#### Labor struggle is in crisis – both scholars and organizers have given up on the role of workers in social change, and decaying labor power has allowed capitalism to roll back gains and massively expand exploitation, both intra- and internationally – Covid has massively accelerated these processes, which makes now a key moment for reinvigorating worker struggle.

Azzellini ‘21

[Dario, Autonomous University of Zacatecas. August 2021. “Class Struggle from Above and from Below during the covid-19 Pandemic,” <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353735433_Class_Struggle_from_Above_and_from_Below_during_the_covid-19_Pandemic>] pat

Contrary to what politicians, CEOs and advertisement campaigns suggest, we are not all in this together. We are not all equally affected by covid-19 and its repercussions. The rich are getting richer, while those whose livelihoods depend on the sale of their labor power are affected by accelerated levels of poverty and pauperization due to pay cuts and job losses. As is usually the case under capitalism, the poor, people of color, migrants, and elderly people are finding themselves more vulnerable to infection, sickness, and death than the wealthy are. This is true on an international level with regard to the relationship between the Global North and South, as well as within countries. The pandemic has put in evidence for everyone just how little value capital places on human life. As Marx noted: “Capital asks no question about the length of life of labour-power. What interests it is purely and simply the maximum of labour-power that can be set in motion in a working day”.

Nevertheless, while there was once a consensus on the left that organizing workers was the primary tool in the struggle for social change, workers today are frequently seen to support authoritarianism. Scholars and leftists gave up using class as both an analytical category and as a point of political reference—even labor is no longer considered playing a key role. The constant decline of union membership and bargaining power of workers since the late 1970s or early 1980s feeds this type of analysis. Over the past four decades the relationship between capital and wage labor has been continually changing. This led to an increase in structural unemployment and escalating levels of precarization. The forms and the relations of production have changed drastically, as has the prioritization of certain sectors in individual regions and on the global level. The demographics that now make up the working class have also undergone massive changes. Especially in the global North, the extent of industrial labor in the cities has rapidly diminished. Informal labor and precarization have increased globally, particularly in the expanding service sector.

These changes, along with the diversification of protest movements, often labeled as “new social movements” led many in the left and the social sciences to abandon the idea that workers could play a pivotal role in social transformation. The prospect of overcoming capitalism often vanished in the same breath. The new social movements were defined in opposition to the “old” labor movement. A central argument is that the new movements act in specific fields and, supposedly, lack the previous labor movement’s clear goal of total social transformation or a socialist society. The new social movements were considered indicators of malfunctioning political systems, or of growing differentiation in modern societies, and are based on constructed identities. According to Manuel Castells in the “information age”, the labor movement has lost its ability to act as “a major source of social cohesion and workers’ representation”. As a result, workers are no longer capable of being the emancipatory subjects of the future. The future belongs to identity movements not based on class. Castells is just one of many authors predicting the death of the labor movement since the 1990s.

An alternative approach is to integrate categories, such as gender and race, in the analysis of capitalism and exploitation hierarchies. Class and the contradiction between labor and capital do not disappear; the category of class just becomes more complex. A closer look and the working-class composition and workers’ struggles, and a broader view at global value chains, shows that labor is still a central category, and that identity is neither replacing class nor contradicting it, but rather complementing the category and enriching the struggles.

The Covid-19 pandemic has visibly accelerated the multifaceted structural and systemic crisis of globalized capitalism. In this article I argue that contrary to what some social scientists would say, the working class is fighting back. Workers’ struggles have been taking place throughout the pandemic globally. Working class people and working-class communities rose up globally “because of” and “despite” the pandemic. First, I analyze the dimensions of the class struggle from above, the massive financial returns for capital to the expenses of workers. The following section looks at the struggles closely related to covid-era grievances, especially against potentially deadly working conditions and for protective measures, in essential services and other sectors that did not put production on hold. These struggles show how the working class responded globally to the “profits before people logic” of capital. I then resume a number of workers’ struggles that are not directly caused by pandemic, but happened “despite” the pandemic. The range of these struggles goes from protests against the closure of companies and mass dismissals, to strikes with different demands in various sectors, to general strikes and other popular working class uprisings beyond the workplace. These struggles give evidence of how the working class continued rising up and was not paralyzed by a national unity discourse and repressive measures during the pandemic. The following section discusses how to weigh the workers’ struggles. Are we experiencing an increase of class struggle during the pandemic? Or are we witnessing the ongoing decline of class power? In order to answer this question, the struggles have to be analyzed in a greater context of changing class composition and modes of production. Finally, some preliminary conclusions are drawn.

#### Capitalism is terminally unsustainable and at a turning point – reinforcing structures causes extinction and turns their impacts.

* TCC = Transnational Capitalist Class, TNS = Transnational State

Robinson 20 [William I. Robinson, American professor of sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara, “The Global Police State,” 2020, Pluto Press, EA]

