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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Introduction to "Teaching (About) Socialism"

by Paul Lauter

WALTER CRANE, "A GARLAND FOR MAY DAY 1895", WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

"What is Socialism?" asked the governor, and would not stay for an answer. Though he added, as he walked away, "And who cares anyway?"

We do. So do millions of other human beings who in their daily lives see what a changed organization of their society might mean for themselves and their families. But that's very abstract. It is not our intent here to provide the multiple answers that would be necessary to begin answering that initial question about what people mean when they talk about "socialism." As the essays in this cluster illustrate, "socialism" means, as it always has, many differing things to different people.

For some, socialism amounts to a curse word affixed to some ideas or people one dislikes: "You no-good socialist, you." But even for those who use "socialist" as a curse, the idea has certain defining features. It is not our intent, however, to summarize a long history or to substitute for the many, many books on the subject. Rather, we look at some of the ways in which teachers approach the subject, ways as varied as the concept of socialism itself.

Why are we doing this? In the first place millions of people in the U.S.A. and elsewhere, who think of themselves or others close to them as "socialists," welcome the opportunity to talk historically and philosophically about the concept. Second, even advocates for the dominant economic system in the U.S., capitalism, need to try to understand the dynamics of other societies in our world which designate themselves as "socialist." And third, from the standpoint of intellectual history, some of the most exciting and consequential debates of the last two centuries have taken place over the question of socialism: its distinctive place in the world of "isms" and how in particular it remains related to, though different from capitalism, communism, anarchism, and other ideas about the organization of human society. In fact, talking about socialism enables us to see more clearly the limitations and especially the inequities of capitalism.

But perhaps most important of all: universities have, at least for the last century in America, been the venues in which we, our students and ourselves, have talked about how we conceive the future. What will that future look like, what will it entail, what needs to change to bring about a future marked not by fire and flood but by hope? To talk about socialism is to talk about possible, even necessary, futures. Which is why the efforts of governors and legislatures to restrict discussion, to avoid examining and reexamining the past, are so counter-productive. To create viable futures depends upon examining the lessons of the past. Even if one concludes that socialism is not the path to a desirable future, it is a conclusion that can be reached or opposed only by the kinds of teaching illustrated in this issue of *Radical Teacher*.

So what definition would help us talk about socialism? The central issue it raises has to do with property. Let's say a pair of shoes. Most adults "own" a pair of shoes—that is, they are ours to put on when we wish, we don't share them with others, and we probably chose the color and style. Likely we purchased them at a store that is "owned" by someone or by a group of people. They probably lease the space from a landlord who "owns" the building or at least the storefront, and the store has ("owns") a supply of shoes from which customers can choose. Those shoes came, directly or indirectly, from a manufacturer, who has them made using machines that his or her company "owns" or rents. Socialism has very little to say about such commonplace forms of property, though some socialists might begin to ask whether such a manufacturer, which "owns" many machines and hires many workers, should be privately "owned." Or should the machines and the materials (leather, plastic) they work on be "owned" by those who do the work, or by the state, or some other entity instead of—as in American capitalism—by an individual or a group of stockholders? Somewhere between an individual pair of shoes owned by a person and a manufacturer who produces thousands or even millions of pairs of shoes, the question of "ownership" begins to get complicated.

That will quickly be seen if we think not of shoes but of cars. Making, distributing, selling, buying, maintaining a car are obviously much more complicated processes with a greater impact on the society. Individuals or families "own" cars. But the machinery and the processes that produce and distribute cars are in the U.S.A. privately held. That is to say, these processes under capitalism are organized in such a way as to produce profits, which flow to the owner or stockholders. These processes are not generally organized to increase the income of the actual workers who build cars, or to significantly reduce the cost to those who buy cars, objectives which advocates of socialism would favor. This is obvious enough. What is less obvious are the cultural and social consequences of this profit-maximizing way of organizing the economy. A cultural imperative of today's capitalism is, in fact, to privatize as many institutions as possible: not only the tools of communication, like "public" radio or newspapers--which have long been private--but also schools, hospitals, the production of energy, places to live or assemble, pensions (remember those?). Today you privatize health insurance, calling it "Medicare Advantage"; tomorrow you privatize Social Security, calling it "Retirement Advantage." To whose advantage?

