

The Eclipse of Class *Or, Keeping the Vision Alive*

Ron Tabor

April 20, 2018

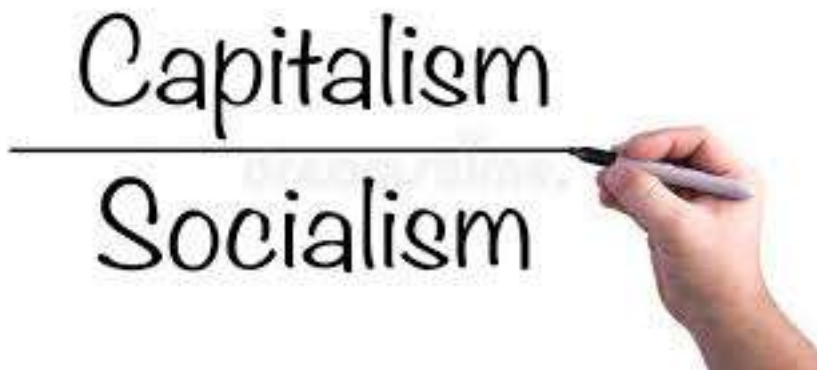


Speaking personally, I see my main political task at the moment as keeping our ideas and ideals alive in a political climate that is not conducive to their positive reception by any significant section of the American people.

As far as I can tell, our group is extremely isolated politically, while the ideas we espouse are perceived as being irrelevant to the economic, social, political, cultural, and intellectual processes currently animating US society. Although there are many reasons for this, among them our limited numbers, our ages, and our relative lack of presence in activist milieus, the main reason is political. Specifically, three of the fundamental aspects of our program are completely outside the contemporary political discourse and are considered by the vast majority of the US population to be not only irrelevant but also absurd: (1) that our society is fundamentally diseased -- cynical, brutal, unjust, and corrupt -- and is incapable of being reformed sufficiently to provide all Americans with a decent and meaningful life; (2) that the solution to this problem lies in a popular revolution, an uprising of

the vast majority of the people against the tiny elite that runs our society; (3) that this revolution should aim at establishing a truly democratic, egalitarian, and cooperative social system, what we have called "revolutionary libertarian socialism." In sum, any notion of transcending the contemporary social arrangement and replacing it with another seems to have been lost.

Our political isolation and programmatic irrelevance are somewhat ironic, since the word/concept "socialism" seems to be as popular today as it has been for decades. According to various polls, large sectors of society, particularly young people, have a positive estimation of "socialism" and consider themselves to be "socialists" of one sort or another. To a great degree, this has been the work of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders and the political campaign he waged in the Democratic primaries in 2016. Although Sanders never called for the establishment of socialism in the United States, he did identify himself as a "democratic socialist." He also spoke highly of the Scandinavian countries and implied that they are contemporary exemplars of what he means by "socialism," despite firm denials of this by the political leaders of these nations.



Unfortunately, what most people understand by the term "socialism" is a far cry from our view. Their conception is much closer to FDR's "New Deal" and LBJ's "Great Society" than anything we might consider to be socialist. From our standpoint, the popular conception of "socialism" has been largely liquidated of radical content, reduced not merely to the level of the reformist and statist program of the old Social Democracy but even below that. Today, "socialism" to most people signifies little more than welfare-state capitalism, the contemporary capitalist system with somewhat more generous social programs. (Even where a more radical conception

continues to exist, that is, among the Marxist-Leninists, their notion of "socialism" is what we consider to be "state capitalism," that is, a highly stratified society, such as the Soviet Union/Russia, China, Cuba, North Korea, and, for some, Syria.)

This fact and our resultant political isolation have been facilitated by the collapse of the majority of US left into and behind the Democratic Party, the party that represents the liberal wing of the capitalist class. Among other things, this collapse parallels and reflects the fact that what seemed to be a militant popular movement, the so-called "resistance" that emerged in the wake of Donald Trump's surprise victory in the 2016 elections, has been effectively defanged and has poured into and behind the Democratic Party. On the part of both the organized left and the "resistance," this political alignment has been largely motivated by fear bordering on panic, specifically, the visceral conviction that Donald Trump is a fascist (or a "proto-" or "quasi-fascist") whose goal is to overthrow "American democracy" and impose an authoritarian regime on the United States, and that the only way to stop this, if indeed it can be stopped, is to align ourselves with, to support, vote for, and organize for, the Democrats.



