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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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Republicans to triumph since the '80s, now approaching Democrats," whose shifting allegiances allowed the generation of disaffected voters, the so-called "Reagan Sanders could appeal to and win back an older is also the sense that in the post-2008 environment to the "Left" of the Clintons on economic policy. There such that even Eisenhower and Nixon were purportedly Great Society, which had pressured the Republicans reformers going back to FDR's New Deal and LBJ's to return to the Democrats' historic role as economic meant a backlash against identity politics, an attempt "brocristians"—straight white men, "Socialism" has with Sanders, it has been in the form of the alleged The degree to which the "Left" has gotten on-board off in terms of voter mobilization, especially as a woman candidate, has exhibited a The presumptive character of Hillary's nomination, Clinton's have had a poor record on marriage equality, Black Lives Matter and the memory by gays that both identity constituencies, despite some turbulence from Hillary has supposedly maintained appeal to the social Sanders's alleged "problem with women and blacks," can be. The problem has been on the Democratic Right: Democrats in the 2016 general election than Hillary has offered himself as a better champion for the Party Congressional election insurgency. Sanders enjoyed when Obama was elected until the 2010 Tea the Democrats to a Congressional majority that they among younger, newer voters, and thus returning an electoral strategy for raising turnout, especially for "political revolution" he explicitly described as into this bitter legacy steps Sanders, whose call Neither will they now.

labor the prospect of passing the Employee Free Choice Act under a Democratic majority, but was unceremoniously dropped after the election. Obama's campaign demanded—and achieved—a reuniting of labor in the AFL-CIO from its split in the Change to Win Federation, so that they would have to negotiate with only one rather than multiple labor constituencies: Obama sought to bring labor under control, specifically in the context of the potentially explosive 2008 economic crisis. The Democrats did not face a labor insurgency. Neither will they now.

Obama's 2008 campaign for instance offered organized that Obama did in 2008. Certainly this goes for labor. not be able to generate the same level of enthusiasm Democrats is uncertain: if she can do so, still, she will Hillary's ability to unite the "Left" and Right of the will have chosen and given a mandate to neoliberalism. as the Democratic Party candidate for President, they supporters: when Hillary is elected by primary voters any contenders. This is a lesson for Sanders' neoliberalism has been further consolidated against neoliberal policies. Far from a crisis for neoliberalism, lacked: now a majority has voted in favor of his provided Emanuel with the opportunity for achieving the electoral mandate endorsement he previously could only be reproduced (if at all) by black (and not Latino) leadership—that is, a neoliberal Center/Right majority, and not a labor-based politics. Washington was supported by the "Left": his campaign chief was a former Maoist—shades of Van Jones? For Rush "Washington majority" candidate. As Obama was, and other black Democrats in Chicago, Rahm is the could only be reproduced (if at all) by black (and not Latino) leadership—that is, a neoliberal Center/Right majority, and not a labor-based politics. Washington was supported by the "Left": his campaign chief was a former Maoist—shades of Van Jones? For Rush "Washington majority" candidate. As Obama was, and other black Democrats in Chicago, Rahm is the could only be reproduced (if at all) by black (and not Latino) leadership—that is, a neoliberal Center/Right majority, and not a labor-based politics. Washington was supported by the "Left": his campaign chief was a former Maoist—shades of Van Jones? For Rush

In the 2015 Chicago mayor election, black his campaign for reelection. embarrases the Chicago native Obama precisely during his neoliberal education reforms in 2012, seeking to Teachers Union that had struck against Emanuel and "Chuy" Garcia, who had the support of the Chicago by fellow Democrat, Cook County Commissioner Jesus Chief of Staff, Mayor Rahm Emanuel was challenged Chicago city-wide election, in which Obama's former fatal split among the Democrats was seen in the 2015 group politics, women, blacks and gays. This potentially—really, the *Right*—are those concerned with identity-concerned with socio-economic issues, the "Center" "Center" voters: the "Left" is organized labor and others



Weekend at Bernie's?

The Occupy generation's wielding of the corpse of social democracy in getting behind Sanders as Presidential campaigns of the 1980s. Sanders has offered "Left" opposition to Democratic Party Centrism, but not by opposing but trying to capture it as well. Sanders meeting with killer Mike isn't the answer—Mike already had endorsed him back in June. Sanders's campaign from its inception in May has been surprisingly and increasingly successful. But it has since plateaued. For a moment in September, it looked like Hillary Clinton's presidential candidacy was in jeopardy due to the Benghazi! hearings. Even Obama threw the Democrats' favorite under the bus, 11, 2015) that Clinton had mishandled her email communication as Secretary of State. In the same interview, Obama asserted that he would win a third election, and—much the same thing—that Biden's experience as Vice President eminently qualified him to be President. But Hillary survived Benghazi; and Biden bowed out.

The Democrats, since the 2014 midterm elections in which they failed to dislodge the Republicans' Congressional majority, have been faced with the problem of reproducing the "Obama majority" that was victorious in 2008 and 2012.⁴ This has been described as the challenge of uniting the Democrats' "Left" and



Bernie Sanders with Jesse Jackson in the 1980s

Just because Sanders embraces instead of rejecting the pejorative hurled at any and all proposed reforms of capitalism doesn't make the charge any more true in fact: for Sanders it is a mere ethic. But it appeals nonetheless.⁵ Sanders's candidacy seems to fulfill the demands borne of the post-2008 economic crisis and downturn, the discontents with neoliberalism—itsself an artifact of the post-1973 crisis that was met by the 1980s "Reagan revolution"—and to offer the electoral vehicle for the Occupy Wall Street generation of activists disenchanting by Obama and the Democrats after 2012.⁶

"Every demand of the simplest bourgeois financial reform, of the most ordinary liberalism, of the most formal republicanism, of the most insipid democracy, is simultaneously castigated as an attempt on society and stigmatized as socialism." (*The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1852)

THE CAMPAIGN CYCLE for the 2016 general election in the U.S. has been characterized by some throwbacks to the 1980s, most notably in the two major party challengers, Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders. Most remarkably, the Sanders campaign has introduced the word "socialism" into mainstream political discourse. It's clear that what socialism means in Sanders's mouth, however, is New Deal liberalism—despite the poster of Eugene V. Debs that hangs in Sanders's Senate office. The specter of "socialism" is just that: the meaning it has for Obama's Tea Party opponents. As Marx wrote over 150 years ago,

Chris Cutrone

The Sandernistas
The final triumph of the 1980s

Back to Herbert Spencer!