Privatizing profit—that is, ownership—creates an increasingly large gap between the income of workers and that of owners. Disparities in income and wealth play out in the kinds of lives most people actually live, including where they can live and how, the schooling and health care they receive, how they can shop and commute, the quality of their daily lives. But also, the private profit system emphasizes a culture of insistent individualism; it gives owners the authority to do what they will with what is defined as "their" property—think Twitter. And, in so exerting control, these owners significantly exercise power over the lives of those they employ. The owner can, after all, fire the worker. Or, as someone Steve Goldsmith worked with in a seventies steel mill put it: ""You either own the motherfucker or you work for it."

To say this in a perhaps milder way, differences between capitalism and socialism have not only to do with "ownership"—that is, economics--but with culture: who decides what is made, how and where it is created, by whom, for whom. And under what circumstances. Those

who favor socialism have different answers to such implicit questions than those offered by capitalist culture. Socialists' answers are based on a quite different basic concept—not private ownership but solidarity among equals. One might argue--as Raymond Williams has done--that the distinction between individual privatization of property and forms of collective control marks the fundamental difference between capitalism and socialism as systems for organizing society.

One major feature of capitalism in America, and in other capitalist nations, is to substitute consumerism for ownership. You may not own the "engines of the economy" but you can at least buy the products—shoes, cars, phones--those engines produce. That those engines are quite productive, no one would deny. Whether people really need what they produce—like endless packs of Camels, carbon-spewing diesel engines, the very latest app--remains quite another question. Who decides? American capitalism argues that consumers decide by virtue of how they spend their money. Socialists might argue that such choices are, in practice, heavily constrained—as, for example, by the lack of clean, comfortable, and efficient public transit that, in a city like Los Angeles, pushes people into private cars. And that real choices should be determined not by private decisions of "owners" but by public—i.e., political—contests over public priorities. Do we "need" Artificial Intelligence? Or Lamborghinis?

Another characteristic of capitalism is to hide the actual costs of the products being produced. The recent push for electric cars has made clear that we—all of us—through taxes and other fiscal devices pay for many of the costs—highways, charging stations, parking arrangements—that never appear on the bill of sale for a car you might purchase. What if some portion of such necessary costs were to appear in the sale price? Would that shift the cultural desire to consume the products being rapidly churned out for the profit of private "owners"? It isn't that socialists wish to limit what people can consume; rather, socialists argue that the true price of an item needs to be clear to consumers long before they invest their limited resources in buying it. For wealthy owners, the price of a private jet, a yacht, or a Lamborghini doesn't matter much; but that is not the case for most of us, as individuals or as part of a society. As individuals, we are limited by our personal resources. But also, as a society, we need to be able to decide democratically how to invest our society's limited resources. That is perhaps the central idea of socialism: let the people decide.

At this point, at least some of our readers will have begun to ask: what relationships need to be discussed regarding socialism and race and gender discrimination, which are, after all, among the most conflicted areas of action in today's education, politics, and media? This is a particularly strained issue because, historically, at least some advocates of socialism have argued that achieving a socialist society would, in and of itself, lead to eliminating racism, sexism, and other forms of bias. Would it were so easy. One could devote more than one issue of a magazine like *Radical Teacher* to how race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and other forms of inequality intersect with the discriminatory class structure of capitalism. Indeed, a whole area of intellectual endeavor, termed intersectionality, has been devoted to that task. That task, as a number of the articles in this cluster illustrate, is one major problem that any teacher will face in discussing the changes proposed for or entailed by a socialist reconstruction of culture. No one has a formula, in fact, for teasing out the multiple threads that weave the fabric of bigotry and inequality. Even those who would bar classroom discussion of sex and gender and race acknowledge by their very efforts the centrality of precisely such discussions to students' educational enlightenment.