There is an additional irony here. This is that many, if not most, of the Marxist organizations and currents that make up the explicitly revolutionary left in the US have abandoned anything even vaguely resembling a class analysis of what is happening in the country and have rejected any kind of Marxist strategy for orienting themselves in the current situation. Rather than seeking to unite the broadest majority of the working class in opposition to the ruling class as a whole, which was the professed strategy of Marx and Engels (as

well as of Lenin, Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg, and Eugene Debs), they have, like the broader liberal-left, decided to do their best to tie one section of the working class to the capitalist liberals while abandoning the rest to the Trump-led Republican Party.

This is a reflection of the fact that the concept of social class (and especially the idea of the working class being in fundamental conflict with the capitalist class) has become virtually taboo in the country's contemporary political discourse. To be sure, Bernie Sanders periodically denounces what he calls the "billionaire class," but he focuses his fire at the Koch brothers and other conservative capitalists, while never mentioning the liberal billionaires, such as Warren Buffet, Bill and Melinda Gates, George Soros, Haim Saban, Eli Broad, (Dianne Feinstein's husband) Richard Blum, Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckerberg, Tom Steyer, and the rest. In like manner, while Sanders excoriated Hillary Clinton as a spokesperson for Wall Street during the Democratic primary season, he never mentioned that ever since the 1990s, the majority of the bankers, hedge-fund managers, and investors on Wall Street have supported and bankrolled the Democratic Party. Moreover, Sanders completely capitulated to this tool of Wall Street several weeks before the Democratic convention, enthusiastically endorsed her candidacy, and ordered his political operatives, in collaboration with Clinton's, to muzzle his disaffected supporters at the convention itself. Meanwhile, most of the left has followed suit. This, sadly, reflects the fact that for all practical purposes, the American working class has lost whatever class consciousness it ever had, while the left, including most of the Marxist organizations, have given up any effort to represent it or to foment it. Instead, what has emerged is a politically diffuse and uninformed "populist" resentment that has been easily manipulated by the leaders of both capitalist parties to pursue their partisan agendas.



The capitulation of the Marxist left to the Democratic Party is an indication of their theoretical bankruptcy. After all, to Marx and Engels, "class" and "class struggle" were fundamental, determinant, facets of human history. They insisted that all history is in fact the history of class struggle and contended (and attempted to prove) that it was the very logic of this struggle that would inevitably lead to an international proletarian revolution and the establishment of socialism around the world. It should be obvious at this point in time (that is, 170 years after the publication of the Communist Manifesto) that these contentions can no longer be defended. However, as far as I know, the Marxist organizations continue to uphold them in theory while completely rejecting them in practice. They have, in essence, followed in the footsteps of the old Communist parties, which in the mid-1930s jettisoned even the pretense of waging class war against the entire ruling class in favor of supporting one section of it, the so-called "progressive" capitalists represented by the Democratic Party, then led by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. This policy, known at the time as the "People's (or Popular) Front," has continued, except for a brief left jag in the late 1940s, up until the present, under the name of the "People's Anti-Monopoly Coalition."

In sum, while these Marxists continue to defend those aspects of Marxism that I believe to be untenable, they have discarded one Marxist tenet that I think remains valid. Thus, while I reject the theoretical contentions of Marxism, I continue to uphold one of Marxism's strategic conceptions: that of uniting the entire working class against the entire capitalist class. In the US, this means, above all, explaining that both the Democratic and the Republican Party are capitalist parties and that the vast majority of the

American people can never win their freedom and the opportunity to live comfortable lives by supporting either one of these outfits.



