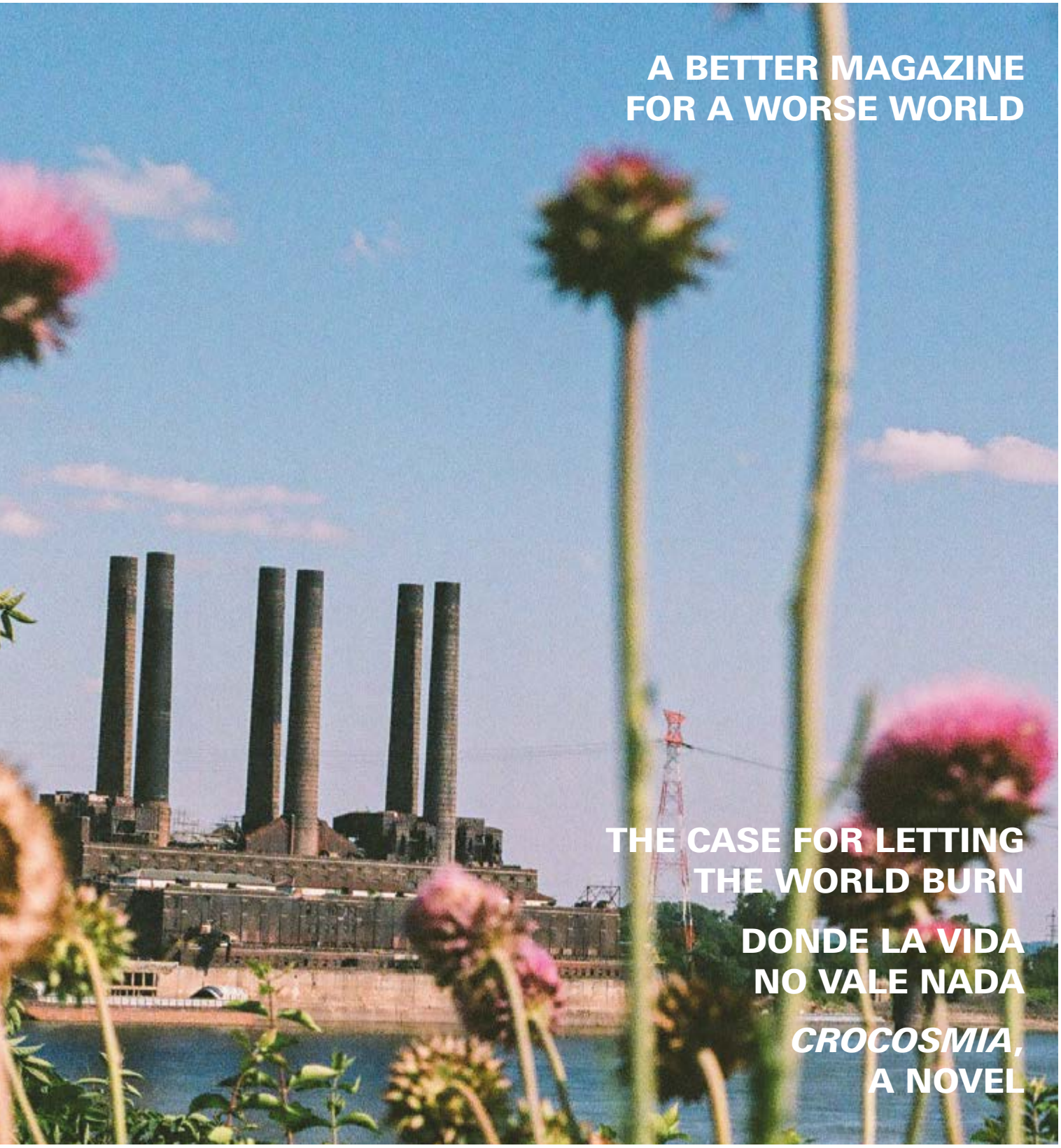
HEATWAVE

SUMMER ‘25 ISSUE 1



A BETTER MAGAZINE FOR A WORSE WORLD

THE CASE FOR LETTING THE WORLD BURN

DONDE LA VIDA NO VALE NADA

CROCOSMIA, A NOVEL

Heatwave is a multi-media project dedicated to sharing experiences and strategizing together in our efforts to break free from the infernal prison of capital. As the world burns and the political horizon grows increasingly grim, we seek to connect comrades around the globe and contribute to building something powerful enough to incinerate that prison. From its ashes, a vision emerges: a world based on the classic principle "from each according to their ability, to each according to their need"—a dignified life on a thriving planet.

Most of our current members are based in the U.S., but we aim to become an international publication that examines struggles globally. In 2025, we're launching our website, a quarterly print magazine, a video channel, and social media. The website will provide previews of each new issue of the magazine, information about ordering print copies, free digital versions of back issues, and printable zines for longer texts. The videos will provide alternative presentations of written material. Our content will cover a range of topics and genres, including reports on recent events, theoretical reflections and analysis, interviews with comrades involved in inspiring projects, reviews of books and films, original artwork, and literature.

While there is no shortage of left media, most English-language publications offer only partial critiques and tepid reformism, or regurgitate debates among 20th-century sects whose material foundations disappeared decades ago. We seek to provide more rigor and depth than the average radical blog or podcast, but to avoid the turgid style of traditional communist polemics and academic journals. Politically, we aim to balance inclusivity with coherence by publishing pieces from a broad spectrum of contributors based all over the world, alongside editorial prefaces providing our own perspective.

CONTRIBUTORS

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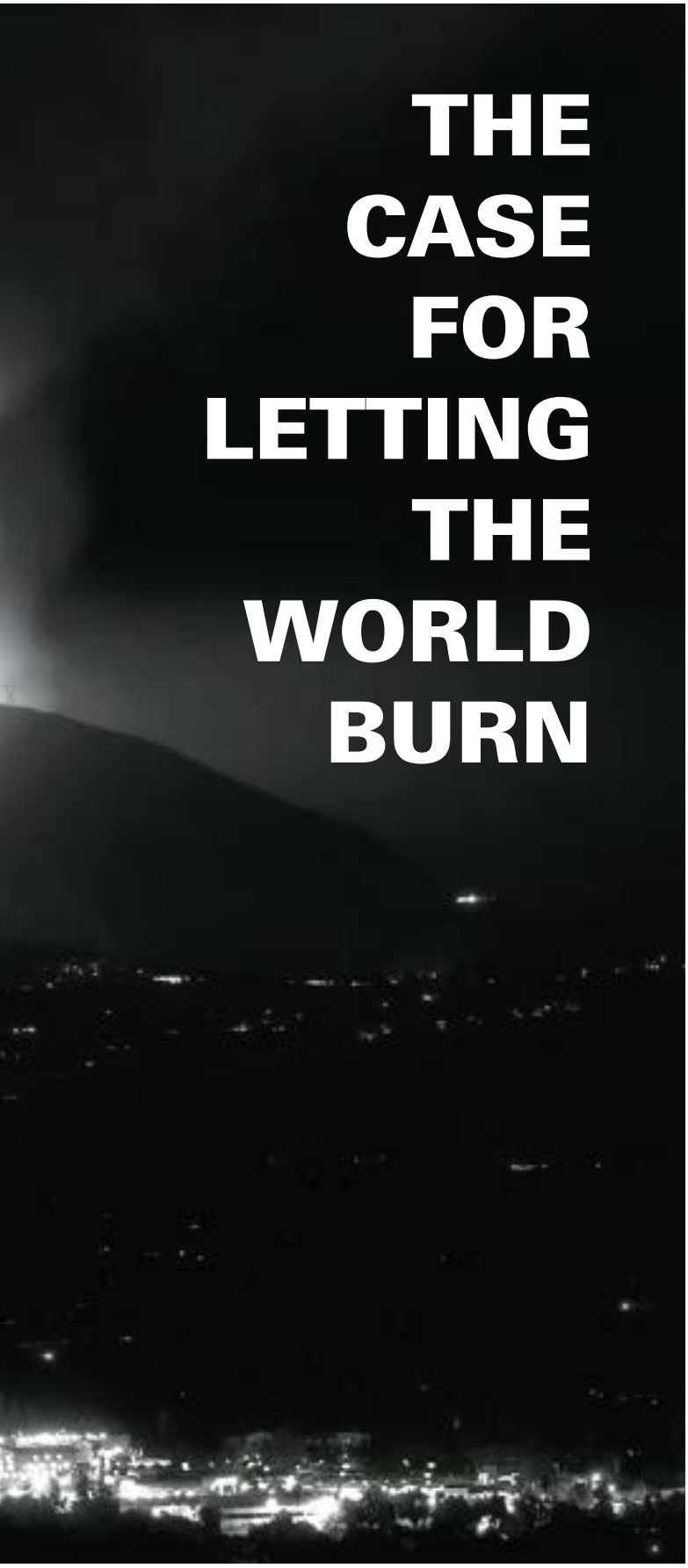


THE CASE FOR LETTING THE WORLD BURN

EDITORIAL

It's not possible to draw up a balance sheet of the times without reviewing the ledger of global catastrophe. Chaos, crisis, destabilization—it's hard to even find the words adequate to express the architectonic character of the compensations: planetary reprisals meted out in familiar forms, but with unpredictable tempos and a strange virulence.[1] *Strange* is perhaps the best we can do for now. The tragedy-farce of this historical train wreck is nothing if not uncanny. There are no parables that satisfy these moments, when the wreckage piles in heaps and clumps, a cruel edifice of defeats, writhing like an eldritch abomination roused from ancient slumber, animated through the intercourse of the species, yet entirely indifferent to it.

Like all years now, 2025 began with fire. There was of course the sequence of wildfires that struck southern California, the most destructive to date, and the most expensive natural disaster in United States history. The long century of fire mismanagement-by-suppression has so clearly come undone that, by now, it would be an aberration for a single year to pass without some record-breaking wildfires devouring unfathomable swaths of land at astonishing paces. Ignition is practically guaranteed: the world is too hot, water too scarce, infrastructure too neglected, tinder too ubiquitous. Fire in these regions has always been a statistical certainty, as the late Mike Davis put it.[2] Now we can say the same of the annual, record-breaking catastrophe itself. All that is left to be decided are the patterns of abandonment apportioned by the administrators of property, which predictably crystallize along lines of class, race and nation. While the uber-wealthy of the Palisades shelled out daily thousands on private firefighting crews to secure their assets, elsewhere California deployed 800 incarcerated workers, working for dollars a day, on multiple fronts to contain the half-dozen winter blazes. Meanwhile, the residents of majority non-white Altadena, historically a bulwark of black homeownership, were served delayed evacuation orders, with the Eaton fire subsequently destroying over 10,000 structures and claiming at least 17 deaths. Almost half of the Altadena's black households were destroyed or damaged. In the disintegrating ecology of the planetary factory, catastrophes assume definite forms as distinct "species of conflagration," to borrow again from Davis. The phylogeny of capitalist reproduction ensures the uneven development of the apocalypse.

Other fires on other shores have proven no less devastating. Ukraine has seen its military front recede as Russian advancements have recovered territory in the east. While the impasse brought Zelenskyy to the negotiating table, weeks of ceasefire talks have been fraught with tension and posturing, to say the least. With the European project facing such dim prospects, the Trump administration has suggested coupling U.S. aid packages and security with privileged access to Ukraine's rare-earth minerals, along with its oil and natural gas reserves—crucial for any revival of manufacturing as part of Trump's promised industrial policies—to be controlled through a joint investment fund. The Sudanese Civil War rages on, drawing belligerents from competing commodity chains, extractive hinterlands, and rural surplus populations. Beset by widespread famine and millions of internally-displaced refugees, the situation is the largest crisis of its kind in the world.

And after fifteen months of genocidal wreckage, with at least 50,000 dead and over 100,000 missing, Israel finally and begrudgingly agreed to an armistice and prisoner exchange with Hamas. A return to colonial hostilities seemed all but assured during the brief détente, as Israel flouted the terms of the agreement, continuing to shoot Gazans, interfere with aid shipments, cut off electricity and escalate its incursions into the West Bank, recovering whatever political legitimacy it could among its fanatical settler constituency. After just two months, the fragile ceasefire collapsed under a cascade of missiles and heavy artillery officially dubbed "Operation Might and Sword." In a single day, the death toll rose by some 400 Palestinians, the majority women and children—one of the deadliest days since the Al-Aqsa Flood. As of this writing, hundreds more have died, over a thousand seriously injured, and over 140,000 displaced, as the IDF resumes ground operations and forced evacuations. In response to Israel's continuous disruption of humanitarian aid during the ceasefire, Houthis executed over 190 attacks on shipping traffic in the Red Sea. The U.S. responded by hitting Yemen with dozens of airstrikes. Not to be outdone, Israel resumed bombing Lebanon, claiming Hezbollah violated its November 2024 ceasefire agreement. Meanwhile, Trump continues to threaten Gazans with yet another kind of F.I.R.E.: real estate development.

If Palestine is a barometer for liberatory prospects more generally, it is telling that the Gaza War should be the most significant conflict since 1973, when the Fourth Arab-Israeli War provided the threshold beyond which the global structure of capitalism would be irreparably altered. Forced into a detente by Arab states, Israel began officially pursuing the "peace process," its utter failure casting a long shadow over the subsequent half century. After decades of warfare mediated by state actors, Palestinian resistance began to take on a more distributed and insurgent quality, characteristic of the civilian-led Intifadas. After the U.S. began supporting Israel in that war, OPEC prosecuted its now-infamous embargo in the first "oil shock" of the 1970s, initiating a sequence of energy crises that accelerated the unraveling of U.S.-led global production.

It feels that we are caught between 1973 and 2025, between collapsing heavens and the unyielding earth below. Like a dying god, capital can barely retain the human flesh that animates it. Meanwhile, promises to resurrect the labor movement reveal themselves as empty acts of necromancy. The blighted accretions of capitalist growth are little more than idle monuments to dead generations. The social peace has come undone. So scarce today are prospects for a return on investments that value chains penetrate the deepest hollows of the earth, leveling and reorganizing its surface, probing for the cheapest inputs, and disrupting the entire biogeochemical metabolism. In tottering, lumbering motion, the planetary factory extends its frail limbs, scours and abrades crust, water, and ice, with fire always soon to follow. Capitalism is the name for this perverted metabolism, imperialism its architecture. Metabolic recompense takes the form of floods and fires, swarms and plagues, species of conflagration witnessed in ever greater frequency.

"Cycles of struggle have the habit of reshuffling the deck, suspending time and space and providing practical truth to the communist hypothesis: the real death of capital is not a given, but a matter of force"

The depravity of the situation should by now be clear. After a decade of ebbs and flows, the wave of struggles initiated after the collapse of the global financial system appears now in retrospect to have crested during the long 2020. Following a series of decisive global defeats for ersatz-social democracy, with the liberal center only barely able to stave off a resurgent far-right by prosecuting a campaign against the left, mass politics once again assumed more insurgent forms: Iran, France,

Haiti, Mexico, Sudan, Algeria, Hong Kong, Chile, Puerto Rico, Lebanon, Iraq, Nigeria, Myanmar, Kazakhstan, Sri Lanka, Kanaky—the list goes on. 2018-2022 witnessed a sequence of historic uprisings both preceding and following the COVID-19 pandemic. In the United States, the George Floyd Rebellion became perhaps the largest and most destructive in U.S. history, torching and leveling numerous buildings and expropriating countless businesses—a general siege on the regime of property and the police that enforce it. In Canada, a cascade

of port and rail blockades executed in solidarity with Wet'suwet'en land defenders throttled the arteries of global commodity flows, just weeks before the pandemic would generalize the effect across the planet.

COVID-19 picked at the scab of "economic recovery." A decade of sluggish growth, stagnant wages, and asset inflation, braced by an addiction to quantitative easing, was by 2019 showing clear signs of strain. The pandemic offered momentary relief to this senescent juggernaut, providing an exogenous explanation for the recession and unemployment. But covid did more than rip off the scab of this festering wound; it brought contradictions long-submerged to the surface. Inflation returned in a force not seen since the 1970s. It turns out that we've long been living in an era of inflation in the form of what Paul Mattick calls "competition by price maintenance," a historical expression of the growing insufficiency of the total social profit.[3] The decades-long interlude of suppressed inflation and low interest rates, from the 1980s to a few years ago, had been underwritten by the historical integration of massive segments of the global population into the circuits of capital—the former USSR and Eastern Bloc, decolonizing countries, and above all China—which allowed producers to maintain low costs and stem inflationary pressures. This temporary fix cannot be repeated. Now those same regions face declining growth, and the prospects for new industrial territories are few and fleeting. Inflation has returned to the historical stage, given its first push by the pandemic rupture of the global supply chain, then a big shove by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Despite persistently maintaining elevated interest rates, central banks have not been able to turn the tide.

This has left governments little choice but to induce recession, thus curbing investment, or else be forced to deal with an increasingly restive populace who can no longer afford basic goods. Neither option can address the structural causes of inflation. Since early 2022, we have been caught in a holding pattern of inflation struggles over the price of inputs and consumer goods, oscillating between the food riots of Martinique, Sri Lanka, Iraq, Sudan, Ecuador or Peru, on the one hand, and the farmers' protests that have spread across the European Union, Latin America, and India on the other. If anything unites these struggles it is the mere inability to survive the post-pandemic order, with prices impairing the social reproduction of different fragments of the class in different ways—too high for some, too low for others. Unfortunately, these conflicts tend to become unified only in the national body, given the function of central banks to maintain prices at the national level. It's no surprise, then, that a retrenched right-wing populism and economic nationalism have only gained momentum in recent years, witnessed in the wave of far-right victories in parliamentary elections and, of course, the bitter re-coronation of Donald Trump.

The abject failures of Biden's industrial policy, the punditry's much-touted "Bidenomics," can be understood only in this dim flickering light of global economic decline. The centrist rhetorical embrace of "supply-side economics" was made politically feasible by a year of riots and pandemic, to be sure. But it was really the shakeout provided by Trump's earlier program of economic nationalism that put the zero-sum game of contemporary industrial policy back on the agenda. It was Trump who threw the first stones at China in the name of making U.S. manufacturing more competitive. It was the early pandemic relief packages (primarily aimed at floundering businesses) that provided proof of concept for the fiscal policies and the role of central banks in maintaining liquidity, both long advocated by the neo-Keynesians who congregated around Biden. The economic continuity between Trump and Biden was obscured by dressing the latter in green garb, championed as historic by the usual suspects on the social democratic left. Together, the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and the CHIPS and Science Act (designed to raise U.S. industrial competitiveness by spending more on infrastructure and education, and by providing tax breaks for onshore manufacturing and renewable energy investment) accomplished precious little beyond rebranding the trade war into a sort of progressive gesture. In the handoff, Biden's technocrats did not foresee the looming threat of inflation that would so quickly dash their hopes and dreams of "modern American industrial strategy." All the familiar macroeconomic indicators—investment in plant and equipment, productivity growth, employment growth—have remained stagnant. Perhaps the only meaningful accomplishment of Bidenomics was achieving record-breaking oil and gas production under the guise of "Green Industrial Policy."

No wonder, then, that Trump would ride back into office primarily as a result of low voter turnout. Having received approximately the same number of votes as in the 2020 election, Trump gained little new support or appeal. 2024 was, if anything, a referendum on the failures of the Democratic Party—yet another final nail in the coffin of American liberalism. Of course, prospects under Trump fair no better. Industrial policy today cannot conjure the return of economic growth, at least not in the absence of full-scale global war and widespread destruction of plant and equipment. While these are no doubt possibilities, they do not present a clear path forward for any government. Threats to seize the Panama Canal or expand U.S. sovereignty over Greenland seem more bombastic than imminent. Control over trade routes and extractive reserves—especially as climate change opens the arctic as a strategic corridor for both—are certainly matters of significance in the zero-sum imperial drama, but breathing life into expansionist rhetoric also contradicts Trump's stated aim of reducing military spending and negotiating arms con-

trol. The return of trade wars, nationalism and belligerent military postures provide clues to the increasing weakness of state administration: the declining ability of governments to function as the political form of the class relation, or even as the "committee for managing the common affairs of the bourgeoisie as a whole" as Marx put it. In the short term, industrial policy will have to overcome intractable inflation and other barriers to investment. The high interest rates being maintained by central banks threaten another debt crisis that will devastate low-income countries. They also deter the borrowing necessary for investment in plant and equipment that industrial policy is ostensibly intended to promote. Other options to promote manufacturing, like the much-discussed tariffs, threaten to exacerbate inflation in the prices of basic goods. Trump's waffling over these issues has tanked global equities markets and raised the specter of stagflation. The early months of the second Trump administration have demonstrated this double bind, a clear representation of the era. The state can do little more than dispense violence to manage the decline. Halcyon days indeed.

Chaos and revanchism seem the order of the day. We are living in the long shadow of defeat, the undertow of the long 2020. What the coming cycles of struggle will bring is unclear. We wish we could promise that the death of liberalism will become the real death of politics: an end to the separation between the political and economic spheres. Rosa Luxemburg articulated most clearly that the unity of the two finds antagonistic expression in a revolutionary crisis, when the antinomy between the struggle *within* and the struggle *against* becomes suspended in the emergence of a communist program.[4] While some kind of a collapse is certainly underway, it has not been accompanied by the widespread development of organizational, strategic, or tactical forms that present such a resolution. Instead, we are left with a balance of forces, always contending and shifting.

Revolution is not an organizational riddle, but an ecosystemic problem. Many projects make their burnt offerings to the communist prospect. Some offer past ideologies and organizational forms as catch-all solutions to the present: unions, autonomism, political parties, republicanism, guerrilla cells, etc.[5] Others relish in atomization as something to be valorized, groupuscules and puritan cults of all sorts, each vying for the mantle of radical idealism. While the past is certainly foreclosed, the fog has not yet burned off to reveal tomorrow's horizons. The flickering spasms of the weary leviathan saturate all perspective. It's difficult to discern any direction in the twilight. All that's available now is knowledge of the ecology, the conditions of all future activity. Uncertainty is given, inquiry is necessary. *Heatwave* is our humble offering to this ecosystem.

Heatwave begins with the gambit that communism remains a distinct possibility, even if its contours are formless and its prospects bleak. The frequency and repetition of today's major conflicts are modulations of a cadence that began in 2005, when social irruptions began to spread from the French *banlieues*, the *Z*ócalo of Oaxaca, and the *Suea Daeng* (Red Shirts) of Thailand to the riots of Exarcheia, the occupation of Tahir Square, and the movement of *indignados.* The movement of squares coalesced from 2011 to 2013, when the financial crisis was translated by state administrators into public austerity and debt in high- and low-income countries alike, initiating a cycle of escalating antagonism against particular state institutions that set the terms of social reproduction—the police, transportation authorities, revenue agencies, energy departments. Conflicts over survival unfolded in the spheres of circulation and reproduction. The 2018-2022 wave of this long cycle proved particularly incendiary in this regard. To some, the radiance of the flames suggested a guiding light to exit the stage entirely, so when the fires were extinguished, despair set in. In those moments when we glimpse the far horizon, its distant glow can trick us into thinking we have entered a moment of rupture.[6]

It is a bitter pill to swallow, but we have not even come close. Instead, what we glimpse is the assurance of the inevitable blazes to come, the certainty of struggle, if nothing else. Cycles of struggle have the habit of reshuffling the deck, suspending time and space and providing practical truth to the communist hypothesis: the real death of capital is not a given, but a matter of force. If one lesson has percolated through the cracks and fissures of these moments, it is that every limit is also a condition of possibility. Reading the signposts—the failures, limitations, partial victories, tragedies—is our only guide to the geography of conflict. The communist hypothesis cannot be validated in advance of practice, but must instead be constructed *in situ,* when the partisan contours begin to take shape and choices must be made. That is, the lessons of the past can be verified only in the revolutionary shattering of the world. What lessons can we suppose today then? How are they to be derived and disseminated? Our answer is insufficient, but necessary. Correspondence is a form partisan inquiry and preparation elemental to our turbulent, but decidedly non-revolutionary times.

— Heatwave Collective, March 2025

countrysteak

Notes

1: "Nature meanwhile is taking back the reins over history, making its own titanic compensations, at the expense of powers, especially over natural and engineered infrastructures, that empires once thought to control. In this light, the 'Anthropocene' with its hint of the promethean, seems especially ill-fitted to the reality of apocalyptic capitalism." Mike Davis, "Thanatos Triumphant," Sidecar, March 2022.

2: Mike Davis, "The Case for Letting Malibu Burn," Longreads, December 2018.

3: Paul Mattick, Jr., The Return of Inflation: Money and Capital in the 21st Century (Reaktion Books, 2024).

4: Rosa Luxemburg, The Mass Strike, the Political Party, and the Trade Unions (1906).

5: Here want to emphasize two problems: nostalgia for past ideologies and organizational forms that may be inappropriate or impossible to revive en masse under current conditions, and the tendency to fetishize particular forms to the exclusion of others—as opposed to fostering a diverse ecosystem of forms that could facilitate the worldwide unleashing of communist measures (centered on expropriation) necessary to undermine capitalism and its corollaries (the state, gender, race, species, etc.). On this latter point, Phil Neel's observations in "The Knife at Your Throat" (Brooklyn Rail, October 2022) are instructive: "On their own, both illegality and the various forms of self-consciously political organizing—ranging from 'autonomous' activities such as mutual aid to the institutional projects of formal trade unionism or policy advocacy—tend to remain segregated from one another and from the population at large, with each form romanticized by some political faction within the broad but shallow 'Left.' … If we take a more expansive view… the potential to build communist power is just as visible in the increasing popular interest in unionization as in the semi-improvised, semi-organized looting networks that developed through the George Floyd uprising…. It only grows into something more when the walls dividing the various channels of subsistence are broken down."

6: For a good analysis of this cycle of struggles, see "The Holding Pattern" (Endnotes 3, 2013), which focuses on the 2011-2013 wave known as "the movement of squares" and its origins in the 2008 financial crash (and the crash's own deeper causes), and "Onward Barbarians" (Endnotes blog, 2020), on the first half of the more incendiary wave we've been calling "the long 2020," characterized by "non-movements" of "revolutionaries without a revolution" (terms originally coined by Asef Bayat in reference to the Arab Spring). For clarification of the relationship between these two waves in light of subsequent developments, see "Neither Prophets nor Orphans: An Interview with Endnotes," Chuang blog, February 2025. Also see Jasper Bernes' critique of a popular Leninist-reformist account of this cycle's ostensible lessons, "What Was To Be Done? Protest and Revolution in the 2010s," Brooklyn Rail, June 2024.

ON THE TRUMP BLITZKRIEG

By S. Darby

In the first five weeks of Trump's second term, *The New York Times* ran six separate opinion pieces describing the experience as a "blitzkrieg."[1] One reader wrote to express how, "we've witnessed a rapid onslaught… of executive orders, proclamations and mandates, including the firing of at least a dozen inspectors general."[2] On February 22, the Editorial Board wrote that "Mr. Trump has waged a concerted and well-choreographed assault on the institutions of American government and the longstanding principles of its foreign policy…"[3] David Wallace-Wells framed it as:

> [A] blitzkrieg against core functions of the state, operating largely outside the boundaries set by history, precedent, and constitutional law, and designed to reduce the shape and purpose of government power to the whims, and spite, of a single man. Or perhaps two men.[4]

That newspaper was hardly the only mainstream outlet relying on the moment's most salient military metaphor. Would we echo this blitzkrieg discourse to describe the whirlwind of executive actions, the storm within the administrative agencies, and the spectacular bluster coming from the U.S. federal government? I think we should.

But first, let's distinguish our position from that of the liberals. Lately, the typical use of the term "blitzkrieg" reflects, in large part, the shock of loss that Democrats are experiencing. Steve Bannon gleefully explained this as an intended effect of the MAGA strategy:

> When you're winning, it's like blitzkrieg… They're surrendering without a fight. This is extraordinary, and that's their urgency: You got to keep pounding. Don't let them up. Don't let them have a breath. Don't let them regroup. Don't let them organize.[5]

Truly, in the face of the blitzkrieg, the liberals can't stop Trump now. It's just like Denmark's historic inability to stop the Nazis. The Democratic Party is in crisis. But we don't own their electoral loss, and we can't do anything about their powerlessness.

A major reason liberals are bound to keep losing is that they're myopically focused on the blitzkrieg's illegality. Laurence Tribe described Trump as "the most lawless and scofflaw president we have ever seen."[6] For Noah Millman in the *New York Times*, "[t]he question is whether [the Trump blitzkrieg] will transform our constitutional order fruitfully yet again or accelerate a final degeneration into Caesarism." For us, on the other hand, we wouldn't defend the neoliberal *status quo ante*—except maybe insofar as it provided easier terrain for us to navigate. Trump's lack of respect for the Constitution isn't his greatest crime. Rather, we're responding to his amplified repression and how he's consolidated power around a certain pole of economic nationalism.[7]

We also recognize that the mainstream media trades in hyperbole, outrage, and moralism. David Wallace-Wells admits in his February 5 piece that, "[a]t the moment, it is hard to see it but hysterically." For us, the media's clichés are generally distractions when what we need is analysis.

And yet, we have a few reasons to embrace the term blitzkrieg. First, we register the actions of Trump, Musk, and this new authoritarian rightwing movement in January through March as if they were also attacks*... on us actual "leftists," as well as on ordinary proletarians in general*. They don't know us very well and their rhetoric shows they certainly don't understand us, but it seems clear that we are the real enemies they militate against. The disappearances and attempted deportations of Mahmoud Khalil and other participants in the Gaza solidarity movement are evidence of this, along with ICE's more recent targeting of labor organizers.[8] The more idealistic among the Trumpists (Thiel, Yarvin, Bannon) seek to forge an autocratic state that ruthlessly polices and exploits its proletarians. The more pragmatic ones see opportunities for power and personal profit. They haven't won our consent. So, to everyone in that coalition, we are an obstacle to those ambitions, a problem to be solved.

Second, though a cliché, "blitzkrieg" nicely captures the shock of these attacks. The word evokes the terror of being overwhelmed by an unanticipated oppositional force, the chaos in our camp. We imagine the noise of tanks, artillery, and aircraft. The blitzkrieg renders our resistance fragmented and uncoordinated. Material defeat is coupled with psychological pain, disorientation, the loss of control and hope. It interrupts the rhythms of daily life, breaks time—moments and days advance suddenly, without affording any period of reflection.

