections and public policy debates and many Socialist reform planks were adopted, albeit in diluted forms, during the New Deal era.

The point of this historical sketch is to show that America is not an exceptionally hard place to build a mass-based socialist movement. We had them for over a century. What is exceptional is that our Left abandoned the first principle of socialist politics—political class independence—when it largely went into the Democratic Party in 1936.

Political independence is what the socialist movement learned from the Revolutions of 1848. The pattern in those revolutions was that the workers' and small farmers' erstwhile allies in the struggle with the old landed elites for democratic and economic reforms, the professional and business middle classes, abandoned them once they received concessions from the old regime. The same dynamic is at work today when the working class movements and institutions largely rely on the Democrats: They get nothing but taken for granted, because the Democrats have their votes in their pockets.

The Socialist Party of America relearned the lesson of political independence from the debacle of fusion in the populist movement. It put into its party constitution a ban on cross-endorsements with capitalist parties.

Why it took until the Socialist Party for the American left to adopt independent political action as a principle is rooted in its unique history. In America, the franchise was justified in universalistic terms from the start. In Europe, workers had to fight for it. From the American Revolution and before, America's landed and business elites supported a popular electoral franchise. In New England, where a majority of the adult male population (about 70 percent in Boston in 1776) that had some taxable property—farmers, merchants, and artisans—exercised their franchise in directly democratic town meetings. Though initially extended only to propertied white males, because political rights were articulated in universalistic terms, over the course of American history other groups were able to win the franchise for themselves. In other industrially developing countries, workers and peasants had to form their own independent labor parties to fight for the vote and social reforms against the new business elites as well as the old landed elites. The nature of that fight made independent political action by the working class a principle for socialists, not just a contingent tactic. In America in the populist era, fusion politics competed with independent politics until the debacle of 1896.

The missing mass-membership party

The Socialist Party of America also learned another lesson: that to have a working-class party that is democratically accountable to its members and has the financial resources it needs, the members have to agree to a statement of principles, support the party with dues, and participate in a local branch. This mass-membership party structure was an invention of the socialist left in Europe in the latter third of the 19th century. It was how they challenged the older parties of the landed and business elites for power. Except for the Socialist Party of America, which peaked at a membership of 118,000 in 1912, the American left has failed to build this kind of mass party.

The reason that fusion kept coming up in the populist parties is that the they did not base their conventions on delegations from the mass-membership organizations that supported them, such as the Grange, Knights of Labor, Greenback Clubs, and Socialist Labor Party locals in the case of the Greenback-Labor Party, or the northern, southern, and colored Farmers' Alliances and the Knights of Labor in the case of the People's Party. Instead, in the convention tradition invented by American political parties in the 1830s, the populists made open calls to precinct caucuses, which would elect delegates to county conventions, and then state and finally national conventions. The problem was that anybody, no matter what their politics, could participate in this convention process. Opportunists from the major party that was the minority party in its region (Republicans in the South, Democrats in the North) flooded populist conventions with proposals for fusion campaigns. Where the popular base of the Populist Party was not well organized, fusionists tended to prevail.

The Socialist Party of America argued that its membership convention system was more democratic than the new voter registration and primary system that corporate-backed reformers introduced in the Progressive Era.[3] While the Progressives argued that primaries were more democratic than the old boss-controlled conventions of political machines, they were also concerned that the Socialists were actually building an organization and taking power through elections in many cities and towns. The New York State Legislature said as much in 1920 in justifying its expulsion of five Socialists elected to the Assembly in 1918 and re-elected in a subsequent special election to replace them. The Joint Legislative Committee Investigating Seditious Activities said the Socialists were not a political party (i.e., a list of voters kept by the state to determine who could vote in a party's primary), but "an organization" that required political agreement and dues of its members.[4] The last thing the top-down corporate-backed Democrats and Republicans parties wanted was workers organized politically into their own party. They wanted professional elites managing parties and government from the top-down like the modern corporation was managed. The Socialists argued that their deliberative process and accountable structure was more democratic than the primary system, where atomized voters choose among candidates pre-selected by moneyed elites.

It is clear in retrospect that the Socialists were right. The introduction of state-managed party registration rolls and corporate-elite financed primary elections between 1899 and 1920 corresponded also to the introduction of barriers to registration such as poll taxes, literacy tests, and violent intimidation that served to disenfranchise blacks and poor whites in the south and the immigrant workers in the north.[5] At the turn of the century, as European Social Democracy was consolidating the universal franchise and using it to contest for state power, the southern planter and northern business elites were successfully disenfranchising much of the American working class.

The national turnout of voting age citizens in presidential elections was 70 percent to 80 percent in the 19th century. It dropped steadily from 79 percent in 1896 to 49 percent in 1920. The turnout has fluctuated between about 50 percent and 60 percent for the last century. It rose somewhat to about 60 percent during the New Deal/Great Society era between the 1930s and 1960s when reforms beneficial to working class people were on the agenda. Since the 1970s and bipartisan neoliberalism, the working class vote has declined again and the turnout in presidential elections has been closer to 50 percent, except for the Obama bumps to 62 percent in 2008, and 57 percent in 2012.

So we have lived for a century now with the problem that the natural working class base of a left party does not vote much. There are institutional reasons for this low voter turnout, such as voter registration that requires the initiative of voters in the U.S. In most other nations, the government takes the initiative to register its citizens for elections. Since the 2013 U.S. Supreme Court decision gutting the pre-clearance provision of the Voting Rights Act, many states have instituted identification requirements for registration and voting itself. This too suppresses working class votes.

But I would argue that the biggest reason for low turnout among working class voters is not institutional barriers, nor is it "apathy" as so many commentators assert. It is disgust with a two-party system that does not speak to the needs of, and cannot relate to, working people. A close look at who voted for the supposed working people's champion in each major party this year—Sanders in the Democratic Party, Trump in the Republican Party—shows that workers are still mostly not voting. Based on my experience in electoral campaigns, as a candidate and as a canvasser for other candidates, working people feel the two parties do not care about them, do not know them, and cannot even see them.