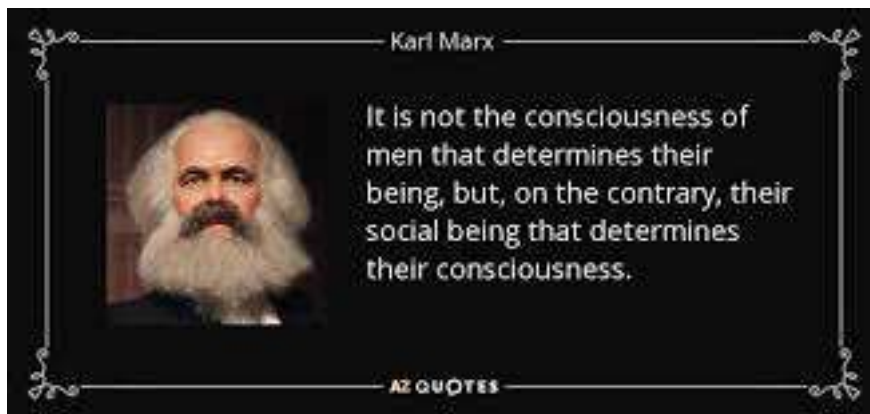
Among other aspects of Marxism that I reject are two centerpieces of the Marxist canon, while I would substantially revise a third.

I. I no longer believe that the working class, in contrast to other popular social layers, is ontologically privileged. By this, I mean that I reject the notion that the logic of capitalist development (and all history) automatically impels the working class to carry out a revolution. In my view, an honest look at the history of the last 150 years shows:

- A. The working class is not intrinsically revolutionary. There are times when it can and has become revolutionary, but this is not the expression of some underlying (let alone inexorable) logic of capitalism or the nature of the class itself, but the result of contingent and ultimately unpredictable economic, social, political, and cultural/psychological processes.
- B. Other popular classes, such as small farmers (peasants); semi-proletarian social strata, such as artisans and craftsmen; and other sectors of society, such as middle-class students, may also, under certain circumstances, become revolutionary. (Incidentally, this was one of the crucial differences between Marx and Engels and other Marxist theorists, on the one hand, and major anarchist thinkers, such as Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin, on the other.) It is also worth noting that in many of the revolutions of the past that have been described or identified as "proletarian" or "working-class," the most revolutionary elements were to be found not among the

longstanding proletarians but among those social layers, such as peasants and artisans, and workers recently derived from those groups, which were in the process of being "proletarianized," that is, forced into the working class.

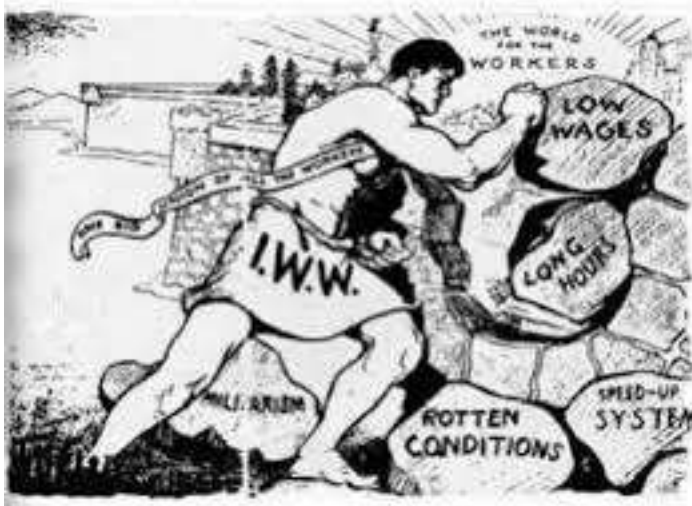
- C. While the working class continues to have a structural advantage over other sections of the population in terms of economic muscle, this is not as significant as it used to be. Yes, workers on the whole continue to be located in urban areas, which is where economic and political power lies in contemporary society. Also, since most working-class people have jobs, they have a degree of economic power because of their ability to stop work, that is, to strike, even if this is limited in time. Finally, many workers are still united in and organized by their workplaces. However, because of the tremendous amount of automation that has occurred over the last few decades along with other economic realities, such as the transfer of manufacturing plants to low-wage countries, the fact that small businesses today employ a significant proportion of the working class, and the fact that many people now work out of their own homes and/or are self-employed, this has become far less important than it was in the heyday of "industrial capitalism."