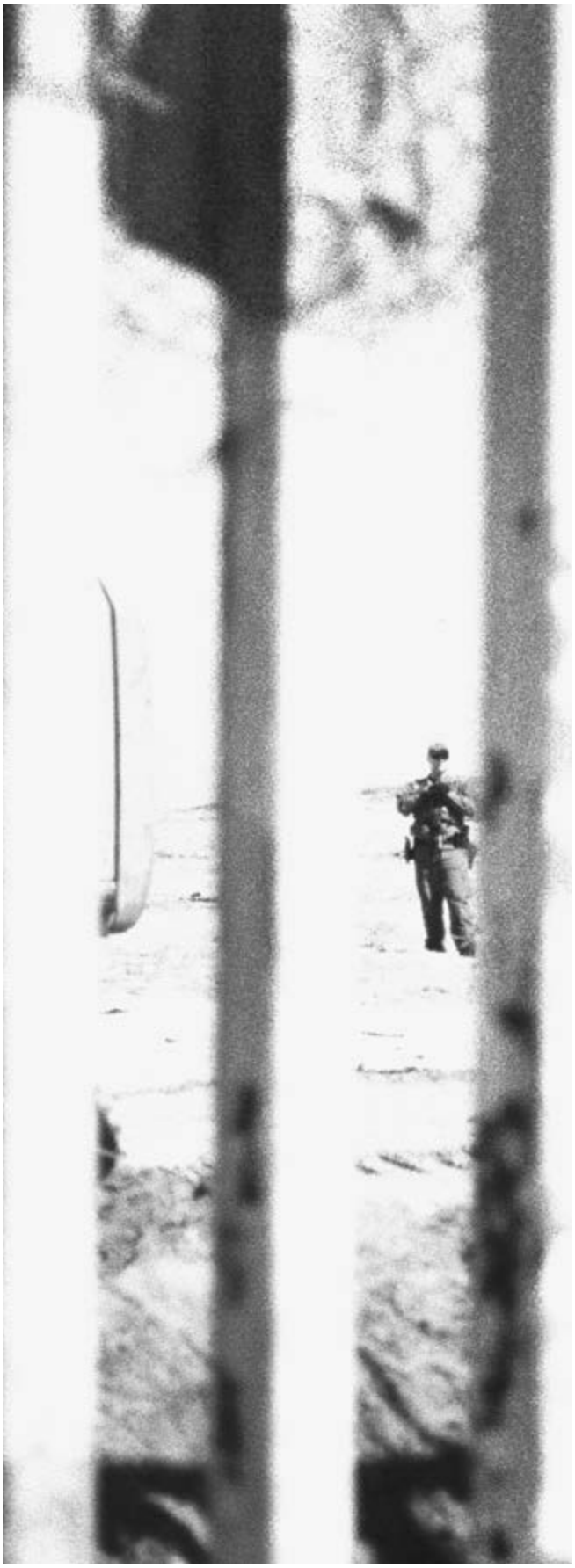
That's what it feels like lately. Laurence Tribe is overwhelmed by the task of addressing all of the administration's illegal acts ("The very fact that the illegal actions have come out with the speed of a rapidly firing Gatling gun makes it very hard for people to focus on any one of them. That's obviously part of the strategy," he writes). For us, there is a rapid upending of our lives, projects, and strategic interventions. We marvel at the fast pace of change, and only too late do we recognize our unpreparedness. We are not ready to answer the burning questions of the moment.

When Trump was reelected, political analysts predicted economic disaster and corollary civil unrest. At the time, we knew it would be naive to assume that everything Trump threatened would actually happen. We also knew it was equally foolish to ignore the potential and actual threats presented by his victory. We saw *something* coming, but didn't know what it would be. It was spectacle, no less so for our recognition of this fact.

Once in office, the administration didn't delay in implementing its plans. Trump signed an executive order that denies the constitutional birthright to citizenship. The Senate is now pushing forward a budget that funds mass deportations and a border wall. Trump's allies propose camps. They want to deputize 10,000 private citizens, empowering them to round up their neighbors. Trump removed a member of the NLRB, denying it quorum, emboldening Amazon to refuse to recognize unions. The EEOC will sue to stop what it calls "discrimination" against Christians and white people. Musk does the Nazi salute and helms the absurd DOGE. MAGA shitheads celebrate chauvinistic nationalism and white supremacy. The right is ascendant and it feels like we are surrounded.

Trump's blitzkrieg forces us to become reactive, impairing our inquiry. How does labor organize without an NLRB?[9] Where is it safe for pregnant, queer, and/or trans people? What can we do for our friends and family who are losing their jobs? Where are the ICE raids and deportations happening this week? These are all pertinent questions, of course; we need to answer them. But it's also worth pausing to reflect. As always, we must analyze the conjuncture while we strategize and respond creatively.

So, here's a deeper reason why the metaphor "blitzkrieg" is apt for us to describe the Trump strategy: shock and awe can make it hard to assess the material realities. For us, a substantial part of our problem is confusion about how to grapple with a political spectacle that obscures the concrete work Trump and his world have done. As historians now recognize, the German army never articulated a military doctrine of blitzkrieg.[10] Hitler is reported to have derided the term, calling it "completely idiotic."[11] To the Germans at the start of World War II, the invasions were simply about applying available technology and capacity to the battlefield. Military



countrysteak

units were carefully positioned and forces energized, then unleashed. The opposing armies, though numerically superior in some cases, were simply outmaneuvered. Reeling from defeat, the word "blitzkrieg" was invented by non-Germans to describe the attacks.

Like Germany's neighbors, we're also victims of the psychological dimension of blitzkrieg. Although we knew *something* was coming, we're still struggling to think clearly and recognize that these attacks didn't come out of nowhere. The right's strategy is the logical application of its power. And, frankly, the architects of this moment had drafted a plan well in advance. Trump, while puerile and lacking a consistent ideology, is a skilled political organizer. He held dozens of large rallies in 2024, raised over a billion dollars, defeated challengers and folded them into his project. Musk constantly vents sheer idiocy, yet he's the wealthiest person alive and controls one of the few social media platforms with mass reach. The MAGA movement has a cadre of professional operatives, some of whom are young and energized while others are savvy and experienced.

Some of us were surprised that such an ambitious and profoundly unpopular project could ascend to such heights of power. The architects of Project 2025 were not surprised—they were prepared. Describing the Department of State in the Project 2025 *Mandate for Leadership*, Kiron K. Skinner frames the incoming Trump administration as a minoritarian faction within the broader U.S. State bureaucracy. She anticipated stark resistance to a "conservative" agenda because "large swaths of the State Department's workforce are left-wing."[12] (Though, of course, "left" means something entirely different to us, the point here is that they are internal enemies.) Nevertheless, they built a strong-enough coalition that they are now dictating the policies of American government. They are playing by Carl Schmitt's rules: as the sovereign, Trump gets to define the exceptions. They planned to have Trump sign these 70-some executive orders immediately upon taking office. Will they be deemed legal? Does it matter? There's no legal barrier to a *fait accompli*. They don't need to win all hearts and minds. In a hegemonic struggle, the powers that be are not trying to get you to agree that they're right; they're trying to convince you that they're the only way out of a crisis. The point of Trump's blitzkrieg is to make us ask "Why even bother?"

Here's why we bother: the question of political limits is a question of social force. We still can build our social force. As Stuart Hall said, "no victories are permanent or final."[13] The point now is to resist the idea that we've lost the battle before it's even begun. Now is the time to bother our enemies.

Notes

1: Carolyn Faggioni, et al., "Assessing Trump's 'Wrecking Ball' First Week," January 28, 2025; David Wallace-Wells, "This Isn't Reform. It's Sabotage," February 5, 2025; Charlie Savage, "Trump Brazenly Defies Laws in Escalating Executive Power Grab," February 5, 2025; Noah Millman, "Welcome to America's Fourth Great Constitutional Rupture," February 10, 2025; Zeynep Tufekci, "The Pharmaceutical Industry Heads Into Musk's Wood Chipper," February 11, 2025; and The Editorial Board, "Who Will Stand Up to Trump on Ukraine?," February 22, 2025.

2 :Faggioni, "Assessing Trump's 'Wrecking Ball' First Week."

3: The Editorial Board, "Who Will Stand Up to Trump on Ukraine?"

4: Wallace-Wells, "This Isn't Reform. It's Sabotage."

5: Isaac Arnsdorf and Natalie Allison, "In Trump's Whirlwind First Two Months, Speed and Aggression Are the Point," *The Washington Post*, March 27, 2025.

6: Steven Greenhouse, "Trump's Disregard for US Constitution 'a Blitzkrieg on the Law', Legal Experts Say," *The Guardian,* February 1, 2025.

7: As Jamie Merchant explores in *Endgame: Economic Nationalism and Global Decline* (Reaktion, 2024), economic nationalism has increasingly become an ideology shared, in a variety of forms, by not only the Republican and Democratic parties in the U.S., but also by many "socialists" here and abroad from Bernie Sanders to Xi Jinping. See review in this issue of *Heatwave*.

8: See, for example, "Now they're targeting labor: Union farmworker Alredo 'Lelo' Juarez Zeferino seized by ICE," *People's World*, April 1, 2025.

9: Hypothetically, the end of the NLRB could actually provide an opportunity for a revival of something like the early 1930s labor illegalism that the institution was designed to contain. See "No NLRB? No Problem!" *Industrial Worker*, February 7, 2025.

10: Azar Gat, *War and Strategy in the Modern World: From Blitzkrieg to Unconventional Terrorism* (Routledge, 2020).

11: David Reynolds, *The Long Shadow: The Great War and the Twentieth Century* (Simon & Schuster, 2014).

12: Paul Dans and Steven Groves (eds.), *Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise 2025* (The Heritage Foundation, 2023).

13: Stuart Hall, *Selected Political Writings: The Great Moving Right Show and Other Essays*, ed. Sally Davison, et al. (Duke University Press, 2017).

CLASS AND DISASTER IN VALENCIA

By prole.info

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"No capital will be invested for the good of our great-grandchildren."

–Amadeo Bordiga

"They know the value of words but they don't know how much of the future is contained in the workday of a laborer."

–Lucía Sánchez Saornil

"How are you?" I say, tossing a spongy green ball to the eight-year-old in front of me. I've found that eight-year-olds are far more likely to pay attention if I throw them a ball at the same time as I ask them a question. And this is the spongiest ball I could find, because if not, they would find a way to hurt each other with it. The semi-private Catholic school I'm teaching in is not a great environment for learning. There are too many students per class. The walls echo. It's loud. The kids don't really want to learn English. They're used to being yelled at by teachers and administrators and forced to sit in a seat and do exercises in a book. By the time they get to our extracurricular English classes, they'd rather be running around in the courtyard or playing soccer or basketball. Still, the teachers are doing our best. Coaxing, praising, occasionally threatening to talk to their parents. Telling them to stop bullying the poor kid recently arrived from an active war zone who sits in the corner covering his ears when it gets too loud. Telling them not to hug the crying kid, because he clearly doesn't want to be hugged by them right now after they were just being mean to him. Trying to teach a bit about empathy and respect and consent. With luck, they even learn some English.

"How are you?" I repeat. The last few kids have said, "I am happy." "I am bored." And "I am very very very very very happy." I make a mental note to teach them "fantastic" and "great" so they stop overusing "very." This eight-year-old thinks for a moment and says, "I am sad."

"Why?" I ask. And she reaches the limits of her English and switches into Spanish.

"Because of *what happened*."

"Oh. I'm sorry," I say, giving her a hug. "Did you have family in the affected zones?"

"No. But it's sad."

"Yes." I say, and think of how to transition into a lesson on sea animal vocabulary in English. I can't think of a segue and ask, "Does anyone know how to say *'medusa'* in English?" Half a dozen children scream "JELLYFISH! JELLYFISH!" The refugee kid and I both cover our ears from the noise.

This was our first class back after the school was closed for several weeks because of *what happened*.

WHAT HAPPENED

What happened was that the Autonomous Community of Valencia experienced the worst "natural" disaster in Spain in decades. There was a "cut-off low"—a meteorological phenomenon known by the acronym DANA in Spanish—basically a storm that drops massive amounts of rain in a short amount of time. From what I've read, they happen from time to time in the Mediterranean, but with rising sea temperatures, they're expected to be more frequent and more intense. On October 29th, 2024 one hit Valencia. Over a year's worth of rain fell in eight hours. A town in the mountains broke the all-time rain record for Spain. This caused massive flash flooding. Towns in the mountains, and especially the suburbs south of the city of Valencia were inundated. Bridges were destroyed. Over 220 people were killed. Over 15,000 homes were damaged or destroyed. And over 100,000 cars were totaled.

This part of the world is no stranger to flooding. Valencia, which is the third largest city in Spain, is on the Mediterranean coast where the river Turia flows into the sea. It has the second busiest port in the Mediterranean (after the Spanish port of Algeciras near the strait of Gibraltar) and has high speed rail that runs straight to Madrid. Throughout its history as a Roman city, an Islamic city, and a medieval Christian city, Valencians have had to deal with water management—flood prevention, and the use of water for irrigation. A storm in 1957, during the dictatorship of Francisco Franco, caused the river Turia to overflow its banks and flood the city. 6000 houses were destroyed and 81 people were killed according to official statistics, although people suspect that the real number was over 300 dead. After that, the government instituted a massive public works project changing the course of the river. The old riverbed is now a long park that runs through the city. It's a nice place for a bike ride on a sunny afternoon. The river was diverted to an artificial channel south of the city. In the October storm, the city of Valencia proper was not badly flooded, but the suburbs and towns south of the city were devastated.

Several days before the recent floods, the Spanish meteorological service had warned about severe weather on the 29th. The University of Valencia suspended its classes the day before. The port of Valencia closed at 7:00 in the morning on the 29th. By 10:30 people were already being rescued from flooding in the mountains nearby. At 13:00 the president of Valencia, Carlos Mazón, gave a press conference saying that the storm was expected to dissipate by 18:00 that evening. At 19:00, trains between Madrid and Valencia stopped running. As the water rushed down out of the mountains, more and more areas flooded. More and more people died. Finally at 20:12 Mazón sent out a general red alert.

I remember I was sitting in my kitchen with a few house guests, and we were startled as *all* our cell phones buzzed and went off at the same time, making a horrible emergency alert sound. My first thought was that it was a terrorist attack by the Israeli government, like the pager bombs in Lebanon. Ridiculous, but a year of genocide, of watching the steadily unfolding apocalypse in Gaza caused by the Israeli state will put those thoughts in your head.

THE PEOPLE, THE STATE AND THE APOCALYPSE

The Prime Minister of Spain is the crafty and good-looking Pedro Sánchez. His Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) is in government at the national level, with a coalition of left, and Catalan and Basque nationalist parties. But Spain has a fairly decentralized state system, where a lot of government functions are devolved to the level of the Autonomous Community.

The right-wing Popular Party (PP) is in government in Valencia, and the president is Carlos Mazón. He won in the most recent election in 2023 and formed a coalition government with the support of the far-right party Vox. Vox is a party that broke away from the PP (with sketchy funding from Iranian exiles) and are now the third biggest party in Spain. PP are the first and PSOE are the second. Vox position themselves as the anti-establishment voice of the people (hence the name), and their idea of "the people" is a very specific one. They are strongly anti-immigrant, worry about birth rates of Spanish women, play down the brutality of Franco's dictatorship, want to recentralize the Spanish state, deny climate change exists, want to get rid of bike lanes, scapegoat feminists, communists, Muslims, queer people, and especially Catalan and Basque separatists. And they have the support of an important part of Spain's elites. I remember walking around in Salamanca, the poshest neighborhood in Madrid, before the last Spanish election, and there were Vox posters on every light post.

After coming to power, the PP–Vox government in Valencia targeted organizations that promote the Valencian language. Valencian and Catalan are mutually intelligible dialects of the same language, but since Catalan separatism is seen as such a threat to Spanish national unity, Spanish nationalists sometimes insist that they are completely different languages. The law eliminated government subsidies to organizations that "make us ashamed to be Valencian." During the dictatorship it was illegal to publish, write official documents, or educate children in languages other than Spanish.

The PP—Vox government in Valencia also eliminated the Valencian Emergency Unit—a coordinating body between different emergency services created under a previous PSOE-lead government of Valencia in response to flooding that killed 6 people in 2019.

A fight between Vox and PP at the national level in the summer of 2024 meant that Vox ministers in the Valencian government were removed from power, and the PP continued in power as a minority (still depending on Vox votes though). The split happened because Vox leaders accused the PP of being insufficiently hard on immigration for not opposing a PSOE law supporting refugee children. The Spanish border is a slaughterhouse. In 2024 alone, under the "socialist" government, over 10,000 people died trying to get into Spain—the majority drowned at sea. Vox have spent a lot of time blaming immigrants for everything, especially refugee children. They have turned "*MENA*" (the Spanish government acronym for "unaccompanied foreign minor") into a slur.

Such was the state of the state when disaster hit Valencia.

I've always been a fan of zombie shows and I'd recently been watching the zombie-adjacent series *The Last of Us*. In almost every zombie apocalypse, when disaster hits, and the state is not in control anymore, social

ties completely fall apart. Everyone's first instinct is to protect their immediate family and be hostile to anyone else. The result is a war between roaming bands of survivors. This tells us less about human nature and more about the imagination of the big businessmen who fund these series. They rightly worry that hoards of poor people would take their property if they were not constantly protected by the government. Still, I admit to being worried about the *social* effects of a "natural" disaster like this, especially in a context where racism and the far-right have been growing.

With the complete mismanagement of the warnings and evacuation, the state had more or less failed. Some emergency services worked furiously, but an effective response by the government (Valencian or Spanish) had not been organized. On the other hand, regular people did react. As soon as the flood waters had receded, people kicked into action. It was very heartening to see that people's first reaction was to talk to their neighbors, see what they needed, gather together as many supplies as they could, and help out. Literally tens of thousands of people walked south out of the city of Valencia to help with the flood clean-up. I helped shoveling mud and cleaning for several days in the affected area, and later organizing supplies in a community center. As I headed toward the flood zone, there were people coming up towards the city covered in mud and looking exhausted. I joined people walking south. They were carrying shovels and brooms, hauling shopping carts full of food, bottled water, sandwiches, diapers, toilet paper, and cleaning supplies, giving them to anyone who needed them. I crossed a long foot and bike bridge over the new channel of the Turia with thousands of other people. Just on that bridge I remember hearing people speaking Spanish, Valencian, English, Arabic, Portuguese, Italian and what I think was Bengali. Everyone was engaged in a massive project of mutual aid. For weeks after the disaster, you would see people covered in mud all around town, and there was a real feeling of collective solidarity. Almost everyone I know in Valencia helped out in some way, either going to the affected areas, watching someone's children so they could go to the affected areas, or donating supplies or labor to the relief effort. I even heard interviews with farmers who drove their tractors down to the affected areas and moved the destroyed cars out of the way. For the first couple days, it was clear that regular people were being far more effective than the state. You started to see a slogan on banners hung from bridges, on social media, and spray-painted everywhere: "Only the people save

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the people!"—in Spanish or Valencian depending on your particular view of "the people."

MONKEYS WITH PISTOLS

While most people have a healthy distrust of government and rightly see politicians as self-serving and bought-off, the state still usually has a kind of halo of the common good about it. It's the place where everyone should come together and bring their grievances and work out their common problems. As the response to the disaster unfolded, it became more and more difficult to believe that the state was there to help everyone.

After several days of a massive self-organized mutual aid effort, the Valencian government tried to insert itself. They set a meeting point in the center of the city, and organized city buses to take people to the affected zones. While this did save some people a long walk, the government had different priorities. Volunteers were furious when one group of a dozen or so city buses, filled with hundreds of people, stopped in the parking lot of a big shopping mall that had been flooded. Clearly the government saw in all this solidarity some free labor that could be used to save businesses some money. The volunteers angrily refused to clean the mall and instead walked to the nearest town. Videos and voice messages of the disbelief and anger were all over social media. "We didn't come here to clean a Zara. We came here to help people," said one person. Another said of the government relief effort, "This is being directed by monkeys with pistols"—a Spanish idiom that refers to irresponsible, dangerous people.

Two days later, on November 3rd, a media event backfired on the politicians. The King and Queen of Spain, Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, and Valencian President Carlos Mazón organized a joint visit to the town of Paiporta, one of the worst affected areas with the highest death toll. There was a massive police presence and the bridges over the new channel of the Turia were closed. For a photo op, the government was cutting off the main route that the tens of thousands of volunteers had been using to get down to the southern suburbs. The photo op did not go well. The people cleaning up the town were outraged. Mazón and Sánchez quickly retreated. Sánchez's car windows were smashed. The aristocrats tried to talk to people and were shouted at and had mud thrown at them. Mazón imagined that this was anger against the national government and tried another visit weeks later where he was also shouted down and forced to leave.

The far-right tried to capitalize on the disaster to push their particular agenda, and to try to place as much blame as possible on the "socialist" government. Initially they tried to work up a panic about looting in the flood zones, but it was so clear that the majority of the looting was just people taking necessities from flooded supermarkets, and this didn't really take off. The sheer diversity of the volunteers cleaning up the city made it difficult to blame immigrants. It looks likely that San-

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chez's car windows were smashed by fascists on the ground in Paiporta. The far-right conspiracy theorist, and TV and podcast host Iker Jiménez spread rumors that the government was covering up deaths. In an interview with a member of the Spanish military, he suggested that the military high command needed to act independently of the government, they should just step in and take control of the situation. He also had to cut ties with one of his reporters after video surfaced of the reporter in the flood zone kneeling down to get mud on himself before going on camera—to make it seem like he had been in the thick of things. A far-right group with links to Vox called Revuelta organized a protest about the mismanaging of the disaster response. Their name means "revolt" and on stickers and t-shirts they use the slogan "Revolt against separatism." Their protest only got about 300 people.

Since then there have been several much larger protests organized by various Valencian community groups against the government of Mazón. The first three had between 80,000 and 130,000 people each. In the first, protesters smeared the palace of the Valencian government with mud, and when riot police formed a line to protect it, people chanted "Where were you on the first day?" In the second, masses of people all set off the emergency alert sounds on their phones at exactly 20:12. When a Vox media personality (known as "Vox's black guy" because he's from Cameroon) went to one of the protests, he was confronted and kicked out, as people chanted, "Fascists off our streets!" Thankfully, it doesn't seem that the far -right have been able to turn the disaster to their advantage. They haven't been able to destroy people's immediate reaction of empathy for other people in a bad situation… for the moment anyway.

The more established political parties are less interested in shaking things up. The PP dismissed the massive protests, saying they were the work of "Catalanists." In his first statement in the Valencian legislature after the disaster, Mazón thanked the king and queen for their empathy and bravery. For their part, PSOE seem threatened by the distrust in government, and have tried to blame everything on the far-right. They want to counter the idea that the state is made up of heavily armed apes and have been trying to paint "Only the people save the people!" as a far-right slogan. The leader of the PSOE in Valencia talked about "climate change deniers" and "state deniers" as the same thing. And Pedro Sanchez has been pushing the idea that "We are all the state."

BACK TO CLASS

If the fiction that "We are all the state" seems pretty ridiculous in light of recent events, "the people" are an equally ridiculous starting point for understanding what's happening. The people can be the totality of citizens subject to the rule of a particular government. Or, the people can be defined more narrowly by language, food, traditions, religion, race. Usually both definitions sit on top of each other. In either case, state institutions are the most important element that create the people: either the abstract fact of being subject to a specific government, or more concrete institutions like the school system, immigration enforcement, language laws, subsidies for certain kinds of cultural events. Being a people is, to a large extent, a question of having a state, and states justify their rule by being the state of a particular people.

Both in everyday life and during a climate disaster, how you experience life is overwhelmingly defined by your relation to property and the means of production, and therefore to work—it is defined by class. Even after Mazón's government finally sent out the warnings, plenty of people were still working. Bike delivery riders employed by app companies could be seen pedaling hard in the wind and the rain. A number of delivery drivers for Spain's largest supermarket Mercadona were seen driving well after it was safe. After the destruction of so many houses, Valencian landlords have been taking the opportunity to raise rents. In the aftermath of the disaster, police have continued to evict families of squatters. Amancio Ortega, the billionaire owner of the clothing chain Zara, is as Spanish as the volunteers who refused to clean out the mall. It is not "the people" who organized a massive mutual aid effort, quicker and more effective than the state. It is a diverse and activated working class.

We've been back to work at the semi-private Catholic school for over a month now, and something is brewing. Management have been talking about how the students have missed out on a lot of classes. One day after a long weekend we receive a message that all the English classes will be 25% longer for 5 weeks to make up for lost class time. Oh, and this time won't be paid—since we continued to receive our salaries when the school was closed, they say they already paid for these classes. The Spanish government have passed a series of laws to cover salaries of employees who work for businesses affected by the flooding, so it's obvious the school is just taking advantage. I quickly message a friend who is a labor militant in Madrid and another in Galicia to make sure I have a handle on our rights under Spanish labor law. The teachers are pissed off, worried and having an animated conversation in our private chat group. We've been getting guilt-tripped about how our students will be behind, and how difficult it is to run a small English school. In the end we agree on a strategy. We arrive at school and have a tense argument with our boss that is cut short when we all have to go into class. I do my regular routine, throwing around my spongy ball, reviewing vocabulary and trying to teach a few new things. At the regular time, the teachers give each other a look through the windows of our classrooms, and we leave class, simply not doing the extra time. Our boss looks furious and shocked. After a day and a half

of this direct action he agrees to pay us for the extra time. So far, since we were all in it together, he has not been able to retaliate against us. Solidarity and direct action get the goods.

HOPE

We're now several months on from the floods. "Mazón resign!" "Mazón Murderer! and "20:12" are graffitied all over the city—alongside "Israel = murderers!" The spectacular tragedy of climate-related disasters is slowly giving way to the everyday tragedy of capitalist daily life. I'm re-reading an old text on natural disasters. It's by Amadeo Bordiga, the former leader of the Italian Communist Party—he was removed and replaced with the more orthodox, more pro-Stalin Antonio Gramsci. In 1951 the river Po had flooded, killing 84 people. Bordiga makes the point that while one could invest more to maintain the riverbanks or the levies, or reforest areas around the river, that's not how the economy works. Capital is constantly searching for short-term profits, and it profits off reconstruction after destruction. As we blow past climate target after climate target, it's hard to argue. Israel's genocidal war machine releases more carbon in a month than whole countries in a year. The leader of Vox has recently congratulated President Trump on his victory, writing, "Congratulations to the defenders of liberty and common sense around the world." More monkeys with pistols. Grim times.

It's a sunny afternoon. On top of everything else, my girlfriend and I have recently broken up. I'm kinda down and I decide to do something to cheer myself up: visit a cemetery. It takes me 15 minutes to bike down to the big Valencian cemetery and 30 minutes of walking around to find the specific grave I'm looking for. I finally find it: the grave of Lucía Sánchez Saornil. She was an anarchist, a poet, a lesbian, and a founder of the Mujeres Libres, an important women's group during the Spanish Revolution and Civil War. She was a firm believer that a united working class, through its own action, could change the world and free itself. After the nationalist side won the war she spent some time in exile in France, and eventually returned to Spain, doing gig work and living clandestinely under the Franco dictatorship. Partially covered by flowers and pennants from the anarchist union CNT, a line of her poetry is carved into her gravestone. It reads, "But… is it true that hope has died?"

I think for a second and mentally answer, "No." Strangely, despite all the stress and tragedy of the last few months, I've come out of all of this with more hope, not less. Each year is hotter than the last, and climate disasters, racism and authoritarianism are on the rise. But working class solidarity is still a powerful force. And I think there is still hope that a diverse international working class can take action and remake the world. It's really the only way there is any hope for the future.


Carrer
Antonio Machado

DAMS AND DELUGE: on communist niche construction

By Common Ruin

Refuge

A thicket of spindly trees spread out in every direction, crisscrossed by gravel roads gouged into steep hillsides. Late afternoon sun struggled through the closed canopy, weakly reaching between the monotonous trunks of plantation timbers. Our worn-out boots crunched over a carpet of dead twigs as we wound our way up a faint trail roughly parallel to a deeply incised stream.

It was 2010 and the Great Recession was well underway. I was staying on an old farmstead in the Cascade foothills east of Kalama, Washington — a dreary mill town on the I-5 highway. I was picking up odd jobs and interning at a permaculture project in exchange for a design certification, which could potentially help me to land some work back in the city. The area still held natural beauty, especially along the river, but the hills had been mutilated. Woodlands which Indigenous peoples had tended for millennia were laid to waste by the timber industry, then replanted as "working forests" with just a handful of species. These were doomed to be grown and re-cut in an interminable cycle, with diminishing returns traceable in the erosion of the hills themselves, and the decay of the towns the industry had once built.

I was hiking with D, my internship boss. He grew up on the farm where I was staying, raising pigs and living with his folks in a house which had since burned down. When I met him, he was living in the old pig barn which he had converted into a cabin. He had been in the military and then earned a masters in environmental engineering, but his income of late came from installing gardens for yuppies down in Portland, work rendered scarce by the recession. So he tried teaching, launching an ill-fated permaculture education project. I'd soon learn that he was virtually broke, the whole project was about to implode. Like the remains of the burned house strewn with melted aluminum siding and flakes of lead paint, our society seemed generally unable to function or decompose.

"Check this out!" D called from up ahead. The ground had begun to level out, and a break appeared in the trees, which I might have guessed meant another clear cut. Instead, I noticed a rising chorus of birds and frogs as I approached. And then I gazed out upon what felt like another world. Before us lay a golden chain of ponds, their surfaces illuminated by the afternoon sun, reflecting the dance of swallows in the air above. They rose like terraces up the slope, separated by small dams and waterfalls, bordered by wildflower-studded banks. The dams were alive, sending up shoots of willow and red osier dogwood which bore buds and bright new leaves. Skillful efforts had transformed this stretch of watershed. The dams slowed the water of the creek, spreading it over a broad area. The saturated soils offered wetland plants and deciduous trees — elsewhere confined to narrow ravines — a broader foothold, laying the foundations for this thriving scene.

Decaying towns, devastated forests, the ruined farm on which I lived and the infrastructure joining them — all were residues of the capitalist relations which structure our society and constitute our species. But at that beaver complex, I saw a glimmer of life beyond capitalist logic and a cloistered humanity.