But the globalization boom of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries was short-lived. The global financial meltdown of 2008 marked the onset of a new structural crisis of global capitalism, one that opens the possibility for systemic change. Karl Marx was the first to identify crisis as immanent to capitalism and there is a vast literature on capitalist crisis.11 Here I identify three types of crisis. Cyclical crises, or recessions, occur about every ten years in the capitalist system and typically last some 18 months. These comprise the so-called “business cycle.” There were recessions in the early 1980s, the early 1990s, and the early 2000s. “Structural crises,” so called because the only way out of crisis is to restructure the system, occur approximately every 40–50 years. A new wave of colonialism and imperialism resolved (that is, displaced) the first recorded structural crisis of the 1870s and 1880s. The next structural crisis, the Great Depression of the 1930s, was resolved through a new type of redistributive capitalism, referred to as the “class compromise” of Fordism-Keynesianism, social democracy, New Deal capitalism, and so on (more on this below). As we have seen, capital responded to the next structural crisis, that of the 1970s, by going global. Each of these major episodes of structural crisis have presented this potential for systemic change. Historically, each has involved the breakdown of state legitimacy, escalating class and social struggles, and military conflicts. In the past, structural crises have led to a restructuring that includes new institutional arrangements, class relations, and accumulation activities that eventually resulted in a restabilization of the system and renewed capitalist expansion. Yet a new period of far-reaching restructuring through digitalization appears to be under way at this time. Before we return to this new wave of restructuring, let us focus on the nature of the current crisis, which shares aspects of earlier system-wide structural crises of the 1880s, the 1930s, and the 1970s. Yet there are several interrelated dimensions to the current crisis that I believe sets it apart from these earlier ones and suggest that a simple restructuring of the system will not lead to its restabilization—that is, our very survival requires now a revolution against global capitalism. Above all is the existential crisis posed by the ecological limits to the reproduction of the system. We have already passed tipping points in climate change, the nitrogen cycle, and diversity loss. For the first time ever, human conduct is intersecting with and fundamentally altering the earth system in such a way that threatens to bring about a sixth mass extinction.12 While capitalism cannot be held solely responsible for the ecological crisis, it is difficult to image that the environmental catastrophe can be resolved within the capitalist system given capital’s implacable impulse to accumulate and its accelerated commodification of nature. The ecological dimensions of global crisis have been brought to the forefront of the global agenda by the worldwide environmental justice movement. Communities around the world have come under the escalating repression of a global police state as they face off against transnational corporate plunder of their environment and demand environmental justice and action by governments to avert the climate catastrophe. And climate change refugees, who are likely to run into the hundreds of millions in the years ahead, are vilified by racist and neo-fascist forces and repressed by a global police state. This accelerated commodification of nature points to another underlying dimension of the current crisis. We are reaching limits to the extensive expansion of capitalism, in the sense that there are no longer any new territories of significance to integrate into world capitalism and new spaces to commodify are drying up. The capitalist system is by its nature expansionary. In each earlier structural crisis, the system went through a new round of extensive expansion—that is, incorporating new territories and populations into it—from waves of colonial conquest in earlier centuries, to the integration in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries of the former socialist bloc countries, China, India and other areas that had been marginally outside the system. There are no longer any new territories to integrate into world capitalism. At the same time, the privatization of education, health, utilities, basic services, and public lands are turning those spaces in global society that were outside of capital’s direct control into “spaces of capital,” so that intensive expansion—that is, the commodification of what were non-commodified resources and activities—is reaching depths never before seen. Commodification refers to the process of turning people, the things that people produce, and nature into things that are privately owned, have a monetary value, and that can be bought and sold. Capitalism by its nature must constantly expand intensively by commodifying more and more of the world. What is there left to commodify? Where can the system now expand? New spaces have to be violently cracked open and the peoples in these spaces must be repressed by a global police state. But what does exhaustion of spaces for extensive and intensive expansion imply for the reproduction of the system? The sheer magnitude of the means of violence and social control is unprecedented, as well as the magnitude and concentrated—and increasingly privatized—control over these means of violence along with the means of global communication and the production and circulation of symbols, images, and knowledge. As I will discuss in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3, computerized wars, drone warfare, robot soldiers, bunkerbuster bombs, satellite surveillance, cyberwar, spatial control technology, and so forth, have changed the face of warfare, and more generally, of systems of social control and repression. We have arrived at the panoptical surveillance society, a point brought home by revelations of the defector from the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA), Edward Snowden, that the NSA monitored virtually every communication on the planet. It is no exaggeration to say that we are now in the age of thought control by those who control global flows of communication, information, and symbolic production. But most frightening is the production and deployment of a new generation of nuclear weapons and the threat of “limited” nuclear war.13 If global crisis leads to a new world war, the destruction would simply be unprecedented. Combined with ecological meltdown, it is difficult to see how humanity could survive such a conflagration. Global capitalism lends itself to escalating inter-national tensions with the potential to spill over into major interstate conflict. But we should not explain these tensions through the outdated nation-state/interstate mode of analysis that attributes such tensions to national rivalry and competition among national capitalist classes for international economic control. Rather, these tensions derive, above all, from an acute political contradiction in global capitalism that I already alluded to above: economic globalization takes places within a nation-state-based system of political authority. Nation-states face a contradiction between the need to promote transnational capital accumulation in their territories and their need to achieve political legitimacy. In the age of capitalist globalization, governments must attract to the national territory transnational corporate and financial investment, which requires providing capital with all the incentives associated with neo-liberalism—downward pressure on wages, deregulation, low or no taxes, privatization, fiscal austerity, and on so— that aggravate inequality, impoverishment, and insecurity for working and popular classes. As a result, states around the world have been experiencing spiraling crises of legitimacy. To put it in more technical terms, there is a contradiction between the accumulation function and the legitimacy function of nation-states. This situation generates bewildering, unstable, and seemingly contradictory politics. It helps explain the rise of far-right and neo-fascist forces that espouse rhetoric of nationalism and protectionism even as they promote neo-liberalism, such as the Trump government in the United States, and has confused some into believing that “deglobalization” is under way as we move backward to an earlier era of national protectionism. In fact, the “old protectionism” of the twentieth century aimed to protect national products and the national capitalist groups that produced them with tariffs and subsidies. The new protectionism—if we could call it that, as the term is extremely misleading and leads to much confusion—aims to create the conditions to attract transnational capital to national territories. Despite its protectionist rhetoric, for instance, the Trump White House called not for locking out foreign investors but for transnational investors from around the world to invest in the United States, enticed by a regressive tax reform, unprecedented deregulation, and some limited tariff walls that would benefit groups from anywhere in the world that establish operations behind them. “America is open for business,” Trump declared at the 2018 meeting of the global elite gathered for the annual conclave of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland: “Now is the perfect time to bring your business, your jobs and your investments to the United States.”14 And the biggest single beneficiary of steel tariffs that Trump imposed in 2018 on imported steel was ArcelorMittal, the Indian-based company that owns majority shares in U.S. Steel.15 Moreover, as we will see later, TCC contingents from countries around the world that appear to be in geopolitical competition are not just heavily invested in global police state but they are cross- and mutually invested in it. More to the point here, economic globalization as it has unfolded within the interstate system generates mounting international and geo-political tensions to the extent that the crisis exacerbates the problem of legitimacy and destabilizes national political systems and elite control. Inter-national tensions must be seen as derivative of the contradiction between the expansion of transnational capital within the framework of the nationstate/inter-state system, in which global capitalism pits nationally constrained workers against one another and sets up the conditions for the TCC to manipulate the crises of state legitimacy and the international tensions generated by this contradiction. The political tensions generated by this contradiction can and do take on the appearance of geo-political competition.16 Will the centrifugal pressures produced by this contradiction undercut the centripetal pressures brought about by economic globalization? Will these centrifugal pressures break out into open, largescale inter-state warfare?17 Will geo-political tensions “overdetermine” the corporate interests of the TCC? We need here to extend the analysis of transnational politics and the TNS in order to understand this dimension of global crisis, especially so considering that it is central to the story of global police state. Transnational elites have been clamoring for more effective TNS institutions, in part, in order to resolve this disjuncture between economic globalization and the nation-state system of political authority. However, the fragmentary and highly emergent nature of TNS apparatuses makes the effort problematic given both the dispersal of formal political authority across many nation-states and the loose nature of TNS apparatuses with no center or formal constitution. The more “enlightened” elite representatives of the TCC are now searching for ways to develop a more powerful TNS, one that could impose regulation on the global market and certain controls on unbridled global accumulation. They are seeking transnational mechanisms of “governance” that would allow the global ruling class to rein in the anarchy of the system in the interests of saving global capitalism from itself and from radical challenges from below—from both an insurgent Left and extreme Right. More than in any other forum, the politicized strata of the transnational elite comes together in the activities of the WEF, a “network of networks” for the TCC and the transnational elite that holds its famed annual meeting in Davos. Indeed, it is not for nothing that “Davos Man” has been used to describe the new global ruling class. WEF founder and Executive Chairman Klaus Schwab called in 2008 for renovated forms of “global leadership” by the TCC: Whether it is poverty in Africa or the Haze over Southeast Asia, an increasing number of problems require bilateral, regional or global solutions and, in many cases, the mobilization of more resources than any single government can marshal … The limits of political power are increasingly evident. The lack of global leadership is glaring, not least because the existing global governance institutions are hampered by archaic conventions and procedures devised, in some instances, at the end of World War II. Sovereign power still rests with national governments, but authentic and effective global leadership has yet to emerge. Meanwhile, public governance at the local, national, regional, and international levels has weakened. Even the best leaders cannot operate successfully in a failed system.18 But if the transnational elite wants a stronger TNS in order to cement the TCC’s rule and stabilize the system, it has not been able to resolve the contradictory mandate it has accorded to the TNS. On the one hand, the TNS sets out to promote the conditions for capitalist globalization; on the other, it tries to resolve the myriad problems globalization creates: economic crisis, poverty, environmental degradation, chronic political instability, and military conflict. The TNS has had great difficulty addressing these issues because of the dispersal of formal political authority across many nation-states. To reiterate, TNS apparatuses are fragmentary; there is no center or formal constitution, and there is certainly no transnational enforcement capacity. These TNS apparatuses have not been able to substitute for a leading nation-state—what the international relations literature refers to as a “hegemon”—with enough power and authority to organize and stabilize the system, much less to impose regulations on transnational capital. The politicized strata of the TCC and transnationally oriented elites and organic intellectuals, including those who staff TNS institutions, attempt to define the long-term interests of the system and to develop policies, projects, and ideologies to secure these interests. Since the specific interests of the various components of the global power bloc are divergent, it is the TNSs’ role to unify and organize the various classes and fractions to uphold their long-term political interests against the threat of the exploited and oppressed classes around the world. But the inability of the TNS to impose coherence and regulation on transnational accumulation and to stabilize the system is also due to the vulnerability of the TCC as a class group in terms of its own internal disunity and fractionation, and its ~~blind~~ pursuit of immediate accumulation—that is, of its immediate and particular profit-seeking interests over the long-term or general interests of the class. There is of course a profound social dimension of global crisis. In these times of unprecedented worldwide inequalities, capitalist crisis breaks apart the social fabric and devastates communities everywhere. Billions of people around the world face struggles to survive from one day to the next, with no guarantee that they will succeed in this struggle (indeed, many are not and many more won’t). In academic terms we could call this a crisis of social reproduction, but this phrase does nothing to capture the depths of misery that poverty, disease, un- and underemployment, food insecurity, social exclusion, racist, xenophobic, and other forms of social violence into which billions are thrust on a daily basis, or to the persecution that they face as migrants, refugees, surplus labor, and so on. The next two chapters will take up these matters. However, let us point out that the social crisis is decidedly not a crisis for capital, and may even help it to reproduce its rule, until or unless it leads to mass rebellion that threatens the ruling groups’ control.