II. I do not accept, as Marx put it, that "social being determines social consciousness." In other words, I do not believe that human consciousness is an automatic reflection (or reflex) of socio-economic processes. This is one of the many things in Marxism that have a superficial plausibility but which cannot be reasonably sustained after careful consideration. In fact, nobody knows what consciousness is, what ideas are, or how our ideas arise, let alone

what the precise relationship is between our consciousness and the rest of reality. Moreover, the notion that social being fully “determines” our consciousness, as opposed to merely influencing it in some way, represents a denial of ontological freedom, that is, it defines out of existence the idea that human beings, as individuals, groups, and as a species, have the ability to make choices and to determine our future. And if such freedom does not exist, the idea that human beings can create a truly free, self-determining society, is a complete and utter delusion, or in the words (actually, the title of one of his stories) of the Russian writer, Fyodor Dostoevsky, “the dream of a ridiculous man.” (The question of whether such ontological freedom exists or not has never been answered, and in my opinion, never will be answered, by science, philosophy, religion, or anything else. It is, at bottom, an issue that everyone must decide for oneself [if, of course, one is interested in such things]).

III. I think we need to revise our notion of the working class, specifically, to broaden it and make it more inclusive. We have in fact done this over the years, but I think we need to make this explicit and to extend our conception even further. I believe the classic Marxist definition of the working class is too narrow to reflect modern capitalist reality.



Marx and Engels defined the working class primarily as the industrial “proletariat,” that is, as workers in large industrial and manufacturing factories and in allied sectors of the economy, such as transportation (particularly, the railroads) and the wholesale sector. In their view, these workers represented the essence of

humanity under capitalism, that is, people completely deprived of all their human attributes but their labor-power, their ability to work, while all the accumulated creative powers of historical humanity have been alienated from them and congealed in capital/the modern technical-industrial apparatus that stands over them, dominating them at work and, through this, their entire lives, their very being. Marx and Engels also believed that the logic of capitalist development, the necessary evolution of the system, would impel the vast majority of human beings, including small farmers, artisans, shopkeepers, peddlers, white collar workers, professionals, intellectuals, artists, small businesspeople, and even most of the capitalists, into the ranks of the industrial proletariat. Eventually, if not in their day then ultimately (asymptotically), humanity and the proletariat would be co-terminus, so that the proletarian revolution would represent the democratic self-emancipation of humanity. It was this conception of the working class that was adopted by the classical Marxist thinkers and organizations. The Bolsheviks, for example, did not include white collar workers, such as employees of the banks and the government, to be members of the proletariat. (These workers reciprocated the sentiment. Better educated and working and living in more comfortable circumstances than the industrial workers, they did not see themselves as "proletarian" either.)

From the vantage point of the present, we can see that, at least in this respect, capitalism has not evolved as Marx and Engels thought it would. Thus, while today most members of society are working people in the literal sense of the term (that is, people who must work if they are to survive and who do not possess substantial financial assets), they are obviously not all members of what Marx and Engels called the proletariat. Many are white-collar workers employed in banks, insurance companies, medical establishments, and other offices, including those of local, state, and the federal government. Many are technicians of various kinds. Others are teachers, nurses, doctors, lawyers, and other professionals, most of whom are not wealthy. In addition, more and more people today work as "independent contractors"; legally (as far as the IRS is concerned), they are owners of small businesses: those who drive for Uber and Lyft and those who work in other sectors of the "gig economy", along with street vendors, owners of shops and restaurants, and other small businesses. In my opinion, most of

these people ought to be included in a political (as opposed to a narrowly ideological or sociological) definition of the working class.



Today, as I understand the situation, roughly 20% of the US population are wealthy or at least comfortable. The rest of the people, roughly 80%, are struggling to get by; many, maybe the majority, are in deep distress. So, when I say I wish to unite the working class in a militant movement against the capitalist class as a whole, these (at the risk of being theoretically muddled and overly sentimental) are the people I mean.