It is the absence of a pro-worker independent left party that accounts for the low voter turnout of workers. The institutional barriers to voting contribute to the difficulty of building such a party. But that is not an excuse for the Left not to build its own party.

Prospects for the Green Party

Could the Green Party reach working people and build a mass-membership party of the Left? I think it could. But let us first dispense with some of the panelists' mistaken ideas about the Green Party.

Lichtenberg says the Greens are not focused on workers. Nonsense. Greens talk to workers whenever they run electoral campaigns, which I recommend to every socialist to get beyond singing to the choir. Greens recruit workers in those election campaigns. I would like to introduce Lichtenberg to the members of the Teamsters, Steelworkers, Ironworkers, Sheet Metal Workers, Teachers, Nurses, Communications Workers, Electrical Workers, Food and Commercial Workers, and Farmworkers unions in my Green Party local in Syracuse, New York. We may not be typical of Green locals, but I find that Green locals tend to be more composed of working class people in communities compared to socialist groups that tend to be more composed of middle class professionals on college campuses.

Lichtenberg also says the Greens are not and never were anti-capitalist. In fact, the Greens were born out of the death of social democracy. The Greens in Germany were the left alternative to Social Democratic cold-war militarism and welfare-state capitalism. The German Green's success in electing 35 members to the German Bundestag in 1983 sparked the formation of Green parties around the world where the Social Democracy (or the New Deal Democrats in the U.S.) presented the same problems for the movements growing out of the New Left of the 1960s. The Green Party in the U.S. has always had a socialist left. We have been patiently explaining the socialist analysis of wage labor as exploitation, of competitive endless accumulation as incompatible with ecological sustainability, of the symbiotic growth of capitalism and racism, of the imperialism that competitive accumulation spawns, and so forth. Socialists are now the dominant tendency in the American Greens, as evidenced by the overwhelming support for the adoption of an anti-capitalist platform plank at the 2016 Green Party convention that calls for "eco-socialism" and a "cooperative commonwealth."

Lichtenberg says the Green Party movement internationally was never a social-democratic movement. That assertion cannot explain why, for example, the Green Party of England and Wales grew explosively in the post Great Recession years by keeping alive the social-democratic reforms the Labour Party had abandoned under its pre-Corbyn leadership. The Green movement is a mixed bag like the socialist movement is. Realo Greens in Germany imposing austerity as junior partners in coalition with the Social Democrats no more define Green politics than Social Democratic austerity policies, or Stalin's repressive policies, define socialist politics.

The Greens remain a mix of what might be called progressive populists along with socialists. What is most important is the class independence of all Greens from the corporations and their political representatives in the Democratic and Republican parties. As Engels argued to his Marxian Socialist Labor Party correspondents with respect to Henry George's 1886 Labor Party run for mayor of New York City, working class political independence was the crucial step; the socialist content of the program will come in time from experience in fighting for working class interests.[6] The Green Party in the U.S. has been evolving along these lines.

That is why Tokar's generalities about the Green Party in the U.S. are so wrong. He generalizes from his own Vermont experience, where the organized Greens did leave the field during the Nader campaigns. The opposite happened in all other states where the Greens were organized. Nader brought in new layers of activists. To say that the Vermont exit was because Nader, or the Green Party, lost interest in giving voice to social movements in elections is just wrong. Nader's presidential campaigns gave voice to the demands of movements for fair trade, global justice, renewable energy, Palestinian rights, ending the wars in the Middle East and other issues that found no expression in the major parties. Giving voice to social movements, particularly the hardest hit so-called frontline communities, is one of the missions of Jill Stein's current Green Party presidential campaign.

Nader's innovative campaign in 2000 pioneered the online networking, information sharing, mobilizations and contributions, as well as the campaign super-rallies, that Dean, Paul, Obama, Sanders, and others built upon in subsequent campaigns. Far from representing a turn to the right and conventional electoral politics, Nader did more to bring class politics to the Greens in 2000 than anyone has before or since. Nader centered his 2000 campaign on corporate power and economic class issues. When the Greens were split in 2004 over whether to run a "safe states" campaign to help Kerry defeat Bush or an independent campaign against both pro-war corporate candidates, Nader continued his focus on class issues as well as the anti-war demands with his independent run with longtime socialist Peter Camejo as his running mate. Most Greens who worked on the Nader-Camejo campaign remain active in the Green Party today.

To say, as Tokar does, that Nader and subsequent Green candidates like Stein left nothing in the wake of their campaigns is to dismiss the credibility with masses of people that Nader's reputation as lifelong people's advocate gave to the Greens. It is to dismiss the lists of supporters local Greens were able to develop and then use to continue organizing after the campaigns. Every serious organizer knows how important lists of supporters are. Tokar also disregards the very tangible asset of state ballot lines the campaign won in many states with presidential votes. Those ballot lines enabled Greens to run local campaign in subsequent years in many states.

Tokar is on to something, however, when he says "with the Nader campaigns in 1996 and 2000, the existing Green networks were taken over by tendencies with mainstream electoral ambitions that pitted them against the more left-wing voices within the Greens." What happened in those years is that the national Green Party structure was changed from a mass-membership party structure of dues-paying members organized in local chapters into a party structured like the Democrats and Republicans, as a federation of state parties with no direct national membership, dues, or structure of direct accountability to the rank-and-file members. Instead, grassroots supporters are an atomized base of supporting voters indirectly represented by insiders on party committees and campaign organizations.