Ecosystem Engineers

A tool-using mammal with a seemingly innate drive to radically alter their environment: this description could just as easily apply to beavers as to humans. These crea-

tures alter landscapes on a fundamental level by constructing extensive complexes of dams and canals. It's no exaggeration to say that beavers have transformed habitats on a continental scale. North America's beavers once "submerged 234,000 square miles … [resulting in] a watery country, a matrix of ponds and swamps, marshes and wetlands, damp mountain meadows and tangled bottomlands."[1] Far from leaving ecological devastation in their wake, beavers create "a profusion of life-supporting habitats that benefit nearly everything that crawls, walks, flies, and swims."[2] Beavers have been enhancing habitats for perhaps 24 million years, contributing to the profusion and evolution of a myriad of other species.[3]

If you read anything about beavers, you are bound to encounter descriptions of them as *ecosystem engineers*. This term helps emphasize that ecosystems are dynamic compositions of interwoven processes. But designating only a handful of animals as "ecosystem engineers" risks obscuring the fact that *all* life processes contribute to the co-production of ecosystems. However, beavers, like humans, are among the few species "that can significantly change the geomorphology, and consequently the hydrological characteristics and biotic properties of the landscape."[4] So ecosystem engineer remains a useful descriptor for this sort of fundamental alteration to conditions, under the broader concept of *niche construction*. Whereas earlier evolutionary theory posited unidirectional causal relationships between organisms and environments — in which organisms adapt to fit preexisting niches — niche construction recognizes reciprocal causality[5] wherein "organisms themselves shape or "construct… the external conditions of their existence" as well as "their experience of those external conditions."[6]

Ben Goldfarb, author of *Eager: The Surprising, Secret Life of Beavers and Why They Matter*, has referred to beavers as humanity's "closest ecological and technological kin." Humans have long recognized the ecological significance of beavers and similarities between these creatures' activities and our own niche-constructive or socioecological practices. Perhaps the oldest of Blackfeet medicine stories center on the supernatural beaver, Kitaiksísskstaki, transferring knowledge to human beings, including "the power of the waters." These gifts also signified a compact, a relationship with mutual obligations.[7] Colonization and the ongoing entrenchment of capitalism, however, have transformed human socioecological relations and subjectivity, influencing the activities we engage in, the environments we inhabit, and the language and concepts we use to make sense of our world. Examining the history of human interactions with beavers illuminates the role of capital in shaping our reality, the paths which led here, and perhaps some paths leading elsewhere. In agreement with *Endnotes*' view that "Communist theory is an apparatus for thinking the experience of life dominated by capital and the movement beyond it,"[8] this essay dialogues with texts like Goldfarb's *Eager*, but from a communist perspective.

Beavers as Kin

Long before colonization and the development of ecology as a science, Indigenous societies of North America recognized the ecological significance of beavers and parallels between beavers' world-shaping activities and their own stewardship practices. While it is impossible to adequately summarize the range of Indigenous views and practices, this recognition has generally involved enacting reciprocal relationships between people and beavers, a tendency to regard beavers themselves as persons or kin, and an incredible variety of stories involving beavers. Through these actions and stories, people are situated within and find agency through relational webs as bearers of gifts, knowledge, and obligations. Kinship as a concept emphasizes this sort of connection and relationality.

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes of Nishnaabeg cautionary tales against excessive hunting and exploiting others' labor.[9] Rosalyn LaPier relays Blackfeet understanding of the crucial role that beavers played in bringing water to arid territories, which inspired the people to prohibit beaver hunting. This too was reinforced through story. LaPier emphasizes that this was not a simple or naive environmental moralism; Blackfeet traditionally understood their own power and agency as flowing through relationships with other kinds of beings, and they stewarded the land in accordance with these principles.[10] Indigenous niche-constructive socioecological practices such as those touched on here — and the subjectivities which shape and are shaped by them — saw to it that beaver populations of sixty to four hundred million were co-creating a world of abundance alongside human beings, until the advent of the fur trade.

Beavers as Commodities

The fur trade was the first tendril of the emerging capitalist world system to probe and strangle its way across much of the North American continent. Beginning in the early seventeenth century, beaver pelts became "North America's most coveted commodity" and they would continue to be sought after for over two hundred years.[11] The trade lay at the heart of many struggles and alliances, fueling the conflict between settlers, Indigenous powers, and the British Empire which ultimately spawned the United States.

Fifteenth century furriers devised a means of producing unparalleled felt from beavers' fine undercoats, and the upper classes of Europe were stricken with an insatiable lust for hats and other items made from this material. Upon learning of North America's abundance of beavers — and having already destroyed most of their continent's fur-bearing wildlife — Dutch, Swedish,

French, and British merchant capitalists raced to secure supplies of beaver furs for their respective empires.

As part of a "maelstrom of colonialism,"[12] the fur trade radiated violence outward through the same processes that concentrated its fortunes in European capitals and colonial outposts. Whether introducing socially destabilizing commodities like guns and alcohol, or mundane items like textiles and kettles, fur traders were frequently the first Europeans to enter Indigenous territories, serving as vectors for devastating epidemics. The trade shaped political conditions to which Indigenous societies had to respond. Against a backdrop of plagues and uncertainty, control of fur-rich territories and trade routes meant secure access to firearms and trade goods, along with more advantageous alliances. In other words, it could be key to a group's survival. Preexisting tensions within and between Indigenous groups flared into open hostilities, and a range of new tensions were introduced.

Precolonial hunting and trapping had been conducted in accord with practices of reciprocity. Social activity had never before revolved around the mass procurement of beaver pelts, let alone procurement for exchange. Now, in many regions Indigenous groups began relating to pelts as commodities just as their trade partners did, carrying out much of the trapping and processing according to this new logic. Beaver pelts came to be treated as a sort of currency, at times euphemistically referred to as "hairy bank notes."[13] The Hudson's Bay Company produced "Made Beaver" coins representing not quantities of precious metals but whole or fractional quantities of quality beaver pelt. The result of this commodification was that the creatures who had nurtured the ecosystems of a continent were killed by the tens of millions.

So long as their territories and ecosystems were intact, Indigenous groups maintained significant leverage in trade relations, with, for example, Algonquian and Haudenosaunee peoples often setting the terms for European traders.[14] But the British increasingly saw the maintenance of *relatively* amicable relations with Indigenous producers as an impediment to profit maximization. After the Seven Years War (1756–1763), backwoods settlers and the colonial bourgeoisie escalated their expropriation of Indigenous territories. Other than direct violence, racialization, the claiming of the best farmland, the over-hunting of game, and the banning of ecological practices like controlled burning were all ways that settler society displaced Indigenous peoples and pressured survivors towards market dependency.[15] In 1808, Thomas Jefferson wrote to Merriweather Lewis that "Commerce is the great engine by which we are to coerce them, and not war."[16] Nevertheless, the US military and civilians spent over a century waging war against Indigenous peoples and their socioecological practices, which threatened the capitalist order.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the fur trade had wiped out commercially viable beaver populations across much of North America, and European fashions shifted towards Chinese silk. The trade had incentivized a rapid explosion of exploration and expropriation before slowly imploding. Trappers had blazed trails that settlers followed. Profits amassed through the fur trade were reinvested in its wake, serving as startup capital for agricultural, timber, and mining enterprises. The wage laborers set to toil in these industries would not be harvesting wildlife from landscapes left relatively intact but would instead be transforming the land itself. This shift to more capital-intensive forms of productive activity would foster a new attitude towards the animals whose bodies had once been fuel for the engines of empire.

Beavers as Impediments

In North America, the plunder of ecosystems set capital in motion. "Formal subsumption" refers to situations where capital takes hold of a labor process but leaves it unchanged. This is never enough, as imperatives for ever-increasing productivity run up against natural and social limits. So, capitalists deploy new technologies and social practices aimed at maximizing control and increasing the relative surplus value it can extract from labor, reshaping production, social life, and the physical world. This more fundamental tranformation is called "real subsumption." Nonhuman nature presents just the sort of unruliness that real subsumption strives to discipline and transform.[17] Since the concept of niche construction includes organisms' social practices along with material reconfigurations of environments,[18] we may consider the real subsumption of nature to be a sort of capitalist niche construction. Our capacity to reconfigure the environment has been hijacked by capital and turned against us, confronting us as an alien power.

Beaver ecosystem engineering eventually presented barriers to the expansion of capitalist production. Dams downstream from agribusinesses risked causing floods that would damage fields and pastures. Dams upstream of water-wheel-powered factories threatened the flow which animated the machinery. No longer lucrative, beavers were becoming the opposite: impediments to accumulation. They would still be trapped or shot on sight, but now simply because they were in the way.

Rivers themselves were reconceived as mechanisms for circulating commodities, irrigating plantations, and supplying power to industries. The continent's wild rivers were still vast and maze-like expanses of beaver dams and log jams, characterized by patchiness and discontinuity,[19] as well as unruly rapids and currents. In 1874, a US congressional committee declared that post-Civil War America could be reunited by waging a new kind of war — a war against the Mississippi river.[20] The US Army Corps of Engineers was set to the task. The war on rivers would spread across the continent and continues today. The Army Corps, "fixated on turn-

ing rivers into freeways for shipping, embarked upon an anti-logjam crusade. … Beaver dams, in many cases the most visible blockages, were not spared."[21]

Capital strives to increase the rate of exploitation of labor — in large part by mechanizing and automating production processes — leading to an insatiable appetite for fuel, and incentivizing the further subsumption of nature. Beginning during the Great Depression, the Army Corps set about constructing a series of enormous hydroelectric dams, intended to revive the economy with an abundance of cheap electricity. The real subsumption of rivers like the Columbia undermined Indigenous social autonomy and inter-species kinship relations along the West Coast. Celilo Falls was the most significant Indigenous fishing site along the Columbia River, and has been called the oldest continually inhabited location on the continent, dating back 15,000 years. But in 1957 it was submerged by the Army Corps, sacrificed to bring The Dalles hydroelectric dam online.[22] The subsumption of nature entails the eradication of alternative niche-constructive social practices.

Between the seventeenth and early twentieth centuries, North American beavers were nearly driven to extinction. In terms of ecological impact, geomorphologist Ellen Wohl has called it the "great drying," and Leila Philip notes that, "more than 80 percent of the riverside marshes, swamps, lakes, ponds, and floodplain forests of North America and Europe have disappeared."[23] Beaver populations have risen in recent decades but remain a fraction of precolonial levels. The destructive reconfiguration of life on Earth is commensurate with the accumulation of capital. The scale of harm wrought is difficult to fathom. The problem is what Daniel Pauly calls "shifting baseline syndrome."[24] As capital's treadmill is wrought upon the planet, each successive generation is prone to assuming that the conditions into which we are born are normal or even natural. We notice destruction wrought during our lifetimes but are far less likely to comprehend the full severity of the situation. What we take as a baseline is already a ruin. By destroying or subsuming all ecological and social impediments, capital constructed a world with value as its center. The center cannot hold and that world is falling apart.

Beavers as Saviors… of Capital?

If you wanted to incinerate California, one place to start would be to kill as many beavers as possible. Without them, millions of acres of wetlands and moist riparian zones would shrivel down to spindly ribbons, no longer recharging groundwater, serving as natural fire breaks, or providing a verdant refuge for wildlife during a fire. Next, you could forcibly shut down Indigenous ecosystem engineering practices, especially the controlled use of fire, turning what were once carefully nurtured open forests and savannas into tinderboxes. Then you could shunt the rivers from watersheds into "a pipeshed"[25] directed into suburban lawns, concentrated animal feedlots, and above all, into mercilessly over-tilled, water-hungry croplands of the Central Valley, effectively evaporating as much moisture back into the atmosphere as possible. To maximize harm, you're going to want to destroy at least 90 percent of precolonial wetlands. Finally, you would want to pump enough carbon dioxide into the atmosphere that it alters precipitation patterns, provoking unprecedented droughts and raising summer temperatures to record-shattering highs. After that, any spark would do. If you wanted to incinerate California, you wouldn't have to do a thing. Capital has done it all for you. Altadena and Pacific Palisades burned during the time it took to complete this essay.

Elsewhere, floods rip through valleys with unprecedented frequency and ferocity. Carbon emissions have yielded an atmosphere on steroids, pumping out intense storms carrying significantly more water vapor with each degree of warming. It may seem paradoxical, but beaver wetlands mitigate the effects of flooding. By slowing and spreading out water, beaver wetlands and meadows facilitate storage and infiltration, while reducing the sediment load of downstream runoff. From Asheville, North Carolina to Valencia, Spain, climate change highlights the absence of these creatures and their work.

As the world falls apart around us, capital scrambles to ensure further accumulation. Under these conditions, yet another shift is taking place in relations and attitudes towards beavers. For decades, there has been a push to frame ecology in terms of economics. Monetary values are assigned to the processes of life in terms of *services* provided to the economy, tasks which would otherwise be resource and labor intensive. In this light, beavers have been rechristened as *service providers.*[26] The dynamic wetlands they would create are circumscribed, with a few animals introduced here, a few killed there, whatever it takes to stabilize infrastructure. Working beaver wetlands are used as sewage treatment ponds, or to soak up polluted highway runoff. For flood and storm-water management, "the cost-benefit ratio of using beavers is astronomical" according to a Maryland engineering firm.[27] In drought-stricken western states, agribusinesses utilize beavers to boost productivity. "Beavers increase production tenfold" and they "do it for free," said the manager of a three-million-acre Nevada cattle ranch.[28] In other words, beavers are to assist in capitalist niche construction, extending the pseudo-life of this grim machine for a bit longer. And the longer that is, the more dire the future prospects for everyone else.

Processes of Communist Life

Salvaging the ecological preconditions for lives worth living entails breaking from the social logic that dominates and reroutes proletarian niche-constructive capacities towards capitalist accumulation and the common ruin of Earthly life. However, some implications of

breaking from this logic remain under-theorized. Marx and Engels noted the tendency wherein people mistake concepts derived from particular historical social relations for immutable facts.[29] We proceed in error if we fail to consider that communist subjectivities, needs, and desires will diverge from our own. I've sought to illustrate how the imperatives and deepening entrenchment of capitalism have shaped relations and attitudes towards beavers. More broadly, the abstract domination which characterizes capitalist social relations — whereby access to the means of life is mediated by value — fosters a sense of ontological separation between humans and our living world. This separation is neither transhistorical (as inter-species kinship practices demonstrate), nor is it validated by science.

Contemporary works in biology, ecology, and the philosophy of science abound with descriptors of life such as *mosaic, processual,* and *entangled*. The development of each organism is profoundly modulated by the environment, which, in turn, is shaped and constituted by the bodies and activities of other organisms.[30] Microbes co-create human bodies, endosymbionts power our cells, and eight percent of our genome is of viral origin and responsible for essential processes.[31] Your ability to read this, and "every thought that has ever passed through your brain was made possible by plants."[32] We are "fluid processes; metabolic streams of matter and energy," unable to "function, or even persist, independently of the entangled web of interrelations" linking us with other beings.[33]

Cloistered notions of self and species are "directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse" of capitalist social relations.[34] "Capitalism is founded upon the insertion of the logic of valorisation into the gap between life and its conditions,"[35] engendering an ontological sense of separation between our species and the rest of the biosphere. Further, because the creation of surplus value — the secret of profit making — is only achievable through the application of living human labor in the production process, "nonhuman inputs that cannot be objectified in the form of value… become merely vessels for the objectification of human labor."[36]

Endnotes describes communist revolution as "an accumulation of ruptures," wherein *rupture* denotes a qualitative break with the existing social order, beyond mere disruption, that "calls life itself into question, but in a way that allows us to carry on living."[37] But the means of carrying on living seem further from reach with each

passing year. If there is to be revolution, it will be here, in a world scoured by fire and flood, hollowed out by mass extinction and the decline of biodiversity. It will unfold into a near-future defined by unprecedented migration, climate breakdown, and perhaps the fallout and complications of so-called geoengineering. Any communist theory worthy of consideration must be situated on this terrain.

Thinking revolution as the enactment of *niche-constructive* communist measures — relations and practices unfettered by the law of value, in opposition to all forms of domination and exploitation, grounded in the entangled reality of Earthly life — is both a foundation upon which to struggle against capital, and a proposal for salvaging as much as possible from the mangled web of life. The abolition of value is not a return to an original ontological unity — there is no such thing. But as rupture extends and deepens via communist niche construction, the activities through which we craft our lives, including how we use technology, will shape new subjectivities. This would be a communism of the web of life, not the human species, a dynamic mosaic of relations as varied as the terrain of the earth, without a center. The real movement stirs in our time beneath banners bearing messages like "Mní Wičóni" (Water is life) and "Nous ne défendons pas la nature, nous sommes la nature qui se défend" (We don't defend nature, we are nature defending itself).

If, as Roland Simon once argued, the "abolition of value is a concrete transformation of the landscape in which we live," [38] then we might once more look to beavers, those great transformers of the landscape, for some principles to guide niche construction. Echoing *Endnotes*, we might say beavers rupture the flow of rivers. Through an accumulation of ruptures, they construct niches that are not only suitable for more beavers (and therefore the proliferation of further rupture), but for innumerable other species. This includes, of course, the plants on which beavers depend, their means to life. The wetland and the beaver exist symbiotically: the wetland is an extension of the beaver's life into the landscape, melded with the lives of other beings. This continual process recursively builds upon itself. To speak more abstractly, we see the conditions wherein new forms of life are made possible and an expansive sense of self is made realizable by undertaking measures "*which fold themselves into each other and which ultimately succeed in giving to the overall organisation of the world an altogether different quality.*" [39] By acting together with the knowledge that our lives are quite literally constituted through socioecological processes, communist wealth will present itself not as an immense accumulation of commodities but of relationships, whereby the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.

Reciprocity

A few weeks ago, I wandered down the train tracks, hopped a fence and waded across a river to a beaver complex on the fringe of the city where I live now. As I looked upon a crescent-shaped dam, its form arcing into the current, dissipating the river's force outward, I recalled those ponds that D showed me. It had been years since I thought of that place, but now I was wondering, hoping that it still existed. At home, I pulled up a recent satellite image. I wish I could tell you that it's still there. Maybe I looked in the wrong place, but I saw no sign of it, just clear cuts, plantations, and a maze of logging roads gouged into the Earth. Beavers are struggling against capital, struggling to remake the world, and would gift their knowledge to those of us who would accept it. I have learned from them, and here I have passed a bit of that knowledge on to you. But their gift is not without obligation. How might we reciprocate?

Notes

1: Ben Goldfarb, *Eager: The Surprising, Secret Life of Beavers and Why They Matter* (Chelsea Green Pub, 2018), 36.

2: Goldfarb, *Eager*, 8.

3: Frances Backhouse, *Once They Were Hats: In Search of the Mighty Beaver* (ECW Press, 2015), Chap. 2.

4: Frank Rosell, et al., "Ecological Impact of Beavers Castor Fiber and Castor Canadensis and Their Ability to Modify Ecosystems," *Mammal Review* 35, no. 3–4 (2005): 248–76.

5: Joseph Rouse, *Social Practices as Biological Niche Construction* (University of Chicago Press, 2023), Chap. 2.

6: Sonia Sultan, *Organism and Environment: Ecological Development, Niche Construction, and Adaptation* (Oxford University Press, 2015), Chap. 2.3.2.

7: Rosalyn R. LaPier, *Invisible Reality: Storytellers, Storytakers, and the Supernatural World of the Blackfeet* (University of Nebraska Press, 2019), Chap. 4.

8: "We Unhappy Few," *Endnotes* 5 (2019).

9: Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Univ of Minnesota Press, 2020), Chap. 5.

10: LaPier, *Invisible Reality*, Chap. 4.

11: Pekka Hämäläinen, *Indigenous Continent: The Epic Contest for North America* (Liveright, 2023), Chap. 6.

12: Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Harvard University Press, 2008), Chap. 2.

13: Eric Jay Dolin, *Fur, Fortune, and Empire: The Epic History of the Fur Trade in America* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2010).

14: Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), Chap 2.

15: White, *The Middle Ground,* Chap 11. Note that the difference between pre-capitalist commercial activities (such as market exchange) and a society's integration into the capitalist mode of production is defined by that society's *dependence* on participation in those activities — no longer as a supplement but now as necessary for survival. For a detailed study of how this process played out on one island in the late 20th century, see Tania Li, *Land's End: Capitalist Relations on an Indigenous Frontier* (Duke University Press, 2014).

16: "From Thomas Jefferson to Meriwether Lewis, 21 August 1808," Founders Online, National Archives.

17: Søren Mau, *Mute Compulsion: A Marxist Theory of the Economic Power of Capital* (Verso, 2023), Chap. 11.

18: Rouse, *Social Practices as Biological Niche Construction*, Chap. 2.

19: Denise Burchsted, Melinda Daniels, and Ellen E. Wohl, "Introduction to the Special Issue on Discontinuity of Fluvial Systems," *Geomorphology* 205 (2014): 1–4.

20: Boyce Upholt, *The Great River: The Making and Unmaking of the Mississippi* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2024), Chap. 7.

21: Goldfarb, *Eager*, Chap. 5.

22: Shasta Kearns Moore, "Group Seeks to Recover Celilo Falls," Portland Tribune, May 15, 2014.

23: Leila Philip, *Beaverland: How One Weird Rodent Made America* (Twelve, 2022), Chap. 9.

24: Daniel Pauly, "Anecdotes and the shifting baseline syndrome of fisheries," *Trends in Ecology and Evolution* 10, no. 10 (1995).

25: Brock Dolman, quoted in Goldfarb, *Eager*, Chap 6.

26: Ecologists and activists sincerely committed to beaver restoration constantly run up against limits imposed by capital. Efforts such as these can only find their full expression in a non-capitalist world.

27: Philip, *Beaverland*, Chap. 13.

28: Goldfarb, *Eager*, Chap. 7.

29: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (1846), Chap. 1.

30: Sultan, *Organism and Environment*, Chap. 2.3.2.

31: David Quammen, *The Tangled Tree: A Radical New History of Life* (Simon & Schuster, 2018), Chap. 77.

32: Zoë Schlanger, *The Light Eaters: How the Unseen World of Plant Intelligence Offers a New Understanding of Life on Earth* (Harper, 2024), Chap. 2.

33: John Dupré and Daniel J. Nicholson, "A Manifesto for a Processual Philosophy of Biology," in *Everything Flows: Towards a Processual Philosophy of Biology*, ed John Dupré and Daniel J. Nicholson (Oxford University Press, 2018).

34: Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology,* Chap. 1.

35: Mau, *Mute Compulsion*, Chap. 12.

36: "Tragic Theses," *Decompositions,* March 9, 2023,

37: "Spontaneity, Mediation, Rupture," *Endnotes* 3 (2013).

38: Roland Simon, "Self-organisation is the first act of the revolution; it then becomes an obstacle which the revolution has to overcome," in *A Théorie Communiste Reader* (2021).

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BLOCKADE BISALLOY: a report from the 'gong

By Two Wollongong Friends of Palestine

We arrived at 5:45 a.m. It was an overcast morning in November, but unlike last time the sky was already light, dawn had just passed. We were in the middle of a regional industrial zone that was already alive with machinery churning, trucks arriving and departing, and workers from various sites smoking or drinking coffee at the gates. As we walked down the road to Bisalloy Steels, where the picket would be, a friend struck up a conversation with some men on the street. They had heard about the picket happening down the road, but weren't too keen on discussing the basis of it: better things to do with their short time on 'smoko'. In the distance we could see some comrades already gathered at the gates of Bisalloy.

It felt good to see their numbers already growing. In the week leading up to the picket, we had received intel from workers and unions at Bisalloy that the company was saying they had to cross the picket line. The night before we again had it confirmed that operations would continue, the bosses having issued an ultimatum that if workers didn't cross the line, they'd have to take leave or go unpaid. So we had expected there would be some conflict today, most likely with the police as they sought to break the picket. We came prepared, with pallets and other materials to reinforce the barricades.

But as we arrived it was impossible not to notice how quiet it was. The usual industrial clamour of the steel treatment plant, the hiss and stamp of the machinery, was silent beyond the fence. All doors were closed, signals that no work was underway were lit up, and no one was inside. Few police were visible, scattered up and down the street. A piece of paper on the office door proclaimed, "Closed for the day for annual company picnic".

What had happened? Were they really closed once again? Had just the threat of another picket been enough for them to shut up shop?

Palestine Solidarity in Australia: Pickets and Blockades

In Australia, as across the world, a massive wave of struggle rose against the genocide in Palestine, comprised of a wide constellation of political groups and practices. Compared to previous iterations of Palestine solidarity here, this wave has been more widespread, involving a broader range of tactics. These included regular rallies and marches across major cities, student encampments at several universities, an encampment at the Prime Minister's office, pickets and blockades of key infrastructure, and smaller scale actions involving lock-ons, targeted property damage and sabotage, among other practices.

Pickets here have traditionally been divided into trade union pickets and community pickets. Trade union pickets are organised by unions, usually while involved in legal industrial actions, during strikes or to challenge lock-outs. Due to the repressive legal context in Australia, the only legal pickets that unions can organise are during a specific time of bargaining, usually every 3 or 4 years.

Community pickets can occur to support workers in an industrial campaign where legal restrictions limit the actions of unions. In this case, community pickets are often a tactic endorsed by a union and used to further its campaign. Another type of community picket is organised and run by the 'community', i.e. people from outside the picketed workplace organising and participating in the picket themselves. It is only the latter type that has been used in the Palestine solidarity movement.

The first call for a blockade and community picket came in November 2023, targeting the Zionist shipping company ZIM. Simultaneous calls for port blockades in both Melbourne and Sydney were made to prevent the loading and unloading of various ZIM ships. Initially, the calls resulted only in protests outside the port, without disrupting the shipping line at all. Soon, however, pickets were attempted at each port.

At Port Botany, in Sydney, two community pickets were held. While these were not trade union pickets, the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) was involved in both. The MUA is the most militant union in Australia, and its Sydney branch is particularly left-leaning. Their support bolstered confidence, but police broke both pickets and arrested dozens of participants, including MUA branch officials.

It's worth noting that in New South Wales (NSW, where Sydney and Wollongong are located), certain economic zones and infrastructure are designated "protected" and subject to stronger anti-protest laws. Incidents at

these sites carry heavier fines and a higher likelihood of imprisonment. The ports in Sydney are subject to such laws. While it was significant that these pickets challenged the laws, and welcome that the MUA played a role, the number of arrests and the character of repression has meant that no further action has taken place at Port Botany since March 2024.

In Melbourne (in the state of Victoria), the situation with port actions has been different. The first picket there involved "actionists" (a term some Australian leftists use to distinguish themselves from "activists" by emphasizing direct action), MUA members, and others. For the first few days, it appears the MUA branch told its members at the port to honour the picket, but after the picket was broken by police on the third day it was not reestablished. The picket provoked debates along factional as well as tactical lines as to how much deferral to union members there should be, and which tactics and practices were legitimate on the picket.[1]

Since these early pickets in November 2023, the tactic has spread to other ports in Victoria and NSW, as well as Queensland and other states/territories. The pickets organised at Bisalloy differ from those outlined above, providing insights into other ways that this tactic can disrupt supply chains.

Who are Bisalloy Steels?

Bisalloy Steels is located in the Illawarra region of NSW, in the Wollongong suburb called Unanderra. It produces hardened, 'quenched and tempered' steel used for both military and civilian applications, including armoured vehicles, watch towers, panic rooms, and jail/prison infrastructure.

The company purchases steel 'coil' from BlueScope Steel (located at Port Kembla, also in the Illawarra), treating it with high heat and chemical reactivity. Bisalloy product is predominantly used in military vehicles such as Merkeva and Boxer-CRV tanks, and so-called 'civilian defence vehicles', such as retrofitted armoured cars produced by Plasan Reem. The absolute devastation wrought by Israel's Merkevas in Gaza and the West Bank is now well known. The use of civilian armoured cars, however, may not be initially apparent.

These vehicles are popular in illegal settlements across Palestine, facilitating their expansion and allowing set-

two wollongong friends of palestine

tlers to move across the country with impunity. In the hands of Israeli occupiers, armoured vehicles function as weapons. They are used to harass and threaten journalists trying to document settlers' activities. Olive farmers often describe the first sign of settlers descending on the harvest as the glint of sunlight on these vehicles swooping down from the ridges where many settlements are located, and into the valleys where olive trees grow. The quenched and tempered steel covering the car's chassis allows for the mounting of launchers for tear gas canisters, for ramming ancient trees, and for protecting the occupants from incendiary devices settlers launch into fields to burn olive groves.

The company engages in two-way trade with Israel. For example, in 2023, Bisalloy contracted Plasan Reem to assist in the building of naval frigates for the Australian Navy. In addition to their existing provisions to the Zionist entity, Bisalloy's product guides increasingly hint at their product's possible application in incarceration technologies—cells, secure rooms, and watchtowers.

Under the banner 'No Illawarra Steel for Genocide', a network called Wollongong Friends of Palestine has organised a series of pickets at the Bisalloy Steels factory in Unanderra.

Organising Community Pickets

The wave of Palestine solidarity has seen the largest street mobilisations in Australia since protests against Australian involvement in the Second Gulf War. Like elsewhere, Wollongong had weekly protests in the streets, drawing several hundred people each (a consistent number for a regional city of 300,000). The families and friends who connected at the rallies had previously organised a community *iftar* (fast-breaking dinner during Ramadan), mass postering at a local politician's office, and an evening vigil. The rallies in turn became an open organising base for other actions, including the Bisalloy pickets.

After each of the weekly rallies, planning meetings were made accessible to a wide array of locals interested in advancing the struggle. The open format allowed participants to develop an environment where everyone felt able to contribute to discussion, to debate tactics and objectives, and to disagree freely. The practice of debate, which involved both regular and irregular participants in the planning process, contributed to propagating the idea that a picket/blockade of Bisalloy could be successful, while also building decision-making infrastructure that would become important on the picket lines. Mass, open organising *of* the pickets enabled mass, open organising *at* the pickets.

The meetings also allowed for a cross-pollination of people and ideas where the possibility of undertaking the picket became more realistic for more people. Weekly protests drew a variety of people, many of whom had never been involved in direct action of any sort before. Rallies served as an entry point, and the weekly open meetings built trust, while consistent conversations about disruptive tactics built courage and interest. Finally, picket training and skill shares built the capacity for mass, militant action.