#### Thus, vote aff to affirm an unconditional right of workers to strike.

#### Strikes represent a school of war for class struggle – the crucial task for Marxists is to shift workers away from liberal unionism towards revolutionary organizing.

Smith ‘11

[Sharon, author of Subterranean Fire: A History of Working-Class Radicalism in the United States (Haymarket, 2006) and Women and Socialism: Class, Race, and Capital (revised and updated, Haymarket, 2015). July 2011. “Marxism, unions, and class struggle: The future in the present,” <https://isreview.org/issue/78/marxism-unions-and-class-struggle/index.html>] pat

Shifting the balance of class forces is, of course, of immediate urgency for the U.S. labor movement. But for Marxists, a new era of class struggle also provides a path to working-class revolution—by preparing workers not only to overthrow the system but also to rule society collectively. Marx stated clearly in the German Ideology, “[T]he revolution is necessary therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.”

Marx and Engels regarded class struggle as the means through which the working class advances from a class “in itself” to a class “for itself,” as a necessary precondition for their own self-emancipation. As Marx wrote in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, “Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers.… The mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have noted only a few phases, this mass becomes united, and continues itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests.”

The tremendous class solidarity expressed in Madison in February and March marked a leap forward in establishing a working class “for itself”—including union and non-union workers from the public and private sector, students and supporters from all over the U.S. committed to defending public sector unions in Wisconsin.

Engels argued that unions, and the strike weapon in particular, are “schools of war” that train workers in class struggle, as a necessary precondition to their own self-emancipation:

These strikes, at first skirmishes, sometimes result in weighty struggles; they decide nothing, it is true, but they are the strongest proof that the decisive battle between bourgeoisie and proletariat is approaching. They are the military school of the workingmen in which they prepare themselves for the great struggle which cannot be avoided.… And as schools of war, the Unions are unexcelled.

Draper added to this formulation, “The trade-union movement is a school or training ground of the proletariat in a less warlike sense too, including that of preparing cadres of workers capable of administering society. Engels pointed out that ‘the working people, in the management of their colossal Trade Societies’ also prove themselves ‘fit for administrative and political work.’”

Thus, while unions exist to negotiate better terms for workers under capitalism, the additional goal for revolutionaries is always to strengthen the fighting capacity of the working class, with the aim of expanding and deepening revolutionary leadership among rank-and-file workers. As such, each phase of struggle—whether a victory or a defeat—marks a particular moment in the revolutionary process. This is not a wooden formula, but involves shifting strategies and tactics appropriate for every stage of the class struggle, which will be discussed further below.

Negotiating the terms of exploitation

At their best, unions are indispensible vehicles for the class struggle. But since their essential function under capitalism is to negotiate the terms of exploitation on behalf of their members, their preservation depends on the continuation of capitalist class relations. As Tony Cliff and Donny Gluckstein argue, “The improvement of workers’ conditions within capitalism—not the overthrow of capitalism—is the common guideline of trade union activity in normal times. In reality unions tacitly accept the framework set by the system and tend either to exclude political issues from discussion or to support reformist political parties that do not challenge the present order of society.”

At various points in Marx and Engels’ lifetimes, unions led the class struggle far forward; at others, they restrained the movement. In times of union retreat, Marx and Engels complained bitterly about the state of the trade unions. As Engels wrote in 1871, “The trade union movement, among all the big, strong and rich trade unions, has become more an obstacle to the general movement than an instrument of its progress.”

The Russian revolutionary V.I. Lenin echoed Marx and Engels’ changing attitudes toward trade unions. But he too was reacting to the historic role of the unions themselves, reflecting their vacillation. In 1899, Lenin wrote, “Every strike brings thoughts of socialism very forcibly to the worker’s mind, thoughts of the struggle of the entire working class for emancipation from the oppression of capital.… This is the reason that socialists call strikes ‘a school of war,” a school in which the workers learn to make war on their enemies for the liberation of the whole people.”

Just three years later, Lenin’s polemic What Is to Be Done? described the politics of trade unionism in singularly negative terms: “There is much talk of spontaneity. But the spontaneous development of the working-class movement leads to its subordination to bourgeois ideology...for the spontaneous working-class movement is trade-unionism…and trade unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie.” Yet three years after that, during the 1905 revolution, Lenin returned to his earlier argument, commenting that “the working class is instinctively, spontaneously Social-Democratic [socialist].”

The commentary above appears contradictory but represents Marxists’ theoretical understanding of the contradictory role played by trade unions in day-to-day class relations. A second aspect of the role of unions limits their explicitly political role under capitalism. Unions represent (or seek to represent) all workers of a particular trade or within a particular industry—the more workers a union can organize into one organization, the stronger its ability to wield its economic power through strikes and other workplace actions.

So a bigger and broader union reduces competition between a larger section of the working-class. But this economic strength imposes political limits on unions. As Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky pointed out,

The trade union embraces broad masses of workers, at different levels. The broader these masses, the closer is the trade union to accomplishing its task. But what the organization gains in breadth it inevitably loses in depth. Opportunistic, nationalist, religious tendencies in the trade unions and their leadership express the fact that the trade unions embrace not only the vanguard [most militant workers] but also heavy reserves. The weak side of the unions therefore comes from their strong side.

For this reason, unions cannot be transformed into revolutionary formations. This historic political role can only be fulfilled by explicitly revolutionary political organizations and parties.

The trade union officialdom

Cliff and Gluckstein, with the benefit of more recent experience, elaborated on the role of trade union officials:

To believe that pressure from below can force union leaders on to a revolutionary path is to misunderstand the nature of the bureaucracy, to spread illusions in it, and to blunt workers’ consciousness and action. Trade union leaders may be induced to obey some wishes of the rank and file, but they will never be able to substitute for the collective action of the masses. The self-activity of the workers is therefore paramount.

Marx and Engels (and other Marxists since) frequently directed their frustration at trade union leaders. Indeed, Marx and Engels repeatedly complained about craft union leaders who refused to broaden the union movement beyond their particular trades. “It seems to be a law of the proletarian movement everywhere that a section of the workers’ leaders should become demoralized,” wrote Engels in 1869. “The leadership of the working class of England has wholly passed into the hands of corrupted union officials and the professional agitators,” echoed Marx in 1878.

If unions function to negotiate the terms of exploitation under capitalism, then union officials act as the negotiators for their members. Their class position is thus itself contradictory. Full-time union officials are not workers themselves, and the contracts they negotiate on behalf of their members do not affect their own salaries and working conditions. If the contract agrees to layoffs, union leaders still keep their jobs. If wages are slashed or a speedup imposed, union officials will maintain the same salaries and working conditions as before.

Thus union leaders are neither workers nor capitalists, but mediators between the two. In the absence of pressure from below, they are likely to adapt to pressure from above. As German revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg described,

The specialization of professional activity as trade-union leaders, as well as the naturally restricted horizon which is bound up with disconnected economic struggles in a peaceful period, leads only too easily, amongst trade-union officials, to bureaucratism and a certain narrowness of outlook.… There is first of all the overvaluation of the organization, which from a means has gradually been changed into an end in itself, a precious thing, to which the interests of the struggles should be subordinated. From this also comes that openly admitted need for peace which shrinks from great risks and presumed dangers to the stability of the trade unions, and further, the overvaluation of the trade-union method of struggle itself, its prospects and its successes.

To be sure, the business cycle imposes some objective limits to unions’ ability to negotiate favorable terms for workers under normal conditions of capitalism. During the boom phase of the economic cycle, capitalists are far more likely to grant union demands, while in periods of recession—and high unemployment—the tables are reversed. This certainly contributes to the pattern of advances and retreats in the class struggle. But the decline of wages and union membership over the last three decades cannot be explained by the business cycle, as the current “recovery” demonstrates all too clearly. This decline can only be explained by the scale and duration of the neoliberal assault on the working class and the conservatism of the entrenched U.S. labor bureaucracy.