To me, what our situation adds up to is that, today, we and other radicals face a choice. Either we abandon any claim to stand for a revolution, deciding that it is not feasible at the moment or not possible at all, and commit ourselves to support, vote for, and organize for the "lesser evil," which, to most leftists, means the Democratic Party. Or, we can continue to raise and fight for the idea of building a revolutionary working class movement, one that is conscious of itself as being distinct from and counterposed to the entire ruling class. And this, in turn, requires opposing both the Democratic and the Republican parties. (As a tactical aside, I don't think we should concentrate our efforts on convincing people not to vote if they are inclined to do so. Instead, I believe our focus should be on exposing the pro-capitalist nature of both parties, while arguing that we need to build a movement that is independent of both of them. For those active in political organizations, this means opposing resolutions to endorse Democratic candidates, to give them money, and to work on their campaigns, including so-called "socialists" and "progressives" running in the Democratic primaries.)



If we are to unite the majority of the American people into a militant anti-capitalist movement, we cannot write off all the people, particularly the working-class people, who voted for and continue to support Donald Trump. These people have real grievances; they have been victimized by the capitalist system that we oppose. Living in medium-sized and small cities, in towns, and in rural areas that have been rendered obsolete by the relentless march of the capitalist system, millions of them are truly suffering, from unemployment or partial employment, and from social isolation, depression, and opioid addiction. Moreover, they are not all committed racists and fascists. Nearly ten million people who voted for Trump in the last election voted for Barack Obama in 2008. Hardcore racists do not vote to make a Black man the president of the United States! While they have illusions in and delusions about Donald Trump, as well as various levels of racist and sexist attitudes, they have legitimate resentments against the capitalist liberals in general and the Democratic Party in particular. Remember, the Democratic president, Barack Obama, who claimed to represent all the people, threw billions of dollars at the banks and insurance companies and bailed out the auto companies but did very little to help the real victims of the recession: the homeowners who lost their homes, the workers who lost their jobs, the small businesspeople who lost their businesses, and the millions of others whose lives were devastated by the worst economic crisis since the 1930s. The workers and other people who voted for Trump have good reason to hate the Democrats and the rich, corrupt, and condescending liberals, such as Hillary Clinton, who lead the party. Following on Obama's betrayal, Clinton made it very clear, both in

word and in deed, that she didn't need and didn't want the votes of the white working-class and middle-class people in the cities and towns of the Rust Belt and elsewhere in the heartland of the country, people who once constituted the base of the Democratic Party. I don't know how we can even begin to talk to these people if we tell them that we voted for Hillary Clinton and think that they should support the Democrats this time around too.

As I see it now, it is people like us who represent "class consciousness," at least in embryo. If we don't hold onto it and fight for it, nobody else will. At some point in the future, such consciousness may emerge among broader layers of the population. (As we know from our experiences in the 1960s, things can change, and radical consciousness can develop, very rapidly.) However, neither the "laws of motion" of capitalism nor the logic of history guarantee its emergence.

As far as this year's election and the election of 2020 are concerned, each of us ought to act as he/she thinks best. If people are so frightened of Donald Trump and the policies he is pursuing that they want to support the Democrats in the next two elections, or support "socialist" candidates running in the Democratic Primaries, they should do so. I, for one, do not want to try to convince people intellectually of what they do not feel emotionally. However, I will continue to wave the flag of revolution no matter how absurd this may seem at this time, to try to explain to whomever is willing to listen what's the matter with the capitalist system and why the majority of the American people should rise up, smash it, and replace it with a better one. And I will continue to look for and to unite with other people who think and feel, in their heads and in their guts, as I do.

Discussion

April 23
All,

A brief comment on Ron's statement, with his focus on the issue of class. I am mainly in agreement with him, from the point of view of

a "class-struggle anarchist" who has been influenced by Marxism. Years ago when I first came around the unorthodox Trotskyists of what became the International Socialists, I (like everyone else there) read Lenin's major work, *What Is To Be Done?* Along with what I eventually came to see as authoritarian aspects, I noted that one of his main points was that working class revolutionaries should not only fight for immediate working class and labor union issues (that was "Economism"). They (we) should also defend every popular struggle and democratic issue. This included big non-working class issues, such as those of the peasants and oppressed nations, as well as women. Also, he wrote, we should champion smaller issues, such as the writers fighting censorship, abused rank-and-file soldiers, religious minorities, and so on. I think this revolutionary democratic approach was attractive to many of us.