That change was a win for the liberals against the socialists in the Green Party. The liberals thought that the platforms voted through by the delegates of the rank-and-file locals earlier in the 1990s were too socialistic. They did not want to run for office on such radical platforms. They wanted a more top-down structure that cut the rank-and-file members in the locals out of national decision-making, which became their federation of state parties structured around state election laws governing primaries rather than around a grassroots-democratic structure of organized locals.[7] The change in structure largely defunded the national Green Party organization, rendering it incapable of providing much support for local and state party organizing. So the level of party organization varies widely from state to state based on the initiative and capacity of local organizers.

Tokar and his Vermont comrades left after the change in structure was made. Most left Greens stayed, kept working, and the fruit of their work is a Green Party that is the only left political party with a national electoral presence and is programmatically to the left of where it was in 2000. It may not presently have an effective national structure to support local organizing, but there is a base of organizers and activists that have kept the party going across the country.

If the Green Party is to realize its potential, it will need to go back to the mass-membership party structure in order to fund organizers who can support local and state party development and, just as important, to give the party's grassroots members local organizations through which they can participate in shaping the party's policies and activities. Discussions about restructuring in this manner are underway today in many state parties and the national party.

The Green Party also needs to get back to what Tokar alludes to when he mentions the more "holistic strategy" of the early Greens when educational and cultural projects, issue campaigns, cooperatives, and labor organizing were pursued alongside with, or in preparation for, electoral campaigns. While European social democracy was known for its socialist cultural milieu in affiliated unions, cultural clubs, and cooperatives, the American left of the populist and early socialist era was also strong in this era, from the populists' large encampments evangelizing their social message in the manner of religious revivals to the unions, housing cooperatives, and educational projects of Socialist Party chapters.

Internationalism and popular assemblies

Thus far I have argued three points about the path for American socialists beyond the death of Social Democracy:

- It is the broad Left's abandonment of independent working class politics since 1936, not some American exceptionalism rooted in our political institutions and culture, that best explains the absence of a mass party of the Left.
- An independent left party must be a mass-membership party of dues-paying members organized into activist locals, not a copy of the state-regulated top-down registration/primary election party structures of the Democrats and Republicans.
- The Green Party could potentially be that independent left party.

I agree with Lichtenberg that the "subjective factor" is what is missing, that the American left needs to focus on building an independent mass working-class party instead of disappearing into reform Democratic campaigns.

The two most important ideas in terms of the program of such a party to come out of the panel were an internationalism and a radically democratic new political order.

Shulman's call for internationalism must be embraced. In addition to the type of internationalist economic program needed that Schulman indicated in his critique of Corbyn, the knee-jerk anti-interventionism of most of the American left and peace movement is isolationist, not internationalist. The American left had no qualms about intervening

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Seventeen ways of looking at Stalin

Journal Review: Frank Ruda and Agon Hamza (eds.) "Stalin: What Does the Name Stand for?" Crisis and Critique 3, no. 1 (March 29, 2016)[1]

Watson Ladd

Soviet propaganda, such as this 1936 poster, portrayed Stalin as the natural successor to the great communist figures of Marx, Engels, and Lenin.

STALINISM'S IMPACT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE in the world today. North Korea and Cuba limp along, sponsored by a capitalist China and caudillo-ist Venezuela, respectively. The official Stalinist parties in the Western world remain, at least on paper, but tend to throw support behind Hillary Clinton or the local equivalent. In one way or another, any examination of Stalin is thus historical—not a critique of a living political movement, but of a movement situated in a time remote from our own. The object of investigation is a legacy whose practical effect in the present is deeply obscure.

The journal *Crisis and Critique* has recently published a compilation of such examinations. In the introduction, editors Frank Ruda and Agon Hamza emphasize their desire to examine the politics that led to Stalin and shaped the period during which he lived, neither damning nor defending, and hoping to avoid the reduction of complex questions to the status of a single individual.

As Lars Lih points out in the first contribution, Soviet artists celebrated Stalin as a mythical figure, an ersatz czar who defended the Russian people. Indeed, Stalin invites a series of historical comparisons. By turns he is Robespierre,[2] by turns a brute responsible for the failure of a revolution.[3] For Domenico Losurdo, he is the Soviet Gandhi, fighting against colonialism with methods no more dictatorial than the global crisis of the 1930s demanded.[4] Enver Hoxha's essay, which closes out the volume, does not need to mention Stalin by name to argue that he enabled the people to "write their own history," and that we must stay to the course he laid out, if we wish to defend the revolution and achieve the political empowerment of the masses.

Elsewhere Stalin curiously recedes into the background. He becomes the pretext for a discussion about the metaphysics of language,[5] or for an analysis of how his early seminarian experiences influenced the creation of the new communist man.[6] Or the topic shifts to the philosophical school of dialectical materialism,[7] analyzed without really taking stock of Stalin, who hovers quietly in the background. And there is the experience of those who lived under Stalinism,[8] and the memory of the political struggles over revisionism and orthodoxy.[9]

With all these views (and more) of Stalin represented in this volume, one might think that the subject, if not exhausted, had at least been opened up for inquiry. Unfortunately this is not the case, unless we want to understand the long shadow of Stalinism as only the latest in a line of tragedies. However, whatever else we may think of him, Stalin is far more than merely a Tamerlane or an Alexander Nevsky.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 represented the most profound change in the history of the world since the advent of modern capitalism. Nothing short of worldwide socialist revolution, which is what the Bolsheviks hoped to ignite, could have lived up to its promise. So long as that revolution has not taken place, Stalinism's legacy remains indeterminate.

While striving to offer a left-wing alternative, the Trotskyist movement failed to accomplish its goal of re-creating the revolutionary moment of 1917. Each crisis of capitalism became more obscure as revolutionary potential grew more distant. The Soviet workers who believed themselves to be building a new and just future became the cynical loafers of a system older than its increasingly forgettable and geriatric leaders. The revolutionary who in the 1930s helped to organize major strikes became the greying seller of a street newspaper.