The conservatism of the U.S. labor bureaucracy in recent decades is distinguished not only by union officials’ demonstrated abhorrence of struggle, but also by labor’s long-standing ties to the Democratic Party, a self-proclaimed pro-capitalist party. Both Clinton and Obama, for example, made significant campaign promises to unions that were quickly broken upon taking office. Neither Clinton’s promise to ban the use of permanent replacements of striking workers, a favorite strategy of corporations in defeating unions, nor Obama’s pledge to pass the Employee Free Choice Act, enabling “card check” voting in union recognition, ever saw the light of day.

Yet support for the Democrats has continued unabated even as union membership and wages reached a crisis point over the last decade. Each election year Democratic Party candidates can continue to count on unions’ massive political and financial support for their campaigns, while delivering little or nothing in return.

The reluctance of top union officials to challenge the status quo is certainly reinforced by their enormous salaries, which equal those of many corporate executives. As Nelson Lichtenstein wrote, comparing U.S. and European union officials, unions in the U.S. grew to employ

The largest and best-paid stratum of full-time salaried officers in the labor movement world.… Functionary worker ratios in the United States were something like one in three hundred at the end of the 1950s, while the European average was about one full-time office holder per two thousands unionists. The U.S. had sixty thousand full-time union officers in 1960, compared to just four thousand in Great Britain.38

As Mark Brenner reports in Labor Notes, union officials “earning more than $100,000 a year tripled between 2000 and 2008, the latest year with complete data, and the number earning more than $150,000 also tripled.… In 2008, nearly 10,000 union officials or staff brought home salaries greater than $100,000, costing a total of $1.2 billion.” Indeed, five of the top union officials “received more than half a million dollars just in salary, and everyone in the top 15 earned more than $400,000.” Brenner also noted, “Officials earning more than $150,000 found themselves among the richest 5 percent of American households. Meanwhile, the typical union member earned $48,000 in 2008; the overall average U.S. income was $40,000.”39

The weight of this past weighs heavily on the labor movement today, even as the working class becomes ripe for struggle.

Theory and practice

Union workers will be key to turning the tide, and a union orientation must be central in formulating a political perspective today. Socialists must participate in their unions, however ossified their union bureaucracy or undemocratic their practice.40 As Lenin advised revolutionaries in *Left-Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder*,

You must be capable of any sacrifice, of overcoming the greatest obstacles, in order to carry on agitation and propaganda systematically, perseveringly, persistently and patiently in those institutions, societies and associations—even the most reactionary—in which proletarian or semi-proletarian masses are to be found. The trade unions and the workers’ co-operatives (the latter sometimes, at least) are the very organizations in which the masses are to be found.

Union democracy is of paramount importance, with the aim of strengthening the fighting potential of the unions’ rank-and-file members. But there is no predetermined series of stages that must be passed through to accomplish this goal.

Nor do union leaders’ formal politics necessarily determine their role in the class struggle. Mineworkers leader John L. Lewis, judged by his formal politics—a staunch Republican and anti-communist—might have seemed an unlikely candidate for spearheading the struggle for industrial unions in the 1930s. Yet Lewis recognized that the American Federation of Labor (AFL), in refusing to organize unskilled workers, was holding back organized labor from growing. He led a split within the AFL, effectively unleashing the strike wave that built the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). Lewis intended to run the CIO in the same top-down manner as he did the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA). But the scale of the class struggle often prevented Lewis from reigning in rank-and-file workers leading strikes and factory occupations on the ground, particularly in the auto industry in 1936 and 1937.

Marxism provides the theoretical foundation for understanding the vacillating character of trade union officials. Below, Cliff and Gluckstein lay out the basis in practice for “common action between a revolutionary party leading sections of the rank and file, and the trade union bureaucracy—both the left wing and sometimes the right”:

This common action can be useful in developing the working-class struggle, for although even the most left elements of the bureaucracy remain unreliable and unstable, a temporary alliance of revolutionaries with them can weaken the hold of the bureaucracy as a whole. A revolutionary party must know how to exploit the division between left and right bureaucrats, between those who are prepared to make militant speeches (even if they will not act upon them) and those who are openly wedded to conciliation at all times. Through using this division the independence, initiative and self-confidence of the rank and file may be strengthened, on one condition: the party must make clear that the rank and file cannot trust the left officials or put their faith in radical rhetoric. The party must always remind trade unionists that even if bureaucrats put themselves at the head of a movement of insurgent workers, they do so in order better to control that movement.

An alliance with left bureaucrats is only a means to broad action. Even the best and most radical speeches should never become a substitute for the action of the mass of workers themselves. Such an alliance, like every other tactic in the trade union field, must be judged by one criterion, and one criterion only—whether it raises the activity, and hence the confidence and consciousness of the workers.43

Trotsky made the same point, writing about Britain, “With the masses—always, with the vacillating leaders—sometimes, but only so long as they stand at the head of the masses.”44

This begs the question: should socialists run for union office to replace these “vacillating leaders?” This question is answered in Cliff and Gluckstein’s formulation above, which bears repeating here: all trade union tactics should be measured by “one criterion only—whether it raises the activity, and hence the confidence and consciousness of the workers.” In a revolutionary period, when a majority of workers are already exercising their fighting capacity and revolution is on the agenda, the answer is straightforward, since revolutionary union leaders can easily act in sync with the revolutionary movement.

But in less tumultuous times, this decision is far more difficult. Over the last three decades many of the labor movement’s most dedicated radicals have taken on leadership positions in trade unions, and their efforts have born some important results—even in the absence of a significant rise in class struggle. Due to widespread and insistent pressure from antiwar union activists, for example, the 2005 AFL-CIO Convention voted in favor of a resolution calling for a “rapid” return of all U.S. troops from Iraq—reversing many decades of uncritical support for imperialism in the U.S. labor movement.

Socialists cannot be indifferent to the election of reform slates in union elections and must actively support any and all other concrete steps toward winning union democracy. Nevertheless, it is also the case that holding a full-time union office always brings forth substantial pressure to compromise with employers. This pressure from above can easily lead to conservatism even among the most well-meaning union leaders, particularly without the counterbalance of pressure from the rank and file below.

Because above all, revolutionary leadership is not measured by title, but by deed—in ensuring that the most militant workers are able to organize and lead the struggle from below, with or without the agreement of the existing union officials. If this group of militants remains a minority among the union’s membership, then strengthening their confidence and influence might well prove the most effective tactic, which would certainly not be accomplished by taking full-time leadership positions.

Helping to cohere this militant minority can be achieved in a number of ways, from forging alliances with other workers willing to stand up for union rights in individual workplaces to standing with those who vote no on a concessionary union contract. Even if the membership vote for a contract is 90 percent in favor and just 10 percent opposed, socialists could be far more effective in focusing on cohering, and expanding the influence of, this small but militant minority than on formal union leadership positions.

Cliff and Gluckstein also described the necessary discipline imposed upon members of a revolutionary party working inside unions:

[T]here must be collective control by the party over the individual and his or her subordination to the party cell in the workplace or the local party branch.… [T]he struggle for the election of any official should supplement and not supplant the activity of the workers. Elections in the union should enhance the power of the rank and file, and not substitute for it.

The importance of perspectives

Marxist theory provides a starting point, but only a starting point, for socialists in unions today. There is no formula for applying the Marxist method in individual unions at specific points in the class struggle that lie ahead. Unions do not negotiate in a vacuum and union leaders alone do not dictate the future of the class struggle. Strategies and tactics need to be determined in practice, and adapted to the many factors that determine the balance of class forces—which are not static, but ever-changing—at any given moment. Those sectarians who at all times view the “treachery of the union bureaucracy” as the key obstacle to advancing the class struggle (accompanied by incessant calls for a “general strike” no matter what the actual state of class relations) have strayed far from the Marxist method. As Luxemburg articulated in the Mass Strike, written shortly after the 1905 Russian revolution,

If, therefore, the Russian Revolution teaches us anything, it teaches above all that the mass strike is not artificially “made,” not “decided” at random, not “propagated,” but that it is a historical phenomenon, which, at a given moment, results from social conditions with historical inevitability. It is not, therefore, by abstract speculations on the possibility or impossibility, the utility or the injuriousness of the mass strike, but only by an examination of those factors and social conditions out of which the mass strike grows in the present phase of the class struggle—in other words, it is not by subjective criticism of the mass strike from the standpoint of what is desirable, but only by objective investigation of the sources of the mass strike from the standpoint of what is historically inevitable, that the problem can be grasped or even discussed.