Now I am no longer a Leninist in any way. But what I reject about Lenin (and Lenin's Marxism) is *not* his support for non-working class, democratic, struggles. Quite the contrary. Without giving up a working class perspective, I still think this applies more than ever. I think this is in agreement with the direction of Ron's statement on class.

Wayne

April 25

The Inevitability of Socialism

Eric Chester

I am in general agreement with Ron's assessment of the current situation in the United States, but Ron also includes a critique of Marxism that seems to me to be simplistic and not helpful.

Ron believes that Marx held that the working class would automatically become class-conscious socialists and that capitalism would be automatically superseded by socialism. Needless to say, neither of these propositions accord with the actual experience of the last century and a half.



To begin with, it seems helpful to outline Marx's argument. The relations between capitalist and worker, here Marx was thinking of both industrial workers and miners primarily, were bound to be one of conflict. Over time, the working class would coalesce into both militant unions and a working class party. As the working class became more powerful, the ruling class would crack down, democratic norms would be discarded and a revolution would be the only way forward.

This is a compelling scenario and yet one that hardly seems inevitable. There are certainly sections of writings from Marx and Engels that indicate that they viewed these propositions as some type of law, but there are also writings that indicate that Marx and Engels understood that society was far more complicated, with conflicting currents at work.

For us in the twenty-first century, more important than understanding exactly where Marx stood on these issues is learning from those who followed them. Marxists come in many different varieties, but one trend is that of the anti-authoritarian revolutionaries. Luxemburg famously wrote that the choice was one of socialism or barbarism. (I would slightly modify this to socialism or catastrophe.) This is hardly the argument of someone who sees socialism as inevitable or class consciousness as automatic.



Instead of presenting a simplistic version of Marxist thought and then rejecting it, it is more useful to try to take a more nuanced approach and to see how both Marxist and anarchist thought and practice of the past can be used to help us develop a theory and strategy that can be relevant to the current period.

May 3, 2018

Utopians may find interesting this essay that I submitted to the Anarcho-Syndicalist Review. It discusses issues that have recently been raised here.

Wayne

Liberal Illusions and Delusions

Wayne Price

Facing the Trump regime, there are several different liberal delusions (although these views are also held by many who regard themselves as radicals). One is to see Trump as leading pretty directly to fascism and another believes that Trumpism does not really represent a major change in U.S. politics. The view that the U.S. is approaching fascism is based on an unrealistic expectation that the U.S. government is—or at least ought to be—a fair and open democracy, as portrayed in high school civics classes.

Instead, many people are shocked—shocked!—when the state acts in an undemocratic, unjust, and authoritarian manner (I am not thinking of young people, new to politics, but to older people who

should know better). *What, the government lies to us! Elections are distorted and votes are suppressed! African-Americans are killed by police at random! Public opinions (on gun reform or the environment) are ignored by elected "representatives"—who are really agents of the wealthy! The government attacks people in countries with which the U.S. is not at war! And so on.* Therefore the conclusion is often reached that the U.S. is undemocratic and on the road to fascism, or perhaps is already fascist.

On the contrary—**this is what capitalist democracy looks like.** It is a system, which serves the interests of the capitalist class and its systemic need for capital accumulation. *"The three wealthiest people in this country own more wealth than the bottom half of American society. The top one-tenth of one percent now owns as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent."* (Bernie Sanders in an interview with John Nichols for **The Nation** 4/2018; p. 4.) How could such an arrangement permit true democracy? Instead, the system of representative democracy permits factions of the capitalist class to fight out their differences and make decisions. And it fools the mass of working people into thinking that they really control the state—that they really are free.

At times things have been worse. The '50s were part of the "golden age" of capitalism, the prosperous years following World War II. They were also the years of the anti-communist hysteria and McCarthyite witch-hunt. Thousands of leftists were persecuted, jailed, or thrown out of their jobs in government, universities, public schools, unions, entertainment, and other private businesses. Meanwhile, the whole of the South was under legal segregation, the vicious oppression of African-Americans. This was enforced by the law and by the terror of the Klan. The anti-communist repression and the legal Jim Crow laws were defeated by the 70s. This was done by the massive struggles of African-Americans and by the movement against the war in Vietnam, and other efforts.