...to "teach about socialism" entails teaching about often bitterly contested histories and current actions regarding sex, race, gender, religion, and ethnicity.

But this much is certain: to "teach about socialism" entails teaching about often bitterly contested histories and current actions regarding sex, race, gender, religion, and ethnicity. To anyone wishing to command "thou shalt not teach X," we project an image of Heinrich Himmler, who said: "The best political weapon is the weapon of terror. Cruelty commands respect. Men may hate us. But we don't ask for their love; only for their fear." No. Now and forever.

The Governor might not stay for an answer. But the answers, like the questions, continue to emerge from the everyday experiences of students and teachers throughout this and thousands of other classrooms across our haunted globe.

*****This issue of *Radical Teacher* was edited by Susan O'Malley, Paul Lauter, Michael Bennett, and Mary Ann Clawson.

Paul Lauter retired as Allan K. and Gwendolyn Miles Smith Professor of Literature after 26 years at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. He has served as President of the American Studies Association (of the United States) and he remains General Editor of the groundbreaking *Heath Anthology of American Literature*. Lauter's most recent books include *From Walden Pond to Jurassic Park*, an edited volume with Ann Fitzgerald titled *Literature, Class, and Culture,* and a *Blackwell Companion to American Literature and Culture*. New projects have included an edited collection of essays on American working-class literature with Nick Coles (Cambridge, 2017) and an account of the impact of 60s activism on education, politics, and culture, *Our Sixties: An Activist's History* (Rochester, 2020). He remains active with *Radical Teacher* and in the Vietnam Peace Commemoration Committee. He and Doris Friedensohn provided one of the essays in the collection *Gray Love.*

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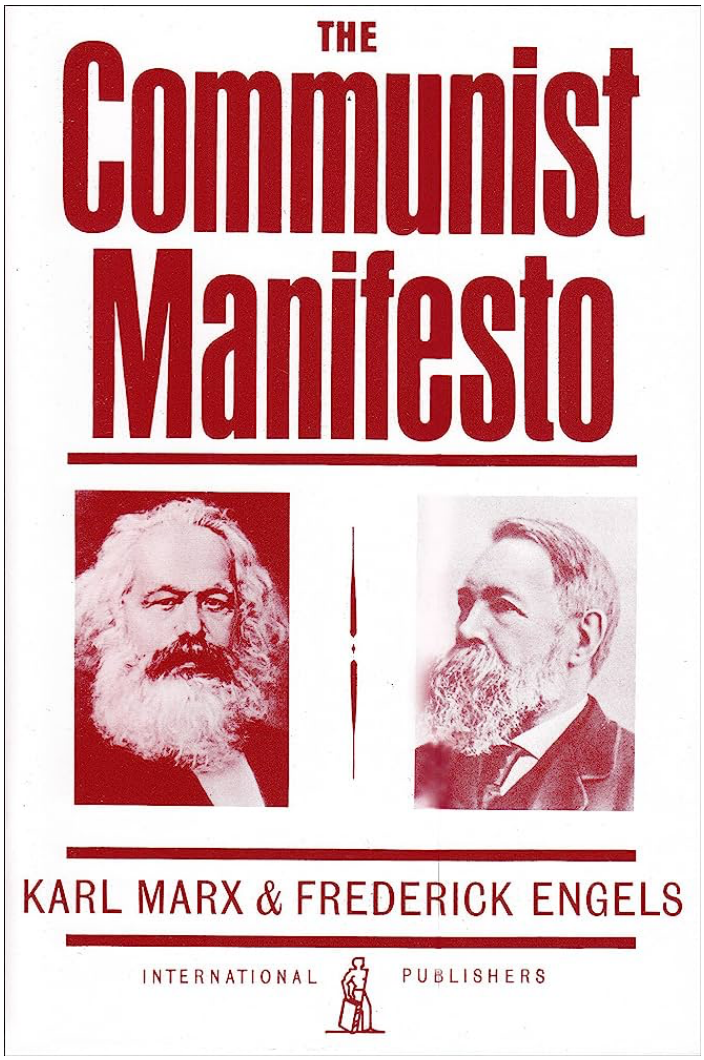
Teaching about European Socialism to Rethink our Societies

by Sandrine Kott



THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO BY KARL MARX (AUTHOR), FRIEDRICH ENGELS