Was Stalin the great organizer of defeats or the necessary preserver of the power of the working class in a time of reaction? As recently as the 1970s the question would have had a different and more pressing relevance. One's position as a leftist is in many ways determined via a referendum on history. Break with Marxist tradition on the War Credits vote, and you become a social democrat. Stay, and break over Kronstadt, and one might be a democratic socialist. Further divisions emerge based on one's stance regarding the Trotsky–Stalin opposition and the various breakups of the Eastern Bloc.

If these dividing lines no longer seem to matter, it is because nearly all roads in the present have ended up in similar places, politically: either rapprochement with the Democratic Party and its homologues, or enthusiasm for the triumphs of military strongmen. But to those involved in such debates in the past, these positions held the deepest significance: The correct path meant retaining in their politics the goal of world revolution.

Today, that relevance is gone. Without it, Stalin and Stalinism cannot be assessed in terms of revolutionary theory, but only through the lens of the academic historian. The promise set forth in the introduction of "Stalin: What Does the Name Stand for?" cannot be met by the essays contained in it. To discuss Stalin's theory of the New Soviet Man as an anthropological one, as Roland Boer does, and to place it alongside the theories of Pelagius and Augustine, is an illuminating piece of scholarship, but it does not orient one to today's political possibilities.

The role Stalinism played in foreclosing those possibilities is only hinted at in the introduction and addressed head-on in a few of the essays. However insightful, most of the contributions in "Stalin: What Does the Name Stand for?" do not grapple with the historical and political dimensions of this problem, today, in light of the history of the Left. They thus fall outside the scope of this review. What remains are the writings of Stefano G. Azzarà, Bill Bowring, Paul LeBlanc, Judith Balso, and Domenico Losurdo.

Azzarà considers how we remember Stalin in the limited context of Italian historiography. The concept of "totalitarianism," that is, the equation of Stalin with Hitler, has been deployed to rehabilitate the Italian state and current social order, thereby undermining the Left. The political ascent of neoliberalism and the decline of the Left are bound up with this historical amnesia, which erases the distinction between communism and fascism. The emergence of historical revisionism takes place alongside the defeat of socialism. The new right-wing parties, untainted by association with the fascism of their ideological parents, throw the charge of dictatorship against their opponents.

For Azzarà, the young historian Ernst Nolte provides the way forward: The totalitarian thesis proves too much. Central to every state is the sort of force and public propagandizing that, according to the liberal critique of totalitarianism, have corrupted politics in mass society. Thus nothing can be said of progress in history. As Azzarà states, "any direct or indirect reference to Communism has failed while the anti-fascist identity remained intact."[10] Yet, ultimately, a reenactment of anti-fascism is not enough; one must affirm the necessity of socialism. The political task today is a new reconstitution of what it would mean to be a communist.

For Losurdo, Stalin is first and foremost an anti-imperialist. One is tempted nowadays to point to the Baltics and mass resettlements of ethnic groups as a counterpoint, but there is a logic to Losurdo's view. Losurdo argues that the Soviet Union was a land of 160 races devoted to preserving the national culture. Nazi Germany's eliminationist plans for the East were only a more virulent form of the designs that the democratic states of France and the United Kingdom had carried out in Africa and the Americas. Stalin did abandon the struggle for socialism against capitalism, Losurdo admits, but was nonetheless an anticolonialist in a world governed everywhere by racism and genocide. On this view, Molotov–Ribbentrop was no more than a tactical alliance, and Stalin was a dictator amid a global crisis that demanded a strong hand. The end of colonialism begins at Stalingrad; against the liberal critique of totalitarianism, which tends to equate Hitler with Stalin, Losurdo argues for an anticolonial viewpoint that equates Hitler with Churchill.

I would argue differently. The crowning glory of Stalin's reign was Stalingrad, Leningrad, Moscow, and then the road to Berlin. These were not triumphs of the workers of the world, however, but nationalist victories, stained by accusations of cooperation with the fascists and tyranny. Preferring Soviet Russia to Hitler's Germany is senseless—it becomes a matter of picking one's poison—unless the preference is rooted in the history of 1917 and the revolutionary potential that the Soviet state might have retained, even at so late a time as the 1930s and '40s. Otherwise, it becomes a choice between competing, reactionary nationalisms.

Bowring asks if Stalin should be rehabilitated, as Cromwell and Robespierre have been. In contemporary Russia, Stalin is seen as a great national hero, with Putin restoring the statues of Stalin and Dzerzhinsky in front of the Lubyanka. Cromwell permanently assured Parliamentary supremacy. Robespierre was far less bloody than the legend his enemies made of him, and his partisans can point to his record as a defender of equality for Jews, his abolitionism, and his submission to the judgment of the Committee of Public Safety. Ultimately, what sets the enemies of Cromwell and Robespierre against them is the success they found in leading revolutions. Stalin murdered all the Old Bolsheviks who refused to become his cronies. His cruelty should be contrasted with Lenin's toleration of political opponents; no major Mensheviks were executed during the Red Terror. The restoration of Stalin today in Russia is the restoration of a modern czar, not a revolutionary.

LeBlanc and Balso also engage with the question of Stalin's legacy as a revolutionary. For LeBlanc, Stalin represents a turn away from global socialist revolution to the demands of industrial modernization. Stalinism is, in short, "authoritarian modernization in the name of socialism,"[11] which came at the price of subordinating communist politics in the rest of the world to the narrow interests of the Soviet Union as a *nation*. Balso, by contrast, offers apologetics, arguing that Stalinism was nothing more than an expression of the totalitarianism inherent in any revolution. In other words, Balso concedes to the standard, liberal criticism of revolution; she merely praises what such criticism finds abominable. Though differing on the necessity of Stalin, LeBlanc and Balso agree on the broad strokes: Stalinism was revolution from above, with propaganda driving the masses, a large party bureaucracy, and a political disposition animated by one-sided anti-liberalism. With society subordinated to the state, the revolutionary potential of 1917 atrophied.