Industrial vs. militant society

Chris Cutrone

HERBERT SPENCER'S GRAVE faces Marx's at Highgate Cemetery in London. At his memorial, Spencer was honored for his anti-imperialism by Indian national liberation advocate and anti-colonialist Shyamji Krishnavarma, who funded a lectureship at Oxford in Spencer's name.

What would the 19th century liberal, Utilitarian and Social Darwinist Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), who was perhaps the most prominent, widely read and popular philosopher in the world during his lifetime—that is, in Marx's lifetime—have to say to Marxists or more generally to the Left, when such liberalism earned not only Marx's own scorn but also Nietzsche's criticism? Nietzsche referred to Spencer and his broad appeal as the modern enigma of "the English psychologists." Nietzsche critiqued what he took to be Spencer's assumption of a historically linear-evolutionary development and improvement of human morality leading to a 19th century epitome; where Nietzsche found the successive "transvaluations of values" through profound reversals of "self-overcoming" [On the *Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic*, 1887]. Nietzsche regarded modern liberal morality not as a perfection but rather as a challenge and task to achieve an "over-man," that, failing, threatened to result in a nihilistic dead-end of "the last man" instead. Marx regarded Spencerian liberalism as an example of the decrepitude of bourgeois-revolutionary thought in decadence. Marx's son-in-law, the French socialist Paul Lafargue, wrote, just after Marx's death, against Spencer's "bourgeois pessimism,") to which he offered a Marxist optimism. Such Marxism fulfilled Nietzsche's "pessimism of the strong." By the late 19th century, Marxists could be confident about transcending bourgeois society. Not so today.

Spencer's distinction of "militant" vs. "industrial" society (*The Principles of Sociology* vol. 2, 1879/198)—that is to say, the distinction of *traditional civilization* vs. *bourgeois society*—is still, unfortunately, quite pertinent today, and illuminates a key current blind-spot on the ostensible "Left," especially regarding the phenomenon of war. Spencer followed the earlier classical liberal Benjamin Constant's observation lin "The liberty of the Ancients as compared with that of the Moderns," 1816)

that moderns get through commerce what the ancients got through war; and that for moderns war is always regrettable and indeed largely unjustifiably criminal, whereas for ancients war was virtuous—among the very highest virtues. Do we moderns sacrifice ourselves for the preservation and glory of our specific "culture," as "militants" do, or rather dedicate ourselves to social activity that facilitates *universal freedom*—a value unknown to the ancients? Does the future belong to the constant warfare of particular cultural differences, or to human society? Marx thought the latter.

The question is whether we think that we will *fight* or rather *exchange* and *produce* our way to freedom. Is freedom to be achieved through "militant" or rather "industrial" society? Marx assumed the latter. When we seek to extol our political leaders today, we do not depict them driving a tank but waking at 5 o'clock and staying up past midnight to do society's business. We do not speak of their scars earned in combat but their grey hairs accumulated in office. Not enjoying the spoils of war on a dais but getting in their daily morning jog to remain fit for work. We judge them not as cunning warriors but as diligent workers—and responsible negotiators. In our society, it is not the matter of a battle to win but a job to do. Carl Schmitt thought that this has led to our dehumanization. But few would agree.

What would have appeared commonplace to Spencer's contemporary critics, such as Nietzsche and Marx, must strike us today, rather, as profoundly insightful and indeed critical of our society. This is due to the historical regression of politics and society since Marx's time, and, moreover, to the liquidation of Marxism. What Marx would have regarded as fatally one-sided and undialectical in Spencer would today seem adequate to the prevailing condition in the absence of the Marxist-Hegelian dialectic. The Marxist critique of liberalism has been rendered moot, not in the sense of liberalism's actual social supersession but by historical regression. Society has fallen below the historical threshold of not only socialism but of classical liberalism—of bourgeois emancipation itself. Not only have we fallen below the criteria of Kant and Hegel that surpassed 18th century Empiricism, we have fallen below its 19th century successor, Positivism,

as well. The question is the status today of liberalism as *ideology*. It is utopian. As Adorno put it, it is both promise and sham.

Militant and industrial tendencies confront each other today not as different societies, but as opposed aspects of the same society, however contradictorily and antagonistically in capitalism. Similarly, the phases of "religious," "metaphysical" and "positive" forms do not succeed one another sequentially in a linear development but rather interact in a dynamic of social history. What Spencer regarded as regressive "metaphysics" remains valid in capitalism, as "ideology" calling for dialectical critique. We cannot now claim to address problems in the clear air of Enlightenment.

If Adorno, for instance, critiqued sociological "positivism," this was not as a Romantic anti-positivist such as Max Weber, but rather as a critique of positive sociology as *ideology* in capitalism. For Adorno, positivism and Heideggerian ontology, as well as Weberian "cultural sociology," opposed each other in an anatomy of capitalism that would be overcome not in one principle triumphing over another, but rather in the antinomy itself being succeeded dialectically in freedom. Weber denied freedom; whereas Spencer assumed it. Both avoided the specific problem of capitalism. To take a condition of unfreedom for freedom is the most salient phenomenon of ideology. This is what falsified positivism as liberal Enlightenment, its false sense of freedom as already achieved that still actually tasked society. Freedom is not to be taken as an achieved state but a goal of struggle.