Strategies and tactics must be determined through an assessment of both objective and subjective factors at each particular phase of history. James P. Cannon, founder of the U.S. Trotskyist movement, described the importance of this process as follows: “The first point is the question of perspective. Where are we going, what are the factors in the situation, and what is the general trend? Clarification on this point is necessary first.”50

Anticipating the future direction of the class struggle is crucial to developing a perspective. In the same article, Cannon laid out the importance of the Communist Party’s trade union resolution adopted in May 1928—which anticipated “the growing industrial depression and its radicalizing effects upon the workers” years before the rise of industrial unions during the Great Depression. Cannon continued, with remarkable accuracy,

The resolution predicts a growing unrest of the workers and sees a prospect of big struggles, particularly in fields where the workers are unorganized, such as the automobile, rubber, textile and meatpacking industries. Great masses of workers are employed in these industries, they are fiercely exploited, the existing trade unions offer them no protection, and their mood for struggle is growing.

These factors determine our orientation. The only possible line for the Communist Party in the present situation is to calculate upon a growing unrest of the workers and an increasing will to struggle and to put the main emphasis and center of gravity in its trade union work on the organization of the unorganized and the preparation for strikes.

Recognizing when the time is approaching for a surge in class struggle is essential to preparing for its arrival. The outbreak of class struggle in Wisconsin, and indeed throughout the Midwest, marks the opening battle of a future era of class conflict. It takes place in the context of a protracted and severe economic crisis that began with the onset of the Great Recession and still shows no sign of significant rebound, despite the restoration of corporate profits. The excesses of neoliberal policy caused the financial meltdown of 2008, yet neoliberalism persists. The corporate class will continue its assault on workers until the class struggle forces a shift in the balance of class forces.

There will be many challenges, victories, and defeats ahead of us. These are inevitable in the revolutionary process, during which the revolutionary party prepares itself to lead the self-emancipation of the working-class—while the working class prepares itself to not just overthrow the system, but also to rule society in the interests of the vast majority of humanity.

#### That enables a popular anti-imperialism built on shared interests and solidarity through proletarian internationalism.

Viewpoint ‘18

[Viewpoint Magazine aims to understand the struggles that define our conjuncture, critically reconstruct radical history, and reinvent Marxism for our time. Viewpoint is therefore neither a socialist news source nor an academic journal. It is a militant research collective. 02/01/2018. “Internationalism against Imperialism,” <https://viewpointmag.com/2018/02/01/internationalism-against-imperialism/>] pat

The challenge of reactivating an effective proletarian internationalism is made even more urgent by the aggressive rise of right-wing nationalisms, which have taken a range of organizational and ideological guises. The clarified ideological form of this rightward shift is an emboldened “possessive nationalism” in the North, which revolves around restrictive immigration and trade policies, as responses to the perceived erosion of territorial logics of sovereignty, and the hybridization of the ethno-national community. Any prolonged combat against these nativist impulses – especially as they seep into social-democratic or left-liberal parties in Europe and the United States – will need to reinforce the link between migration and imperialism, the former in many ways constituting the reflux of the latter. Here we might center the rich legacy and actuality of migrant struggles for communist politics, and how questions of mobility, control, and dispossession are now at the core of imperialist dynamics. The political and social, informal and formal spaces of migration remain an open field for investigation. As Etienne Balibar noted over 40 years ago, “the concrete knowledge of the causes and effects of immigration is a two-way guiding thread towards an understanding of imperialism,” a methodological linkage which “renders internationalism, more than ever, the very condition of struggles for workers’ liberation.” This raises the practical necessity of reconsidering the tactical repertoire and strategic horizons of anti-imperialism. The nearly two-decades-long “War on Terror” – a euphemism for a war on human welfare in the Middle East and a war against Muslims at home – has proven to be a difficult nub for anti-war and anti-militarist activism in “the belly of the beast,” particularly as U.S. violence, amidst ever-shallower domestic hegemony, takes forms other than that of U.S. boots on the ground. The fading – or destruction – of the anti-war movement after 2005, following massive demonstrations against the invasion of Iraq which featured considerable grassroots mobilization, is a critical episode to reflect upon. The ubiquity of manned and unmanned aerial bombardment, the diffuse and often cloaked nature of counterinsurgency operations, the multiplication of U.S. proxies, and dense financial ties have rendered the military conflicts of U.S. empire, perhaps the most visible manifestation of imperialism, an asymmetrical yet constant presence. Any sustained fight against it must be coordinated around several fronts. Recent experiences of mass protest show that a powerful anti-war movement, if it is to reappear, would do so in an altered shape and in close relation to other insurgent forces in society, an extension of their discursive and strategic reach. The high level of organized resistance to militarized border security and repressive immigration policies, the environmentalist/anti-extractivist campaigns around Standing Rock and elsewhere, and the nascent coalitions and activist milieus that have been fortified through the International Women’s Strike initiatives (resonant with calls from Latin America for a new feminist international) indicate a real potential to build a “popular anti-imperialism” from grounded social struggles, connecting the sites of contestation across neo-colonial and imperial frontiers. One can see how this changes the aims and targets of alter-globalization movements, exemplified in the militancy of summit-hopping demos that directly confront leading economic and financial bodies, or in the parallel institution-building and transnational networking of civil society organizations involved in the World Social Forums. A more adequate approach to questions of coordination and solidarity across borders would have to probe how political organization is tied to material practices of translation, and recognize that even localized concerns often involve the commonalities and divisions of the global labor force. The mutations of class struggle, where the wage-earning proletariat has given way to more diverse social alliances and associations of what Göran Therborn calls the “plebeian strata” or “popular classes,” has provided glimpses of what anti-imperialist mobilization could look like: new strategies of threading upsurges of disruption, combination, and antagonism as they extend over an unstable terrain.

Today, it is necessary to re-situate the concept and question of imperialism. We agree with Lenin when we recognize that no revolution, even a national one, is possible without grasping the effects of imperialism on any local articulation of the working class. And we further agree that, of course, no national revolution would be sufficient for the goal of communism. In short, we see imperialism as both an obstacle to and enemy of internationalism and we in turn view internationalism as a position to be composed in working class struggle itself. Thus, at the risk of simplifying our approach, we propose that to examine imperialism today is to bring it into the realm of class composition. This can involve no disavowal of the complicated history of Marxism and popular struggle with regard to imperialism, nor a simple repetition of any one of its moments. In our sixth issue of Viewpoint, we instead seek out the possibility of an encounter, bringing together historical accounts, artefacts of struggle, and theoretical interventions past and present. Thus we neither “endorse” all of the positions represented here nor reject those that might be absent from this issue, which is a situated engagement with the problem of opposing imperialism from within American empire; we are proud to offer these contributions as material for the long-term work of thinking and struggling against imperialism in the 21st century.

We will not overstate the systematicity of this approach; proceeding in this way entails a roll of the dice. It may involve taking up a history and putting it down again, only to have its importance suddenly strike us when we’ve moved onto a seemingly unrelated study, or when we later discuss a pressing issue at a political meeting. The categories we present here could be presented otherwise, and the various themes and topics that have entered into the current issue are certainly not enough to fill the lacuna of the concept of imperialism demanded by our present. Under- or unrepresented are migration and the struggles that surround it; ecological imperialism and climate debt; the role of China and other states of growing economic weight and political significance; configurations of “super-exploitation,” unequal exchange, and neoliberal labor arbitrage; the changing nature of war – conventional, nuclear, and otherwise; U.S. and E.U. sanctions as a tool of warcraft and statecraft; the role of primary extraction and other environmental threats; the ongoing presence and effects of settler colonialism; and certainly much more. As always, we hope this issue of Viewpoint is only the beginning. If these works can be a foundation for more theoretical and political work, we will be pleased. And if others are compelled to fill in what we and our contributors have had to put aside, even these lacks will have had a purpose.

#### Communist organizing requires collective struggle and the establishment of centralized organization to inform both theory and practice – only the party and the vanguard can provide for the needs of the masses.