These five authors take on either the rise of Stalin or the Great Patriotic War. Left largely unexamined is the international dimension to the long death of Stalinism. Stalin and Stalinism were global phenomena; the Comintern sought to link up parties of the organized left in every country in the world during the 1930s. More important, it sought to lead them, despite its many blunders. (The Spanish Civil War, for example, to some extent was lost due to the diplomatic imperatives of the USSR rising above the demands for solidarity.)

What is missing from all these approaches, then, is a detailed analysis of what Stalinist politics meant on a global scale. What did Stalinist parties believe and how did their positions affect the prospects for world revolution? What did the overall decline of the Left in the course of the 20th century do to them?

Stalin—the name means nothing. It can be deployed for a hundred different political purposes. Not because Stalin stood for nothing, but because what he stood for has been forgotten. The history of Stalinism as a period of *politics* on the Left, globally, has all but faded from view. We are left with a historical figure, with a name—onto which almost any political concerns can be grafted. Only in the context of a renewed revolutionary movement will the meaning of Stalin be rediscovered and the evaluation of his legacy completed. |P

1 The full text of this issue of *Crisis and Critique* is available online at <http://crisiscritique.org/ccmarch/complete.pdf>.
2 Jean-Claude Milner, "The Prince and the Revolutionary": 70–80.
3 Bill Bowring, "Cromwell, Robespierre, Stalin (and Lenin?): Must Revolution Always Mean Catastrophe?": 267–387.
4 Domenico Losurdo, "Stalin and Hitler: Twin Brothers or Mortal Enemies?": 32–48.
5 Samo Tomšič, "'No, it is not true!': Stalin and the Question of Materialist Science of Language": 388–409.
6 Roland Boer, "A Materialist Doctrine of Good and Evil: Stalin's Revision of Marxist Anthropology": 108–155.
7 Evgeny V. Pavlov, "Comrade Hegel: Absolute Spirit Goes East": 156–189.
8 Cécile Winter, "Staline selon Varlam Chalamov": 190–257.
9 Paul LeBlanc, "Reflections on the Meaning of Stalinism": 81–107.
10 Stefano G. Azzarà, "A Left-Wing Historical Revisionism: Studying the Conflicts of the Twentieth Century After the Crisis of Anti-Fascist Paradigm": 421.
11 LeBlanc, 87.

A monument was hastily erected following the Soviet victory in the Battle of Berlin. Translated, the adjoining text reads, "Long live the victory of the Anglo–Soviet–American alliance over the Nazi invaders." Berlin, ca. July 1945.

Social democracy, continued from page 3

on the side of the Spanish Republic, or the Spanish revolution, in their fight with Franco in 1936-1939.[8] But today, for example, most of the American left has opposed U.S. military intervention in Syria without taking up the difficult question of how to support the democratic revolutions in Kurdish Rojava or Arab Daraya. This failure to act in solidarity with democratic revolutions has to change if the American left is to be internationalist in action and therefore up the task of transforming global capitalism.

Internationalism requires international organization that develops a common program and action. The Greens have a loose international, the Global Greens Coordination, with affiliated parties organized in four continental federations (Africa, Americas, Europe, Asia/Pacific). Most of the parties send representatives who can pay their own way rather than who are sent with the support of their party's funding, which obviously limits who can participate in continental and global Green meetings. It will take the consolidation of member-funded mass parties in more countries before the Global Greens Coordination is fully representative and accountable. The Coordination is now more of a talk shop for issuing resolutions than an organization with a comprehensive common program and effective international campaigns. But it is a beginning that could evolve—no doubt in conjunction with other left socialist tendencies internationally and in diverse countries—into an international left federation that matters in global politics.

Schulman ("extreme democracy," "genuinely democratic republic"), Tokar ("confederations of rebel cities"), and Pelz ("example of the Paris Commune") seem to converge around the notion that the Left should not focus on capturing the existing capitalist state by parliamentary or insurrectionary means, but on moving toward radically democratic alternative from the bottom up that can replace the capitalist state.

Tokar cites Murray Bookchin's writings on confederations of popular assemblies and notes how the Kurds of Rojava are consciously using Bookchin's approach to build a confederal democracy based on popular assemblies in the midst of the civil and proxy war in northern Syria.[9] In the U.S., as Bookchin often urged the Greens to do in the 1980s and 1990s, we can run for municipal office on a program that includes the rewriting of municipal charters to place political power in the hands of the citizens assembled in neighborhood or town meetings and aims to link up these democratized municipalities in confederations to coordinate public affairs across regions from the bottom up. Bookchin summarized this program with the slogan, "Democratize Our Republic and Radicalize Our Democracy."[10]