I have taught the history of European socialism several times, in different forms, at different levels, and in different countries in Europe and the United States. The following text is an assessment of these experiences. I explain the choices I made, the approaches I adopted, and the way in which, through the history of socialism, I try, together with the students, to question our present. In the United States, where socialist culture has largely been lost and socialism has been much caricatured, this teaching aims also at correcting the many misconceptions and errors which have been spread. Beyond the transmission of a controlled knowledge, it is also about giving students the opportunity to think about possible alternatives to the society in which they live as well as their limits. It is not about "converting" students to socialism but about giving them the tools to critically think about the world around them. For me, teaching about socialism is first and foremost about creating a space for free thinking.

My teaching is deeply influenced by these premises, so it is never apologetic. Starting from the original 19th century texts, I study with the students the way in which socialists drew the contours of a better, more just, less unequal, less oppressive society, but we also work on the contradictions and limits of these projects. Working with a recent historiography that is more interested in practices and implementations than in theoretical debates, we reflect on the successes obtained but also on possible drifts and failures. Socialism as it has been conceived and practiced in the wake of European industrialization does not offer a ready-made solution to the problems of our time, but the plurality of socialist projects and practices opens avenues for rethinking our world.

The many socialist inspirations and currents

Contrary to the often vague ideas that students have, socialism should not be reduced to the "scientific socialism" of the Marxist tradition. In class, we begin by reading the texts of the first socialists, those whom Marx and Engels grouped together under the heading of "utopian" socialists. This allows us to become aware of a first diversity among the ones who see themselves or have been grouped under the label "socialists." We begin with *Report to the Country of Lanark* (1820) in which Robert Owen (1771-1858) outlined plans for a radical transformation of agricultural and industrial organization, where better educated workers would be given more power. We then read the *Letters from an inhabitant of Geneva to his Contemporaries* (1803) or the *Catechism of industrials* (1823-1824) of Claude-Henry de Saint Simon (1760-1825), who laid the foundations of an industrialist and technocratic vision of social organization. Through a selection of writings (*Selections from the Works of Fourier*, English, 1901) we study how Charles Fourier (1772-1837) envisioned a collective organization (the *phalanstère*) that would be based on the satisfaction of individual passions. In the *Travels in Icaria* (French 1840, English 2003) Etienne Cabet (1788-1856) drew plans for an egalitarian communist society in which the distribution of wealth would be organized by a central authority (State). Interestingly, the writings of Saint Simon, Charles Fourier, Robert Owen, and Etienne Cabet even though sometimes obscure (Fourier in particular), often speak more to students than Marxist texts because they offer concrete solutions. For this first part of the 19th century, we also study movements that do not necessarily label themselves "socialist," but which laid the foundation of the workers' movement and were close to the socialists. The Luddites formulated claims not against the machines but for a reorganization of work and the Chartists took a stand for a true democracy of the people. These first socialists elaborated precise plans for the society to be built from concrete local experiences. Even if these community experiments, carried out essentially on the territory of the United States (like The Owenite New Harmony in Indiana) failed, they opened up fertile avenues of reflection. In many respects the prospect of establishing spaces of direct social and political democracy from below resonates with current political aspirations.