The process of preparing for the pickets had to be *consistent, slow*, and *steady*. At first, there was a sense from some that it would not be feasible to disrupt the production and circulation of materials at Bisalloy. They argued that a protest outside of the factory would be more viable. It took ongoing conversations—in cars, during marches or trainings, whilst we cooked iftar meals during Ramadan—to work through this perception and emerge with a collective sense of readiness for a little more risk-taking. Though not everyone was ready to take the same risks at the same time, our collective arrived at a point where we felt that trying to fully shut down Bisalloy was possible.

Our approach to organising the pickets, aiming for a practice of mass action with an internal articulation of autonomy, sought to navigate beyond the apparent binary that seemed dominant in the wake of Israel's 2023 invasion of Gaza. This binary tended to pose participation as either passive or limited to a closed group supported by observers. While rallies could be important, they tended to involve a kind of passive participation for the majority of people present. Alternatively, closed affinity groups were capable of impressive actions of disruption, but rarely fostered a practice of widespread participation in militancy. We hoped to develop more widespread participation in the picket, while also encouraging people to take initiative with further actions.

The approach to the pickets aimed to break down as much as possible the division between "organisers" and "the organised", or between planners and participants. In so far as the struggle against capitalism cultivates the formation of collective bodies of class power that could become vehicles of revolutionary action, we have sought to build the pickets as one such instance of this power: an organ of struggle in its own right. This has involved creating participatory political spaces, including the pickets themselves, where everyone present has the ability to contribute meaningfully to decisions, to contribute materially as they are able, and to use a variety of methods to shut down IDF supply chains. We have aimed to promote mass action with an internal articulation of autonomy as a method of class movement away from simply observing actions planned and controlled by others, and to initiate mass action that we navigate collectively.

On the Pickets

There have been five pickets and three other actions at Bisalloy since October 2023. There was an office occupation, which emerged from an open community meeting but was not publicly advertised in December

two wollongong friends of palestine

2023. In April 2024, a group entered the facilities and locked on to machinery, disrupting operations for several hours and prompting the company to build an extra security fence. The pickets aimed to build off these actions, while also taking a different approach.

The first two pickets were limited in duration to three hours from 6:00 to 9:00 a.m., seeking to interrupt the morning change of shift and prevent any materials from entering or leaving the factory (though each picket ended up lasting longer). The third picket was called for twelve hours, from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. And the last two pickets were open-ended from 6:00 a.m. Decisions about the length of each picket were made through discussion in our planning meetings, reflecting on the lessons of each previous picket.

Bisalloy is not a large industrial site, but it stretches a couple of hundred meters along an industrial road. There are two vehicle gates spaced about 150 meters apart, and an office entrance between them. It was necessary to have enough numbers to be able to block all entrances, and we also needed ways to communicate across the pickets. We prepared simple systems of communication, through delegates whose role was simply to share information to the common channel about needs and updates from each gate. The picket at each gate functioned as its own hub for deciding how to run that picket. Within this wider system of communication and decision-making, affinity groups could make their own decisions on how to act.

Decisions during the pickets, to the extent they were necessary, were made collectively through meetings at individual gates and across the whole picket. These decisions were made through discussion and, where possible, consensus. At the same time, there was no pretence that these decisions would be binding for everyone.

Meetings allowed for clarity on what we knew about the site that day (for example, when we had been told in advance the site would be shut) or to gather observations from the whole picket (Were there cars in the carpark? Were the factory's roller doors open?). They also helped us Picket meetings were also convened to discuss potential challenges to the picket from cops or others.

For example, when a cop tried to intimidate a small group of the first picketers to arrive on site, we held a meeting on one of the site's driveways to decide how to respond. It was quickly proposed that we would begin our hard picket, with anyone reluctant to step onto the driveway remaining on the grass. Affinity groups quickly moved towards the driveways, and the picket continued unchallenged.

The pickets have been successful, but it has been a strange success. Each time, hundreds of people have turned out to participate. During the first two shorter pickets, nothing moved in or out of the gates. When we called longer or indefinite pickets, the company shut operations completely for those days. While we prepared for confrontation with police and other hostilities, it turned out that neither the police nor anyone else has posed a serious challenge to any of the pickets. Each time, we assembled at each gate, blocking all entrances to the site, and waited for a confrontation that never came. Aside from the one attempt to intimidate picketers into leaving the site, mentioned above, no threat has been made and production has been stopped on five occasions.

This lack of confrontation may be partly explained by the numbers of people turning up to the pickets. It may also reflect that, while the workers employed at Bisalloy have not participated, they have played a role. In the lead-up to each picket, we have communicated with workers at the site, with the unions that have coverage there, and the South Coast Labour Council (SCLC—a regional council to which trade unions affiliate). In this way, we were able to learn what to expect. For example, we were told on various occasions that at least some of the workers were sympathetic, even though they were not participating. Prior to the picket in September, we were told that the company had decided to close for the day. On a later occasion, we were informed that the company was insisting workers cross the picket line—though in the end the company closed on that occasion too. It may be the case that sympathies within the shop played a role in shutting operations.

It is also worth noting that the SCLC took the interesting step of initiating an audit into worker exposure to war crime prosecution due to employment in industries implicated in the genocide. This opened the possibility, within the legal framework of industrial law, for workers to refuse work that put them at risk of prosecution. Unfortunately, no one has taken up this opportunity.

Another factor is that the openly organised and public mobilisations for the pickets played a role in influencing the company's decisions. The open publication of the call to shut down operations at Bisalloy in defiance of the law, as well as the openness of preparatory meetings, likely played a positive role not only in building confidence in the actions, but also in spooking the company.

Given the lack of challenges to the pickets, on each occasion they ended up being more like street parties, with the road overtaken by picketers, music, art, discussions, kids spaces, and meals provided by Food Not Bombs. The success of the pickets has meant that certain organisational measures remain untested, such as our capacity to resist police attempts to break the picket line, to practice the organisational principles of participatory decision-making alongside autonomous action, and to maintain and expand the pickets in a context of stronger repression.

Picket as Tactic and the Question of Class Composition

A common criticism of community pickets is that they are weak, especially when compared to industrial actions taken by workers employed at the picketed site. For example, a recent article by the Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group argued that,

> "The community" is also a poor substitute for working class organisation. Community blockades of manufacturing sites, ports and other infrastructure correctly identify the importance of disrupting production but they lack the power to achieve what they set out to do. A community blockade (unsupported by workers at the blockaded site) lasts as long as it takes the police to break it up.[2]

While we do not disagree that workers at these factories taking action would be very welcome, powerful, and an important step in class struggle, the fact of the matter is, aside from the MUA-supported actions mentioned earlier (which were broken by police), not one industrial action of that nature has taken place. Under current circumstances in Australia, the police don't even have to break up industrial actions, as the character of industrial laws has already made it extremely unlikely that such actions occur. Of course we should support such actions whenever possible, but this sort of critique tends to abstract from the existing terrain of class struggle that we can see in front of us.

Moreover, the notion that community pickets do not create a point of tension where workers employed at the site might take action is ill-founded. To take the example of Bisalloy, we can see how the community pickets have contributed to some, albeit not enough, movement by workers and their official representatives. Given the lack of direct worker action in these sites, and the inability/unwillingness of unions to break out of the legal binds on formal industrial action, community pickets do constitute a means of rebuilding class power appropriate to the contemporary class composition of deindustrialised regions, where shopfloor modes of organisation no longer hold the power they once did.

The condition of the proletariat is not synonymous with the status of being an employee. From a communist viewpoint, limiting the consideration of working-class organisation and power to employees is problematic. The law of value and the rule of capital operate at the level of a totality, across the social factory. In this context the production, reproduction and circulation of capital are all constituted as terrains of class struggle. Class movement involves the construction of organs of power that challenge capital, as well as the negation of our condition as variable capital subject to the law of value. Such modes of organisation necessarily involve, but are not limited to, the shop floor. Given that the proletarian condition extends beyond the workplace across the social factory, articulating a communist politics must avoid reductive notions of class organisation.

Of course, a challenge that the Bisalloy pickets have confronted is how to develop stronger proletarian relations across the gates of the factory. We can look to examples of class organisation that involve but also exceed the workplace in grappling with this challenge, such as the NSW Builders Labourers Federation of the 1970s. The BLF took up 'green bans' (refusal to work on projects that would harm the natural or cultural environment, including disruption of proletarian neighbourhoods),as well as women's and queer liberation struggles, as key organising objectives, demonstrating how proletarian relations could become a part of class movement within and beyond the workplace.[3] Wollongong's own history as a working-class town also provides lessons, where the Wollongong Out of Workers' Union struggled for both the right to work and the refusal of it.[4] Class alliances across the boundary between the neighbourhood and the shopfloor have been pivotal in the reduction of toxic production practices that poisoned everyone in proximity to the industrial zones of Port Kembla. These histories offer some guidance for developing the politics of the Bisalloy pickets. At the same time, we would suggest that it is precisely the reality of proletarian relations within and beyond the shopfloor developed over the course of Wollongong's history that has contributed to the success of the pickets so far.

Finally, community pickets can articulate proletarian internationalism against the social factory—in this case, against capital's military supply lines that connect proles within and outside of Wollongong's factories to the atrocities facing our fellows in Gaza. Without overstating the significance of the pickets, they do constitute a form of class organisation appropriate to the conditions in Wollongong today.

Epilogue

Once again, we gathered in the pre-dawn twilight across the driveway at Bisalloy. The police took their positions along the street. A hundred of us discussed the fact that, for the first time, we had received no information about whether the factory would be open or closed today, whether our picket was likely to be challenged. We agreed to take our positions across the three entrances and wait.

Early signs were good. There were no cars in the employee carpark, the enormous roller doors were closed, and no one could be seen moving around the site. A solitary hardhat sat on the picnic table where workers often take their lunch. We settled in. Discussion groups started at various gates; bands played at the entrance to the office. It was a hard picket, a demonstration, and a radical street festival, all in one.

During our second meeting of the day, around 8:30 a.m., a picketer called Bisalloy's front office. With the phone on speaker, everyone got quiet and leaned in. Closed for 48 hours, we were told, due to "the protestors". Later, we learned through the unions that workers had been sent offsite for training. Our picket ended at 10:30 a.m., and no workers entered the site the rest of the day, or the next day either. With this latest picket, we have shut Bisalloy down for nearly 100 hours over 2024 and 2025.

Another picket has been set for May 8, 2025.

freewheelinizgood4u

Notes

1: See "Official Myths and Enduring Fantasies" (Backlash blog, March 2024) for an extended analysis of this picket, as well as a consideration of the politics of community pickets that parallels the analysis we develop in this essay.

2: "Why the Working Class?," Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group blog, October 2024.

3: See Meredith and Verity Burgmann, *Green Bans, Red Union: Environmental Activism and the New South Wales Builders Labourers Federation* (University of New South Wales Press, 1998).

4: Nick Southall, *Working for the class: The praxis of the Wollongong Out of Workers' Union* (Honours thesis, University of Wollongong, 2006).

dirtyclean

WHAT WAS RECESSION POP?

By Jean Maro

"Recession pop is so back." Such was the reaction when Lady Gaga released "Abracadabra," the second single for her new album *Mayhem*. On TikTok and across social media, a consensus began to form – last time Gaga released a hit like this the economy fell apart. But Lady Gaga isn't the only harbinger of doom; scroll back far enough and you'll find similar pronouncements about Kesha's "Joyride" and even Brat Summer. Everything, it seems, foretells a crash. And how better to get a sense of what is coming than to look back to the most recent crash, the financial crisis of 2008. Faced with the difficult task of finding our bearings in the present, we read the cultural tea leaves for any hint of our fates, any confirmation of what we all already know, that things are bad and are only going to get worse. At least we have Lady Gaga.

The claim that "recession pop is back" is a claim both about the present and the past, about the relationship of pop music to the financial crisis and the relevance of that moment to our current one. In evaluating this claim, then, we must attend to both aspects. First, we must explore the relationship between pop music and the financial crisis, teasing out the complex, contradictory, and often obscured ways the crisis appeared in music of the era. Only then can we address the reemergence of recession era pop music in the national discourse and ask what these references to 2008 might reveal about the present.

Let us take a brief trip back in time, back to when Taylor Swift had not yet given up the veneer of country, Beyoncé came into her own as a solo artist, and Rhianna collaborated with literally everyone. Yet it is a new cohort of pop stars that interests us, a group of debut artists whose meteoric rise mirrored the stock market's catastrophic fall. Lady Gaga released her first album, *Fame,* in 2008, with the extended *Fame Monster* coming in 2009 and landing spots 2 and 3 on the Year-End Hot 100. Katy Perry left Christian music behind to dominate the pop charts, releasing *One of the Boys* in 2008 and *Teenage Dream* in 2010, the latter producing five number one singles. But the recession years really belonged to Kesha, who released "TiK ToK" in 2009 as the single for her 2010 album *Animal*; "Tik Tok" skyrocketed to success and became the Billboard Year-End Hot 100 Single of 2010 after spending nine weeks at number one. Kesha, Lady Gaga, Katy Perry, these are our coordinates.

Taking these three artists as our guides, we can say that recession pop was music made for dancing, with synth beats at a fast tempo, driving yet still fun and bouncy, a music made for clubs and bars if not the rave or the warehouse. These years also saw the rise of talk sing-

ing, a conversational vocal style that is less concerned with pitch or melody than rhythm and even more-so timbre, with emphasis on gritty vocal fry and sarcastic twang. Playful, irreverent, and unpolished, with deliberately heavy-handed applications of autotune and formant shifting adding to its artful nonartistry, recession pop was amateurish and delighted in it.

Although we have named Gaga, Perry, and Kesha as the giants of the moment, the style we are describing is much more pervasive – we could have easily chosen Rhianna, Pitbull, or Miley Cyrus as staples of the period. Indeed, Rhianna's chameleon-like transition into and away from this style illustrates the extent to which recession pop's emergence transcended individual artists. This convergence of style was partly because so much music during this period was written and produced by the same people. If anything was too big to fail it was Dr Luke, who wrote so many chart-topping hits that he practically was the pop charts for a few years. He was often joined by Max Martin, who returned to songwriting prominence in this period after writing the greatest hits of dot-com-bubble teen pop; Martin's first number one single since 2000 was Katy Perry's "I Kissed a Girl" in 2008. Indeed, there was hardly a hit song that one or both didn't touch. Pop music is an industry and the giants rule. Our task is to discover why this giant took on new characteristics around the financial crisis of 2008.

Movement One: Just Dance

Recession pop is, at its heart, party music. We have already noted that the iconic songs of this era are made for dancing, but they are even more so songs *about* dancing, from Gaga's "Just Dance" to Rhianna's "Don't Stop the Music." Given how frequently clubs and dancing appear in these songs, one could easily be forgiven for believing that the financial crisis turned the world into one big party. Instead, we might say that the party is the entire world of this genre, the setting in which its dramas play out, with all the social dynamics of reality condensed into one endless dance.

The party world of recession pop is chaotic and dysfunctional, a space of bad decisions and questionable morals. But that does not stop the partiers, whose sarcastic, fuck-it attitude is perfectly embodied in the purposeful amateurism of the vocals. And just as the playful, irreverent vocal technique provides much of the music's appeal, the dysfunction of the party is half the fun, as the partiers seem to revel in their dirtiness. When Kesha brags that she will "brush [her] teeth with a bottle of jack," she embodies the exuberant depravity of the partygoers, a group at once carefree and careless, their sleaziness part of their charm.

But beneath the endless revelry lies something more sinister, that carelessness and lack of regard for the future too easily peels back to reveal a sense of desperation hiding just below the surface. Lady Gaga is possibly the most direct about this darker side of the party; her breakout hit "Just Dance" is haunted by the constant threat of sexual assault, a threat it tries to deny through its repeated instruction to forget your worries and "just dance." The threat of sexual violence is an all-too persistent feature not only of clubs and parties, but also of the music industry itself, as Kesha's allegations against Dr. Luke make clear. But for the most part, the danger in these songs is less physical danger and more existential dread; Kesha urges us to "make the most of the night like we're gonna die young," while Usher repeatedly reminds us to dance like it is the "last night of your life." Is this existential angst merely the voice of youth protesting its inevitable end? Or is there something more?

If there is a specter haunting the party, then it is Timbaland who first gives it a name. "The Way I Are," released just as the subprime mortgage bubble began to burst, opens with "I ain't got no money," and much of the rest of the song is a long litany of other things he does not have or cannot afford. Once identified, the "recession" in "recession pop" is unavoidable; Kesha originally styled herself as Ke$ha, the dollar taking up central billing in her name and in the pop charts more broadly. In this light, the constant references to dying young appear more literal than metaphorical, the expression of the decreased life chance and increased mortality rates facing those affected by the crisis. Kesha's promise that "when I leave for the night I ain't comin' back" takes on a different meaning during a wave of foreclosures, a time when many suddenly found themselves without a home to return to. Dancing is less a youthful escape and more the last resort of those with nowhere else to go.

Unsurprisingly, racialized and other marginalized people were hit hardest by the crisis and the resulting recession; Black borrowers were disproportionately affected by the mortgage crisis, and those already in precarious positions were the first to be let go when companies downsized. For the teens and twenty-somethings who were the target audience for this type of pop music and the parties that music describes, however, economic turmoil posed a particular set of problems. The crisis saw a cohort of young college graduates enter the job market at the very moment that market imploded and was flooded with millions of older, more qualified jobseekers. While a middle-class twenty-something might have expected a college degree to grant them some upward mobility or at least stability, the crisis transformed their prospects into at best stasis and at worst downward mobility. Faced with an absent future, middle-class young people could only hope to tread water in the present. They were, in Katy Perry's formulation, stuck in a perpetual "teenage dream."

It is in this context that Timbaland's choice to spend his last dollar on the club cover makes sense. After all, what is the point of saving if it can all be wiped out in an

instant, your 401K obliterated, your home foreclosed? If there is no home ownership, no career, no upward mobility in your future no matter what you do, then what does the price of a club cover or a few drinks really matter? It is this problem that the music captures and to which it offers its own answer. If you must be down in the dirt, then you might as well revel in it. And revel it does, taking almost obscene joy in its own messy irresponsibility.

If the recession is the truth of recession pop, it is a truth it tries to avoid, one it promises to help the listener forget. The protagonists of these songs escape reality with drinking or drugs or dancing or sex. Just as the music itself provides a reprieve for the listener, the club it depicts represents an escape, a place where the real world cannot reach you and you are free of all that weighs you down. This is the promise of "Telephone," Lady Gaga's 2009 collaboration with Beyoncé, in which they both ignore incessant phone calls from the men they left behind to go dancing with the girls. But this escape from heterosexuality is also an escape from financial exigency – Beyoncé says that her man is "callin' like a collector." The prison-break imagery of the music video drives the message home: Gaga and Beyoncé will set you free, so long as you get up and dance.

Yet as much as the music represents a kind of freedom, it is also obsessed with repetition, with the fact that its protagonists find themselves at the same clubs night after night. Do the partiers return to the dance floor out of enjoyment, or necessity? This is the central question of Katy Perry's 2010 hit "Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F.)." After a weekend of excess and bad decisions, Perry's partygoers "always say we're gonna stop" on Monday morning before inevitably finding themselves back at the club to "do it all again." Indeed, although the title of the song is "Last Friday Night," that account of the weekend prior serves just as well as a description of the next one, the past and future fading into the "blacked-out blur" of an eternal present that parallels the arrested development of the generation dancing along.

But the partiers of "Last Friday Night" are not merely partying to pass the time. Their long litany of regrets and repeated promises to stop suggest that they arrive at the club each weekend against their wishes, as if they have no choice but to dance. While this could be read as a meditation on addiction, it is also the inversion of the normal work-week story, in which the weekend bender provides a brief glimpse of freedom before you are forced back to work on Monday morning. In "Last Friday Night," the weekend release is figured as that which you cannot escape, while the work week appears as a period of relative reprieve. This inversion between the work week and the weekend also appears in Usher's "DJ Got Us Fallin' In Love." The song begins on familiar terrain: "thank god the week is done, I feel like a zombie come back to life." Having been introduced early, the work week then disappears from the song, which focuses instead on the party, the dancing quickly eclipsing all else. Then, the song takes a turn: "suddenly we all got our hands up, no control of my body." Here, Usher depicts music as a form of compulsion, something that takes over his body and places it outside his conscious control. Coming directly after his description of the work week making him "feel like a zombie" – another body without consciousness – this image blurs the line between working and dancing and reveals a profound truth about unemployment. In a period of prolonged unemployment, the weekend and the freedom from work it represents expand to take up more and more of the week just as the party takes up a majority of the song. As it does so, it is no longer experienced as a relief but rather as an imposition, a fate. Usher and Perry realize the cruel irony of capitalism: the only thing worse than having a job is not having one.

"Last Friday night, we maxed our credit cards, and got kicked out of the bar, so we hit the boulevard." Perry's narration of her weekend is an oddly accurate description of a credit crisis ejecting people from their lives and into the streets, a motion we would see mirrored a year later in Occupy and more broadly in the rise of the riot and circulation struggle over the last half century. We might even imagine the movement of the dance floor becoming the movement of the squares, with the party representing that great collection of the un- and underemployed that might take to the streets should the music stop, a crowd that if barred entrance to the club might start crashing through the windows. "Gon' set the roof on fire, gonna burn this motherfucker down," says Usher.

Yet this threat that the party will overspill its bounds and become something more only ever exists in the negative. Usher is only burning things down metaphorically, after all. Despite its edginess, recession pop is not a music of rebellion except inasmuch as it refuses to grow up, a posture that is less a choice than an effect of the crisis itself. Pop music of this era might capture the affective dimensions of the crisis, but it does not provide a way out. Instead, it offers its listeners a brief reprieve, a chance to laugh in the face of misery. *Let's make the most of the night like we're gonna die young.*

Movement Two: Fallin' in Love Again

We have arrived at an account of recession pop as both the expression of declining life chances and the distraction from that fate. But surely this is too neat, too tidy a reading, in part because we have thus far focused on only one of the dramatic personae who appear in these songs, the twenty-something partier. But there is another who we have not yet mentioned but who is central to the genre: the DJ. If the party is the world of the song, then it is the DJ that makes that world go 'round. Only the DJ can grant the dancers one more beat drop, one more song, one more party, one more weekend, each one like the last. The constant calls for the DJ to keep

the party going – Kesha's request that the DJ "turn it up" or "blow them speakers up" and Gaga's plea to "spin that record babe" are only the tip of the iceberg – reveal the DJ as the necessary condition for the party.

If there are two characters in this drama, then we must try to understand their roles in relationship to each other. To begin, we might say that the pairing of DJ and dancer mirrors that of the producer and consumer in a conventional capitalist economy. It is after all the DJ who produces the party by building the playlists, playing the tracks, and using his technical know-how to create the transitions, remixes, and mashups that only a skilled DJ can provide. The dancers create demand for the DJ – "spin that record babe" – and the DJ produces the music that the dancers can then consume; the party is a virtuous cycle even if the dancers are anything but. Yet, this image of the conventional economy also underscores the unconventional times in which this music was made; recession pop is, after all, the soundtrack to a specifically financial crisis.

"Quantized and repackaged, its history erased and its risk level obscured, debt enters the great dance floor of the market as the perfect teenage dream."

The DJ injects life into the music and the party, promising that after each drop is another build up, that each low point will lead to greater heights. "Baby you're a firework" and you can only go up from here, he seems to promise. It is here that we begin to see the DJ's other function in recession pop, for surely this promise is the musical equivalent of quantitative easing: injecting more and more energy into the music, more liquidity into the system to keep the party going night after night. Low interest rates are the foundation of the party, enabling the extravagant life of the partiers who can only fulfill their role as consumers through the magic of debt, their maxed-out credit cards just one more entry in a litany of the night's antics. The Fed is our national DJ and only the DJ can make us fall in love again.

In this light, the eternal present of the party is revealed not as the stasis of the unemployed but as the timeless world of capital's imagination, the temporal compression of finance, where futures are real now and crisis is never or at least not tonight. The perpetual present articulated in so many of these songs is not just the arrested development of the twenty-something but the eternal youth of money, born fresh with each new transaction. What else are complex financial instruments but a way to make debt appear young again? Quantized and repackaged, its history erased and its risk level obscured, debt enters the great dance floor of the market as the perfect teenage dream.

Yet the teenage dream of this music is also all-too adult, sleazy and proud of it, reveling in its dirtiness and never stopping to apologize or clean up after. In this, our partiers represent not the victims of capital but its representatives, who can crash the entire world economy, disrupt the lives of millions, and face no real repercussions. If anyone is reveling in debauchery it is the bankers and the businessmen, who, like the partiers of Perry's "Last Friday Night" or the protagonists of every Kesha song, can break anything and fuck anyone, safe in the knowledge that they will be bailed out to do it all again. It is always Friday for the bankers, and we all must bow down at their altar and TGIF.

If on one hand the excess of these songs – the orgy of drinking, drugs, sex, and dancing – compensates the partiers for the misery of the real world, then on the other hand it also represents the excesses of financial speculation and asset price inflation that are the flipside of that misery. If anyone has "had a little bit too much" it is the bankers. Yet, just as the extravagance of the club revealed in negative the poverty of the dancers, so too does the excess of finance reveal that there is too little in the real economy. Financialization is, after all, the last resort of capital when the profit rate is too low to justify industrial investments. If financialization turns the whole world into a party, it is because capital, like the dancers, has nowhere else to go.

The compulsion to party, the sense that the dancers do not have a choice but to enter the club, is therefore not a desperate attempt at self-soothing by a worn-down population, but the compulsion of capital to keep itself running by forcing us back, if not into work, then into motion, circulation, and consumption. "You better move, you better dance," sings Ke$ha, the dollar sign in her name no longer the ironic expression of those without but the truth of who is speaking. Recession pop is not the musical expression of a lost generation but the pure voice of capital. And if capital is the music, then we must keep that music playing, must get up and dance to its rhythms again and again and again, and most importantly must believe that this compulsion is freedom. *Work it, I'm a free bitch baby*.

Movement Three: This Friday Night

Pop music of 2008 may have been the product of the recession, but it did not reflect that world back to itself as simple representation. Instead, it captured the contradictions and tensions of that era, collecting them all onto the dance floor where they could twirl before our eyes. If recession pop was the expression of both poles of the crisis – of capital trying to turn again and again on fumes, of those ground under its wheels escaping misery for one more night – then what can we make of contemporary claims that recession pop is back?

First, let us state the obvious: we have not recovered from 2008. Despite the pundits' claims that the econo-


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SOMETIMES A MAGAZINE IS JUST A MAGAZINE

my is the strongest it has been in our lifetimes – thanks, Bidenomics! – even a brief survey of the present shows that this purported recovery has not touched the lives of most Americans. Life chances are declining, real wages are stagnant or falling, housing is inaccessible to most, and union density is in the single digits. Meanwhile, the Fed is unwilling to commit to quantitative easing for fear of further stoking inflation, leaving us all in a bit of an economic holding pattern. It appears that the only way out is another recession, a crash that can wipe the slate clean. So, when people point to the fact that Lady Gaga or Kesha are still making music 15 years after their debuts, they are simultaneously recognizing that 2008 is still with us too, both as remnant of the past and a grim vision of the future.

But in the popular parlance, a new Lady Gaga album isn't just a reminder of the status quo, but a recession indicator, a promise that another crash is just around the corner. The frequency of these claims and the variety of the indicators named – pop music, art deco jewelry, heroin chic aesthetics – shows that the next crash is always looming in the popular imagination, an inevitability always already begun. Recession pop discourse thus indexes crisis in two registers: cyclical and secular, the coming crash and the long decline. Indeed, it seems to conflate these two scales of crisis; like recession pop itself, which depicted decline as a stagnant series of repeated nights out, so too does recession pop discourse register decline not as one long trajectory but as a cycle of catastrophes we are doomed to live again and again. This focus on repetition can distract from the secular nature of crisis, with the circular motion of the business cycle obscuring the larger downward spiral. However, the formulation of recession pop and its reference back to 2008 also recognizes that recovery from one crash is never finished, that we are still in some ways living in the aftermath of 2008, a persistence that reveals each crash not as mere repetition but as just one moment in a long secular decline. "Is recession pop back" is nothing other than the question of what is cyclical and what is secular, what is returning and what never left.

Conversations about recession indicators represent a popular attempt to understand a world that is too vast and complex for most to grasp, one that seems always to be producing some new misery. However, in this search for signs and portents, many have identified a real change in popular music. The last year saw a shift away from the vibey, sad-girl music that has shaped the pop landscape since 2020. Much of the post-2020 musical scene was defined by its atmospheric qualities rather than a pronounced beat or even strong melodic content – this is clearest in Taylor Swift's artsy twin records or Phoebe Bridgers and all her imitators, but is also true of less folksy fare, including The Weeknd's lush synth soundscapes and Billie Eilish's flat vocals. In comparison, pop music in 2024 was dominated by Charlie XCX, Chappell Roan, and Sabrina Carpenter, all artists who abandoned atmospheric whisper pop for catchy melodies, strong vocal performances, or a danceable beat. While it would be an overstatement to say that music transformed in 2024, the shift has been noticeable. A new Lady Gaga album is just the icing on the cake.

If music has changed since 2020 then it is certainly not the only thing that has done so. The last few years have seen the end of COVID precautions and the state's push to "return to normal" despite COVID's continued presence. The effectiveness of this "return to normal" policy is evidenced by both the literal return of maskless crowds to clubs and other public spaces and the figurative return of the club via the return of dance music to the pop charts. As we have seen, the club is also always a stand-in for work, and so it is no surprise that it has reemerged as a cultural touchstone at the moment when millions are leaving their homes and returning to the office. Just as in 2008, there is a tension here between freedom and compulsion: we are at once free of "lockdown" – never a reality in the US as it was elsewhere – and compelled to return to work. And like in 2008 when the bank bailouts left the rest of us high and dry, we are now facing the rollback of COVID-era social programs amidst a persistent inflation that at once raises the cost of living and limits the Fed's options for addressing the ongoing malaise. Once again, we all lose, and everywhere there is a sense that things are getting worse even as we re-enter the clubs and restaurants and workplaces.

COVID continues to haunt the present, and it is not the only remnant of 2020 that still lingers in the popular imagination, for we are also living in the wake of the George Floyd Uprising. There was a moment in early summer 2020, as the fires of the third precinct spread from city to city, when everything became dizzyingly, terrifyingly possible and it seemed that we might "burn this motherfucker down" for real this time. But that window of endless possibility is closed, at least for now, and we find ourselves back to the grind and to the dance. But it is clear that, for many, this return brings with it a sense of relief – no longer required to care or at least pretend to, they can forget the promises they made in 2020 and get back to enjoying themselves. The return of danceable music registers both movements at once, the closing down of the possibilities opened by that rupture and the permission to ignore the commitments that moment demanded of us.