An emancipated society would be "positivist"—Enlightened and liberal—in ways that under capitalism can only be ideologically false and misleading. Positivism should therefore be understood as a desirable *goal beyond* rather than a possibility *under* capitalism. The problem with Herbert Spencer is that he took capitalism—grasped partially and inadequately as bourgeois emancipation—to be a condition of freedom that would need yet to be really achieved. If "metaphysics," contra positivism, remains valid in capitalism, then this is as a condition to be overcome. Capitalist metaphysics is a real symptom of unfreedom. Positivism treats this as merely an issue of mistaken thinking, or to be worked out through "scientific" methodology, whereas it is actually a problem of society requiring political struggle. The antinomy of positivism vs. metaphysics is not partisan but *social*. As Adorno observed, the same individual could and would be scientifically Positivist and philosophically ontological-Existentialist.

Spencer's opposition to "socialism" in the 19th century was in its undeniable retrograde illiberal aspect, what Marx called "reactionary socialism." But Marx offered a perspective on potentially transcending socialism's one-sidedness in capitalism. Spencer was entirely unaware of this Marxian dialectic. Marx agreed with Spencer on the conservative-reactionary

and regressive character of socialism. Marx offered a dialectic of socialism and liberalism presented by their symptomatic and diagnostic antinomy in capitalism that pointed beyond itself. 18th century liberalism's insufficiency to the 19th century problem of capitalism necessitated socialist opposition; but liberalism still offered a critique of socialism that would need to be fulfilled to be transcended, and not dismissed let alone defeated as such.

Only in overcoming capitalism through socialism could, as Marx put it, humanity face its condition "with sober senses." This side of emancipation from capital, humanity remains trapped in a "phantasmagoria" of bourgeois social relations become self-contradictory.

Spencer regarded the problem as a historical holdover of traditional civilization to be left behind rather than as the new condition of bourgeois society in capitalist crisis that Marx recognized needed to be, but could not be, overcome in Spencer's liberal terms. Marx agreed with Spencer on the goal, but differed, crucially, over the nature of the obstacle and, hence, how to get there from here. Not only Spencer's later followers (more egregiously than Spencer himself), but Marx's own, have falsified this task. It has been neglected and abandoned. We cannot assume as Marx did that we are already past Spencer's classical liberalism, but are driven back to it, ineluctably, whether we realize it or not. Only by returning to the assumptions of classical liberalism can we understand Marx's critique of it. The glare of Marx's tomb at Highgate stares down upon a very determinate object. If one disappears, they both do. **IP**

1 "A few words with Mr. Herbert Spencer," 1884 <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lafargue/1884/06/herbert-spencer.htm>>.

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retirement age and concerned about the opportunities for their children and grandchildren bequeathed by 30 years of decrepit neoliberalism.⁴

Sanders thus offers the Democrats an answer to the Tea Party that has been sorely lacking since 2010, as expressed by the frustration that bubbled over in the 2011 Occupy Wall Street protests. A new generation of activists was mobilized to "get the money out of politics," especially in opposition to the 2010 U.S. Supreme Court's Citizens United decision that allows unlimited campaign spending, a generation whose concerns about "social justice" and the erosion of "democracy" Sanders speaks to. The question has been whether the Sanders campaign is "for real," or whether, rather, it is merely a protest pressure-tactic on Hillary, slowing and perhaps redirecting, however slightly, the Clinton juggernaut.⁵ Sanders's claim that higher turnout means electoral gains for the Democrats neglects that not only the Republicans but they themselves engage in and benefit from voter suppression, especially

political force for doing so. The Democrats are decidedly *not* this, in any conceivable way. The crisis in Europe has demonstrated an opportunity for expanding and deepening neoliberalism, and not for returning to "social democracy"—despite SYRIZA, Podemos, and Jeremy Corbyn's wrestling seasoned 1980s [Benintel] leadership of the U.K.'s Labour Party, back away from the "Third Way" spectacularly unconvincing 1990s-offspring Blairite runs.

Sanders has more evident conviction than Hillary could ever exhibit. This recalls heretic opposition to Reaganism—why his followers have been affectionately nicknamed after the Sandinistas. One key issue for the Sandernistas is that is also similar to the dynamic of Corbyn's supporters in the U.K. is the 2000s George W. Bush-era anti-war movement as touchstone: Sanders, like Corbyn, opposed the Iraq war, which makes him amenable to the "Left." Does the Sanders campaign represent a potential political turn, or is it the last gasp of Occupy activism before growing up and joining the fold of the Democrats? Sanders's abandoning his hitherto vintage 1960s "independence" from the Democrats points the way for the younger generation of



Daniel Ortega in the 21st century

among blacks, especially in the Democrats' urban strongholds. The Democrats have no interest in popular political mobilization, even behind the most anodyne and unthreatening symbolic gestures—see Black Lives Matter—and so seek to curtail it.⁶

Not least, this is because the Democrats don't want the political responsibility that would come with large majorities, as was clear in 2008-10, in which they bent their Congressional supermajority over backwards to placate the utterly prostrate Republicans. Any substantial increase in the voting electorate would present problems of political integration. See the Tea Parties' challenge to the Republican establishment, which would really rather do without such berserkers in their midst. Even before the Tea Parties, in the 2008 bailout crisis, it was unclear whether Congressional Republicans were to fall victim to their own neoliberal rhetoric instead of taking required action to prevent a complete financial meltdown. International financial markets constantly worry over the "political paralysis" in the U.S. yielded by the Republicans hostage to the Tea Party Congressmen and the implications of this for the world economy. The Democrats would be challenged by such unruly voters (especially at the local level of municipal and state governments, as in Illinois) at least as much if not more so than the Republicans are.