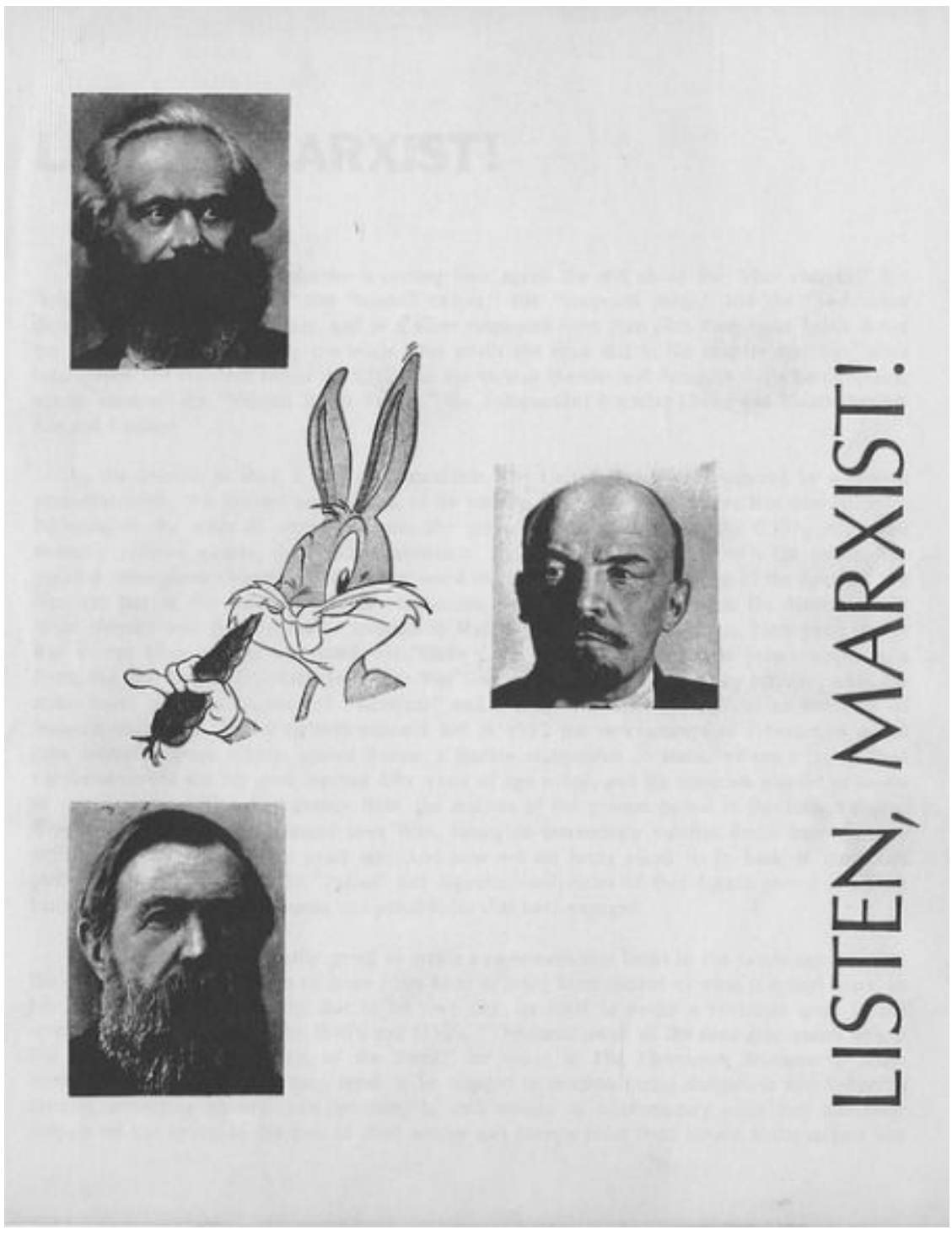
When Pelz cites the Paris Commune, I assume he is referring to its radically democratic structure of a city council composed of mandated and recallable delegates of the people in their neighborhood assemblies. The Paris Commune appealed across France for a "Commune of Communes," a confederation of radically democratic municipalities. I would argue that an independent left that can go beyond Social Democracy should make this democratization and confederation of local governments a central component of its program along with social, economic, environmental, and anti-imperialist demands. If we are going to replace the capitalist state with a real democracy, we need to build it from the bottom up as we gain power from the bottom up. We will need to build this radically democratic and federated power starting at the local level in order to build the mass participation, institutional power, and experience needed to replace the national state and global corporations with a truly democratic socialism. |P

1 Mark Lause, *Young America: Land, Labor, and the Republican Community* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 1.
2 Mark Lause, *The Civil War's Last Campaign: James B. Weaver, the Greenback-Labor Party & the Politics of Race & Class* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001).
3 Arthur Lipow, "Direct Democracy and Progressive Reform," in Arthur Lipow, *Political Parties and Democracy* (Chicago: Pluto Press, 1996).
4 Joint Legislative Committee Investigating Seditious Activities, New York State Legislature, *"Revolutionary Radicalism: Its History, Purpose and Tactics with an Exposition and Discussion of the Steps Being Taken and Required to Curb It,"* April 24, 1920: 510.
5 Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Why Americans Don't Vote* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989).
6 Engels to Friedrich Adolph Sorge, *Karl Marx Frederick Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 47 (New York: Progress Publishers, 1995), 532.
7 Howie Hawkins (ed.), *Independent Politics: The Green Party Strategy Debate* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2006), 23–26.
8 Thanks to Bill Fletcher for making these points about isolationism vs. internationalism on the left today and in the 1930s during a recent discussion about the crisis in Syria.
9 Martin O'Beirne, "Ecosocialism Against ISIS–A Salute to Murray Bookchin," available online at <http://www.kurdishquestion.com/oldsite/index.php/insight-research/ecosocialism-against-isis-a-salute-to-murray-bookchin/1267-ecosocialism-against-isis-a-salute-to-murray-bookchin.html>.
10 Murray Bookchin, *The Next Revolution: Popular Assemblies and the Promise of Direct Democracy* (New York: Verso, 2015).

The future instead of the past?

Bookchin and Marx

Reid Kotlas



Front cover of the 1969 pamphlet by Murray Bookchin, "Listen, Marxist!"

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PLATYPUS AS A PROJECT SEEKS to relate to the contemporary left by focusing on the Left in history. We do this because we think one's understanding of history is in fact one's theory of the present, of how the present came to be and what might become of it.[1] We try to understand the left politics of the present in light of what the Left has been, so as to provoke critical reflection. Is the Left today living up to the legacy it inherits? Are we falling short of the aspirations of the past? Must we?