So we return to normal – to work, to electoral politics, to the clubs and bars and dancefloors. We are told that it is Brat Summer and we get up and dance, smoke a cigarette, make some bad decisions. Rise and repeat. A compulsion that feels like freedom, or a freedom that is nevertheless forced on us: maybe recession pop never left.

wu qin

DISPATCHES FROM MAE SOT: a town on the thai-myanmar border

By Wu Qin

The author of this series, Wu Qin, is a Chinese anarchist who left the PRC in late 2022. Although she had long been interested in the Burmese revolution, it was not a focus of her research or activism (which had recently centered on the Iranian uprising of 2022), but when it became necessary for her to leave China, Thailand happened to be the country easiest for her to enter on short notice until she could move to a third country. While she was waiting, she took advantage of the opportunity to meet up with Burmese revolutionaries who had similarly fled to Thailand, and they recommended she visit Mae Sot.

A journalist by trade, Wu quickly became immersed in this town's fascinating history and current role as a crossroads for political refugees and illicit commerce—a history that has led some researchers to call it an epicenter of "Dark Zomia" or "Zomia 2.0."[1] She took copious notes and recorded long interviews with young revolutionaries who had fled the junta's counter-offensive in Myanmar, older refugees who had been stranded in Mae Sot for decades, migrant workers from as far afield as Ethiopia, as well as Chinese entrepreneurs in the smuggling and online scam industries. Eventually she moved away, but was able to obtain a journalism grant that funded a return to Thailand a few months later, when she began further research and wrote the long-form Chinese story that forms the basis for this Heatwave series.[2]

PART I: FIRST IMPRESSIONS, 2023-2024

Mae Sot is a border town on the Western edge of Thailand, separated from Myanmar by the Moei River. Walking along the river, I could sometimes hear the soft singing of Burmese pop music, the chanting of sutras, or the roar of drones.

Across the river stretched the Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge built in 1997, connecting the two countries. Perched atop the bridge stood a border checkpoint; beneath it an informal market ran along both sides of the chain-link fence during times of the year when the riverbed was dry. On the far side you could hear hawkers calling out the names of various Burmese foods along with those of smuggled alcohol and cigarettes. On the Thai side customers would make their selections. The hawkers' children hopped from one side of the fence to the other and back—each agile hop an "illegal border crossing."

It was only after I had visited that market many times that I realized the hawkers were neither in Myanmar nor in Thailand, but on a patch of unclaimed land: a little sandbank situated between the two borders. It was home to stateless people without claim to any citizenship—some were Rohingya, displaced by ethnic cleansing in Myanmar but refused entry by Thai authorities; others were fugitives evading Thai or Burmese law, who had taken refuge on this exclave without a sovereign.

In a sense, Mae Sot is an extension of that little sandbank, where the concept of "nationality" is unsettled. It's on the Thai side of the border, but it feels more like a Burmese city. People here speak Burmese languages, and most production and consumption take place around the flow of people originating in Myanmar. Few of them possess any official citizenship. Some are stuck in a legal limbo, holding various types of temporary documentation issued by Thai authorities. Others exist without any legal status, excluded from the modern order.

The Border and the Stateless

One could say that the border is like a prism, reflecting the flows and conflicts of the past and the present.

Zugar still remembers the difficult summer treks of his childhood, traveling from Yangon to visit his grandmother in Mae Sot. The family would first drive to Myawaddy, the town across the border, after which everything depended on luck. There was only a rugged, single-laned road from Myawaddy to Mae Sot, sometimes open for travel in one direction, sometimes in the other. At best, they could make it across in 24 hours, but often they had to spend a couple nights in Myawaddy first.

I met Zugar in Mae Sot's Muslim neighborhood in February 2023. As one moves from the town's markets to this neighborhood, the vivid colors characteristic of Southeast Asia grow dim. Streets become more rugged and the shacks more dilapidated, iron sheets and wooden planks only half-covering their living rooms. With few street lamps, an atmosphere of danger looms over the neighborhood in the evenings. Sounds of prayer and chanting drift through half-closed shutters. Incandescent light reveals children reciting the Quran, faintly illuminating the narrow streets. The neighborhood is rarely visited by non-Muslims—even the police are a rare sight, and the government has grown oblivious.

Zugar's sister runs a food stall on the ground floor of the house where their family lives, selling a dessert called *faloodeh*. As legend has it, this dessert originated in the Persian Empire, spread to Myanmar through India, and later to China's Yunnan province, each place adding its own local flavors. I had once sampled it in Yunnan, so was excited to taste it again here. As I chatted with Zugar over a bowl of faloodeh, he invited me to dinner at his home.

His mother wore a niqab covering her face, while his sisters wore hijab. Zugar sported a pair of retro square-framed glasses, his curly hair gathered behind a headband—a fashion sense that stood out in this conservative Muslim neighborhood. He was 27, working remotely as a programmer for a Singaporean tech firm. He described himself as "Burmese Bengali"—a somewhat paradoxical autonym, since in the context of Myanmar politics, "Bengali" is often used as an exclusionary label for the Rohingya. His mother's parents had crossed the border as war refugees, and his mother and uncle were born in a refugee camp. Zugar was born in Mae Sot, but moved back to Myanmar as a child with his father, who was from Yangon. He spent his entire adolescence in Yangon until 2012, when an anti-Muslim riot broke out.

"We were terrified. In the Muslim neighborhoods of Yangon, we had young guys stand on guard 24/7 to protect the community from Bamar Buddhist rioters." His family moved back to Mae Sot soon after. In contrast with the "economic exile" of migrant workers or the "political exile" of dissidents from movements against the regime (both contingents hailing from Myanmar's majority Bamar population among other ethnic groups), Zugar describes his family's status as "religious exile."

That was the last time he had crossed this border, via the newly constructed Asia Highway, which brought them from Yangon to Mae Sot in only four hours. For ten years after that trip, he had been stuck in this town. Lacking any documentation, he had not even been to Bangkok.

Zugar had never possessed a nationality, and might not ever get one. As a Muslim, it is incredibly challenging for him to acquire Burmese citizenship. After the anti-Muslim riots, he sought asylum status in Thailand. After ten years, he finally received a "Stateless Card" in 2022, giving him legal status to stay in the country. But this status is not a path to citizenship—only his children could become "Thai." Fortunately for him, Zugar was not alone: most people in Mae Sot were stateless as well.

Historically, Mae Sot has long been the first stop for refugees who flee to Thailand to escape the unending turmoil in Myanmar. Ever since the Union of Burma achieved independence from the British Empire in 1948, the federation's Karen State, across the border from Mae Sot, has been in a constant state of war. This has displaced many refugees, alongside rebel forces who move between Mae Sot and the war zone in the jungles. Following the riots and Myanmar's policies of systematic discrimination, Muslim refugees also started arriving, forming settlements connected to transnational trade. The mass protest movements of 1988 and 2007 also brought in Bamar dissidents from Yangon and other parts of Lower Burma.

The "Spring Revolution," latest in the history of Myanmar's oppositional movements, started after the military *coup* in February 2021. Within a week, hundreds of thousands of protesters flooded the streets of major cities, demanding the junta release its captive Aung San Suu Kyi, former State Counsellor and Minister of Foreign Affairs, and restore the democratically elected government. The younger generation came up with creative means of resistance, like banging pots and pans in symbolic demonstrations, flash mob protests and street performances. Civil servants resigned *en masse* in what they called a "civil disobedience movement," while workers across the country launched general strikes. In response to the citizenry's nonviolent resistance, the junta responded with violence in increasing severity, culminating in massacres and mass arrests.

Faced with this repression, the resistance moved underground. Many of the protestors fled Lower Burma for the jungles, some joining existing separatist forces known collectively as "Ethnic Armed Organizations" (EAOs), while others went into exile across the border. Mae Sot thus began absorbing another round of Burmese exiles.

For Muslims and Karen people in Mae Sot, national identities exist on a spectrum: the distinction between "Burmese" and "Thai" is arbitrary at best. Most of the political exiles do not have passports and are wanted by the junta. When asked, they clearly identify as "Burmese," but since the start of their exile, they have lost their rights and identity as citizens of Myanmar. Most are unable to apply for Myanmar passports or return to the country without facing persecution. Some have applied for refugee status from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) field office to go to a third country. Many of those who stay apply for the "Pink Card," a labor permit issued for migrant workers, while others apply for the "Stateless Card" (also known as the "White" or "Hilltribe Card"), an identification document valid for ten years, designed for ethnic minorities on the border, by paying more to the agencies handling residency documents. Still others hide away in safe houses, facing harassment or extortion by local police if they go outside.

As Stephen Campbell points out in his book *Border Capitalism, Disrupted*, the Thai-Myanmar border synthesizes the promise of asylum with the practice of violence. People from Myanmar can cross the border when they face persecution, without having to formally apply for asylum under international law. However, the technologies of power on the Thai side of the border are aided by the junta tyranny on the other side, as the precarious condition of exile enables Thai authorities and businesses to exploit refugees for economic gain.

Since around 1990, more and more Thai factories have moved to Mae Sot to access the labor of Burmese workers, who can be paid less than the minimum wage. Mae

Sot has thus become home to massive sweatshops staffed by Burmese migrants. Today, the town is the main base of production for the Thai garment industry. It had already been attracting cheap labor from Lower Burma for decades, also due to the demand for labor in construction and agriculture in surrounding villages. Every round of mass land confiscation in Myanmar by the junta, and every Western sanction imposed against military repression, has resulted in another wave of migrants and refugees flowing into Thailand.

"Mae Sot has thus become home to massive sweatshops staffed by Burmese migrants. Today, the town is the main base of production for the Thai garment industry."

For most of the displaced people, proper work authorization is too expensive. Those who are able to afford these documents move from the border to other cities in Thailand for better labor conditions. Those who can't afford them have to stay in Mae Sot. The systems of production on the border thus form a brutal link in the chain of global capitalism, where Burmese migrants are treated as disposable lives. Here, workers are deprived of a social safety net, and they have very little time off work, if any.

Since the 2021 coup, state violence in Myanmar has reinforced the precarity of Burmese people's lives in Thailand, facilitating extortion by Thai police, whose threats of deportation feel more serious under current conditions. From 2021 to 2023, over 50,000 people flowed into Mae Sot from Myanmar. Without legal status, they became magical money trees for local police, who stop and frisk Burmese people on the streets and threaten them with deportation or detention. The lucrative gray income has made Mae Sot one of the most desirable places for Thai police from throughout the country, creating fierce competition for law enforcement jobs in the city.

The Burmese town across the border, Myawaddy, has become fairly well known in China through its association with telecom scamming compounds. Horror stories of Chinese victims being abducted, enslaved, or subject to kidney harvesting have attracted significant attention from the public. In reality, more of the people trapped in these compounds come from the bottom of Myanmar society, whose impoverishment only worsened after the coup. As many had never been recorded in official registries and no one could claim their bodies, their lives are not considered newsworthy.

On the border, almost everyone feels the perpetual presence of Myanmar's state violence through its absence. While I've never been to Myanmar, in Mae Sot I found myself growing immersed in Myanmar's cityscapes, its rugged hills and flowing streams.

The Road to Exile

On my phone, there are pins all across the border on Google Maps, marking the routes taken by young exiles of the Spring Revolution. This was one of my favorite topics of discussion in Mae Sot: they would tell me one geographical name after another as I recorded them on my map.

Yet, no matter where they departed, or which route they took, they all eventually ended up in Mae Sot.

When I first met Waso and Pyartho, I was struck by their incredibly similar appearances: both wore glasses with black frames, had braided hair, were elegantly dressed and spoke fluent English. I had a hard time telling them apart even after we became good friends. When I met them in February 2023, they had just arrived at Chiang Mai, Thailand's second-largest city. They had been stuck in a safe house in Mae Sot for a month due to their undocumented status. Now that they had obtained work permits, they were excited to be able to walk around town every day, shopping for supplies.

These twin sisters came from a Muslim family in Myanmar, where they had worked as public school teachers in Yangon before the coup. They left their jobs in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), which called for state employees to quit their jobs. The movement was initiated by Yangon healthcare workers, hitting its peak when 400,000 state employees joined, about half of whom were teachers.

After quitting their jobs, the sisters started to engage in underground activities. After surviving two years of heavy repression, a friend in their activist group was arrested by the military. Everyone else fled the country. "We all agreed: if anyone were arrested, they should just give the interrogator the list of names—nobody ought to endure the torture that would be inflicted otherwise."

Waso and Pyartho could not get passports because they were wanted by the junta. They had no option but to smuggle themselves across the border, like many of the other protesters. They followed the smugglers from Yangon, switched vehicles and crossed the entirety of Karen State. But just as they crossed the border and got on the smuggler's motorbike, Thai police showed up.

In a panic, the sisters started speaking in Korean—the "secret language" they had learned by binge-watching K-drama for years. After a moment of confusion, the smuggler told the police in Thai that the sisters were probably Rohingya. Convinced by their South Asian appearance, the police took them to detention alongside the smuggler.

For many years before the coup, Mae Sot had already served as a point of transit for Rohingya refugees fleeing ethnic cleansing in Myanmar. Many hid in the town's influential Muslim community. Most would not stay long before moving to Malaysia via a network that connected them from the northwestern border to the

Muslim-majority regions in southern Thailand. Very few of the Rohingya refugees stayed in Mae Sot or joined local Muslims in trading second-hand cars, teakwood and gems in local markets. If at any point they were arrested, Thai authorities were likely to deport them for crossing the border illegally.

The exiles of the Spring Revolution enjoy a somewhat safer status than other refugees in Thailand. Facing international pressure, the authorities have agreed not to repatriate dissidents who fled Myanmar. Over the course of two years, the tens of thousands of resettled Burmese dissidents constructed an extensive safety net involving the democratic government-in-exile known as the NUG,[3] grassroots organizations, international NGOs with programs focusing on Myanmar, and the UNHCR. News and funding circulate within this network so that when a comrade faces difficulties, the community can help them out.

The twin sisters were rescued by this safety net, just a day after they were detained.

For Thein Tun, another native of Yangon, the journey to Mae Sot was much shorter as he departed from Karen State. Like many, Thein Tun had joined the People's Defense Force (PDF) after the coup and begun training under the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) in the jungle camps near the border. After his son was born, he quit the PDF and went into hiding.

In February 2022, Thein Tun decided to leave the Karen jungle with his family. In contrast with the twin sisters, he was fortunate enough to avoid police, but he also lacked assistance, so he had to cross the border with his wife and child, together with some 30 Rohingya refugees and Burmese migrant workers. Through conversation, he discovered that the latter were headed for different destinations than the revolutionaries: the Rohingya were on their way to Malaysia, while some of the workers planned to work in Mae Sot's garment factories, others hiding in cargo trucks bound for the industrial port city of Mahachai, where the seafood industry thrives on undocumented migrant labor from Myanmar. As for the Spring Revolution exiles, in order to understand how so many ended up in Mae Sot, we need to rewind the tape two months to a town across the border: Lay Kay Kaw in Myawaddy township, where the largest and riskiest wave of escape began on December 15, 2021.

Lay Kay Kaw was once known as "the town of peace." It was built with the support of Japan's Nippon Foundation during the 2015 democratic transition, after the military had signed an armistice with the KNU (Karen National Union) in 2012. The town was meant to provide accommodation for Karen people who had been displaced by the decades-long conflict. Before the coup of 2021, there were more than 4,000 Karen villagers in the town.

After the coup, Lay Kay Kaw became a "liberated zone" for a variety of revolutionaries. Thousands of young protesters came to this town under the KNU's protection as they fled junta rule. Most planned to join the PDF as guerilla fighters, responding to the NUG's rallying cry. The town became a supply station and transit stop for the Ethnic Armed Organizations training in the jungles. There were also dissidents, journalists and former representatives of the NLD (National League for Democracy) government, who came to Lay Kay Kaw for temporary refuge.

For the parents and brother of Saw Marner, a young Karen revolutionary, Lay Kay Kaw has been home since construction finished in 2015. Like many Karen villagers, they welcomed the protesters and dissidents who arrived from Lower Burma after the coup. Almost every villager had a protester in their homes before the military's final assault. Some even rented out their Japanese-built houses to the urban middle-class visitors and moved into shacks they hastily constructed on farmland.

Ko Tin Maung had been an engineer in the Thilawa Special Economic Zone in southern Yangon. He was one of the first people to flee to the Karen jungles after the coup. After two months of military training, he realized that he wasn't suited for frontline work, so he set up a school and a library in Lay Kay Kaw for local children. At first, only four children attended the school; this number rose to more than 70 just before they had to flee again. Aside from academic courses, he also led the children in physical fitness exercises. He sent me a couple of videos of him playing games with the children, adding "I miss my kids. Lay Kay Kaw was like a utopia."

Mg Saint is an experienced anarchist activist from Yangon. After the coup, he worked with the General Strike Committee. Due to his decade-long engagement in social movements, he was quickly identified as a "fugitive" on junta-controlled TV broadcasts. They accused him of killing a soldier. His home in Yangon was raided by the military, and his wife and kids went into hiding. He and his comrades at the Committee fled into the Karen jungles.

Everything came to an end just a month after Mg Saint had settled in Lay Kay Kaw. The military assault started on December 15th, 2021. The "town of peace" had become a hub for the arms trade after accommodating more and more guerrillas, and this had attracted the junta's attention.

At first, the villagers did their best to cover for the revolutionaries. However, the military soon began indiscriminate air raids. Tens of thousands of people dispersed in an instant, setting out on their paths to exile. Some of the elderly villagers and children couldn't escape in time and were killed in the bombings.

There was no phone service along the border, so a lot of people lost contact with each other as they fled. Ko Tin Maung remembers a friend who lost track of his wife and three children, the youngest only four years old.

Refugee camps and villages lined both banks of the Moei River, long-term accommodations for Karen people displaced by war. Saw Marner's parents and brother settled in one of these villages. But the protesters from Lower Burma had to constantly move back and forth across the river. Villagers would ask them to leave just as they were getting settled, as their presence would attract military drone strikes. But when they went to the Thai side, they would find themselves forced back to Myanmar by Thai border forces or refugee camps that refused to take them in.

"Many camps were involved with the underground arms trade. We don't know which side they're on, if they supply weapons to the junta or their allied Ethnic Armed Organizations," Mg Saint said, adding with a bitter smile, "We haven't seen a single one of the welcome signs that the UNHCR claims to have installed."

After two weeks on the road, Ko Tin Maung and his friend found an appropriate place to cross the border. The friend managed contact his wife when they arrived in Mae Sot. She thanked Ko Tin Maung for setting up the school in Lay Kay Kaw and helping the children get in shape: they couldn't have survived the journey otherwise.

Just as they settled down at a camp next to the river, Saw Marner's mom passed away, but they couldn't hold a funeral for her. A couple months later, his brother sneaked back into Lay Kay Kaw, wanting to take one last look at the house they had hurriedly fled. The house had been plundered clean—all the furniture and appliances were gone. A few months later, the "town of peace" was under complete military occupation.

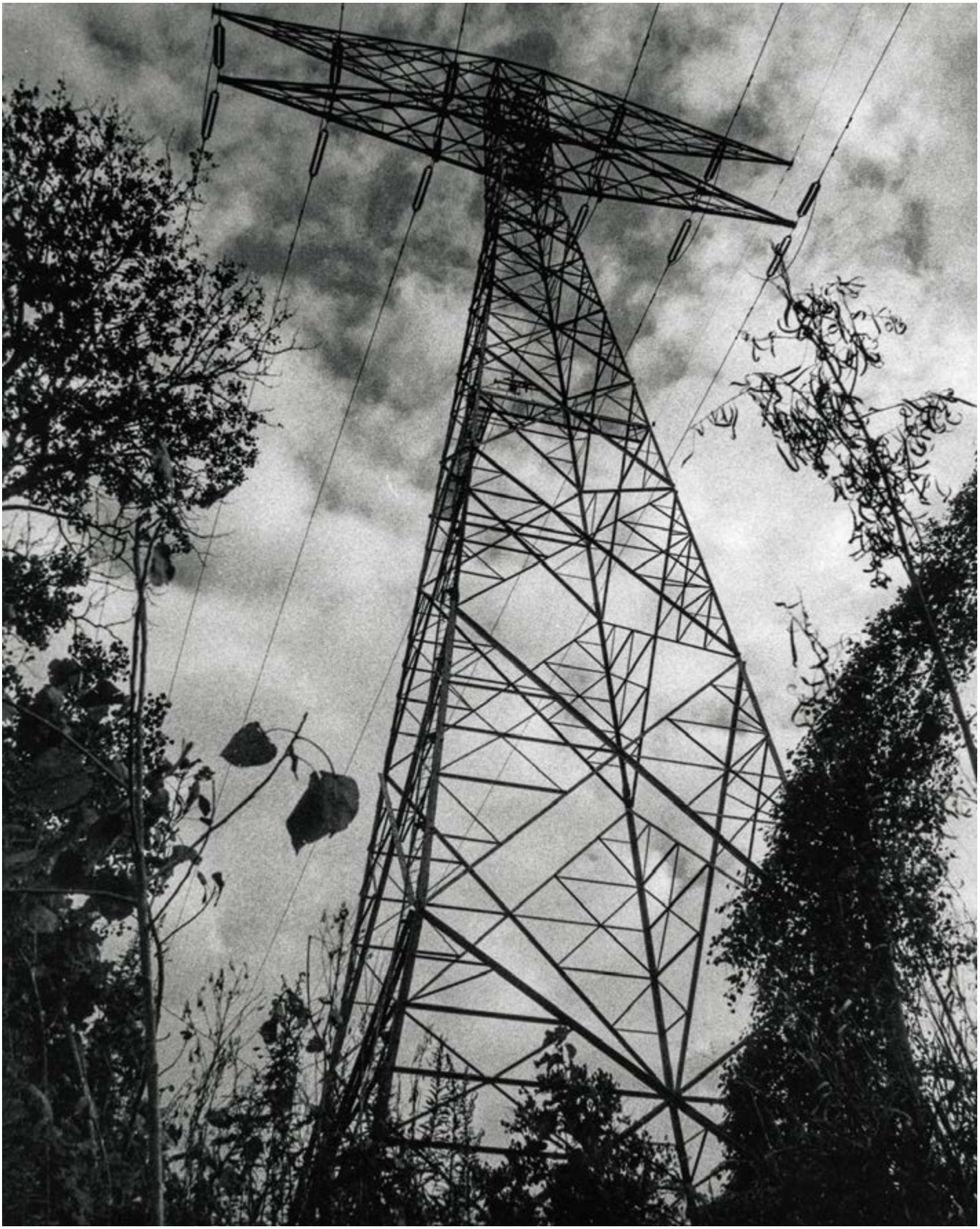
Part II to appear in the next issue

Notes

1: "Zomia" is a term for the border regions of highland Southeast Asia popularized by James Scott, who argued (in *The Art of Not Being Governed,* 2009) that Zomia was historically defined by intentional autonomy from state control. The term "Dark Zomia" was used in the title of a keynote speech by anthropologist Pinkaew Laungaramsri to frame the International Conference on Myanmar's Borderlands at Chulalongkorn University in June 2024, which included several presentations on Mae Sot. There, "dark" was meant in a derogatory sense to emphasize the role of organized crime in such border towns. The term "Zomia 2.0" has been used in a broader sense to describe these towns' semi-autonomy from the state regulation of commercial activities more generally, the term being coined by anthropologist Alessandro Rippa in his case study of a Laotian SEZ ("Zomia 2.0: Branding Remoteness and Neoliberal Connectivity in the Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone, Laos," *Social Anthropology* 27/2, 2019). While Scott had concluded that the region's historic autonomy had ended by the 1950s as its inhabitants were incorporated into various states, Rippa asserts that some relatively well-placed Zomians have revived their efforts to escape state control by resorting to "neoliberal" methods: buying some degree of autonomy "in exchange for political recognition, development of infrastructure and the possibility for those in power to accumulate hidden fortunes" (p. 255)—often involving the exploitation of less fortunate members of their own communities, or workers trafficked from elsewhere. Wu is not satisfied with either of these framings, but it's worth noting that this is how academics have been theorizing the region.

2: Diego Ge's English translation of the story was published as "Between Borders: The Spring Revolution and Burmese Exiles on the Thai-Myanmar Border" on the funder's website (frontlinefellowship.io, where the Chinese original can also be found). They've generously offered to let us use revised and abridged portions of that translation in this series. In addition, Wu will be incorporating updates based on later visits to Mae Sot and communication with her contacts there. For another English text by Wu Qin, see "An Embassy's Blood, a March in Beijing, and Chinese Intellectuals in 1999" (Chuang blog, 2023).

3: The National Unity Government of Myanmar (NUG) was formed after the 2021 coup by members of the National League for Democracy, Ethnic Armed Organizations, and various other minor parties. It currently operates from both within and outside of Myanmar, with an affiliated military wing known as the "People's Defense Force" (PDF). For details on the federalist NUG/PDF and their tensions with separatist tendencies in the revolution, see "Unhappy is the Land that Needs Heroes" by Geoffrey Rathgeb Aung (Chuang/Endnotes, January 2025).



countrysteak

A SUMMER WITH A THOUSAND JUNES: the nahel riots and the communist hypothesis

By Artifices

Translated from French by Enzo Bodine & otto dix rivers

tulyppe

This text was originally the second part of a project to analyze the intense episode of class struggle that shook France in 2023. The first text was devoted to the social movement against the pension reform bill, which lasted from January to June 2023. The aim was to show how the movement was not defeated but came up against its own limits. In particular, the "riotous moment" of this period, during which numerous wild demonstrations took place in reaction to the government's "passage en force", was not taken for what it really was. By focusing on the "riotous" form of these demonstrations, which went beyond the trade union framework, it was little noticed that their content - the questioning of the State by its citizens and the internal criticism of democracy - was identical to that of the trade union side of the movement. But we came away from 2023 noting that, to each of these [inter-classist?] "errands," the proletariat "responded with insolent lines of flight." The Gilets Jaunes movement in 2018 was a case in point. The riots that followed the murder of Nahel Merzouk in Nanterre by a policeman were another, and are the subject of the second article, which is translated below. A few weeks after the end of the pension movement, and in the space of a few days, these riots raised the question of communism far more than the long months of social unrest that had already ended in certain defeat.

This second text on the June riots is also part of the history of suburban riots following racist police killings. In particular, the riots of 2005, following the deaths of Zyed Benna and Bouna Traoré, two teenagers who died while being chased by the police, gave rise to a number of analyses within the far left and the left, most of which condemned the use of riot and the rioters. It is therefore on the basis of the reflections of the communization milieu in 2005, which disagreed with these condemnations, that we have written this text. First, we recall the general state of class struggles after restructuring, and how the particular situation of the racialized proletariat reveals the general state of social relations. Secondly, we look at the Left's reaction to the riots. We note that the Left's discourse shifted from a strong condemnation of the riots to a civic minded "il faut comprendre" ("we must understand"), which found little favor with the insurgents. Finally, we look at the riot itself, concluding (contrary to certain analyses of the autonomous milieu) that while this episode did not represent a process of insurrection, it did represent an outline of one. Echoing our first text on the pension movement, we criticize conceptions of the "riot" as an essentially revolutionary overcoming of the present situation.

We had explicitly chosen to write two texts on 2023: the first in response to the many analyses that seemed to us to miss the point of the pensions movement, the second in response to the few analyses that seemed to misunderstand the nature of the June riots. The reactions we received confirmed this imbalance of interest in the analysis between the social movement and the Nahel riots. Yet we still believe that the riots were a far more intense episode of class struggle than the long months that preceded them. The whole of 2023 also, and above all, seemed to indicate the twilight of the cycle of struggles begun since the last restructuring, rather than the umpteenth repetition of a citizens' social movement. So we remain ever vigilant to class struggles as they unfold, in order to grasp their rapid mutations in this period of crisis of the capitalist mode of production.

PART I

THE END OF SPRING

On 27 June 2023, a video of a police killing during a traffic stop made waves on social networks. It showed two cops shooting the driver of a stationary car in Nanterre. While the event itself was unfortunately nothing out of the ordinary for the racialized proletariat of the French "banlieues," the existence of a video showing the open barbarism of the murder of a 17-year-old teenager for all to see gave specificity to what could have remained just a local news item—like a recent murder of the same kind in Cherbourg. The wide circulation of the video quickly provoked an explosion of anger, leading to—among other things—a wave of riots on the evening of the crime.

While the eruption of riots in response to a police murder is not in itself exceptional,[1] the riots that followed Nahel's death had a singular impact on the year 2023—if not beyond. Their intensity, dynamics, and content, as well as the subsequent crackdown, marked a particular moment in the more general class struggle. As soon as the first clashes began, the event definitively silenced the last psalmodies of the movement against pension reform[2] and announced a level of political offensiveness unseen in France since the most glorious acts of the Gilets Jaunes. As a result, the riots enjoyed widespread support, including in the ranks of the far left, whereas similar events had been unanimously condemned after the deaths of Zyed and Bouna in 2005.[3] Paradoxically, the response to the riots in our circles can be summed up as inaudible expressions of solidarity—in the form of exalted slogans—with the rioters. Although they only lasted a handful of days, we believe that these riots were an important moment in the current cycle of struggle, the story and legacy of which must be kept alive.

On June 27th, riots broke out, although at the time they were confined to certain districts of Nanterre, and a few fires spread, mainly in the 92 [French *département* close to Paris], a few districts in the Paris region and a handful of other large towns. The following day, the riots spread to many cities across the country. On June 29th, a white march took place in Nanterre, bringing together Socialist Party (PS) MPs and autonomous activists in the middle of inhabitants from the surround-

ing banlieues. A not-so-anecdotal fact: Nahel's mother refused to call for calm. Attacks on prisons, public transport, CAF offices [Social Welfare offices], schools, libraries, nurseries, police stations, tobacco shops and supermarkets became the norm in the days that followed, even in residential areas deemed to be "quiet." Journalists were beaten up and their equipment stolen before the contents of their film ended up in the offices of the judicial police.