Neoliberalism needs to be seen as both an accommodation to and a reinforcement of social and political demobilization after the 1960s, visible for instance in the decimation of labor unions but also of other civil society institutions, after abandonment of their original liberal *raison d'être* in favor of integration in what the Frankfurt School called the authoritarian "administered state," already observable to C. Wright Mills and other political scientists after the waning of the radicalization of the 1930s through WWII: what remained was the political parties' organization of a "power elite." But even this structure has atrophied since the 1960s. Privatization through NGOs has not meant a renaissance of civil society, but has left the political field abandoned of any substantial forces for reform since the 1980s. Even what Eisenhower decreed as the "military-industrial complex" in the Cold War has been revealed after the Iraq war as a massively corrupt freewheeling affair, and not a political force to be reckoned with: Enormous sums of money may be thrown around to government contractors, but this hardly amounts to political control over policy; 1970s Ford administration veteran Donald Rumsfeld went to war not only against forces in Afghanistan and Iraq but against the Pentagon itself, in a neoliberal privatization campaign of "slimming down" the military, to the embitterment of the officer corps, even amid soaring expenditures. What C. Wright Mills warned about "political irresponsibility" in "liberal rhetoric and conservative default" has only grown more unchecked since the '60s. Indeed, Mills seems too optimistic in light of even more miserable realities today. The "political establishment" is actually quite threadbare and in evident disarray, not a convincing "power elite." But: There is no alternative.⁷

The issue is whether the post-2008 crisis has been an opportunity for undoing neoliberalism—reversing the '80s—or for further entrenching it. But to overcome neoliberalism there would need to be an organized

21st century activists.

The "Left" may be tempted to imagine the Sanders campaign as a potential crisis for the Democrats—just as Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party could be seen as a crisis and opportunity for the "Left." It is more likely that—just as Corbyn will save and not wreck the Labour Party—Sanders will boost and not undermine the Democrats' campaign around Hillary in 2016. Or at least that is his avowed hope.

What if any kind of political movement could come out of the Sanders campaign? The Sandernistas certainly do not think of the campaign as a way to reconcile themselves to the Democratic Party but rather hope to transform it. Like with Chuy in Chicago, the hope is to mobilize new forces through the campaign that will be sustained after the election. Will this be within or outside the Democratic Party? Perhaps it will be both. In the 1980s, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) was established; in 2004, the Progressive Democrats of America was founded out of the Howard Dean and Dennis Kucinich Presidential campaigns. The first was, in DSA founder Michael Harrington's words, "a remnant of a remnant" of the New Left; the second was in many respects a repeat of the first. These have not been auspicious developments indicating possibilities for where the Sandernistas might go after 2016. The DSA supported Jesse Jackson's Democratic Party campaign for President, which Sanders also endorsed, in protest against Reaganism. The precedents in the 1980s legacy of the 1960s New Left suggest the further adaptation to—through protest of—the Democrats moving ever Right-ward.

Sanders like Trump demonstrates the hollowness of the two U.S. political parties today, if only through the inability to stop their candidacies by the "establishment." The parties are no longer the formidable "machines" they were in the 20th century—confronted by the 1960s New Left generation—but are merely brandings anyone can buy into—whether wholesale by billionaire magnates like Trump himself or the Koch Brothers Tea Party-backers, or through tiny payments to Sanders's 2016 campaign, as had been made to Obama in 2008, as an internet media phenomenon. Clinton at least still needs to win over union endorsements and particular capitalist business-sector funding. But in any case there is no political process involved, but only the aestheticization of politics as a consumer article.⁸ As such it can and will be rendered in typical postmodernist pastiche of non-partisan eclecticism. "Politics" means what any- and everyone wants to make of it. This is even claimed as a virtue, of "divided government."

The worst possible outcome of this is the most likely, that Hillary will be elected as President, but the Republicans will retain a Congressional majority, reproducing the polarized stalemate and deadlock that actually sustains—stabilizes—U.S. politics around a conservative neoliberal consensus, in which certain social issues are given obligatory genuflections without being actually addressed let alone ameliorated. Since the Democrats won the "culture wars" under Obama's neoliberal leadership, a new division of labor with the Republicans has been established: that the Republicans will represent "straight white men," especially in rural and exurban areas; and the Democrats, under the

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and illegible. As Adorno put it, "The whole is the false." Only by confronting the negative totality of capitalism politically was class struggle possible. The power-struggles of rackets do not point beyond themselves. There is no history. **IP**

1 Unpublished manuscript, available online at: <http://sammlungen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/horkheimer/content/pageview/6591478>. See the symposium on Horkheimer's essay with Todd Cronan, James Schmidt, John Lysaker, Nicholas Brown and David Jenemann published at *nonsite.org* January 11, 2016), from which this essay is taken: <<http://nonsite.org/the-tank/max-horkheimer-and-the-sociology-of-class-relations>>.

2 Max Horkheimer, "The authoritarian state," in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1985), 117.

3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x034u2pl53M>

4 See David Black, "The elusive threads of historical progress: The early Chartists and the young Marx and Engels," in *Platypus Review* 42 (December 2011 – January 2012), available online at: <<http://platypus1917.org/2011/12/01/elusive-threads-of-historical-progress/>>.

5 See Lenin's *What is to be Done?* (1902), where Lenin distinguished "socialist" from "trade union consciousness": "We have said that *there could not have been* Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers. It would have to be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc. The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical, and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals." Available on-line at: <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witdb/ii.htm>>.