Kuhn ‘18

[Gabriel, Austrian-born writer and translator living in Sweden. Among his book publications is “All Power to the Councils! A Documentary History of the German Revolution of 1918-1919”. March 2018. “Don't Mourn, Organize! Is Communism a Pipe Dream—or a Viable Future?” <https://brooklynrail.org/2018/03/field-notes/Dont-Morn-Organize-Is-Communism-a-Pipe-Dreamor-a-Viable-Future>] pat

The forms of organization this requires must go further than the affinity group but stop short of the vanguard party. Affinity groups do not answer the demand for mass organizing that mass societies require. But neither do vanguard parties. They attempt to lead the masses, not organize them, and that’s a big difference. The party model might in general be insufficient for mass organizing today. The networks that movementism gave way to are perhaps more appropriate, but only if they can overcome the assumption that the looser the connections are, the better. This assumption is wrong. Loose connections might suit the needs of an ever more flexible market economy, but not of effective political organizing. To “have contacts” is not enough; you need to do something with them. And you need to stay committed to the projects you initiate. I will try to flesh this out by listing the aspects I consider most important in organizing today.

1. We need to leave sectarianism behind. The left is weak and each additional division weakens it further. In a 2011 article titled “Movement, Cadre, and the Dual Power,” Joel Olson made a simple, yet very important observation: “We believe that the old arguments between communists and anarchists are largely irrelevant today.” This must be our point of departure.

2. We need theory that is adapted to our times. It must overcome the false contradiction between “class struggle” and “cultural struggle.” There is a fruitful debate about a “new class politics” in the German-speaking world. Sebastian Friedrich, one of its main proponents, drew these conclusions in an article published by Counterpunch:

A new class politics does not relegate gender, race, and imperial legacy to issues that are supplementary to class relations. These issues, and the struggles they imply, are an integral part of class relations. In fact, feminist, anti-racist, and anti-colonial struggles are the base on which effective unified class struggles must be launched.… A new class politics must clarify where and how the specific experiences of workers based on gender, race, citizenship, and other factors converge. It must reveal the overlapping interests of workers as members of the class. This makes common struggles possible.

3. We must not rely on the “objective forces” identified by historical materialism. Subjective forces are important for change. It is easy to underestimate how much neoliberalism shapes the lives even of people opposed to it. In the Global North, political activism has become a leisure activity that people engage in or not, depending on their mood, the identity they are trying to create for themselves, or the road of “self-improvement” they have chosen. In almost all cases, it is secondary to professional careers and personal comforts. Under such circumstances, it is difficult to get anything done. There is nothing wrong with being “voluntaristic.” Radical change is dependent on people wanting radical change, no matter how much Marxists still insist on economic realities determining individual consciousness and, therefore, individuals’ capacity for political action. An organization’s efficiency relies on the individual qualities of its members, that is, responsibility, reliability, and accountability.

Making Things Concrete

If we want communism to be more than a pipe dream, we have to be willing to face reality, even if it confuses, challenges, or even frightens us. We cannot ignore struggles that refer to communist ideals, simply because they aren’t the struggles we’d like to see. If our enthusiasm for communism remains limited to lecture halls and conference rooms, it won’t be anything the powerful will lose sleep over.

The struggle that currently receives most attention among communists of all stripes in the Global North is the one in Kurdistan. In Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan), forces affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, PKK, have established a direct-democratic council system, based on the “democratic confederalism” conceived by the imprisoned PKK leader Abduallah Öcalan. Öcalan describes democratic confederalism as “a non-state political administration or a democracy without a state,” and cites Murray Bookchin’s “libertarian municipalism” as a major influence. There are people who celebrate this as a form of anarchism. But as an observant friend of mine noted, an anarchism that is imposed by a leader is a strange kind of anarchism. Besides, there are reports from the ground that challenge the libertarian narrative. The editors of Lower Class Magazine, an online project dedicated to “low budget underground journalism,” travel regularly to Kurdistan and have the following to say:

The Western left sees Rojava as the realization of a democracy “from below”: communes, councils, a confederation; no hierarchies, no party, a spontaneous mass project. Anarchists and “libertarian” communists wax lyrically about the dawn of a direct-democratic Shangri-La. […] Yes, the change in Rojava comes “from below. It is based on the power of the people, no doubt. Communes and councils are at the heart of decision-making, that is true. But as essential is the following: None of this would be happening if it wasn’t for a vanguard leading the way. The revolution in Rojava proves that Leninist vanguardism is correct, not false.

Another European journalist visiting the region noted that the cadres of the People’s Protection Units, YPG, relate to the councils of Rojava in the same way the Bolshevists related to the councils of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, there are troubling pragmatic alliances, which have included collaboration with the U.S. military. Yet the people behind Rojava Solidarity NYC sum up the situation well:

Rojava, an autonomous region in Northern Syrian, the largest revolutionary territory of the 21st century, has projected anarchist and communist ideas to the forefront of political discourse and into the pragmatic and messy reality of everyday life. … From communal relationships to the councils and self-defense units, we can assess numerous potential routes by which we can create liberated communities at home, while learning from their possibilities and pitfalls.

Rojava won’t be the answer to our problems. No single struggle ever is. But the developments in Rojava challenge us to discuss real-life strategies for radical change. It is easy to focus on shortcomings, but if this is all we ever do, where will it get us?

Councils are essential for communist projects. Their power, which is based on the direct involvement and active participation of the masses, is curtailed as soon as political interest groups, such as parties, assume control over them. This conviction separated historical council communism, represented by figures such as Otto Rühle and Anton Pannekoek, from the Bolsheviks. Pannekoek wrote:

The councils are no government; not even the most central councils bear a governmental character. For they have no means to impose their will upon the masses; they have no organs of power. All social power is vested in the hands of the workers themselves.

Unless we want the transition to communism to entail enormous human suffering (which would be utterly absurd), we need to consider the fact that billions of people will need to be fed, sheltered, nursed, provided with access to clean water, and so forth. To produce according to the needs of the people rather than the needs of profit requires enormous efforts in planning, especially if current living standards are to be upheld. (Living standards don’t equal standards of consumption—the standards of consumption in the Global North cannot and should not be upheld, since they are unsustainable.) Furthermore, we must collectively dispose of industrial and nuclear waste, weapons of mass destruction, and ticking environmental bombs. None of this is possible without a level of centralization, no matter how visceral the reactions are that the word might provoke in some circles.

Only a council system can combine the centralization required by the complexity of modern societies with participative democracy. Centralization requires formal structures. Participative democracy requires these structures to be transparent. They need to be bottom-up rather than top-down, and delegates must be directly responsible to their constituencies. The council system is the only administrative framework to provide that.

Romanticizing particular struggles rarely does any good, no matter how council-based they are—or claim to be. If radicals in the Global North fail to address concerns with respect to struggles in the Global South, it is not respectful but condescending. To escape into the intellectual poverty of cultural relativism doesn’t help. We can only evolve from critical engagement. But real-life struggles are our starting point. It makes little sense to demand struggles for communism if we shy away from engaging with the ones that exist. Arundhati Roy put it simply after spending time with Maoist Naxalites in the forests of central India, an experience she chronicled in the book Walking with the Comrades. She said: “I went in because I wanted to tell the story of who these people are.” This informs revolutionary theory and, in turn, improves revolutionary practice. Most importantly, it is crucial for saving communist struggles from betraying their own principles. Everyone can watch failure unfold. The challenge lies in helping to prevent it.

#### In the face of capitalist hegemony, Marxist thought affirms that, above all, it is right to rebel – truth can only be found in revolutionary practice.

Badiou ‘6

[Alain, French philosopher, formerly chair of Philosophy at the École normale supérieure and founder of the faculty of Philosophy of the Université de Paris VIII. “An Essential Philosophical Thesis: ‘It Is Right to Rebel against the Reactionaries,’” <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/190192>] pat

The sentence, “it is right to rebel against the reactionaries,” bears witness to this more than any other. In it we find expressed the fact that Marxism, prior to being the full-fledged science of social formation, is the distillate of what rebellion demands: that one consider it right, that reason be rendered to it. Marxism is both a taking sides and the systematization of a partisan experience. The existence of a science of social formations bears no interest for the masses unless it reflects and concentrates their real revolutionary movement. Marxism must be conceived as the accumulated wisdom of popular revolutions, the reason they engender, the fixation and detailing of their target. Mao Zedong’s sentence clearly situates rebellion as the originary place of correct ideas, and reactionaries as those whose destruction is legitimated by theory. Mao’s sentence situates Marxist truth within the unity of theory and practice. Marxist truth is that from which rebellion draws its rightness, its reason, to demolish the enemy. It repudiates any equality in the face of truth. In a single movement, which is knowledge in its specific division into description and directive, it judges, pronounces the sentence, and immerses itself in its execution. Rebels possess knowledge, according to their aforementioned essential movement, their power and their duty: to annihilate the reactionaries. Marx’s Capital does not say anything different: the proletarians are right to violently overthrow the capitalists. Marxist truth is not a conciliatory truth. It is, in and of itself, dictatorship and, if need be, terror.