The Senate did the math: 2,500 buildings hit, 12,000 cars burnt and 782 cops injured in 672 communes and 95 of the 101 départements. In just one week, these figures exceeded those of 2005, which had lasted three weeks, and the riots spread at an unprecedented rate, particularly in medium-sized towns.

The government decided to deploy elite troops (RAID, BRI, GIGN) to supplement the 40,000 cops and gendarmes sent to quell the riots. The Prefect of French Guyana announced that a local civil servant had died from a stray bullet allegedly[4] fired by rioters. On the 30th, the riots continued to spread and intensify, town halls were burnt down and a freight train was attacked. The next day, in Marseille, the city center was out of control for several hours and RAID police officers shot Mohamed Bendriss in the chest with an LBD ("defense bullet launcher"). His cousin had been shot in the eye by the same 'non-lethal' weapon the day before.[5] The riots continued over the following days, gradually losing momentum until 5 July, when the violence dropped sufficiently for the media to jump on the occasion and declare the sequence over. Although a few clashes persisted, the riots had lasted only 9 days, with the return of order proving to be as swift as the outbreak of the revolt. Nearly 4,000 people were arrested, and a third of them received prison sentences, three times as many as in 2005. The material damage caused by the riots reached an unprecedented level, with insurers putting the figure at over a billion euros.

A few weeks after the movement against pension reform, the riots opened up a breach in the daily course of the class struggle that the earlier demonstrations had not even been able to glimpse. But while comparison makes the qualitative differences between the two movements obvious—and the limitations of the first blatantly apparent—there remain few analyses of those summer nights, whose intensity could only be contained by the brutality of the repression. Traces of melted asphalt under the burning cars were the only scars of an episode too quickly consigned to history. Without fantasizing about a movement that did not give birth to communism, we feel it is vital to reopen the debate about these riots. We intend to see them for what they are, neither purely racial nor purely proletarian: riots by racialized proletarians—racialized in so far as they are proletarians and proletarians in so far as they are racialized.

THE MISADVENTURES OF CLASS STRUGGLE

> "To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships."
>
> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

Leftists in search of a revolutionary subject, sociologists and/or cops—all observers of the blaze that swept through the French suburbs in the summer of 2023 asked the same question: who were the rioters? I.e., what was their employment status, their sociability, what were their grudges, and, ultimately their goals? In short, to gain a foothold it was necessary to translate their activity, as best as possible, into the language of politics. But attempts at filling such a gap in the matter at hand with statistical research are not without their pitfalls and there is the risk of losing the point entirely.

There was, of course, the crime itself, the militarized crackdown, and the odious pot of money the far-right fundraised for the murderer to thank him for having so zealously served the endocolonial order. All this belongs to the realm of injustice and is easily accessible to any documentary examination. But there was also the uprising, which never directly answers to its trigger but

rather pursues its own history, mapping out possible paths to its own overcoming.

When Debord *wrote*, in a similar context,[6] that it is the task of revolutionary theory to provide the rioters with their reasons, he correctly recognized that the task of communism can only be raised from the point of view of the riot. The situationists embraced this perspective when they argued that it was because of "augmented survival" —the advertised proliferation of commodities meant to satisfy the artificial needs of "alienated" individuals within the spectacle—that white people failed to grasp what the black proletariat was already contesting in practice. As passive consumers of commodities, whites would be subjected to this "drug" of the spectacle and submit to its dictates. In contrast, Black people, for whom access to wage labor is tenuous and whose material misery precludes any superfluous consumption, would prove unassimilable by a spectacle that has nothing to offer them.

The logic of the spectacle exhibits an immanent contradiction here. On the one hand, advertising and the reign of the commodity universally impose property and consumption as the insatiable fulfillment of social life. On the other hand, access to these commodities is restricted to the minority of workers earning substantial wages. It is this gap between the material reality of the black proletariat and the promises of the spectacle that makes them conscious of their social misery: "The blacks of Los Angeles are better paid than anywhere else in the United States, but they are even more separated than elsewhere from the maximum wealth that spreads out precisely in California."[7] But the situationists thought this rift could only become concrete if Black people were confronted with an ostensible abundance of commodities, otherwise absolute poverty would prevail over the spectacle's contradictions, condemning proletarians to inactivity and despair. Excluded from the process of capitalist circulation, where exchange value rules over social relations, Black people had no choice but to destroy, through looting, the value virtually contained in commodities and usually realized in the act of purchase, allowing only concrete use values to survive.

> "Like the young delinquents of all the advanced countries, but more radically because they are part of a class without a future, a sector of the proletariat unable to believe in any significant chance of integration or promotion, the Los Angeles blacks take modern

> capitalist propaganda, its publicity of abundance, literally. They want to possess now all the objects shown and abstractly accessible, because they want to use them."[8]

In this case, the mercantile abundance is "taken at its word," since the purpose of the looting remains the appropriation of goods, but to obtain what they want the rioters practically deny the mediation of wage labor.

Thus, the specific condition of Black proletarians, who don't even have the material means to be alienated by the commodity, would be the primary condition for the development of a proletarian class consciousness, as the spectacle would leave them no other alternative and would dispel all of capital's illusions of freedom. The commodity is universal in its fetishism, but hierarchical in its distribution, and it is in this asymmetry that, for the situationists, lies the possibility of a rupture, for Black people "can find aid in the world only by attacking this world as a whole."[9] Through their racial particularism, Black people would realize the universal nature of man by tearing down everything that separates them from the "human community."

A few years later, the situationist Mezioud Ouldamer would reiterate the main theses of his comrades regarding the impossibility of immigrant alienation. By this time, the crisis of the 70s had arrived and the key concept of "augmented survival" disappeared in favor of the question of work and its corollary, unemployment:

> "*Like the lumpens of the last century (to whom it will always be a mistake to assimilate them completely), young immigrants are confined to a literally impossible existence* [emphasis added], having to 'learn industrial discipline' on the one hand, and 'accept the absence of any industrial prospects' on the other."[10]

The cause of the rupture between what the spectacle can offer and what racialized individuals can desire is then turned upside down: it is no longer the contradictory position they occupy within the spectacle that confronts them, but rather the spectacle itself, which decomposes under its own weight, without the process of racialization establishing any fundamental distinction between its subjects.

> "Immigrants are now just a part of France. In this part, however, we see the whole, the totality of the disaster, the collective loss, the generalized dispossession. If immigrants are more deeply affected, it's because they don't even have the image or illusion of an accessible France left, something worth running after."[11]

For his part, Debord asks, lamenting the failure of all previous attempts at revolutionary transformation: "How many Frenchmen[12] are left, and where are they? (And what is it that characterizes a Frenchman now?)," and adds "there is no one left but immigrants in this horrible new world of alienation ." This suggests that the "immigrant" condition is no longer defined by race, but rather affects all individuals, whoever they may be. Now that the spectacle has wiped out all the cultural landmarks to which the "French" could attach themselves, everyone feels external to their own social life, and particularity has already reached the level of the general.

Despite the outdated character and humanist grammar (all situationist theory is predicated on the irreducibility of use value) of these two texts, the situationists' intuitions have the undeniable merit of having conceived of race as the locus of the general contradiction. They urged white proletarians to "first rally the black revolt,"

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immediately adding "not as an affirmation of color, of course." Race is neither an obstacle to unity, nor an additive to the combativeness of the traditional proletariat, but the class itself as it cannot appear under the leaden cloak of the "spectacle." By contrast, the later pessimism of Ouldamer's opuscule is symptomatic of the decline of working-class identity and the triumph of capital (conceived as its antagonist), which has irrevocably colonized all aspects of social life. The main interest of situationist theory was also its impasse: according to it, the crisis is driven by prosperity. Outside of it, there is no salvation.

For a long time, Marxist orthodoxy defended the idea of a sense of history, a teleological succession of defined modes of production, of which communism would be the ineluctable culmination. As capital developed, it would generalize the condition of wage labor, thereby creating the objective conditions for its revolutionary overcoming, by unifying an increasingly homogeneous class.

Programmatism[13] thus established the figure of the white, male worker as the essential political subject, the sole guarantor of proletarian universality. The rise [*la montée en puissance*] of the class throughout the twentieth century coincided with the development of capital, which in turn solidified the internal segmentations of the proletariat. The granting of social and legal rights, as well as a relative degree of representative legitimacy in institutional political bodies, was tied to the belonging to the national community and to the status of citizenship associated with it. Hence, the figure of the white worker is not just a racist construct, but proletarian subjectivity as produced by the national structure of the Fordist compromise. Ideology (in this case, racism) is a practice which aligns the social existence of the subject with the representation it constructs of itself. Racism thus allows the white proletariat to reap the fruits of the over-exploitation of its racialized counterpart, and to benefit from a surplus of dignity within the social hierarchy, in order to consolidate its status of respectable worker.[14]

Anything that deviates from the abstraction of this generic, immaculate "conceptual worker," is treated as an accident of history; race is thus either a contingent determination of the being-proletarian or an insufferable ideological machination (the notorious "racialism" that some lunatic [*illuminés*] people still use today to explain why their calls for international insurrection systematically fail to unite the class) perpetrated by the bosses or, later, by the racialized petty-bourgeoisie[15].

There is no such thing as a pure class struggle because it is always overdetermined. The proletariat does not exist independently of its stratifications, and it never appears to us as a concept but as a contradiction in process.

At the macrosocial level, it's not so much that the apparatus of class and racial assignments influence each other, but rather that these two categories are always-already structured together by the objectivity of capitalist social relations. They are not indissociable downstream, as the intersectional approach clumsily suggests, but co-constitutive upstream. It is therefore a fraction of the proletariat that entered the struggle, not as an unfortunate surrogate for the organized workers' movement, nor even as a disadvantaged population, but as the practical conjugation of several determinations.

To insist on the primacy of class is to try to restore a proletarian positivity that could express itself as such in the face of capital, to sweep away its particularisms, which would only be an ideological deviation, an employer's manipulation to create division. In the early 1980s, the term "immigrant worker" still upheld the illusion that the two terms could function separately. And yet, even if the struggles of specialized workers (OS, low-skilled workers)[16] at the time did not identify themselves as immigrant struggles, the position of OS had already been racialized as such: "immigrant workers," essentially Algerian, Spanish and Portuguese at the time, carried out the most back-breaking work, as in the press workshops, were paid less than their domestic [*nationaux*] colleagues and also lacked any prospect of career advancement. This schism introduced specific concerns that departed from the unitary line held by the CGT and provoked internal conflict within the working class during its struggles.

With the advent of the industrial crisis and the twilight of Fordism, the restructuring of the secondary sector in France and the subsequent offshoring led to a massive loss of unskilled blue-collar jobs.

Tragically, race came to the fore as immigrant blue-collar workers became the first casualties of the wave of layoffs that swept through the industrial proletariat.

As the prospect of the racialized individual's relative integration into the working-class community disappeared, his proletarian identity was denied, and the "immigrant worker" was soon essentialized, becoming just an "immigrant." Their children will never know the erstwhile promise of integration. The state exacerbated the precarization of the workforce, exposing it to the threat of structural unemployment via the arsenal of neoliberal labor legislation adopted in the wake of the austerity turn [tournant de la rigueur], despite the apparent racial neutrality of the political contract. For the white proletariat, meanwhile, immigration lost its function as a guarantor against social decline and the immigrants were now completely excluded from the national labor community, the margins of which they had once occupied.

The partial collapse of the welfare state cut workers off from social services and exacerbated their aversion to those still relying on them, now perceived as parasites

"taking advantage of the system": the disjunction between the social wage and the reproduction of labor power produced "a situation in in which workers are led to identify less with the capital-labor opposition than with the dichotomy between labor and its rights, and everything that threatens both."[17] In the wake of the spiral of growth of the Fordist compromise the divide between rich and poor had taken the place of the divide between bourgeoisie and proletariat. This divide was now doubled by the rift between workers and welfare recipients, reinforcing discriminatory dynamics and justifying further exclusion.

But the objective situation of the racialized proletariat does not mechanically give rise to riotous subjectivities; ideological activity is needed to produce its existence as unbearable. If the entire capitalist mode of production (CMP) is indeed structured by the "principal contradiction," i.e., the relation of exploitation, the possibility of disjunction[18] lies in every cog of the social totality. Thus, its reproduction implicates all instances that guarantee the objectivization of the economy, first and foremost ideology. Race unfolds in its own effectivity on the base of the ideological fossilization, and thus naturalization, of the primary segmentation of labor power. When this naturalization comes into crisis, because it malfunctions and/or is no longer self-evident, social roles are reshuffled—until the eventual "return to normality," which is never really a return to normal. Class struggle is always waged through ideology because social relations are mediated by flesh-and-blood human beings.

At the turn of the 1980s, it became necessary to put this unassimilable proletariat somewhere. The spatial confinement of immigrant families to the banlieue finely delineated segregated zones where the management of the labor force is founded on practices that could not be implemented elsewhere.

Day after day, proletarians living in these suburbs are subjected to state violence, whether in the form of the police (bullying, humiliation, slaps in the face at a checkpoint, beatings for a passing glance or a baggie of pot... murder is only the culmination of this harassment) or of the administration (family benefits advisors threatening to cut off allowances if you refuse to take the first underpaid job offered by France Travail, the lengthy appointments at the prefecture to regularize your ID, etc.). These routine practices remind them of their place in society. But they also generate obvious targets: the places where this violence is practiced (and, sometimes, the people practicing it). Under these conditions, it's hardly surprising that "revenge" is the ideological transmission belt of their revolt. It is vengeance in the present and for the future because no horizon seems to emerge from the contradiction they inhabit, the contradiction of the proletariat as a whole.

The struggles of racialized proletarians thus reveal the general situation of the class, but because of their ideological character, they carry the particular content of police violence, lack of ID papers, Islamophobia and so on. The road taken by the class struggle is definitely full of pitfalls, but we will have to get used to it.

Part II to appear in the next issue

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Notes

1: We could mention the riots for Sullivan in Cherbourg in early 2024, Selom and Matisse in 2017, Adama in 2016, Moushin and Laramy in 2007, and so on.

2: The powerlessness of the "people from the left" to get the pension reform abrogated was dispelled by the promise that, next time, we won't let it happen, and that the movement had helped to recruit many new supporters, which would strengthen the fighting spirit of the class. Hope is life.

3: Except in autonomous scene and insurrectionist circles, whose members we will not insult by assimilating them to the 'far left'.

4: Neighbors claimed that it was the police who fired the shots, but the investigators quickly buried the case.

5: Médiapart, a liberal outlet, counted 6 people disabled and twice as many seriously injured, but these figures are probably underestimated *https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/020823/l-effroyable-bilan-provisoire-des-violences-policieres-apres-la-mort-de-nahel*

6: The Watts riots broke out in a black ghetto in Los Angeles in August 1965 after yet another episode of police violence.

7: Guy Debord, "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy," Internationale Situationniste #10, 1966: *https://libcom.org/article/decline-and-fall-spectacle-commodity-economy-guy-debord*

8: Ibid

9: "Address to Revolutionaries of Algeria and of All Countries" (*Internationale Situationniste #10*, 1966) in *Situationist International Anthology*, Berkeley, Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006, p. 192.

10: Mezioud Ouldamer, *Le cauchemar immigré. Enquête dans la décomposition de la France*, Paris, Gérard Lebovici, 1986.

11: Ibid

12: The term 'Frenchmen' here does not refer to specific ethnic or national origins, but to 'authentic' individuals who refuse to take part in spectacle.

13: Pre-restructuring cycle of struggle in the 1970s: the proletariat must gain strength through the workers' movement and its organizations and assert itself as a class with a program and a workers' identity, in order to achieve socialism.

14: "If we go back only about twenty years, 'national preference' was the construction of a 'racial' group on the basis of criteria that were not 'racial'; it was a matter of resistance to social relegation against those who were designated as its symbols and purveyors. It was in this way that the defence of 'working class respectability' became 'national preference', which was constructed on the basis of the criteria of working-class respectability as the delimitation of a 'racial' group to be fought against, and not as the affirmation of a 'us' like 'France', 'the fatherland', 'Christianity'. 'National identity' was not a substitute for working-class identity; it was working-class identity that was "resisting" in the form of the national identity that had always been one of its determinants. 'Resistance' was not an anachronism, it had completely changed its content by reworking some of its determinations: from a desire to liberate labour from wage labour, it had become the affirmation, threatened as a social order, of wage labour as it ideally existed in the capitalist mode of production. Asserting oneself as a national, democratic and republican citizen meant conjuring off the anxiety of falling into precariousness and worrying about the future and asserting as inherent in citizenship the threatened 'right' to social advancement'."; for more, see *https://dndf.org/?p=21431*

15: This remark refers to the French context, in which a certain number of groups, organizations and intellectuals perceive race as a mere employer's mystification that can be ignored by the union of proletarians. The latter criticize any serious analysis of the materiality of racial divisions created and reproduced within the capitalist mode of production. Evoking the concept of race would therefore be racist in itself, and keeping one's blinders on would be the only real revolutionary strategy.

16: OS (ouvrier spécialisé) is a category of worker assigned to a specific task. It's the typical Fordist factory worker. The expression "factory worker" would be the closest translation.

17: Théorie Communiste, « Le kaléidoscope du prolétariat. De la segmentation raciale dans le mode de production capitaliste », TC #26, 2018, p.44.

18: Certain excesses need to be tempered here: disjunction does not mean insurrectionary crisis, or even crisis at all, but a temporary discrepancy between two moments in the process of reproduction. Capital and its institutions do not stand idly by and watch the contradiction grow until it explodes.

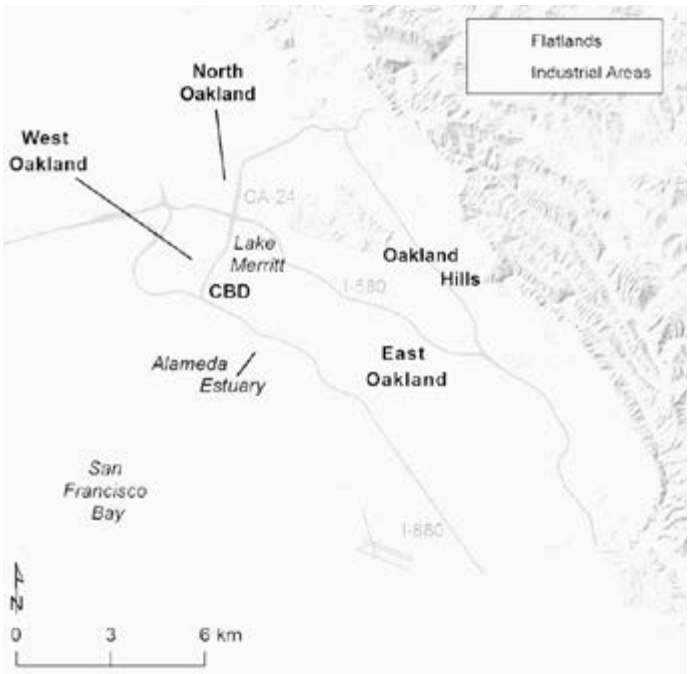
DONDE LA VIDA NO VALE NADA: scattered thoughts on organized abandoment & ideological retrenchment in oakland

By E14 Notes

"Oakland, California. Donde la vida no vale nada. Donde la ciudad nos tiene abandonados. Oooooaaklaaaand Caaaliiifooooorniaaaaa!!!"

-Gregorio Roman,
IG: @oakland_california_2023

"Oakland California. Where life isn't worth anything. Where the city has abandoned us. Oooooaaklaaaand Caaaliiifooooorniaaaaa!!!" To almost anyone in the Town these days, these words are all-too-familiar. The IG videos follow a formula: depicting scenes from East Oakland streets—police chases and other activity, burnt out abandoned vehicles, dilapidated boarded-up buildings, smiling community members on the street or on bikes, and the occasional promotion of local taquerias and other business. The account has spawned a spinoff clothing line with screen printed t-shirts , hoodies, and even hats worn proudly by those lucky enough to get ahold of them. Most recently, they covered local anti-ICE protests that went largely unnoticed in local media.



This IG account's popularity lies in its simplicity and relatability; it quite literally just depicts what many residents see as they go about their daily business, providing a tongue-in-cheek window into the texture of daily life often ignored or spectacularized in local news, politics, and popular media. Anybody cruising down major arteries like E 14th Street can attest to the fact that the images circulated on this account and others like it seem to reflect back to us our own reality. Notably—with the exception of promotional videos—the majority of what the account posts are ambiguously captioned "Oakland California," without additional commentary or framing: this is kinda just how things are these days. For many, it's a mirror into their reality, for others it can be read as crafting negative imagery around Oakland, contributing to a growing sense that things are out of control and *something* has to be done. And maybe that's just how it is. *Or is it?*

Where We're At

Even for those who question the narratives circulating on social media, it's clear that shit is getting harder for the poor and working-class denizens of Oakland's sprawling flatlands.[1] Skyrocketing inflation, a decades-long housing crisis, episodic eruptions of street violence, and the tactical and ideological failures of

progressive alternatives have left a vacuum of despair, nihilism, and skepticism. Many people have been living on the razor's edge for far too long. In a fragmented present, images become the truth, shaping an ideological consensus about the source of the malaise of the current conjuncture - shaping the public itself. Political crises are constantly being constructed and reconstructed to serve various interests, more often than not having to do with property and class aspirations.

It honestly feels pretty fucking bleak out here these days—politically and otherwise. In a political terrain marked by a municipal budget crisis, recent recalls of 'progressive politicians,' post-2020 crime wave narratives, and general ideological retrenchment, a clear-eyed analysis of the present can feel daunting. From our limited viewpoint, a few things might be happening here:

1) As others have observed, there is a lot of fucking money flowing into astroturfed right-wing political and media campaigns; the 'doom loop' narrative is real and pervasive. This has served to shape an ideological consensus that Oakland is worse than it has ever been—in terms of crime, political corruption, and general infrastructure—and a narrative that progressive politicians are solely to blame: It's time to 'get tough' on the criminals and low-lives and clean our city up. Their success has been palpable, judging from the recent recalls of progressives like Sheng Thao and Pamela Price.

2) East Oakland's flatlands have been at the center of the perpetual crises of housing, underdevelopment, joblessness, poor health, and violence since at least the 60s. **Decades of organized abandonment**[2] **by the state have produced a material context ripe for revanchist political solutions promoting development and wealth creation.** These solutions rely on state violence, which is directed toward a racialized, classed 'other' that is at once the horde at the gates and the enemy inside, leeching up from the streets yet always somehow alien, not one of 'us.' In this landscape, the politics of authenticity and representation remains potent, obscuring the undertheorized, complex, and layered racial and class fissures that permeate the geographies of Oakland's flatlands.

3) Yet, at the same time, undercurrents of social and cultural rebellion are woven into the fabric of daily life in many flatland communities. While the forms—sideshows, Bikelife, graffiti, looting etc.—often lack a coherent political content, the ongoing legacy of youth rebellion represents an organic practice of negotiating and refusing structural conditions of state violence and abandonment. These *anti-political* practices and organizational forms are usually written off as criminality or delinquency having little to do with political struggles. Precisely for this reason, they exist in tension with the politics of polite society, progressive politicians, or the Non-Profit Industrial Complex.

We want to think through these currents, analyzing the relationship between a general context of organized abandonment, property interests both within and outside the community, and the recent turn to law-and-order sensibilities before turning to youth street culture as an undertheorized influence on (anti)political alternatives.

"You Can't Play Politics with Public Safety": Social Media, Representation, & Narrative Work

People from outside the flatlands tend to view places like East Oakland as monolithic, as 'the hood' or 'the ghetto.' But a neighborhood is never just one thing. The reality is that within 'the ghetto,' there are tenants, landlords, homeowners, drug dealers, unhoused people, salaried professionals and tradespeople, undocumented migrants, and long-term unemployed residents all within the same several-block radius.

In the last couple decades, waves of long-term, generational residents, particularly Black homeowners, have left East Oakland for greener pastures like Antioch, Patterson, and other central valley exurbs. For those that want to stay but struggle to afford it, rising rents and foreclosures often don't leave many choices. Holding on can be precarious. Yet many do still hold on, joined by more recent waves of migrants. It remains one of the last places in the city where working-class families have a chance at home ownership, or at least marginally cheaper rent. The Latine population—composed of both homeowners and renters—has grown immensely. In the last several decades, East Oakland has become increasingly Spanish (and Mam) speaking, attracting waves of migrants through the Bay Area's booming construction and service sectors and Oakland's status as a Sanctuary City' This demographic transition in turn has brought up complex conversations around belonging and community identity in a section of the Town that was until recently majority Black.

Meanwhile, as encampments of displaced people are cleared from the lucrative real estate hotspots downtown, they have shifted eastward. With tensions already running high, *those people*—the 'crackheads,' 'crazy people,' 'homeless'—absorb the blame for rapidly changing and deteriorating social conditions. The result is a reactionary political pragmatism that seeks to address issues in the community at the level of the symptom rather than the root.

Enter the Doom Loop: a representation of Oakland as a shithole city overrun with criminals, a warzone driven into the ground by corrupt politicians and lawless 'ghetto' criminals. Popular social media pages like Bay Area State of Mind, Bay Area Kulture, and others provide a constant stream of spectacular, decontextualized imagery of looting sprees, street violence, and seemingly inescapable fentanyl and homelessness epidemics. If we are to believe the comments, Oakland is indeed Go-

tham City. One can ascertain the political implications of this imagery in the unabashedly pro-Trump rhetoric promoted by these pages and others like them since last November. In a context where there is a dearth of local news, social media too often fills that void, making this phenomenon concerning to say the least.

In the aftermath of the pervasive post-2020 'crime wave' narrative, a tacitly law-and-order (dare we say 'proto-fascist') sensibility seems to be growing even among the working class and poor racialized majority. This is nothing new, but for some reason we don't talk about it enough. Racialized people in the flatlands are rendered abstract illustrations of the violence of capital and the state. In need of representation, there is a 'we' who must fight for 'them.' These ungrounded assumptions elide a hard-pill for leftists to swallow: a lot of people in the community often hold incoherent or, at worst, downright fucked up political views. Patronizing, infantilizing narratives do us no good here.

Indeed, the self-righteous progressivism of local politicians and organizations—the misleadership class—too often falls flat for people who live with organized abandonment every day. For those that have lost loved ones to street violence, vague political projects like the 2020-21 Defund OPD campaign or abstract, virtue signaling appeals to racial justice are unable to grapple with the depth and complexity of the trauma. These tensions are amplified through the spectacular lens of social media, which has influenced the deep-seated consensus that 'soft on crime' policies are to blame for the current state of affairs. Safety becomes 'public safety,' a policing framework that beckons struggling residents who may otherwise be sympathetic to structural transformation. For example, during the Defund OPD campaign, a major point of tension within Oakland's Reimagining Public Safety Taskforce was the feeling that defunding would only worsen problems. Many of these residents identified as multi-generational East Oaklanders and property owners. They came out hard against any prospect of defunding the police, asserting their position as 'authentic' and 'representative' of an entire community. For them, defunding was an outside imposition on residents who actually wanted *more* police funding. If they've taken everything else away from us, why would we let them take the last government service left? In this case, 'public safety' came to stand in for a deeper set of anxieties and contradictions that the liberal-to-progressive politics of the Defund campaign failed to connect with.

The flatlands have been at the center of crises of housing, underdevelopment, joblessness, poor health, and violence since at least the 60s. The deep-seated legacies of homeowner and property politics in the area have shaped expectations about prospects and prosperity. Since the 1960s and 70s, homeowner's organizations and local media have sounded the alarm about blight, violence, drug dealing and addiction, and juvenile delinquency. Indeed, the compounding impacts of state violence, deindustrialization, organized abandonment, and underdevelopment have profoundly reshaped the conditions of everyday life in the low-lying parts of the city. Yet, the dominant narratives of these conditions consistently blame problem groups of people, especially criminals, drug users, and the unhoused, for the general malaise.[3] This ideological consensus around the need to 'get tough' on criminals in turn serves as a warrant to authorize increasingly punitive policing of 'problem places': apartments, projects, street corner economies, encampments, etc. The police are a necessary force in order to keep things in 'order' - in other words, to maintain property values.

From this perspective, the specter of (Black) youth criminality looms ever-present. 'Those' youth are out of control. Something has to be done. Going back to the '60s, as growing unemployment, urban decline and blight became central to local War on Poverty debates, *The Oakland Tribune* reported 'gangs of hooligans' throwing rocks and bottles at police patrol vehicles quite regularly, alongside eruptions of looting, vandalism, and general delinquency. These racialized images cohered through the '70s, '80s, and '90s into the recurring media archetypes of lawless drug dealers, pimps, and violent gang members. Yet, too many in the community either gloss over this history or accept this narrative about 'street culture,' believing that there's something inherent in Oakland's underground economies and street politics that can only be fixed by the same systems that brought them into being. The terms of order here are organized around an opposition of hardworking citizen-subject on one hand, and undeserving criminal who only has themself and their choices to blame on the other. This simplistic good/evil narrative is tied into ideological investments in an idealized nuclear family household and aspirations for an ordered, private life—the American Dream. All of this emerges out of a general context in which generations of racialized dispossession and state violence have made these aspirations an impossibility.

We can see a flavor of these politics in pragmatic center-right visions of East Oakland politicians like Noel Gallo, Loren Taylor, and Treva Reid, who emphasize public safety, local business development, and homeownership. In neighborhoods that have been for too long neglected by the state, the prospect of coupling public safety with wealth creation becomes desirable. Promoting development and cleaning up our neighborhoods while keeping our families here—what's not to like?

Yet, these politics are not as organic as they appear. As journalist Ali Winston notes,[4] powerful vested interests are closely entangled with this brand of reactionary politics. The recall campaign, according to Winston, was almost entirely financed by local oligarchs like tech investor Ron Conway and hedge fund executive Richard Dreyfuss, part of a grey-money network covertly funding a whole manner of revanchist efforts like the recalls, re-

pealing the 2020 eviction moratorium, and much more. The astroturfed voter education entities they fund, like Empower Oakland, were seemingly omnipresent in social media ads during the last election cycle, pushing a hardline pro-policing/public safety agenda and endorsing local candidates amenable to these interests. These networks, alongside the landlord interests who have for decades dominated California politics, were crucial sources of support for politicians like Loren Taylor who sought to expand the size and scope of policing, with the ostensible goal of making Oakland great again.