There has since been a rightist backlash. This includes the rise of a real fascist movement, one that aims to overthrow bourgeois democracy and replace it with a political dictatorship. Trump has encouraged these people to come out into the light. However, the neo-Nazis, Klanspeople, and advocates of a theocracy are still a small minority, even of Trump's followers. All parts of the establishment, including businesspeople, high military officials, and

leading Republicans have denounced them. There has not been an effort to cancel elections, establish a president-for-life, ban all but one political party, outlaw unions, throw political radicals into concentration camps, legally persecute Jews, LGBT people, and women, and reinstall African-American slavery. That is what fascism would really be, and it is not what we are currently facing. Claiming that we are confronting an immediate fascist threat from Trump weakens us when we deal with real fascists.

Another Liberal Illusion

This may lead to the other illusion. Since Trumpism isn't fascism, then perhaps it is nothing new or important. The vile Trump is then seen as an accidental president with personal peculiarities. Therefore he will be defeated in 2020 (if not impeached before that). Then U.S. politics will return to "normal." Hopefully a moderately liberal Democrat—or at least a not-crazy Republican—will be elected. Progress marches on.

This approach ignores what is new and dangerous in U.S. politics. Just as, in regard to climate change, we are not facing immediate ecological catastrophe, but there is no more "normal weather." So, in politics, we are not facing imminent fascism, but **there are no more "normal politics."** Since the early 70s, the post-World War II prosperity has ended, and the overall direction of the world economy has been toward stagnation in real production, growth of empty financial and speculative "wealth", increased inequality within and between nations, and limited and fragile growth even in the "up" phase of the economy. In order to keep and expand profits, the bourgeoisie has attacked the world working class, in various ways. In the U.S.A., the main political instrument of this attack has been the Republican Party. Now completely controlled by far-right reactionaries ("conservatives"), it has become the cutting edge of the assault on the working class, as well as on women, African-Americans, Latinos/as, LGBT people, and the environment.

In 2008, much of the public was fed up by eight years of George W's Republican administration. The capitalist class gave them someone apparently different, the first Black presidential candidate. Besides electing Obama, the Democrats expanded their majorities in both congressional houses. In reaction, the Republican response did not seriously try to increase their voting base. For

example, they could have tried appealing to the increasing population of Latinos/as. But such an appeal would antagonize their existing base of nativist-racist white people, even if this sector was declining in population. And there was a limit as to how much they could appeal to the voters, since their real program of cutting taxes on the rich and cutting benefits for working people had only limited attraction. So instead they sought to build in political control, to “rig the game”.

With an unprecedented flood of money, they mobilized their racist, nativist, fanatical base of white, middle class and upper working class people, especially men and especially evangelicals. Republicans whipped up sexual hysteria over abortion choice or rights for homosexuals and trans people. The dupes were organized, through the Tea Party and such, to take over state legislatures. *“Their plan [was] to remake America not from DC down, but from the statehouse up.”* (William Barber, **The Third Reconstruction**. 2016; xiv) They won control of the majority of state governments. There they expanded efforts to suppress votes among People of Color, youth, and women. Also a very conscious plan was carried out to gerrymander the voting districts of each state, to give the Republicans a big advantage. Democrats had gerrymandered too, in the past, but the extent and the methods (using computer maps) were unusual. This was not a particularly secret strategy (see the history in Joan Walsh, “The 7,383 Seat Strategy” **The Nation** 4/2018). Meanwhile a huge right-wing media machine was created, from radio, to Fox television, to the Internet.

These methods did not mean that Democrats could not defeat Republicans in elections. But it became much harder, requiring more effort and more money. There was an extra pull to the right, so that Democrats needed to be more “moderate,” less “liberal,” to have a chance of winning in the biased political system.