Furthermore, in a January 20, 1943 letter debating Henryk Grossmann on Marxist dialectics, Horkheimer wrote that, "It is no coincidence that [Lenin] the materialist thinker who took these questions [in Hegel] more seriously than anyone else placed all those footnotes next to the [Science of] Logic rather than next to the *Philosophy of History*. It was he who wanted to make the study of Hegel's *Logic* obligatory and who, even if it lacked the finesse of the specialist, sought out the consequences of Positivism, in its Machian form, with the most determined single-mindedness [in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, 1908]. It was still in this Lenin sense that Lukács was attacked for his inclination to apply the dialectic not to the whole of reality but confine it to the subjective side of things." Trans. Frederik van Gelder at: <http://www.amsterdam-adorno.net/fvg2014_T_mh_grossmann_letter.html>. Original letter in German: <http://www.amsterdam-adorno.net/fvg2014_T_MH_Grossmann_letter_DEU.pdf>.

Horkheimer in 1943 on party and class

Without a socialist party, there is no class struggle, only rackets

Chris Cutrone

HORKHEIMER'S REMARKABLE ESSAY "On the sociology of class relations" (1943)¹ is continuous with Adorno's contemporaneous "Reflections on class theory" (1942) as well as his own "The authoritarian state" (1940/42), which similarly mark the transformation of Marx and Engels's famous injunction in the *Communist Manifesto* that "history is the history of class struggles." All of these writings were inspired by Walter Benjamin's "On the concept of history" (AKA "Theses on the philosophy of history," 1940), which registered history's fundamental crisis. Instead, for Horkheimer and Adorno in the 1940s, history has become the history of "rackets." As Horkheimer concludes his draft, parenthetically citing Marx on Hegelian methodology, "the anatomy of man is key to that of the ape:" the past is explicable from the present, in the form of clique power-politics. But this change is for Horkheimer a devolution—regression. It stemmed from the failure of proletarian socialist revolutionary politics after 1917-19. Without Marxism, there was no class struggle.

The significance of this change is the relation of the individual to the collective in capitalism. This affects the character of consciousness, and thus the role of theory: the critical theory of the capitalist totality—Marxism—is fundamentally altered. Specifically, the role of working-class political parties in developing this consciousness is evacuated. At stake is what Horkheimer later (in his 1956 conversation with Adorno translated as *Towards a New Manifesto* [2011]) called, simply, the "memory of socialism." It disappears. This was Horkheimer's primary concern, why he points out that the socialist party was not focused on fighting against exploitation, and was indeed indifferent to it. This is because exploitation does not distinguish capitalism from other epochs of history; only the potential possibility for socialism does. That is why, without socialist politics, the pre-capitalist past reasserts itself, in the form of rackets.

At the conclusion of "The authoritarian state," Horkheimer wrote that, "with the return to the old free enterprise system, the entire horror would start again from the beginning under new management." Regarding the specific topic stated in the title of this essay in particular, we should note Horkheimer's unequivoal observation in "The authoritarian state" that,

"Sociological and psychological concepts are too superficial to express what has happened to

revolutionaries in the last few decades: their will toward freedom has been damaged, without which neither understanding nor solidarity nor a correct relation between leader and group is conceivable."²

If there was a "sociology of class relations" to be had, then it would be, as usual for the Frankfurt School, a "negative" and not positive phenomenon. The issue was how to grasp the significance of the original proletarian socialist revolutionary "will toward freedom" degenerating into a matter of mere "sociology" at all. We need to pay attention to the problem indicated by the "On . . ." in the title of Horkheimer's essay. "Class" in Marx's sense was not amenable to sociology; but "rackets" are. Sociology is about groups; but the proletariat for Marx was not a sociological group but rather a negative condition of society. The proletariat in capitalism was for Marx a negative phenomenon indicating the need for socialism. The political task of meeting that necessity was what Marx called "proletarian socialism."

Horkheimer was in keeping with Marx on this score. As the former SYRIZA Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis pointed out in a recent (October 23, 2015) interview, Marx was not concerned with "equality" or "justice," but "liberty"—freedom.³ Moreover, as Varoufakis correctly observes, for Marx, capitalism is a condition of unfreedom for the *capitalists* and not only for the workers.

As Marx wrote, at least as early as *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847), the capitalist class is constituted as such, as a class, only in response to the demands of the workers. It treats the demands of the workers as impossible under capitalism, as a more or less criminal violation of society. It is only in meeting the political challenge of a unified capitalist class that the working class constitutes itself as a class "in itself," not only subjectively but also objectively. For Marx, the historical turning point in this development was Chartism in England, which inaugurates the "class struggle" of the working class *per se*.

Only in fulfilling the task of proletarian socialism, transcending not only the workers' (competing, racket) economic interests in capitalism but also democracy in bourgeois society, that is, coming up against the limits of liberalism, does the proletariat become a class "for itself"—on the way to "abolishing itself" in overcoming the negative condition of society in

capitalism: its politics is not about one group replacing another. But Chartism in the U.K., like the revolutions of 1848-49 on the Continent, failed. For Marx, this is the need for "revolution in permanence" (1850) indicated by the failure of the democratic revolution and of the "social republic" in 1848. This is why Adorno (1966) characterized the *critical* concept of "society" itself, negatively, as originating "around 1848." The Chartists' last act was to translate Marx and Engels's *Manifesto*.⁴

So what, for Marx, was missing in 1848? This is key to what is missing for Horkheimer a hundred years later: an adequate political party for proletarian socialism; the means for making capitalism a *political* issue.

The role of the political party, specifically as non-identical with the workers' consciousness, both individually and collectively, was to actually preserve the individuality of the workers—as well as of intellectuals!—that is otherwise liquidated in the corporate collectives of capitalist firms, labor unions and nation-states. These rackets have replaced the world party of proletarian socialist revolution, which was itself a dialectical expression of the totality of market relations and of the otherwise chaotic disorder of the concrete conditions of the workers. For Horkheimer, workers related to the political party individually, and only as such constituted themselves as part of a class—in revolutionary political struggle to overcome capitalism through socialism. It was not that Lenin's party *caused* the liquidation of the individual, but the later travesty of "Leninism" in Stalinism was the *effect* of a broader and deeper socially regressive history of capitalism—what Marx called "Bonapartism" in the 19th century—that the 20th century authoritarian state and its concomitant "sociological" problem of political "atomization" expressed.