Empower Oakland[5] in particular presents itself as a grassroots formation designed to remedy the very real issues plaguing the Town, "a volunteer-led organization focused on common sense solutions to our most pressing challenges." Their "Common Sense Agenda" addresses seven key issues: tackling the public safety crisis, homelessness, building more housing, restoring governmental trust and accountability, strengthening the local economy and small business, cleaning up blight, and fostering high quality public schools. The slick website and ad campaigns portray a narrative of longtime residents fed up with business as usual, desiring "outcomes over ideology," and promoting "radical transparency." On the surface, this seems like something disaffected locals can really get behind. Empower Oakland's ad campaign relied on spokespeople like generational East Oakland resident, homeowner, and former Reimagining Public Safety Taskforce member Keisha Henderson, whose profile on twitter proclaims "you can't play politics with Oakland safety." Her endorsement lent legitimacy and authenticity.

Tech interests aren't the only powerful players in this field. Local homeowners also wield considerable political influence. Homeowners believe themselves to have the most at stake in community affairs, as opposed to the 'transients' living in apartments and tents. This segment sees themselves as fighting an uphill battle to protect their property values and return to a time when things were 'better.' When people watched out for each other. When it was safe to go out at night. When people in the neighborhood took pride in the upkeep of their houses and community. A time that maybe never was, clouded by nostalgia and class anxieties about 'going backward.' For this social base, concerns about safety, wealth, and stability provide a fertile basis for political appeals to law-and-order.

So, the right-wing turn is not some organic expression of East Oakland, but neither is it purely a conspiracy financed by outside tech and real estate interests. Rather, these revanchist law and order Doom Loop narratives resonate with different segments of the community be-

cause they speak to aspects of communal desires for dignified life, albeit couched in a political expression and orientation that makes those aspirations an impossibility. But the ways that people conceptualize dignity, safety, and justice are always-already refracted through dominant understandings of what constitutes a safe, ordered community. In a community fragmented by displacement, state violence, and day-to-day precarity, people tend to fall back on what seems secure.

Meanwhile, the changing political winds, underwritten by a local budget crisis and a national administration seeking to slash social spending altogether, are eroding the already fragile infrastructure and funding streams for robust NPIC and NPIC-adjacent community projects aimed at violence prevention, service provision, and cultural and community programming. The progressive gains of the last decade, particularly those post-2020 achievements, are turning into losses. With local organizations incapable of undertaking even baseline defensive measures to protect existing wins, it is no mystery why state-facing progressive liberalism lacks popular support among its supposed constituency. Careerism, ego, and the contingency of private and governmental grants, funding sources, and patronage networks often seem like insurmountable barriers to building durable community networks capable of community defense and self-determination. Any nascent movement with teeth in the flatlands must go beyond the dead-end strategies of community development, non-profit coalitions, and the Bay Area Democratic Party machine.

If we are to move past the tired rituals of politics as usual, then we must find new groundings for our action, new viewpoints, new accomplices. For us, this means taking seriously the activities, desires, and analysis of racialized youth and rejecting political resistance invested in optics and respectability. Our solutions lie with us, but maybe not in the way many of us think.

'Sideshow Mentality', Ideological Incoherence, & Anti-Political Rebellion

Flatland youth don't need to be told how to rebel. From sideshows, to graffiti, to music, to social organization, to the teams of SE bikes, dirt bikes, and 4-wheelers that momentarily take over the streets, defying gravity while carrying out gut-wrenching stunts against oncoming traffic, local youth cultures are steeped in a long tradition of saying fuck you to people who try to tell them what to do. Our intention here is not to romanticize; indeed, the complex dynamics of the flatlands are rife with their own contradictions and violence. However, as organic forms of rebellion grounded in the fabric of daily life shaped by all of what we have discussed so far and more, there is much that can be learned by taking this shit seriously.

In early February 2025, in response to intensifying ICE raids on immigrant communities across the country, many grassroots calls to action were circulated on social media, WhatsApp groups, and Spanish-language radio. In particular, in the days before Monday February 3rd, calls for a national "Day Without An Immigrant" emerged, echoing 2006's massive pro-immigration movements and calling for immigrants and their allies to skip work and school and refrain from shopping.

In Oakland, the loosely-organized grassroots calls were put out for protests in two locations: predictably in Fruitvale Plaza in the heart of the predominantly Latine Fruitvale district, and less predictably two mobilizations planned for several miles away on 98th Ave. and International Blvd. At 11am, a youth-heavy bike Ridout was to head towards the Fruitvale action. At 5pm, there was to be a grassroots community protest on the street corners. This section of Deep East Oakland rarely sees this type of mobilization. @Oakland_California_2023 covered both actions, keeping residents informed of when things were popping off and what was happening. The Fruitvale protest was large and lively, lasting into the night. The 98th Ave action, taking place on one of East Oakland's largest major thoroughfares, was much smaller but grew steadily through the evening, with attendees circulating between the two protests. The energy was beautiful: mamalonas and scrapers blasting corridos, banda, and Santa Fe Klan, sporting Mexican and Central American flags and cruising up and down International Blvd, while back at the Plaza community members danced and celebrated in the streets with their flags and signs. The protests themselves were not clearly directed by any formal organization, and this kept things dynamic throughout the day.

Interestingly, local youth were tactically and logistically pivotal in the spread of information within and between both protests. Occasional sideshows broke out on the intersection of Fruitvale and International and in other locations, disrupting the otherwise respectable veneer of this nascent movement, embodying the 'radical joy' non-profits won't shut up about while effectively clogging the arteries of circulation and reclaiming public space. Sheisty mask-clad youth on SE cruisers and dirt bikes kept attendees informed about changing plans for movement as well as police activities, making use of both technology—snapchat, facetime, etc—and the flexibility offered on two wheels.

As night fell in Fruitvale, the tension in the air was palpable. Young people on the street corners and in cars and bikes sought to extend the general desmadre of the day as they shared buzzballs, modelo, and Hennessy. However, police were able to break through the line of cars blocking International Blvd, effectively shutting down the Fruitvale protest fairly early in the evening. In response, the revelers quickly reorganized themselves to bring their rebellious celebration back to 98th, where episodic sideshow activities continued into the night. These pop-up and cat-and-mouse tactics animate the

area's heavily criminalized sideshow culture and often serve to exhaust police energy and resources.

In the days following, the 'sideshow mentality' of this segment of youth protestors was heavily criticized by supposed allies and 'leaders' of the movement and community on social media. They repeated all the familiar talking points: these kids were distracting from the message, 'clout chasing,' and 'making us look bad.' Overbaked assumptions about youth street culture remain pervasive, an investment in respectability politics that presents a barrier for advancing the struggle beyond the typical protest movement. Concern over optics, in turn, will serve to limit its capacity to materially contest the actual reproduction of abandonment and misery. Regardless of the conscious intentions of youth rebels, there is something powerful in their refusal to embrace the dead ends of respectability and law and order. This is an *anti-political* sensibility that at its best points us towards the real sources of our dispossession. Such a sensibility is necessary for the movement to mature tactically and strategically.

Young people in particular remain at the forefront of this movement, as evidenced by the ongoing school walkouts and protests across LA, which are now being organized by local Oakland high school students. We look forward to seeing how these movements develop. Community mobilizations both in Fruitvale and Deep East Oakland continued the following weekend, fostering beautiful rebellious energy in our communities. Mobilizing our people is crucial in building popular energy and a sense of collectivity and common struggle. However, when we see calls to action that specify they are "peaceful," with "no flag burning" and "no sideshow energy," we should seriously assess the limitations of this approach and the capacity for such actions to move beyond the terms of order of the dominant society. We must make these tensions and contradictions visible if we are to overcome their limitations and actualize our collective desires for dignity and self-determination. Perhaps embracing some of the 'sideshow mentality' would do us some good.

From below and to the east.
Towards anarchy and communism.

countrysteak

Notes

1: Extending from the forested uplands down to the low-lying of the central East Bay, Oakland has been geographically and socially divided between the wealthier Oakland Hills, middle class Lower Hills, and historically working class and impoverished flatlands of East, West, and North Oakland.

2: Organized abandonment basically refers to the ways the state has responded to the ongoing structural crisis of the '60s and '70s; slashing social services and disinvesting in community infrastructure while beefing up an increasingly carceral enforcement arm to deal with the fallout. See: Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis and Opposition in Globalizing California* (2007)

3: "In 1978 the California legislature passed Proposition 13, which broke with the previous labor-liberal coalition of the welfare state, slashing property taxes, greatly diminishing state funding. For cities like Oakland who's municipal budgets were already in crisis, this spelled ruthless cuts to social spending and an increasingly punitive form of statecraft as conditions in the flatlands continued to deteriorate, producing a condition that Ruth Wilson Gilmore terms organized abandonment, with dire consequences for nearly all aspects of daily life." Rajagopalan, "From Below and to the East: Notes on Crisis, Dispossession, and Containment in East Oakland's Flatlands" *Ampersand,* Summer 2023.

4: *https://bleeding-edge.ghost.io/oaklands-summer-of-discontent/*

5: *https://empoweroakland.com/issues/*

dirtyclean

FIRE TO THE PRISONS

The wave of uprisings that began in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014 and culminated in the George Floyd Rebellion of 2020 resulted in an undertow of new prisoners and detainees subject to the brutality of the carceral state. As the country with the highest incarceration rate on the planet, the United States has a storied history of repressing social rebellion. From colonial night watch systems and organized slave patrols to criminal syndicalism laws targeting partisans of the old workers' movement to the more recent series of raids, grand juries, and prison terms colloquially known as the "Green Scare," counterinsurgency is a plain weave in the fabric of everyday life. Today, many militants, like Mumia Abu Jamal and Sundiata Acoli, have been behind bars for a half-century. These rebels are living casualties of the war against the New Left, the Black and Red Power movements, and the Black Liberation Army. Others, like the ATL 61, have yet to face trial or sentencing, but nevertheless face the full weight of the state. New techniques and technologies have emerged, but the basic logic is invariant. Repression is a consistent feature of life under capitalism – stepping in where and whenever the mute compulsion of the market is insufficient to maintain order.

Historical and contemporary movements from below share an inveterate tradition of supporting political prisoners and campaigning for the abolition of the carceral state, long used as a cudgel to suppress rebellious factions of the working class and maintain the color line. The vigorous defense campaign run on behalf of the Haymarket Martyrs in the post-Reconstruction era ignited the classical workers' movement and inaugurated the struggle for the 8-hour day. The support campaign for Sacco and Vanzetti, two Italian-American anarchists accused of a murder and subsequently executed for it, was a galvanizing moment for the nascent workers' movement at the turn of the 20th century. During the same period, in response to state and federal repression, the IWW developed an extensive prisoner support culture that defined its legacy. The early CPUSA defended both politically charged cases, like the judicial lynching of the Scottsborough Boys, and communist POWs during the second Red Scare. And in the aftermath of repression against the American Indian Movement, the defense campaign for imprisoned militant Leonard Peltier was widely supported by civil society.

In keeping with this tradition, we want to dedicate space in each issue to highlight prisoner struggles and support efforts. To that end, we introduce "Fire To The Prisons," a regular column dedicated to prisoner support. The name "Fire To The Prisons" is a nod to the popular anarchist magazine by the same name in circulation since 2007. While our project centers some struggles over others, we make no distinction between political prisoners and regular prisoners. For us, all prisoners are class war prisoners.[1] In this first installment, we turn to a small group of comrades who run the Uprising Support website, of-

fering material and spiritual support for prisoners of the recent George Floyd Rebellion. In subsequent issues, we will highlight different prisoner support efforts and individual prisoners who are in need of support.

—Heatwave Collective

Uprising Support

At the time of this writing, the UprisingSupport.org website has the names of 14 people currently serving sentences for their alleged or expressed involvement in what came to be known as the George Floyd Uprising of 2020. When we started this site in the summer of 2021, that number was much higher, as many of the people we were tracking through various court and prison systems were still awaiting trial or sentencing. For those wrapped up in the ever-widening reach of the federal judicial system, trial was unlikely – the vast majority of federal cases are resolved through plea bargain. The prosecutors are too well funded and the penalties too stiff for many people to feel comfortable chancing what is colloquially known as the "trial tax" – the likelihood of doing more years by taking a charge to trial and losing instead of pleading out.

We started the website as a clearinghouse of information about how to support people awaiting trial or currently serving prison sentences from the 2020 Uprising. We found that the many of these people lacked formalized political support structures. Parents, partners, communities, and crews were trying to scrape together small amounts of money, support, and attention. Charges ranged from alleged mass looting actions, arsons, and curfew violations to things like posting on Facebook. In the COVID-19 chaos of backlogged state courts and shuttered grand juries, the scope of repression was scattered. While many of the communities affected routinely face criminalization, this wave of repression targeted acts with political intent. Many people who had been in the streets were being swept up in post-demonstration raids, arrested and charged without attention from the broader left and its organized political bodies. Our intent was to help bridge some of the gaps and provide as much information that consenting defendants could give us in the hopes that everyone facing state repression would have access to the kind of support, organizing, and care that has become synonymous with radical left anti-repression and anti-prison organizing in the United States.

Currently, federal prisoners are featured prominently on the site because they are the ones serving the longest sentences, often for now ubiquitous charges like civil disorder and various forms of arson. When the site began, and for the next few years, there was a higher percentage of people awaiting sentencing, trial, or doing their time at the state level. By our tally, there were somewhere between 350-400 cases charged at the federal level, but at the state and municipal level arrests numbered in the tens of thousands. With even only a fraction of those arrests leading to a criminal charge, conviction, and jail sentence, the number of criminalized people from a spectrum of communities was staggering.

Thankfully, in the past year we have been able to move many of those we reached out to in earlier stages of their criminal cases to our 'Post-Release Support Page' on the website. We hope that people will continue to offer solidarity to them as they transition back to the outside. Many of the people who have or will be released are going to struggle with housing, jobs, and getting connected to larger movements for racial justice and against the police. A common question we get is people wondering what someone needs after they are released. Besides the semi-obvious answer of material support (money, housing, employment), they need vibrant movements of resistance to re/turn to – spaces that can both soften the trauma of the blunt force of the carceral state and sharpen the edges of critical responses to police violence. There are many reasons to do prisoner support, but our overarching ethic remains that support for those locked up in the midst of a demo, an uprising, a movement for a world free from domination, coercion, and control means that those movements will last longer, be stronger, and more worth fighting for.

The small number of names on the website, even if you added of them together since we launched, make up the tiniest slice of those arrested and convicted from 2020. What you see on the site are those whose name we found, tracked through the system, contacted, and who consented to being included (which carries its own kind of risk), or those who were/are supported by a local crew or support committee. There were hundreds and hundreds of letters we sent that went unanswered, and many people who we made contact with but never gained the necessary consent to list them. There are people doing 20+ years in state jails for burning cop cars whose names most of us will never know, and there are people sitting in federal prison for the next 5-10 years for their involvement in a moment, even if fleeting, that we all championed as a movement that could change the world. They are all deserving of our attention, solidarity, and care, now and on the day of their release, and into the future.

Tyre Means is currently serving a 5-year federal sentence for burning a cop car in downtown Seattle, WA at the beginning of the uprising. At his sentencing hearing, Tyre told the judge, "the days of just rolling over to police brutality are over." He likes to read and write, make poetry and rhymes and he says "this time that I am away from my family friends and loved ones is only making me stronger as a man. I have no regrets."

Malik Muhammad is a committed revolutionary, anarchist, and anti-fascist currently held by the Oregon Department of Corrections. He is not up for possible

release until 2031. His support site has quoted him with saying, "unlike those who may regret a thing they did to get convicted or those who tempered their actions for fear of the consequences, I regret nothing, if only not doing more before I was caught."

John B. Wade is a Black Atlanta activist who was arrested on November 2nd, 2020 in an inter-agency raid along with two others. He was charged for his alleged participation in the vandalism and burning of the former Wendy's restaurant on University Avenue following the murder of Rayshard Brooks. Originally sentenced to 5 years in federal prison, John was released in 2024, and then unceremoniously re-arrested at a parole hearing following that release-he is still locked up as of this writing.

Angel Espinosa Villegas is a trans butch immigrant, and life-long organizer. She is currently finishing a federal sentence relating to the arson of police vehicles in Little Rock, Arkansas. Upon hir release she will enter directly into ICE custody and most likely never return to hir home, fiancé (another defendant), dog, and life in the US again.

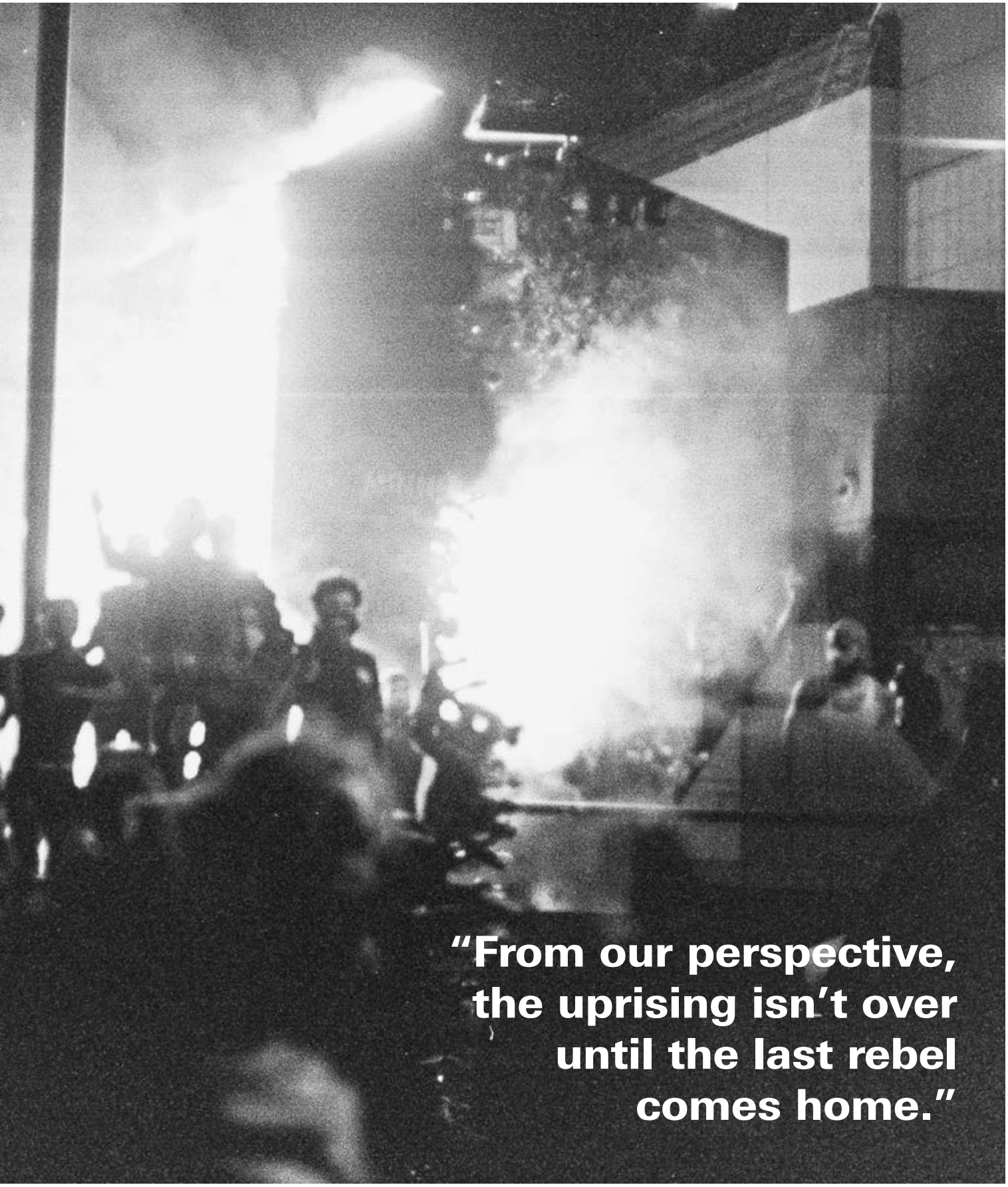
Montez Lee, is a Black community member, and father from Rochester, Minnesota who was sentenced to 10 years in federal prison for arson in Minneapolis, Minnesota at the beginning of the uprising. From his initial support site Lee stated, "I have faced injustices from local police departments myself and have been subjected to racism. I wanted to be a part of something bigger. I wanted to show my kids and peers that you fight for what you believe in."

These are just some of the names of the people who have been under the yoke of the state since the summer of 2020, when people rose up for an end to police murder of Black people and an end to the police themselves. In some places the rebellion burned hot and fast. In other places, it smoldered, reigniting for months after if not years. Regardless of how long or how hard people went, carceral state repression and recuperation followed. From our perspective, the uprising isn't over until the last rebel comes home. With this in mind, supporting the many people still locked up from the 2020 Uprising is not just an ethical imperative for anarchists, it's also how we build strong movements that can withstand state violence and thrive.

You can find out more about how to support prisoners from the George Floyd Rebellion at www.uprisingsupport.org

Note

1: No listing of political prisoners is comprehensive, but the NYC Anarchist Black Cross maintains a guide that comes close. For reasons of space, we recommend readers check out their work: https://nycabc.wordpress.com/


“From our perspective,
the uprising isn’t over
until the last rebel
comes home.”

REVIEWS

***The Housing Monster* by Prole.info**

New edition with prefaces by Lazo Ediciones, Ben Kritikos, and Sean KB

(PM Press, February 2025)

In case your copy of this classic graphic essay got confiscated in the latest raid, a second edition has just been released. Its main differences from the 2012 edition are an exciting new cover illustration and three prefaces about how the book has been applied to struggles in Argentina, Scotland, and the U.S. *The Housing Monster* ranks next to Kate Evans' *Red Rosa* among the finest illustrated introductions to communist theory and history, in this case interweaving original analysis with personal reflections on the alienating experience of life as a tenant and construction worker. If "Work, Community, Politics, War" was prole.info's 21st-century *Manifesto*, and "Abolish Restaurants"explained core ideas from *Capital* through the lens of contemporary service jobs, *The Housing Monster* combines these approaches with an extensively researched history of failed efforts to resolve "the housing question" (rent control, state housing, collective living, etc.), along with discussions of gender, urban planning, unions, and historical "socialism." The book's title derives from a statement by Johann Most about "the beast of property," while also evoking the vampires and werewolves Marx found haunting capital's "House of Terror," but toward the end, the author takes this metaphor in another direction: "Combine criticism with enough moralizing, and monsters appear everywhere—evil robber baron capitalists, lying politicians, greedy speculators, sadistic police, insane war criminals. Calling something a monster is admitting that you don't understand it" (p. 143). The book shows us how to look behind the masks of the villains we normally blame for high rent and low wages to understand the system that "continually recreates" all these monsters—along with "timid, prejudiced and isolated workers," "imaginary togetherness and real conservative communities," "racism and political correctness," "crisis and war": "all these things come about because they work. They grow out of and reinforce the basic capitalist social relationships" (p. 144). More than just an accessible introduction to the critique of political economy with housing as a point of entry, then, the book is also a call to arms replete with practical lessons about how to avoid strategic dead ends, and what will need to happen if we really want to "get rid of monsters." Just please don't misappropriate the illustrations for signs telling your housemates to wash the dishes. *(Review by Max)*

Lifehouse: Taking Care of Ourselves in a World on Fire

Adam Greenfield (Verso, 2024)

Climate change is not the far-off crisis that will arrive in a single cataclysmic event—it's the long emergency we live in now, as Adam Greenfield explains in *Lifehouse*. Greenfield digs into the data surrounding the reality of climate change, then moves on to survey collective efforts at survival and resistance, closing the book with his vision of what is to be done. The book initially reads as a primer for people who may be beginning to consider the impact of this long emergency and what it might mean to respond. However, for those who are already familiar or who have even lived through the stories Greenfield details, such as Occupy Sandy or autonomous Rojava, the practical vision of a "lifehouse" can still inspire action. The proposal is simple: transform the spaces that already exist—old buildings, community centers, defunct faith-based organizations, and even private homes—into a network of lifehouses. These projects are imagined as hyperlocal adaptive spaces of mutual aid with basic necessities to weather a disaster, autonomous sources of sustainable off-grid power, and collective decision-making centers, which emerge as a compelling antidote to the depressing weight you might feel reading this book. Greenfield's strength is that he offers a straightforward proposal that anyone picking up his book could get involved in. The most apparent problem is that it relies on a more urgent sense of volunteerism and does not necessarily build toward any revolutionary strategy. To his credit, he addresses the limits of his own proposal in the conclusion and invites people to consider lifehouses alongside many other methods of struggle. *(Review by A.M.)*

The Destruction of Palestine Is the Destruction of the Earth

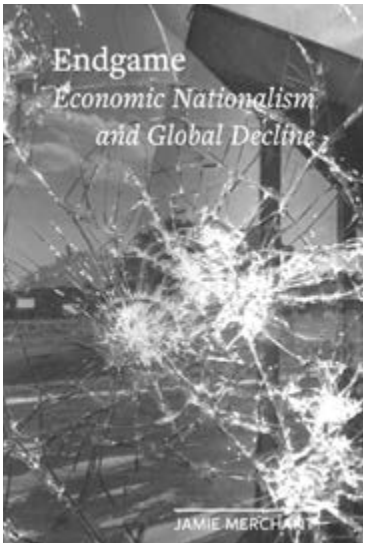
Andreas Malm (Verso, January 2025)

If you think the left has a Palestine problem, even a cursory review of the environmental movement will leave you scandalized. Instrumentalization of progressive causes has long been a staple of Israel's *hasbara* efforts—public relations campaigns to brand Israel as a beacon of multicultural democracy, besieged on all sides by barbarians at the gates. The most familiar of these involve some version of Israel as a patron of LGBTQ+ rights, going so far as to tout the IDF's first out trans soldier on a US speaking tour. One of the most effective aspects of *hasbara* has been the ability of Israel's PR managers to marshal support from environmental, wildlife, and animal advocacy NGOs throughout the world. Surrounded by petrostates and, until recently, a non-significant exporter of fossil fuels, Israel's self-representation as a global climate leader is only the latest iteration of a long legacy of greenwashing, beginning with the Jewish National Fund's earliest "reclamation" projects to "make the desert boom" for the coming waves of agrarian settlers.

Andreas Malm's *The Destruction of Palestine Is the Destruction of the Earth* is a thorough rejection of this bullshit. The book's eponymous essay appeared first on Verso's blog, published six months into the Gaza genocide, and it bears the imprints of that time's political urgency. Dressed in the garb of *longue durée* history and theoretical lucidity, the text is at its best polemical, a clear-eyed and principled defense of Palestinian decolonization, an organic struggle that has thrown down the gauntlet for the climate movement. Malm has made a career out of this gauntlet, suggesting at every turn that it is time for climate activists to get serious and meet the catastrophe in the same register. This essay attempts to avoid that path, down which Malm generally expresses his worst political conclusions. Here, he is a steadfast partisan of the *Tufan al-Aqsa* (Al-Aqsa flood) as "the greatest anti-colonial revolt of the twenty-first century," managing to situate it in a history of first British then US imperialism, which for Malm has always been a "fossil imperialism"—perhaps offering some glimpses of *Fossil Empire,* his long-awaited sequel to *Fossil Capital.*

The relationship Malm presents between the destruction of Palestine and that of the earth seems to be primarily morphological: the two resemble each other. If there is a claim of structural causality, it boils down to this: the use of fossil energy to (literally) fuel colonial ventures opened greater access to fossil extraction, which in turn further fueled the empire, and so on. The argument never fully coheres. Malm utilizes some crude Marxist devices, like a rigid "base–superstructure" model of settler colonialism, or a reductive analysis of imperialist hegemony where monolithic national capitals summon monolithic state actors in their service. His fixation on US hegemony is to be expected if you know a bit about his politics, but here it does him a clear disservice by clouding the position of Israel within global capitalism. Malm's insistence that Israel is merely a client state of the US empire is undermined by Israel's domestic policies and economy, which are highly integrated into global trade. China, which Malm treats as part of a bloc with Russia opposed to the US-Israel-Gulf state bloc, is actually Israel's second largest trading partner. It is no surprise that the central essay offers little in the way of practical clarity, other than principled support for the Gaza solidarity encampments, which were underway at the original time of publication. This is not necessarily a problem, to the extent that this is not meant to be a guide for planning an intifada. Malm's greatest weaknesses tend to be theoretical, so read for its history alone, *The Destruction of Palestine* is a useful rejoinder to any idiot who thinks that Israel's civilizational mission is ecological, or that the al-Aqsa flood made significant contributions to atmospheric carbon. *(Review by J)*

"The commune is a form, rather than an event, because it creates the conditions necessary for the process of communist construction"



Endgame: Economic Nationalism and Global Decline

Jamie Merchant (Reaktion Books, 2024)

All good critiques of capitalism operate on two registers. The first is a systemic one: by taking stock of the relationships between major moving parts, the critic lays bare the nature of the whole beast. The second is perceptual: by taking stock of how these moving parts *appear* to those caught in their paths, the limited appearances and reified misconceptions of capitalist society can be demystified in service of its dissolution. Jamie Merchant masterfully performs this two-pronged analysis in *Endgame: Economic Nationalism and Global Decline*. Mainstream economic commentators struggle to explain the current global pivot away from the neoliberal consensus towards the protective nationalist economic policies of a seemingly bygone era. Merchant situates this current economic moment in the broader history of capitalist society to demonstrate the ways this moment is unique, but more importantly how it is not. By situating the rise of economic nationalism within capitalism's long tendency towards falling profits, Merchant's account gives the reader a window into not only the inner workings of the global economy, but also why capitalist statecraft is reverting to strategies that, up until recently, were considered obsolete. Moreover, he contextualizes these strategies within a broader Marxist critique to demonstrate how even the most powerful states are incapable of resolving the crises that only a full dismantling of capitalism could resolve. *Endgame* is not only well argued, it is also accessible even to those with little background in Marx or economic theory. It is a book as timely as it is incisive. *(Review by Nick)*

The Commune Form: The Transformation of Everyday Life

Kristin Ross (Verso, 2024)

"No New Mega Airport!" Exasperated yard signs peppered the southeast of corner of the Puget Lowlands in western Washington, an area of scattered lakes, estuaries, and floodplains dissected by inlets and rivers. This idyllic landscape had been slotted to host "the Airport of the Future." Sea-Tac airport is projected to reach capacity by 2032, a shortfall that will devolve primarily on central and eastern Washington residents, who may lose air transit services altogether. A new airport was supposed to rectify this geographic discrepancy by sacrificing rural and exurban zones at the altar of development. The clear urban bias of the whole project did not escape notice of residents, who organized under the banner of "Stop the Airport." Such a project would devastate wetlands, watersheds, waterways, prairies, and old-growth forests.