By 2017, the Republicans controlled 32 state governments. If they get control of two more states, they would have the legal power to call a constitutional convention—to alter the U.S. constitution. They have actually discussed this in conservative circles. If they reached this threshold of power, they would not set up a one-party dictatorship. They do not have popular or elite support for this. But they could gut the power of the national government to

regulate business, to protect the environment or labor, or to enforce various democratic rights.

The Democrats

Many liberals believe that the republic can be saved by impeaching Trump. No matter how many illegal, unconstitutional, or immoral things Trump has done, it is impossible that he could be impeached so long as the Republicans hold majorities in both houses of Congress. The current Republican Party is so corrupt that it has done its best to derail and discredit the investigations into Trump's activities. Even their supposed super-patriotism has wilted under Trump's connections with Russia. Therefore passing a bill of impeachment would require a Democratic majority in the House of Representatives—which is quite possible. Then actually expelling Trump would require a two-thirds majority of Democrats and "moderate" Republicans in the Senate—which is highly unlikely. Polls generally show that most U.S. citizens, including Democrats, are opposed to impeachment. This makes support for it unlikely among Democratic politicians from "purple" states, let alone "moderate" Republicans. Historically, only two presidents were impeached (in the House) but neither was expelled (by the Senate). And suppose impeachment did work. The result would be...President Mike Pence! Perhaps the shakeup would be another sign that the system was in crisis, but...all that effort for so little effect.

The biggest illusion of the liberals is that the attack on the people by the Republicans can be beaten back by supporting the Democratic Party. The whole of U.S. politics exists to channel discontent into one or the other of the two big parties. Both are supporters of capitalism and the national state, both rely on big money contributions, both seek to ingratiate themselves with sectors of big business, and both are the enemy of the working class and most of the rest of the population.

The already cited article by Joan Walsh of **The Nation** reports on efforts by rebellious people, new to political action, to work through the Democrats. However, she notes a problem: *"The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, and the Democratic Legislative Committee—as well as state-party operations and legislative-caucus groups—all come to function as incumbent-protection committees...[causing]*

the party's failure to reach out to its grass roots, especially at the state level...." (4/18; p. 17) She reports on valiant attempts of women, youth, and others to break through the old-timers establishment. But even if these efforts were to succeed, basic problems would continue.

What drives people to the Democrats is the horrible failures of the Republicans. But what has driven people to the Republicans has been the horrible failure of the Democrats. After eight years of a Democratic president (which had included two years of a Democratic majority in Congress), there was still so much suffering and stagnation that a bombastic demagogue could appeal to a great many people. Even the best of the left-liberal Democrats (the Warren-Sanders wing) has no real answers to the decay of capitalism. If people swing to the "left," to throw out the Republicans, the Democrats will be unable to improve things significantly—and there will be another swing back to the right.

As the anarchist Paul Goodman said in the 'sixties, even a huge electoral swing to the Democrats, even to their liberal wing, would come up against "*the massiveness of the status quo and its established powers, venal, blimpish, police-ridden, prejudiced, and illiberal, officially existing in the Pentagon, the Treasury, the FBI, the Civil Service...a large part of congress.*" (Paul Goodman, "The devolution of democracy"; **Drawing the Line** 1962; 62) Today we can add the continued existence of far-right organizations, funded by big money, and far-right media. Even with a swing to the "left" (if the Democrats may be called that), there will still be 30 to 40 % of the population which lives in a crazed far-right fantasy bubble, supporting Trump or, at least, Trump-like politics. While only a minority of these people are outright fascists, they still amount to about one out of every three U.S. citizens—a lot of people. Meanwhile the decay of capitalism goes on (even during the current limited "recovery") and the attack on the working class continues by the whole capitalist class, including its "liberal" wing. Gains may still be won, but only limited ones.

These forces cannot be defeated by politics as usual, by rushing into the Democratic Party, or by running in elections. They need to be met by independent mass direct action by working people and all oppressed. Anarchists and other radicals need to raise maximal programs of opposition to the whole rotten system, in all its economic, political, environmental, and cultural aspects. As

Goodman concluded his already cited essay, "*If...catastrophe [is to be] prevented, we must do it by action outside of their politics, by every means and on every relevant issue.*" (77)