Murray Bookchin offers a compelling case of the difficulty of reckoning with history. Bookchin's political career was fundamentally shaped by his education in and ultimate disenchantment with Marxism. He joined the "official" Communist movement in 1930 at the age of nine. By the end of the thirties, disconcerted by Stalinist leadership, he found refuge in the Trotskyist movement. As the Second World War began, there was an expectation that it would set the stage for a new wave of world revolution, requiring well-prepared revolutionary leadership just as the Bolsheviks had provided at the end of the First World War.

Yet Trotsky's judgment was not above reproach among his sympathizers and supporters. Questions lingered about his role in the degeneration of the Bolshevik leadership that had culminated in Stalinism. These concerns were only compounded by his insistence that his followers defend the Soviet Union.

Bookchin was frustrated in his efforts to win workers over to the cause of the Fourth International, finding them concerned only with their wages and working conditions. Trotskyist opposition to the war proved a further obstacle due to popular support for the Allied cause. His frustration with Trotskyism as a practical politics would culminate in skepticism about the ostensibly Marxist conception of the working class as essentially revolutionary. His wavering was only encouraged by the perceived dogmatism of Trotskyist leadership after Trotsky's assassination.

By the end of the war, the hope for a new revolutionary wave repeating the Bolshevik experience had been crushed. Even the most faithful Marxists were deeply troubled by the apparent refutation of Marx's own expectations. Marxist leadership of the socialist movement, now a century removed from the Communist Manifesto, seemingly had nothing positive to show for itself.

Yet Bookchin's crisis of faith in Marxism did not result in depoliticization. He sought another way forward for socialism that would exceed the limitations of Marxism. As Bookchin knew, Trotsky had himself admitted that if the war did not culminate in revolution, "then we should doubtless have to pose the question of revising our conception of the present epoch and its driving forces."[2]

After dedicating two decades to reckoning with the failure of Marxism, Bookchin was confronted with an opportunity to impart the wealth of his own experience to the New Left generation. Alarmed by the growing influence of neo-Marxist currents among young radicals, Bookchin warned in his famous 1969 pamphlet "Listen, Marxist! " that "All the old crap of the thirties is coming back again. . . and in a more vulgarized form than ever."[3]

While the New Left had previously defined itself at variance with the "old" (Stalinist and Trotskyist) leftism of their parents, 1968 represented a crisis which provoked a return not only to Marx but to Lenin as well, albeit through the detour of Maoism. For Bookchin, this represented a step backward, recoiling from the ambiguities of an unprecedented situation into the comforting certainty of tradition.

Bookchin was not interested in simply dismissing Marxism, but in understanding why it found renewed appeal. He had not come to reject Marxism out of hand, but to appreciate its plausibility while recognizing its ultimate inadequacy. As he put it, "[T]he problem is not to 'abandon' Marxism or to 'annul' it, but to transcend it dialectically, just as Marx transcended Hegelian philosophy, Ricardian economics, and Blanquist tactics and modes of organization." For Bookchin, this meant recognizing that capitalism had developed beyond the stage Marx himself had confronted, specifically in achieving "a more advanced stage of technological development than Marx could have clearly anticipated," and that this required "a new critique", "new modes of struggle, of organization, of propaganda and of lifestyle."

Bookchin thought Marx understood why society was divided into mutually hostile classes: that this was rooted in "scarcity", and that scarcity must be overcome to abolish the ill effects and realize the thwarted potentials of the "era" defined by it. Yet Marxism remained beholden to the very condition of scarcity it supposedly criticized, seeking to use methods adapted to this condition to overcome it.

Bookchin claimed that Marx understood the overcoming of scarcity and thus the achievement of the "classless society" on the model of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Bookchin's experience led him to question whether "we [can] explain the transition from a class society to a classless society by means of the same dialectic that accounts for the transition of one class society to another." Thus for Marx, the proletariat was to develop within capitalism until it was able to take political power, just as the bourgeoisie had developed under feudalism.

Bookchin came to believe that this was "ridiculous," and that "what we can learn from the revolutions of the past is what all revolutions have in common and their profound limitations compared with the enormous possibilities that are now open to us."

These possibilities resulted from the fact that bourgeois society was now "in the process of disintegrating all the social classes that once gave it stability," making the "class line" ring hollow. It was not class struggle but the "decomposition" of classes that would yield the classless society. This produced a single great "non-class," drawn from "all strata of society," and especially the young, that would not need to be won over to the cause of revolution because it was already revolutionary in its very lack of discipline and conformity. Bookchin thus interpreted the breakdown of class dynamics in terms of the youth revolt against established authority and tradition.

Bookchin asked, "When the hell are we finally going to create a movement that looks to the future instead of to the past? When will we begin to learn from what is being born instead of what is dying?" He credits Marx with trying to do just this. Yet Marx also knew that the view of future is distorted and obscured by the weight of the past, which constitutes the condition under which anything new might be brought about. The new must be understood not merely as abstract opposition to the old but as defined in overcoming the burdens of history, as achieving something the past pointed toward but never realized.

Bookchin cites the famous opening chapter of The Eighteenth Brumaire, in which Marx contrasted the bourgeois revolutions, which always resorted to mimicking the past, with the proletarian revolution whose poetry would be drawn from the future. Yet Marx's concern was to warn that in seeking to bring about the new we might, despite ourselves, come to rely on the old and familiar, and in doing so, fall below the level of what came before instead of rising above it.

What, then, for Marx, distinguished the revolution of the 19th century from that of the 18th?

The industrial revolution was a turning-point in history not simply because of the "technology" it introduced, but because of the transformation of social relations embodied in that technology. This transformation did not achieve some stable endpoint, but produced a crisis that remains unresolved. If one had to judge, the only certain consequence of this change has been the domination of social life by capital, by the imperatives of reproducing not merely privately-owned means of production, but also—or rather, especially—wage labor.