This airport proposal came across my radar on a drive, in all likelihood on my way to a nearby forest, river, or mountain, surely a clichéd image of the urban-dwelling Pacific Northwesterner. The yard sides were not exactly eye-catching by design. What I noticed was their frequency. It appeared as if residents had achieved unanimity in opposition to the airport. Their reasons were many—displaced families, razed homes, lost livelihoods, destroyed habitat, polluted drinking water—but their rallying cry was streamlined, succinct, and marketable: stop the airport. I open with this project to highlight its ubiquity. 2025 is set to be a banner year for large air-transit-related construction projects, with investors and fund managers watching like hawks for public-private partnership opportunities. Predictably, almost half of these developments are planned in the Asia-Pacific region.

Beneath the Bocage, the Bank

In her 2024 book *The Commune Form,* Kristin Ross identifies this expansionism as the logic of the "airworld," with air transportation growing in importance as international trade substitutes for manufacturing growth. The airport is the "symbol… of state-imposed infrastructural projects,"[1] which have come to characterize the epoch of capitalist development that lurks in the shadow of the postwar boom. The most consequential battles between labor and capital no longer take the

form of an urban workers' movement waging economic struggles against the bosses, but instead find expression in the figure of the world *paysannerie* ("peasantry"), defending rurality and associated ways of life against dispossession by the (capitalist) state. This struggle has not been foreclosed; if you know where and how to look, you can see it carried on today, in far-flung places, bearing idiosyncratic and localized characteristics. We just need tools of analysis adequate to the task. This is the basic gambit of *The Commune Form,* its strongest asset and, as I hope to show, its primary liability.

The Commune Form is but the latest in Ross's catalog of contributions on the subject of "territorial struggles." She turned attention to "the commune form" first in her 2015 book *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune* (Verso), which noted the international "return of an occupational form of protest" in the early 2010s, taking this seriously as a contemporary echo of the Paris Commune of 1871—what Marx had famously called "the political form at last discovered" adequate the economic emancipation of the proletariat.[2] This was for Marx the "secret" of the Commune: *as a form,* its "actual working existence" made possible the historical process of communist construction. The hard lessons that it taught, specifically the contradiction between town and country, greatly influenced the course of Marx's unfinished later research. Among the truths brought to the surface by the counterrevolution was the need to overcome the contradiction between mental and manual labor and the necessity of territorial expansion. For Ross, this signals the importance of territorial defense and rural life. If capitalism survives through the annihilation of space by time, then struggles to defend space present it with a terminal threat.

From Unist'ot'en to Tahrir to Gezi Park, defense of particular places has become a hallmark of the present. In her new book, Ross calls this a "new political intelligence," land as the focal point of revolutionary thought in the present.[3] The commune form today possesses the capacity to resolve what Ross recognizes as the primary contradiction of modern life: alienation from the land. "Capital's real war is against subsistence," is one of her more lucid and portable assertions.[4] Dispossession from the means of subsistence creates a "gap between life and its conditions."[5] This fundamentally metabolic separation gives capital its characteristic "mute compulsion," that drudgery of existing between the carrot and the stick. Following Henri Lefebvre, Ross argues that the only possible response is the "transformation of everyday life" in ways that appropriate space and daily rituals and *defend* them. The commune form emerges at the opening created by the "contradiction between the logic of development and the logic of living."[6]

Following the publication of *Communal Luxury*, Ross visited the ZAD ("zone to defend") in Notre-Dame-des-Landes. Invited to discuss the Paris Commune*,* she developed contact with the Mauvaise Troupe Collective (MTC), a group of occupiers who had become something of a theoretical mouthpiece for both the ZAD and NoTAV.[7] MTC argued that creating and defending territories brought together various stakeholders—what they called "components of struggle." The challenges of existing together in a territory gave these otherwise siloed and divergent strands a common task of social transformation—the emergent property they came to call "composition." Ross translated their manifesto of sorts, *The Zad and NoTAV: Territorial Struggles and the Making of a New Political Intelligence* (Verso, 2018), providing a preface as well.

Commune, territorial struggle, composition—these terms are difficult to parse and have been examined critically elsewhere.[8] The commune form is supposedly all of these and more, the emergent property of these struggles in motion: "at once a political movement and a shared territory, a tactic and a community-in-the-making… nothing more than an attempt to gain ground in the historic fight against enclosure."[9] She traces concepts such as "temporary autonomous zone" (TAZ) and movements like Standing Rock through the long romantic history of left efforts to "defend the territory" against capital and its world, arguing that each iteration has expressed some aspect of the commune form in material reality. Still rooting her argument in Marx's assessment of the Paris Commune, Ross's focus is the "actual working existence" of the form in practice. This focus on "political intelligence" as a function of practice is one of the many assets of her work. If one thing leaps from the pages of the book, it is her commitment to participating in and interpreting cycles of struggle in the unfolding ecological crisis.

The last decade of struggles has seen ecological militancy emerge from the shadow of the left, although it continues to occupy an awkward position vis-à-vis traditional labor struggles. The cliché that environmentalists don't care about workers, threaten job growth, or condescend to rural life still persists, with some truth and much exaggeration. We don't need to go as far back as the timber wars or the northern spotted owl controversy: union support for the Dakota Access Pipeline and opposition to the struggle at Standing Rock demonstrates the point well enough. Ross claims that the commune form transcends this apparent tension by unifying the reproduction of daily life with reconnection to the land, nevertheless ignoring lineaments of class, race, or indigeneity.[10] She explains rural militancy as a fight for survival, a revolutionary form of life in a dying world. In a recent report on Les Soulèvements de la Terre (Earth Uprisings), Ross is at pains to distinguish its collective form from earlier, more diffuse and clandestine cycles of environmental radicalism. "Compositional struggles," wedded as they are to daily life, have a mass character that allows militants to carry out popular destruction of earth-destroying machinery "in broad daylight."[11]

The commune "does not lend itself to a static definition, unalterable through time." This flexibility allows for "local experiments that refuse to be defined by a localist chauvinism."[12] Localist chauvinism, or what Neel and Chavez call "local autarky,"[13] is a specter that Ross clearly wants to avoid. To invert it, she turns to the figure of the peasant (or *paysan*, as Ross prefers to say[14]) to make the case that the future of revolution turns on rurality and the perspective of subsistence. This figure is not a local phenomenon, but a general, world-historical revolutionary subject, produced through capital's war against subsistence. She follows the thought of Bernard Lambert, a *paysan* whose experiences in the 1968 Nantes Commune and a sheep farmers' struggle on the Larzac Plateau, along with close observation of the Lip factory occupation of 1973, led him to found the Paysans-Travailleurs (worker-peasant) alliance and advocate an "anti-productivist" form of self-management he described as the "marriage of workers and paysans, the marriage of Lip and the Larzac."[15] For Lambert, the peasant was the "defender of the earth."

The peasantry fulfills this function because it inhabits the perspective of subsistence and lies beyond the metabolic yoke of the capital relation. On the other hand, it is this expanding separation that generalizes the peasantry as a "distinctly new revolutionary subject."[16] Ross thus finds her position treading a treacherous wire. We are told the commune is a struggle for subsistence outside the circuits of capital. Inverting Tronti's maxim "within and against,"[17] for Ross the commune's real practice of reproducing daily life is *sui generis, external to* and therefore against capital. It works because it is literally a world apart. Hence, the ZAD's rallying cry "against the airport and its world." But what if that world, the "airworld" of capital, has completely enclosed and disturbed the planetary metabolism?

In an excellent review, Kevin Duong predicts that Ross's flirtation with romantic pastoralism is something for which she will not be forgiven, given leftist anxieties surrounding populism and a supposed contempt for rural life, but such flirtation is necessary: while "the paysannerie might be backward, defunct, reactionary, even anachronistic… they have also been fighting for everyone's future."[18] If we follow Ross in taking *paysannerie* to extend beyond the world's few remaining self-sufficient smallholders to include most inhabitants of capital's rural hinterlands, Duong's "backwardness" claim is too broad to have much meaning. To claim further that this motley rurality share common interests and fight for a common future is simply absurd. If the "perspective of subsistence" describes the peasantry as a class, this can be tested against the history of capitalist development. This is where the book's conception of the commune form becomes untenable.

Like many before her, Ross essentially conflates capitalism with urbanization and industrialization.[19] If, however, we understand capitalism as fundamentally an *agrarian* revolution, the 20th century comes into view as a massive de-agrarianization and capitalist transition, unfolding most rapidly during the postwar "Big Push" toward industrial modernization and coming to fruition only toward the end of the century. Even in France, fully capitalist, mechanized agriculture did not characterize the sector until the decades between 1945 and 1973. Curiously, it was at the *close* of this period that Lambert declared the peasantry to be on the side of the communards, when there was no longer a peasantry to speak of. The unfortunate reality, for the vast majority of the global population, is that "We… live in a totally capitalist world. There is no capitalization of agriculture to accomplish, no 'peasant' question for the workers' movement."[20] Capital has inherited the earth.

In this context, for Ross, MTC, Earth Uprisings, and the like to envision the primary struggle as "life against development" or "subsistence versus productivism," they must elide questions of class and property. They are therefore unable to clarify the social relations that subtend their own categories, whether rural or urban. It is only on the basis of these concrete relations that we can judge the communist character of a given struggle, that is, how it catalyzes communist measures.[21] Ross misses the trees for the forest, discounting differences in social content, subsuming anything from indigenous land defense to farmer protest under the general form of the commune.[22]

"Once we accept that capitalism's inaugural act has always been the transformation of agrarian relations, the tasks of communism become much clearer"

The indeterminacy of the struggles surveyed by Ross can thus be resolved only on the level of *function*, which Ross disavows in favor of *form*—one that ultimately turns out to be *formless.* Consider the Sanrizuka struggle against the Narita Airport in 1960s Japan alongside the post-2008 occupation of the ZAD. For Ross, their formal similarity expresses the truth of the Long 1960s. However, if we acknowledge capitalism's basis in agrarian revolution, we can recognize their distinct contents: the first a struggle against capitalist transition, the latter against rural redevelopment, property loss, and asset deflation in the context of capitalist decline.[23] By attempting to unify disparate conflicts, Ross's formal-

ism itself breaks down. Some examples, like the early forest occupation in Atlanta, support her case about territorial defense as occupation and reproduction of space. Others, like the mass actions of Earth Uprisings, do not share this form, but share the "compositional" features and repertoire of tactics. How do we reconcile a formalism with no particular form? If we return to her definition, the general historic fight against enclosure is supposed to subsume these particular differences, a meta-form, so to speak. That might work, if that meta-form had any historical content. But, as we have seen, it lives only as anachronism.

In her commitment to methodological formalism, Ross mystifies the role of territorial struggle today. Instead, I contend that the "commune form," if this category is to have any utility, can be delineated only in relation to particular *functions*—including those of the communist program. Despite her brilliant scholarship on the Paris Commune, she neglects perhaps its most important lesson emphasized by revolutionaries in its immediate aftermath: the commune must expand or die. Among its characteristics that Marx identified as constitutive were: the suppression the standing army and the arming of the general population, revokable supervision drawn from the whole proletariat, and communal administration dedicated to economic emancipation by the common planning of production.[24] The commune is a form, rather than an event, because it creates the conditions necessary for the process of communist construction. Ross's earlier work demonstrates her familiarity with this, yet none of her examples conform to such a program, nor does she weigh them against this standard, instead substituting "the transformation of everyday life" for communist measures. This misty formulation is inherited from Lefebvre, for whom "alienation" was much more vaguely ontological than in Marx's deployment of this term. Conversely, this leads Ross to redefine "appropriation" as amounting to gestures of occupation, defense, and community-making. While the book invests heavily into the late Marx, then, it tends to steer us away from his understanding that communism must be a set of tasks, a historical content expressed through forms. In his discussion of the communist potential of existing Russian institutions such as the *mir*, he never lost sight of their overdetermination by the agrarian class structure and property relations.[25]

The *commune function* would be a better test of the prospects of any given territorial struggle. Ross's emphasis on subsistence as self-management fails such a test, in part because today the global peasantry exists only as a ghost—no less than the urban workers' movement. It is telling that Lambert and Ross should focus on the marriage of Lip and Larzac as the representation of future revolutionary subjectivity. Both possess what Négation called the "producer's consciousness," a symptom of a technical class composition that was already exiting from history in 1973.[26] For the Lip factory workers, the basis of self-management was the artisanal character of the labor process, over which workers' could exert effective control. At the Larzac or Sanrizuka, any possibility of "peasant self-management" was connected practically to the late and as yet incomplete agrarian transition. At Lip, this basis soon expressed itself as a limit, a defense of capitalist production and its division of labor: the backward character of artisanal manufacturing meant that the firm was saddled with debts, so workers could only appeal to the state to intervene on their behalf. Mid-century agrarian struggles, like Sanrizuka, were frequently struggles *against* capitalist subsumption of agriculture, defensive in their own ways of non-capitalist class structures that exist today only as nostalgic appendages to capitalist relations. Neither case offers a tenable model for the present. The Lip-Larzac moment has passed.

In the United States, agrarian class composition appears ripe for the sort of small-scale subsistence struggle that Ross & Co. advocate. 96 percent of farms are classified as "family farms," almost 82 percent being "small family farms," meaning they receive a Gross Cash Farm Income (GCFI) of $150,000 or less.[27] Under these conditions, we might expect the U.S. to be flourishing with commune forms, especially as farm debt increases and incomes stagnate. "Family farm," however, merely describes a structure of ownership: "any farm where the majority of the business is owned by the operator and individuals related to the operator." It does not describe patterns of land ownership, production ownership, capitalization, or agricultural market structure. In fact, "the largest 2% of U.S. farms (5,000 or more acres) controlled 42% of all farmland. Conversely, 42% of farms had fewer than 50 acres and controlled 2% of all farmland."[28] Land concentration has been increasing. Farm debts held by agricultural banks have been increasing as well, across all classes of farm ownership and land size. While most debt is held by large farms, most debt growth has been among small and mid-sized farms. With inflation cutting into farm incomes, even if well-meaning farmers wanted to convert their lands to self-management, this debt servicing raises serious technical problems. The real issue, of course, is that neither farm size nor ownership structure says anything about class composition or the structure of the agricultural workforce (who have, incidentally, tended to be absent from the farmers' protests in Europe). Because Ross casts "appropriation" so broadly as something like presence on the land, she is able to present "composition" within the commune as a convergence of class interests, when this is manifestly not the case. The proletarian character of the commune is evacuated in such a pastoral rendering.

Once we accept that capitalism's inaugural act has always been the transformation of agrarian relations, the tasks of communism become much clearer. Fragmentation of the earth into private property or state-managed

resources cannot be resolved through the cellular approach of the "commune form" as Ross presents it, in the abstract and unbothered by any functional content. The contradiction between town and country, capitalist division of labor, the geography of territorial production, the value chain tethering extraction to production—all of this is inscribed into the earth's crust and the patterns of social conflict that have emerged from it. It must be broken before it can be reconstructed. That is the first step, the earth-rending ramifications of which cannot be overstated. The communist program that follows involves picking up the shattered shards of the old world and reorganizing them into a common plan to meet ecological and social need. The daunting scale of the task is what makes a "commune form" such an appealing solution: it seems manageable and immediate, "making revolution on a scale that people could recognize."[29] Parcelization of the commune form, unfortunately, fails to achieve the initial task, which is to break the geographic and social discontinuities of the urban-rural divide and their accreted layers of capitalist enterprise. Nearly everywhere in the world today, there is no peasantry that can meet this utopian function, but only agrarian laborers and excluded ruralites alongside capitalist farmers, agricultural banks, and real estate investors. To the extent that social reproduction is continuous with the land, it is almost completely capitalist in character. Merely *defending* rurality from further immiseration falls short of destroying "those elements not only of capitalism but of class society since the Neolithic revolution: division of labor, state, and class."[30]

The limits of contemporary territorial movements are not unique to them—they are essentially the same as those reached by the 20th century workers' councils, the inability to wreck and rebuild the social metabolism in a way that dissolved capitalism, regulated production and reproduction, and met everyone's needs. For Ross and other participants in these movements, the commune form represents an "oasis of human and nonhuman actuality,"[31] what Marx characterized as the reconciliation of the human species and the nonhuman world—communism. It is here that Ross is most productive. What is needed to overcome the limits of Ross's commune form is something resembling an "ecological council," a material *more-than*-human community. The task and content of communism then is not merely the transparent self-management of the species and its conscious reproduction, but the free association of producers within an ecological web. *The Commune Form* helps us understand what scattered germs of this process might look like.

In June 2023, Washington's Commercial Aviation Coordination Commission decided against recommending any of the three potential Greenfield sites. While the question of airport service capacity remains, and a new Commercial Aviation Work Group has been meeting since last year, plans for a new airport appear indefinitely derailed. Stop the Airport did not even need to occupy space, seize territory, or defend it. The campaign was clearly concerned with property values and the threat of rising crime associated with more traffic and urbanization, as much as if not more than the other impacts. It just so happened that the main site under consideration was smack dab in the middle of a planned community and HOA, the Sunwood Lakes community, at the eastern fringes of Olympia. To the east, Yelm; to the south, Rainier; to the west, East Olympia and Tumwater—jurisdictions with the highest median household income in the county. There are some small farms, yes, mostly scattered pasturelands, but there are also private lakes and country clubs. Who needs the commune form when you have the NIMBY form? But for those of us without property on our side and who seek to break its rule, we still have a long way to go. *(Review by F.P.)*

countrysteak

Notes

1: Ross, *The Commune Form*, 51.

2: Ross, *Communal Luxury*, 2–3; Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France* (Charles H. Kerr, 1998), 88.

3: Ross, *The Commune Form*, 4

4: Ibid., 55

5: Søren Mau, *Mute Compulsion: A Marxist Theory of the Economic Power of Capital* (Verso, 2023), 114.

6: Ross, *The Commune Form*, 54

7: The ZAD refers to an occupational defense against the construction of an international airport in Notre-Dame-des-Landes, France. NoTAV was a campaign to stop the construction of a high-speed railway ("Treno ad Alta Velocità") in northern Italy. Both efforts intensified following the 2008 crisis, drew local support from rural communities, and demonstrated a flexible repertoire of tactics.

8: See Decompositions, *The Fate of Composition,* 2024.

9: Ross, *The Commune Form* , 63

10: For related criticism on this point, see Anonymous, "Another Word for Settle: A Response to Rattachements and Inhabit," IGD, 2021.

11: Kristin Ross, "The War of the Worlds in France," *The New York Review of Books,* August 13, 2023

12: Ross, *The Commune Form*, 7

13: Phil Neel and Nick Chavez, "Forest and Factory: The Science and the Fiction of Communism," Endnotes blog*,* 2023.

14: In a footnote Ross explains, "Throughout this text, I have chosen to keep the word *paysan* in French. The English term 'farmer' does not distinguish between a smallholding cultivator (*paysan*) and an industrial farmer associated with agri-business (*agriculteur*)." Presumably she does not use the term "peasant" because few English-speaking smallholders actually call themselves peasants nowadays (despite academic calls for "repeasantization"), whereas in French, "*paysan* remains the chosen term among many young farmers, reclaimed from being a term of denigration and given a new value, while the term *agriculteur* is viewed as reducing the worker of the land to the ranks of every other producer of commodities." Ross, *The Commune Form*, 12 and 27.

15: Quoted in Ross, *The Commune Form*, 32-33 and 42.

16: Ibid., 26

17: Mario Tronti, "Within and Against" (May 1967), in Andrew Anastasi (ed. and trans.), *The Weapon of Organization: Mario Tronti's Political Revolution in Marxism* (Common Notions, 2020).

18: Kevin Duong, "How to Build a Wonder of the World," *Public Books,* October 29, 2024.

19: Loren Goldner, "Amadeo Bordiga, the Agrarian Question and the International Revolutionary Movement," *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory* 23, no. 1 (1995): 73-100.

20: Ibid., 95.

21: Artifices, "No Man's Land," Endnotes blog, 2024.

22: See Decompositions, *The Fate of Composition*.

23: Decompositions, "Part Two: Problem of Composition," *The Fate of Composition*, 2024.

24: Marx, *The Civil War in France,* 83-90.

25: Teodor Shanin (ed.), *Late Marx and the Russian Road* (Monthly Review Press, 1983).

26: "Lip and the Self-Managed Counter-Revolution," *Négation* no. 3 (1973).

27: USDA, "2017 Census of Agriculture: Farm Typology," *National Agricultural Statistics Service,* 2021.

28: USDA, "Farms and Farmland: Farms and farmland continued to decline as average farm size increased," *National Agricultural Statistics Service,* 2024.

29: Ross, *The Commune Form*, 16.

30: Jasper Bernes, *The Future of Revolution: Communist Prospects from the Paris Commune to the George Floyd Uprising* (Verso 2025), 125.

31: Ross, *The Commune Form*, 74.

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Excerpt from *Crocosmia*, a novel

(Nightboat Books, forthcoming August 2025)

Miranda Mellis

Miranda Mellis is a writer of stories, critical essays, and poems as well as book length dialogics. She is a practitioner of pedagogy, which shows up in her works not as didactic, but as careful grappling with the pressing problems of our context. Her upcoming book Crocosmia is a mythopoetic novel that is at once affectively pleasing, otherworldly, and, rife with crisis of ecology and care, resonant with the radical struggles of today. The novel recollects a world at a threshold of becoming otherwise. Its deployment of a sort of speculative memory and the assemblage of revolutionary ephemera mapped therein might remind one of a quote from Walter Benjamin, "Every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector's passion borders on the chaos of memories." Yet the dream is lucid and resonant.

On her desk in her small room at the Anarchstery (Maya and Jane's rooms were next to each other and connected by a door, with a shared sink) Jane had her old childhood copy of Vladimir Mayakovsky's *How Are Verses Made?* given to her by her mother, and dedicated to Jane by Mayakovsky, after whom Maya was named.

He had been a playwright, a poet, an artist, an actor, and a maker of children's books and posters. In *A Cloud in Trousers* the street is a character who "shoves pain along" and "coughs up its phlegm" while the poet proclaims his bodily mettle, his weather, he is "pure raging meat," a "sack of grisly meat," "made of bronze" with a "heart lined with iron," "not a man, but a cloud in trousers!" He did his cultural work, warned the angels, "winged fools" "I'll slit you" and threatened the Almighty ("a jerk") with a knife. "Heaven! Get that hat off! Here I come!" for "muscle and sinew work better than prayer" so "I'll rip out my soul / stamp on it / to make it big / and hand it to you / bloody for a flag." "Wearing the thorny crown of revolution" he made public art to inculcate communist sensibilities during the Russian Civil War. But Mayakovsky was soon at odds with the revolution he had helped write into being. He satirized it and was denounced in turn. Posthumously he was celebrated by his enemy, the tyrant Stalin.

Jane took to heart what Mayakovsky called the *social command*, the communist's vocation, an obedience to the people, to the many, to the desires and objectives of the exploited class. The social command concerns a problem "the solution of which is conceivable only in poetical terms." Though she had never known the poet, she had been told by her Soviet mother Hannah that he was her "progenitor" as she put it in her typical impersonal way, from a single drunken night. After he killed himself Hannah fled the country with her child. It took her years to get to Brooklyn only to die of asthma when Jane was still a teenager, leaving her to fend for herself.

Decades later Jane repeated her mother's style of begetting, getting pregnant from one night's sex with a much older man she never saw again, a wanderer, a stranger she met at a train station. He said he was a computer scientist and claimed to have invented the internet. He was voluble about the apocalypse and told her of a Mayan prophesy that the world would end. The Mayans, he said, called creation itself the Framer, the Shaper, and built galactic observatories to predict and represent the flows of time and the universe as an eternally changeful form.

"The Shape Master has abandoned us," he said. Her own intensity rose to greet his. She felt the same mad fear for the world. "The world will end soon," he said, and his eyes filled with tears. "My whole life has been the apocalypse." She told him she thought the world was *not* ending soon, but rather it was going to begin again. "There is a future," she said, and she believed it. She *knew* it.

She named her baby Maya after the Vedic term for illusion, and after Vladimir Mayakovsky, Maya's alleged grandfather and tutelary spirit.

The name told the child everything about who she was, where she was. Each Maya within the proper name Maya encountered another Maya that had nothing to do with the other, yet some-thing occurred between the three that didn't occur within any one of the Mayas, a conversation outside and between each one of them, just as she lived outside and between other lives, in the strewn condition of the flying root, thrown, diasporic, seeking and never finding home. The proper name "Jane" held within it the genius of the begetting gene, not to mention the dedicated aspiration not to cause a single harm — the Jain nuns would wear masks so as not to accidentally inhale an insect, would gently sweep the ground in front of them, not to step on one.

She and Maya lived in a coastal city in the western reaches of the global patriarchal empire. They had a two-room apartment in a large apartment building near the beach. For much of the year their grey building was encased in a matching grey fog so that it could sometimes disappear. It was surrounded by empty lots so that the building itself, between the lots and the fog that crossed every line, blurring the horizon, seemed to exist like an island without connection to the rest of reality except the weedy plants, dandelions, fennels, pampas, and myriad other self-cultivating grasses and stalks, which grew up out of crevices like the children who skateboarded, played ball games, and jumped rope in the afternoons and evenings, until parents called them in from windows of diluted light. Even their clothes and faces seemed smudged by the fog.

When Jane saw a sign on the bulletin board in the lobby of their apartment building offering room, board, and childcare in exchange for part-time handywork and gardening at the The Anarchstery of the Rosas Parks and Luxemburg, she immediately went there and inquired.

She found herself wandering in an old Spanish convent with a grand, high-ceilinged stucco church with wax tiled floors, surrounded by scattered houses with low, red tiled roofs and wide oak floors, long windows, and arched doorways. It took her some time to find anyone. She finally came upon someone sweeping the paths, who pointed her in the right direction. She found the sisters in a large kitchen, preparing lunch. They asked her questions while they cooked, handing her a cutting board and garlic. She told them about the various kinds of jobs she had held, the skills she had picked up. *I can repair anything*, she said, slicing the garlic quickly and efficiently.

In addition to recognizing her competency with a knife, during the interview the sisters also recognized Jane as a fellow witch because of the half crescent moon neck tattoo, as well as the tattoo on her arm which showed a human body with a bird's head and roots for feet, coiled and embracing. She and Maya joined the community.

Enid Rosas, who conducted the interview, herself of island ancestry, her mother from Martinique, her father from Ireland, wanted to get to know Jane. Enid and Jane conversed about having a prismatic heritage, of near ancestors nonetheless planetarily far flung, of how much history they wove in their cells through this kinning across oceans, a meeting taking place in Maya's DNA between Odessan Russian Jewish socialists and the unknown old prophet on the train. Enid's parents had been anti-colonial poets of the "tidalectic." *It is as if the body leaps across the world, from one definition to the next*, Enid said, *stranding us together.* The strands of diasporic heritages intertwined and pulsed in blooded and oil-slicked currents that drifted this way and that. Class and category — scarring legacies of slave states, alienated labor, industry and Cartesian duality — mixed contingently with organized and spontaneous forms of resistance, pained liberation prayers, and songs that argued and longed for justice. Jane and Maya moved in, and it was as if they had been away after a long absence, as if they had always been part of the community, and, for the community, as if a missing piece had fallen into place. *Everyone was happier*, which meant their presence was needed. Needed for what? Enid wasn't sure yet. This called for divination.

The no-ones, as the ex-nuns called themselves, had a practice of *pre-admiration* in which they admired in advance those they had not yet met. They had one central high-ceilinged structure with long, large windows and surrounded by tall plants that was set aside for chance, where they practiced what they called *a ministry of immanence*. They called it the community living room. Nothing was planned there. It was a place in which one was free to be no one, do nothing, ask for help, or just rest, assist with projects on the farm or in the school, take solace, get medicine or food. Whoever arrived was welcomed as the no-ones venerated solidarity as an ethos within which free thought, free association, free will, and free love could flourish. They made agreements but changed them when and as needed, holding seminars for as long as was necessary to work on practical and theoretical problems, distribute responsibilities, and enjoy ideas and projects.

If it weren't for their vestments and the fact that they lived at a convent, or that they meditated and prayed for hours a day and spent their versatile days ministering to needs in versatile ways, using their spiritual imaginations to alleviate suffering, introducing children to experiential learning, and co-creating the possibility of collective happiness, it wouldn't have seemed like a religious order at all, insofar as no one gave or received orders, insofar as such orders had historically entailed the merging of life with rules a priori. In the rainy season they laid out mats and bedding and the Anarchstery grew crowded with people of all ages and conditions seeking shelter from the cold. Enid Rosas, a visionary who co-founded the convent, had been a psychoanalyst until an illness led her to give up her practice and become a contemplative, after which her symptoms abated. She focused instead on writing and social care. She wrote towards a metaphysics of social care, dialecticizing the order she appropriated, adapted, and co-deconstructed along Black feminist lines. She wrote a series of pamphlets deconstructing monotheism: *When the Heavens Ceased to Be Social*, *No One But an Old Nun*, *Little Orphan Anarchy*, and others. It was Enid who asked, *what genre are we living out?* Every genre is an organization of time. She proposed duration as their orientation to time as time-beings. Days and nights that phased like the sky between songs, anecdotes, revelations, projects, plans, study, light, and darkness.

countrysteak

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Most of our current members are based in the U.S., but we aim to become an international publication that examines struggles globally. In 2025, we're launching our website, a quarterly print magazine, a video channel, and social media. The website will provide previews of each new issue of the magazine, information about ordering print copies, free digital versions of back issues, and printable zines for longer texts. The videos will provide alternative presentations of written material. Our content will cover a range of topics and genres, including reports on recent events, theoretical reflections and analysis, interviews with comrades involved in inspiring projects, reviews of books and films, original artwork, and literature.

While there is no shortage of left media, most English-language publications offer only partial critiques and tepid reformism, or regurgitate debates among 20th-century sects whose material foundations disappeared decades ago. We seek to provide more rigor and depth than the average radical blog or podcast, but to avoid the turgid style of traditional communist polemics and academic journals. Politically, we aim to balance inclusivity with coherence by publishing pieces from a broad spectrum of contributors based all over the world, alongside editorial prefaces providing our own perspective.

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