Liquidating the political party paves the way for conformism: individuality in society instead becomes individualism, whether of persons or corporate bodies. As Margaret Thatcher succinctly put it, "There is no such thing as society." Not only as wish but in fact. By contrast, the party was the negative political discipline adequate to the societal crisis of liberal capitalism in self-contradiction. But for Horkheimer, now, instead positivity rules, in a direct authoritarian manner that capitalism eludes. Avoidance of the party means avoiding capitalism—which suits the power of the rackets as such.

The problem of society's domination by anonymous social forces was revealed by the struggle against



Max Horkheimer (1895-1973)

exploitation, which demonstrated the limits of the power of the capitalists and hence the problem of and need to transform "society" as such. The "social question" dawned in the political crisis of 1848: the limits of the democratic republic. This becomes replaced by overt power relations that are mystified, by appearing to know no limits. For Horkheimer, following Lenin⁵, the party's struggle for socialism picked up where the struggle against exploitation reached its limits; without the party there is no struggle for socialism: no pointing beyond but only accommodating capitalism as nature—or at least as a condition seemingly permanent to society. This is why Horkheimer likens the ideology of organized "racket" capitalism in the 20th century to traditional civilization, by contrast with the liberal capitalism of the 19th century mediated by markets. Indeed, the problem with the rackets is that they falsify precisely the universalism of ideology, which in liberalism could be turned into a negative critique, an index of falsity. Universality is no longer claimed, so the universal condition of domination by capital is rendered occult

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Québec and the future of the Canadian Left

Samir Gandesha

ONE OF THE DEFINING MOMENTS of the recent general federal election for the Canadian left was the release on September 15 of the *Leap Manifesto*.¹ The *Manifesto*, spearheaded by prominent left Canadian intellectuals such as Naomi Klein, Avi Lewis, David Suzuki, and Martin Lukacs as well as notable celebrities such as Donald Sutherland and Leonard Cohen, included a bold call for respect for Indigenous rights, transition to a “clean economy,” and a guaranteed annual income. Moreover, it attempted to steer the terms of political discussion in Canada to the left and put pressure on the New Democratic Party (NDP) to reorient its campaign in a more imaginative and bold direction. The *Manifesto* clearly signaled that in the social base of the NDP and in the left outside of the party there was a growing sense of frustration with Tom Mulcair’s overly cautious leadership.² Having squandered an early comfortable lead for fear of being nailed to the cross of fiscal profligacy, Mulcair’s leadership also revealed itself as deeply flawed. It added insult to injury to see that the alternatives arising in the UK, Europe, and even the U.S. have eluded Canada. In the UK, Jeremy Corbyn, a long-time left-wing Labour Party activist had won the leadership of the party and seeks to undo the damage that Margaret Thatcher and “New Labour,” under Tony Blair, have wrought. In Europe new political parties, such as Syriza³ in Greece and Podemos in Spain, have sought to challenge the new austerity consensus. In the U.S., Kshama Sawant of Socialist Alternative was recently reelected to a second term in Seattle and Bernie Sanders’s campaign poses a credible challenge to Hilary Clinton for the Democratic ticket.

It was clear from the outset: in order for the NDP to stand a reasonable chance of forming a majority government at the federal level, it would have to consolidate as well as build considerably on its historic breakthrough in 2011 in Québec. This province itself had been shaken deeply by powerful student protests and a broader anti-austerity movement in 2012 and is undergoing the largest public sector strike in over four decades with 400,000 of its members out on strike.

The seemingly miraculous breakthrough for the NDP four years ago was due in part to the Liberal Party continuing to languish in wake of the sponsorship scandal of 2004—from which it had not fully recovered—and the fact that the Bloc Québécois (BQ) was not perceived as a proper alternative—due to its own leadership issues.⁴ The success of the NDP was also because Mulcair’s power base was already in Québec, as he had served as environment minister in a previous Liberal Government of ex-Tory Jean Charest. In addition “Le bon” Jack Layton was also highly regarded in Québec, prior to his untimely death. While Layton was universally lauded as a leader possessing a rare integrity and personal attractiveness, he was also the NDP leader who in 2013 “modernized” the party—a euphemism for distancing the party from any semblance of socialism. Henceforth there would be no clear means of distinguishing the party from the left flank of the Liberal Party. That Mulcair came from the Liberal Party, and probably not even its left flank, already indicated this. Thus what the party stood for, as the political landscape had begun to change throughout the western world since Tahrir Square and Occupy Wall Street, was simply a deeply uninspiring “austerity-lite,” with an added clear commitment to gender parity and greater ethno-cultural diversity. While these latter issues should not be dismissed, it is clear that the nods in the direction of identity politics are entirely compatible with a commitment to “business as usual.” A country like Canada that typically counts itself among the progressive, social democratic states and considers itself unlike the U.S. in reality appears out of step with much of the advanced industrialized world where the lines of political conflict have sharpened precipitously in recent years. The sharpening will continue as we start to face the evermore powerful effects of the dialectics of natural history in the form of accelerated climate change, deepening food insecurity, deepening class inequality, and an ever-burgeoning migrant crisis. Of course, underlying all of this is the deepening of regional conflicts around the globe. The strange and contradictory position of Québec—the so-called “distinct society”—within the confederation has contributed massively to this status and it is unlikely to change for the foreseeable future.