Mao Zedong’s sentence reminds us that, for a Marxist, the link from theory to practice (from reason to rebellion) is an internal condition of theory itself, because truth is a real process, it is rebellion against the reactionaries. There is hardly a truer and more profound statement in Hegel than the following: “The absolute Idea has turned out to be the identity of the theoretical Idea and the practical Idea. Each of these by itself is still one-sided” (Hegel, Science of Logic). For Hegel, absolute truth is the contradictory unity of theory and practice. It is the uninterrupted and divided process of being and the act. Lenin salutes this enthusiastically: “The unity of the theoretical idea (of knowledge) and of practice—this NB—and this unity precisely in the theory of knowledge, for the resulting sum is the “absolute idea” (Lenin, Philosophical Notebooks). Let us read this sentence very carefully, since, remarkably, it divides the word “knowledge” into two. That is a crucial point, on which we shall often return: knowledge, as theory, is (dialectically) opposed to practice. Theory and practice form a unity, that is to say, for the dialectic, a unity of opposites. But this knowledge (theory/)practice contradiction is in turn the very object of the theory of knowledge. In other words, the inner nature of the process of knowledge is constituted by the theory/practice contradiction. Or again, practice, which as such is dialectically opposed to knowledge (to theory), is nevertheless an integral part of knowledge qua process.

In all Marxist texts we encounter this scission, this double occurrence of the word “knowledge,” designating either theory in its dialectical correlation to practice or the overall process of this dialectic, that is, the contradictory movement of these two terms, theory and practice. Consider Mao, “Where Do Correct Ideas Come From?”: “Often, correct knowledge can be arrived at only after many repetitions of the process . . . leading from practice to knowledge and then back to practice. Such is the Marxist theory of knowledge, the dialectical materialist theory of knowledge” (Mao Zedong, Five Philosophical Essays). The movement of knowledge is the practice-knowledge-practice trajectory. Here “knowledge” designates one of the terms in the process but equally the process taken as a whole, a process that in turn includes two occurrences of practice, initial and final. To stabilize our vocabulary,2 and remain within the tradition, we will call “theory” the term in the theory/practice contradiction whose overall movement will be the process of “knowledge.” We will say: Knowledge is the dialectical process practice/theory.

On this basis we may expose the reactionary illusion entertained by those who imagine they can circumvent the strategic thesis of the primacy of practice. It is clear that whoever is not within the real revolutionary movement, whoever is not practically internal to the rebellion against the reactionaries, knows nothing, even if he theorizes.

Mao Zedong did indeed affirm that in the theory/practice contradiction— that is, in a phase of the real process—theory could temporarily play the main role: “The creation and advocacy of revolutionary theory plays the principal and decisive role in those times of which Lenin said, ‘Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement’ ” (Mao, On Contradiction). Does this mean that, at that moment, theory amounts to an intrinsic revolutionary possibility, that pure “Marxist theoreticians” can and must emerge? Absolutely not. It means that, in the theory/practice contradiction that constitutes the process of knowledge, theory is the principal aspect of the contradiction; that the systematization of practical revolutionary experiences is what allows one to advance; that it is useless to continue quantitatively to accumulate these experiences, to repeat them, because what is on the agenda is the qualitative leap, the rational synthesis immediately followed by its application, that is, its verification. But without these experiences, without organized practice (because organization alone allows the centralization of experiences), there is no systematization, no knowledge at all. Without a generalized application there is no testing ground, no verification, no truth. In that case “theory” can only give birth to idealist absurdities.

We thus come back to our starting point: practice is internal to the rational movement of truth. In its opposition to theory, it is part of knowledge. It is this intuition that accounts for Lenin’s enthusiastic reception of the Hegelian conception of the absolute Idea, to the point that he makes Marx into the mere continuation of Hegel. (“Marx, consequently, clearly sides with Hegel in introducing the criterion of practice into the theory of knowledge,” Lenin, Philosophical Notebooks.) Mao Zedong’s sentence lends its precision to Lenin’s enthusiasm. It is the general historical content of Hegel’s dialectical statement. It is not just any practice that internally anchors theory, it is the rebellion against the reactionaries. Theory, in turn, does not externally legislate on practice, on rebellion: it incorporates itself in the rebellion by the mediating release of its reason. In this sense, it is true that the sentence says it all, an all that summarizes Marxism’s class position, its concrete revolutionary significance. An all outside which stands anyone who tries to consider Marxism not from the standpoint of rebellion but from that of the break; not from the standpoint of history but from that of the system; not from the standpoint of the primacy of practice but from that of the primacy of theory; not as the concentrated form of the wisdom of the working people but as its a priori condition.

B. The Three Senses of the Word “Reason”

If this sentence says it all, it nevertheless does so according to the dialectic, that is, according to a simplicity that divides itself. What concentrates and sustains this division, while apparently cloaking it, is the word “reason” or “rightness”: one is right, the rebellion is right, a new reason stands up against the reactionaries. The fact is that, through the word “reason,” the sentence says three things, and it is the articulation of the three that makes the whole.

1. It is right to rebel against the reactionaries does not mean in the first place “one must rebel against the reactionaries” but rather “one rebels against the reactionaries”—it is a fact, and this fact is reason. The sentence says: primacy of practice. Rebellion does not wait for its reason, rebellion is what is always already there, for any possible reason whatever. Marxism simply says: rebellion is reason, rebellion is subject. Marxism is the recapitulation of the wisdom of rebellion. Why write Capital, hundreds of pages of scruples and minutiae, of laborious intelligence, volumes of dialectic often at the edges of intelligibility? Because only this measures up to the profound wisdom of rebellion.

The historical density and obstinacy of rebellion precede Marxism, accumulating the conditions and necessity of its appearance, because they instill the conviction that, beyond the particular causes that provoke the proletarian uprising, there exists a profound reason, which cannot be uprooted. Marx’s Capital is the systematization, in terms of general reason, of what is given in the historical summation of causes. The bourgeoisie, which cognizes and recognizes class struggle, is happy to admit and investigate the particular causes of a rebellion, if only in order to forestall its return. But it ignores the reason, which when all is said and done the proletarians hold onto—a reason that no absorption of causes and circumstances would ever satisfy. Marx’s enterprise amounts to reflecting what is given, not so much in the particularity of battles but in the persistence and development of the class energy invested in them. The thinking of causes does not suffice here. The reason for this persistence must be accounted for in depth. The essence of the proletarian position does not reside in the episodes of class struggle but in the historical project that subtends them, a project whose form of practical existence is given by the implacable duration and successive stages of proletarian obstinacy. That is where reason lies. Only its clarification and exposition—simultaneously in the guise of reflections and directives—do justice to the movement, which rebellion brings to light, of the class being of phenomena.

Today only the Maoist enterprise integrally develops what proletarians do and allow us to know through the unconditional and permanent character of their rebellion. Only thus can we say: yes, contradiction is antagonistic, yes, the workers’ rebellion, which is the fire at the heart of this contradiction, is the very reason of history. “It is right to rebel against the reactionaries” means above all: the obstinate proletarians are right, they have all the reasons on their side, and much more besides.

#### You should understand the aff as a project of counter-hegemony – every debate and argument is a testing ground to strengthen the communist movement – voting affirmative is an investment in the war of position.