The problem posed by capital is unprecedented in history, and so also is the struggle to overcome it. Recognizing what was new would mean understanding how it came to distinguish itself from what came before: how the social relation of capital emerged historically, what it could potentially mean. Marx did not assimilate the problem of capital to the perennial problem of scarcity, but rather tried to understand why the last two hundred years have amounted to such a profound disruption in the course of history. Marx understood the modern period defined by the bourgeois revolutions to be an incomplete transition from the class society that began 10,000 years ago with the agricultural revolution, to a new society that realizes the potentials created in the ordeal of class society.

Bookchin contrasts "a repressive class society, based on material scarcity" with "a liberatory classless society, based on material abundance," the latter supposedly a unique product of the technological advances of the 20th century. Yet Marx understood class society as based not on scarcity but "abundance," on society producing more than is necessary to maintain the direct producers. The fragile production of subsistence through agriculture could only be sustained through the production of a surplus consumed by a class of non-producers that oversaw the affairs of society as a whole. This "ruling" class would maintain themselves even at the cost of subjecting the direct producers to the pains of insufficient production, depriving them of an adequate share of their own product.

Society henceforth has been dependent on the production of a surplus product and hence the maintenance of a ruling class, who exploit the production of the rest of society in lieu of engaging in productive labor themselves. Society has been capable of producing abundance since the Neolithic era. Crises of underproduction would periodically eliminate large portions of the population, whether through famine and starvation, epidemic, or warfare, but over the longue durée society has survived underproduction. Marx was concerned with the distinctively new kind of crisis that afflicted bourgeois society: crises of overproduction. Not of abundance that temporarily gives way to scarcity, but of overabundance presenting itself in the form of scarcity: overabundant material wealth was experienced by the vast majority as the depreciation of the value of their labor, itself as a consequence of the increase in the productivity of labor.

As labor becomes more productive, labor becomes more dispensable. Marx ridiculed John Stuart Mill's puzzlement over the fact that the introduction of machinery did not lighten but increased the burden of the workers, because he understood that so long as individuals were dependent on the opportunity to find employment to subsist, automation would be used as a weapon by employers against the working class, to keep labor as cheap and pliable as possible and to liquidate whatever obstacles organized labor might throw up. To borrow a phrase of Max Horkheimer, machinery "made not work but the workers superfluous."[4]

Marx recognized that socialism was a symptom of capital. It is not in spite, but precisely because the working class is an integral part of capitalism that its politics could articulate potentials that capitalism itself only realizes negatively. Bookchin relates Marx's "famous theory of immiseration", according to which capitalism, in relentlessly driving down the conditions of the working class, compels them to "revolt". Yet this does not capture the historical dynamics Marx actually describes, in which workers are first compelled to organize among themselves in their "economic struggle" over specific terms of employment, organizations that must grow and spread and change along with capital. This culminates in the necessity of organizing the working class "as a class". For Marx, this meant political organization for socialism, as socialism meant society taking control of itself and realizing its own potential, as the fruit of its cooperation in labor.

When Bookchin says, "Social revolutions are not made by parties, groups or cadres, they occur as a result of deep-seated historic forces and contradictions that activate large sections of the population," he fails to note that for Marx, the "deep-seated" and "historic" character of these forces is articulated in the formation of the socialist party, which gives substance to the "tension between the actual and the possible, between what-is and what-could-be." By contrast, as Bookchin himself notes, "Abject misery alone does not produce revolutions; more often than not, it produces an aimless demoralization, or worse, a private, personalized struggle to survive." It is hard not to suspect that what Bookchin in the same pamphlet valorized as the revolutionary degeneration of society produced little more than such misery, the very sort of abjection that capitalism yields when the working class is unable to articulate in political terms its historic interests in overcoming the necessity of labor.

When the socialist party fails, the task falls to defenders of capitalism, for whom the overcoming of necessary labor can only manifest itself in the superfluousness of workers, or would-be workers who increasingly fall into permanent unemployment and underemployment.

While Bookchin claims Marx was unable to foresee the development of state capitalism, he was in fact acutely aware that in the absence of the political leadership of the working class, capitalism could only become ever more centralized and authoritarian, ultimately requiring the state to manage a society riven by intolerable contradictions. This was the definitive lesson of Marx's own political experience: the failure of the socialists to lead the revolutions of 1848, specifically in France, led to what Marx called "Bonapartism" and later Marxists, invoking the "Second Empire" of Louis Bonaparte, called "imperialism". Marx warned that if the task dramatically posed by 1848—the political leadership of capitalism by the working class party for socialism in the form of the "dictatorship of the proletariat"—remained unaccomplished, the only result would be the degeneration of society under the dictatorship of capital.

Today, we can only look back at Bookchin's injunction and wonder whether the need for Marxism has in fact been overcome by capitalism itself, and if so, whether this has been desirable. After all, coal and steel remain the basis of industrial technology, while the periodic crises Bookchin consigned to a bygone era have returned with a vengeance. Bookchin himself now belongs to the very past he implored his readers to shed for the sake of the future. Indeed, if today there is no future to speak of, it is because the future itself belongs to the past, and so it is to the past we must turn if we wish to go beyond the present. |**P**

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1 Chris Cutrone, "Capital in history" Platypus Review 7 (October 2008). Available online at <http://platypus1917.org/2008/10/01/capital-in-history-the-need-for-a-marxian-philosophy-of-history-of-the-left/>.

2 Quoted in Janet Biehl, "Bookchin's Trotskyist decade: 1939–1948" Platypus Review 52 (December 2012), Available online at <http://platypus1917.org/2012/12/01/bookchins-trotskyist-decade-1939-1948/>.

3 Murray Bookchin, Listen, Marxist! (New York: Anarchos, 1969). Available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/bookchin/1969/listen-marxist.htm>. All quotations that follow refer to the online edition.

4 Max Horkheimer, "The Authoritarian State" Telos 15:2 (Spring 1973 [1940]), 3.