The peculiar position of Québec within Canada and the challenges it poses for the Left were revealed during another key defining moment of the election. After the September 24 French-language leadership debate, a panel discussion on CBC television immediately followed, which touched upon the question of the niqab. The then Conservative Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen Harper, brought to the front and center of his election campaign the promise to appeal the Federal Court of Appeal’s decision recognizing it a woman’s right to don the niqab at the citizenship ceremony. Andrew Coyne, editor and political commentator for the right-wing *National Post* newspaper, suggested that the issue was just a distraction. Taking exception to this, the Québécoise journalist Chantal Hébert fiercely retorted that, contrary to what Bay Street editorial boards may think, some 80% of Québeckers were in favor of a ban and it was strongly defended by the leader of the Bloc Québécois, former Maoist Gilles Duceppe. At the same time, Hébert said, the NDP’s platform centering on the fiscal prudence of balanced budgets in a time of recession “underwhelmed” the electorate as they were tiring of the austerity brought in first by the Péquistes (the Parti Québécois and its supporters) and now the Liberals. As Liberal Party leader (and now Prime Minister) Justin Trudeau put it to NDP’s Tom Mulcair in what was one of most cutting lines of the campaign: “You want to balance Harper’s books.” The niqab issue was therefore not a distraction, as it concerned both the right and the Left. Today, there is broad consensus



Thousands attended a protest against Quebec’s proposed charter of values in 2013.

among all parties in the National Assembly for revisiting the Québec Charter of Values.

Now, a charter that prevents the overt display of religious paraphernalia ought not to be understood on its face as *necessarily* racist or exclusionary. It could be argued that secularism is a central component of the republican tradition that lies at the very heart of public life in France and has, particularly since the 1960s and the challenge to the authority of the Catholic Church, played an increasingly influential role in Québec. However, the backdrop to this republican tradition, which is genuinely universalist and inclusive in theory, is complicated profoundly in France by the colonial character of the French state. The same holds for Québec, which can in the context of North America be understood as both oppressor and oppressed simultaneously. On the one hand, the French presence, namely Lower Canada, was [and continues to be] itself a product of settler colonialism, as on the rest of the continent. On the other hand, Québec came into confederation in a subordinate and dependent way as a kind of a colony within the colony. Its own elite until the 1960s was anglophone. The nominal universalism inherent in the republicanism, or the idea that the sovereignty was vested in the “people” rather than the monarchy, was itself tempered by a definition of the people not as linguistic community—“La Francophonie”—but rather as an ethno-national group—so-called “*pur laine*” or “dyed-in-the-wool” Québécois, those tracing continuity of the blood line with the early Voyageurs, then later the settlers to New France from the old France. This tension between ethno-national particularism on the one hand, and republican universalism on the other, has constituted the real tension in the politics in the province. It is this tension that poses almost insurmountable obstacles for a unified Canadian left oriented to capturing national state power. It should come as no surprise that this is a difficult terrain for the Left to operate on. The Parti Québécois under René Lévesque inflected the sovereignist project towards civic republicanism. However, with the neoliberal turn so clearly exemplified by economist and Québec sovereignist Jacques Parizeau, the emphasis was increasingly placed on ethno-cultural particularism within the context of a larger commitment to neoliberal continentalism whose aim was to purchase greater regional or provincial autonomy at the expense of the federal government. Whatever commitments to national liberation [itself based on solidarity with other anti-colonial struggles, including of course those of Indigenous peoples] that may have existed in the past on the far left in Quebec have clearly given way to a narrow and exclusivist nationalism and ethnocentrism.

Here we have a deep contradiction. On the one hand, Québec has been deeply troubled by the overt signs of cultural, particularly religious, difference in public. This was reflected in the proposed Charter of Québécois Values proposed by the ill-fated Péquiste government of Pauline Marois. The spirit of that charter, which is still very much alive, underlies the overwhelming opposition to the wearing of the niqab in the Canadian citizenship ceremony. During the election there was an attack by two young boys on a pregnant Muslim hijabi, which mirrored other incidents of violence across Canada, and, now, after the Paris attacks, such attacks on innocent Muslims are becoming ever more common. The most chilling event post-Paris, however, was the online spectacle of a man dressed as the “Joker” from the Batman series who threatened to kill an Arab a day until they got the message and left the country. He was based in “La Belle Provence.”

On the other hand, of all Canadian provinces, Québec is now by far the most progressive, if by this we mean a state that is still at least more committed, if only nominally, to social democratic decommodification of higher education and social services such as child care. Moreover, as we saw in 2013, it is comprised of an active, nonconformist citizenry prepared to take to the streets when prompted to challenge the state to push such decommodification further than the state might, indeed, like. Again, we have the example of the public servants’ strike.

The progressive character of the Québécois nation goes back to the so-called “Quiet Revolution” in the 1960s in which Francophones lodged a two-front attack

against, on the one hand, the power of the Catholic Church, which had regulated virtually all aspects of what was then a predominantly rural Québécois life under the tutelage of authoritarian, anti-labor premier Maurice Duplessis and, on the other, the Anglo elite in Montreal. The sentiment here was expressed in the slogan “Je me souviens.” I am sovereign. The latter antagonism was understood along the lines of Third World Liberation struggles, with the majority Québécois, aside from the elites, taking on the position of Franz Fanon’s “*dames de terre*” as was argued by Pierre Vallières in *White Niggers of America*. This also formed the important background to the direct action of the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ), in anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist actions culminating in the declaration of martial law through the invocation of the War Measures Act by Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau during the so-called “October Crisis” of 1970. While it is difficult to understand the Québécois nation in these terms today, this was also the backdrop to the progressive, one could say, civic nationalism of René Lévesque’s leadership of the Parti Québécois. This would, of course, change through the 1980s under Parizeau. But under the leadership of Lévesque, Québécois nationalism was for the most part social democratic in nature. And this, as I shall suggest below, in the past has represented one of the principal challenges of the NDP: how to articulate a form of social democracy that would enable it to challenge Liberal hegemony in that province.