Carrol ‘6

[William, University of Victoria. 2006. “Hegemony, Counter-hegemony, Anti-hegemony,” <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279801161_Hegemony_Counter-hegemony_Anti-hegemony>] pat

The term counter-hegemony seems misleadingly complementary to hegemony. In actuality, there is an asymmetry between the two, rooted in the different forms of power that are at stake. John Holloway, working within an autonomist framework inspired by Zapatismo, has written of the struggle to liberate power-to from power-over as “the struggle for the reassertion of social flow of doing, against its fragmentation and denial” (2005: 36). So long as power-over is sustained through an effective blending of persuasion and coercion, hegemony remains intact. To distinguish practices that liberate power-to from practices that contribute to the replication of power-over, we must return momentarily to critical realism’s transformational model of social activity. If hegemony is deeply grounded beneath the fray of conjunctural politics, we need to distinguish between activity that merely alters a certain state of affairs without effecting any deeper transformation and activity that is transformative (Joseph, 2002: 214). It is the latter that holds the possibility of liberating power-to from power-over. To invoke Nancy Fraser’s (1995) distinction, remedies for social injustice that merely affirm a group’s status or entitlements within an existing order must be distinguished from remedies that transform the world in ways that abolish underlying generative mechanisms of injustice. Such transformation can only take place through concrete political initiatives. Counterhegemony may portend deep transformation, but it gets its start on, and draws much of its vitality from, the immediate field of the conjunctural, in resistance to the agenda of the dominant hegemony (Hall, 1988). A good deal of counter-hegemonic struggle occurs in direct opposition to the aspects of capitalist hegemony we reviewed earlier – in the rejection of social and semiotic fragmentation, of neoliberal insulation and dispossession, of globalization from above. It is precisely through these oppositional politics that a global justice movement has, since the mid-1990s, taken shape and gained a sense of ethical purpose. As important as the concreteness of conjunctural politics is, counter-hegemony cannot simply remain on the terrain of hegemony, contesting its issues within its discursive frames. It is not enough to “celebrate the fragments” in a politics of difference, if such celebration simply intensifies the problems of postmodern fragmentation; nor can “reclaiming the commons” be a resumé of resistance to neoliberalism. Like the trade-unionism of the fordist era, such politics buy too heavily into hegemonic forms; they seek solutions within the existing hegemony (cf. Russell, 1997; Kebede, 2005). The question is how to relate creatively to the immediate conjuncture while avoiding capture by the hegemonic discourses and practices that inform and organize that conjuncture – how to weld the present to the future, as Gramsci once put it. Historic bloc, war of position If hegemony is deeply grounded then counter-hegemony needs to address those grounds. This stricture points to the articulation of various subaltern and progressive-democratic currents into a counter-hegemonic bloc that effectively organizes dissent across space and time. Historic blocs are all about articulation, but which articulations matter? In Stuart Hall’s (1986: 53) conception, articulation is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time. You have to ask, under what circumstances can a connection be forged or made? ... The ‘unity’ which matters is a linkage between the articulated discourse and the social forces with which it can, under certain historical conditions, but not necessarily, be connected. From a critical realist perspective the most promising articulations are those that mobilize social forces in ways that challenge the underlying bases for hegemony while building bases for a radical alternative. In opposing an hegemony that fragments the social, that valorizes the anonymous market and possessive individual, that privileges ‘security’ over justice, movements need to rearticulate and transform, to build solidarities, including those spanning South and North. In a Gramscian problematic, a viable counter-hegemony draws together subaltern social forces around an alternative ethico-political conception of the world, constructing a common interest that transcends narrower interests situated in the defensive routines of various groups. Such counter-hegemony “has to adopt the organisational capacity to establish a rival historical bloc to the prevailing hegemony by sustaining a long war of position” (Morton, 2000: 261). In this perspective, historic bloc and war of position are dialectically linked at the organic level, representing respectively the synchronic and diachronic aspects of counter-hegemony (Carroll and Ratner, 2000). A war of position “opens space for new spatio-temporal totalities” (Joseph, 2002: 218); it creates the conditions under which a democratic culture and new social order can thrive. As a radical politic, this approach emphasizes the need for counter-hegemonic movement to walk on both legs, taking up state-centred issues as well as issues resident in national and transnational civil societies. Indeed, reclaiming the state – democratizing state practices in the wake of neoliberal globalization – is elemental to counter-hegemony today (Wainwright, 2003). Within this framework, states are neither privileged nor forsaken as sites of struggle and change, but state-centred politics is understood as one part of broader transformations (Brand, 2005b: 248). Often romanticized as the world’s first post-modern movement, the Zapatistas actually exemplify what walking on two legs might look like in a world dominated by transnational neoliberalism. Their rejection of Leninist and social democratic strategies to take state power directly, their emphasis on the political struggle over the military struggle, their attention to dignity as an ethical principle are all obvious aspects of a creatively conducted war of position. The Zapatista’s “Other Campaign”, launched in 2005, engaged subversively with the electoral process to consolidate the anti-capitalist left. Instead of running candidates, the Other Campaign called for the enactment of a new national constitution that would bar privatization of public resources and other neo-liberal moves, and insure autonomy for Mexico’s 57 distinct indigenous peoples (Ross, 2005). The call for a new constitution is hardly a rejection of state-centred politics; rather, it is a refusal to be co-opted into the game of bourgeois statist politics. With their clever approach to the state and civil society, the Zapatistas provide clues as to how “to conduct politics with reference to the state without moving oneself in state forms and thus actually reproducing existing relationships of domination” (Brand and Hirsch, 2004: 377).

#### The Role of the Judge is to be a propagandist.

#### Studies prove debate is inevitably implicated in the context of propaganda – voting aff aligns with a model predicated on communist base-building.

Greene and Hicks ‘6

[Ronald Greene, former Chair of the Critical and Cultural Studies Division of the National Communication Association, and Darrin Hicks, communication studies at the University of Denver. 2006. “Lost convictions: Debating both sides and the ethical self-fashioning of liberal citizens,” <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09502380500040928>] pat

Concurrently, the Army Information and Education Group, which would become the core of the Hovland-Yale Communication and Persuasion Group, led by Carl Hovland, was conducting experiments testing the relationship between inducement and internalized attitude change. In 1953, Hovland, Janis, and Kelley published their highly influential book Communication and Persuasion, which established a positive relation between verbalization and the intensification of belief and predicted that being forced to overtly defend a position discrepant from one’s own private beliefs would result in the internalization of the overtly defended position. This prediction was further supported by the forced-compliance and cognitive dissonance studies of Festinger (1957) and his colleagues at Stanford. For decades, the ability to understand the merits of opposing arguments had been championed as one of the prime pedagogical benefits of intercollegiate debate training. However, in the fall of 1954, Hovland’s and Festinger’s studies coupled with the anti- Communist rhetoric of Schlesinger, which would, much to Schlesinger’s dismay, come to underwrite McCarthy’s witch hunts, would be articulated in such a way that debate’s ability to train students to take the other’s perspective might be framed as a threat to national security. The fear that defending the diplomatic recognition of ‘Red China’ would turn American youth into Communist sympathizers saturated the debating both sides controversy with an anxiety over the virility of ‘democratic faith’. Those choosing to defend the virtues of intercollegiate debate and the practice of debating both sides were careful not to question the basic tenets of the anti-Communism that constituted the ideological core of Cold War liberalism. Democracy, if it were to survive the seductive appeal of totalitarianism, had to become a fighting faith, a faith born out of and tested in social and political conflict. Debate, in particular the format of debating both sides of controversial issues embodied the sort of political conflict that could engender sound conviction, rational decisions, and a committed youth impervious to Communist propaganda. Moreover, debate provided the antidote to communist propaganda. Baird concluded, ‘[c]ollege debate teams are the last groups in this nation where Communist propaganda has any chance of making headway’ (1955, p. 7). No student wishing to win the debate, Burns argued, ‘would take the affirmative on the grounds that we must love the Chinese or that they are merely agrarian radicals’ (p. 7). Burns, so confident in the anti-Communist sentiment of the majority of students, contended that no student would dare argue in favour of Communism but ‘pitch his [sic ] case on the argument that recognition might help pull China out of the Moscow orbit, that it might help build a firmer anti-Communist alliance, that it might make peaceful coexistence possible. He [sic ] would, in short, be directing our attention to the very questions that all American’s might well be debating’ (p. 7). For Schlesinger, however, the ground of the anti-Communist consensus Baird believed to be evident in ‘the majority of students’ was unstable.