In any case, this was also the context of the student movement that reached its crescendo in spring of 2012, which, at its peak, saw a quarter of a million students and other activists against austerity participate in the so-called “Maple Spring” that ultimately forced the government to back down on tuition increases and, at the end of the day, led to its defeat. This mobilization could, itself, be viewed as a kind of deferred effect or *Nachträglichkeit* (literally: “afterwardsness”) of the unredeemed promises of the Quiet Revolution that were perceived as increasingly betrayed by the rightward, neoliberal shift of the PQ in the 1980s, which, as explained, grew especially pronounced under Jacques Parizeau in the 1990s. The students, of course, contested the austerity regime imposed by the PQ and drew attention to the growing gap between the emancipatory discourse of Québécois nationalism of the 1960s as well as the social democratic orientation of René Lévesque in the 1970s, on the one hand, and the neoliberal turn. So, how do we account for the contradiction between exclusionary forms of petit-bourgeois *pur laine* Québécois identity, on the one hand, and the fact that Québec’s politics overall are the most progressive in the country—as was evinced by the students’ mobilization against austerity? There are two possible answers to this question.

The first, of course, is that social democracy has historically relied upon a high degree of ethnic and linguistic homogeneity. For example, where social democracy has been strongest, for example, in Scandinavia, until recently these societies have evinced a high level of ethnic homogeneity. Where social democracy has been weakest, namely, the United States, given the settler colonial nature of a state whose original form of accumulation as based on the expropriation of Indigenous land in the “great trek west-ward and slavery,”⁵ social democracy has been at its weakest. Moreover, while the crisis of social democracy, particularly in the land of its birth, namely Britain, has typically been attributed to the socio-economic crisis of stagflation in the middle of the 1970s, an additional, often under-discussed dimension has been the arrival of migrant workers, refugees, and waves of immigration. In other words, deep-seated forms of racism generated through the experience of colonization inhibited the networks of solidarity upon which the welfare state, in part, depended. Once the “empire strikes back” through waves of migration from the West Indies, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, neoliberal ideology thus mobilized such racism in order to exploit the fiscal crisis of the welfare state. What set the tone for Thatcherism was Enoch Powell’s infamous 1968 speech in which he threatened that if immigration were permitted to continue at existing levels, “rivers of blood” would run.⁶

This dynamic could also be said to play itself out

in Québec when the Conservative Party under Brian Mulroney (who came from the town Baie-Comeau) fought the 1984 election almost exclusively on the question of free trade. In Québec, there was a strong grasp of the manner in which continentalism worked to undermine the power of the nation-state that empowered global capital, on the one hand, and regions and provinces, on the other. Amongst other things, it led to a strange confluence of interests between Québec and Alberta, two decidedly opposed provinces, ideologically, but which nonetheless shared an interest, for different reasons, in greater power vis-à-vis the federal government. While under Lévesque, the PQ’s agenda was of a civic form of nationalism, with the neoliberal turn, there came to be an increasing emphasis on ethnic identity. Yet, it is significant that this could be seen to reflect the increasingly heterogeneous nature of Québec society with higher levels of immigration to the province in the 1980s and 1990s. When I lived in Québec, just around the time of the second referendum on sovereignty, a theatre company had planned to produce a play that dealt somewhat pessimistically with the scenario of a sovereignist referendum victory and its repercussions for the “allophone” or immigrant community. Before the play could be produced, considerable pressure was placed on the theatre not to produce it. But, the culmination of this sentiment was Parizeau’s famous words in the aftermath of the failure of the 1995 referendum. Parizeau attributed this failure precisely to the “allophone community,” putting the referendum defeat down, in an unforgettable because deeply troubling phrase, to “money and ethnic vote” comment.

This leads to the second account of the contradictions of Québec society. If the Left had sought to understand the subordinate position of Québec within Canada, itself a semi-peripheral society under the perpetual domination of the United States, based on at least a semblance of an analysis of social and economic relations, then what we have with the neoliberal right is an attempt to displace the problem of abstract labor as the basic mediation of alienated social relations, to wit, a lack of democratic control over the conditions of everyday life, work, and politics, onto signs of ethnic and racial differences. Historically in Québec, as the author of *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* and *Barney’s Version*, Mordecai Richler, from his Montreal base, had been construed in terms of the figure of the Jew. Today, the racial or ethnic difference is now displaced onto religious difference as manifest in religious symbols and paraphernalia—the very target of the Charter of Québec Values. As Bernie Farber, former Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Jewish Congress, recently said: “Today the Muslims are Jews of yesterday.”⁷ No concerns for the future of Québec secularism are expressed, of course, at the prominent display of the crucifix in the National Assembly. The long-standing aspiration to sovereignty, either under the universalist auspices of civic republicanism or the more narrowly defined ethno-national particularism, was somehow threatened not by the increasing liberation of capital from any democratic fetters as manifested in the Free Trade Agreement (and later the NAFTA), which Québec supported by and large, but rather the symbols of cultural difference. This was, in other words, what Adorno called a “reified critique of reification.”⁸ **IP**

1 Online at <<https://leapmanifesto.org/en/the-leap-manifesto/#manifesto-content>>.
2 Although, to be fair, the responsibility probably lies with the party strategists rather than with Mulcair, himself. And this, itself, can be seen as a large problem for the party.
3 Of course, as we know, in this case it was rather short-lived with its *volte-face* in the aftermath of the triumph of the “*oxi*” vote on July 5, 2015.
4 The BQ, was formed in 1990 by disaffected Québécois members of the Progressive Conservative Party and the Liberal Party and led initially by former PC cabinet minister Lucien Bouchard. It was largely social democratic in orientation and sought, through an informal relationship with the Parti Québécois (PQ), to prepare the ground for secession at the federal level.
5 Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015).
6 Online at <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643823/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Blood-speech.html>>
7 The Current with Anna-Maria Tremoni, CBC Radio, Dec. 9, 2015.
8 Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity* (London: Routledge, 2002).