We then read the most accessible texts by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, large excerpts from the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), but also *Speech on Communism* (February 1845) by Moses Hess (1818-1875), which was a crucial source of inspiration for Marx and Engels. We also read political texts, in particular *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte* (1852) and *The Civil War in France* (1871) which clearly show that history is at the very foundation of Marxist thought. In accordance with this historical materialism, Marx himself did not, unlike the first socialists, indicate precise plans of the society to be established and left wide spaces for interpretation of his thought.

We discuss these various interpretations with texts by Rosa Luxemburg (*Reform or Revolution* (1900), Lenin, Jules Guesde in France, and also the revisionist or reformist current such as the German Eduard Bernstein ("Karl Marx and Social Reform," in *Progressive Review*, no 7, April 1897).

Marx and all Marxist authors mentioned above shared a vision of the society of their time penetrated by class conflicts, but they did not have the same definition of class. In our societies in which class conflicts take new forms, it is crucial to discuss this issue with the students. For Marx, social classes are formed and determined by the position that each member of a class occupies in a particular mode of production. In capitalism, beyond the founding opposition between capital and labor, reading of the historical texts shows us that Marx has developed a more nuanced approach to social classes. Moreover, beyond the objective existence of the "class itself," "class consciousness" is fully part of the Marxist definition of class. This class consciousness is a prerequisite without which the workers would not develop their revolutionary potential. On the other side, the revolutionary moment is the crucible in, and through which, class consciousness can develop. The question of revolution and the revolutionary class in Marxism needs explanations and discussion and leads to a redefinition of the distinction between socialism and communism. In Marx's political writings, the proletariat, as a revolutionary class, seizes the bourgeois state, and builds socialism, which, in the long run, must lead to the classless and stateless society in communism. The idea that in Marxist tradition, communism is the ultimate phase of history in which a classless, stateless

society is established is very counterintuitive to US students, for whom communism is associated with dictatorship and violence. This always leads to controversial discussions on the relationship between socialism and communism in the classroom.

Nevertheless, at the end of the 19th century, this conception of class and of the role of the revolution as a condition for political and social transformation was not shared by all Marxists. The German socialist Eduard Bernstein (1850-1932) argued that the class in itself was not a category determined solely by the position in the means of production but that it also depended on a larger range of factors like income, education, lifestyle, and so on…. For Eduard Bernstein, as well as for other Marxist authors, the class for itself was thus also an everyday and cultural experience (*Evolutionary Socialism: A Criticism and Affirmation*, 1889) and class consciousness was not just a social experience but a cultural process.

Studying closely these various interpretations of social classes with the students is crucial because the language of class has largely disappeared in Western Europe, even in the left, and is almost absent from any public discourse in the United States, where it has been replaced by a focus on other forms of social segmentation: race and/or gender. And yet class inequalities are rising in all Western countries and in particular in the US. Reading Marxist authors allows us to question this disappearance of class as an analytical as well as a political and social category and prompts us to reintegrate it as a component of a robust intersectional approach.

It is also important to remind the students that after 1848 and the writing of the *Communist Manifesto*, not all socialists became Marxists and not all saw class struggle and revolution as a motor of history. The French republican socialists like Jean Jaurès (1859-1914) or Léon Blum (1872-1950) insisted above all on the need for reforms to achieve a Social Republic in which the rights of each person would be respected, and solidarity between various social classes (Solidarism) was seen as the backbone of the nation. From the end of the 19th century onward, this social and national interpretation of socialism was very strong in the social democracies of Northern Europe; the Swedish social democratic party asserted its reformist orientation already in 1913. At that time, this reformism was also well represented within German social democracy, even though the party distanced itself officially from Marxism only in 1959 at the Bad Godesberg Congress (we study the Bad Godesberg Program). In 1959, under what was called "Ethical Socialism" the German SPD accepted the free-market economy and capitalism and abandoned references to class struggle. All European social democratic parties evolved in the same direction in the second half of the 20th century. In 1995, under the leadership of Tony Blair the British New Labour abandoned its commitment to "the common ownership of the means of production and exchange" and the call for nationalization; it endorsed a "democratic socialism" based on ethical values.

In class, we discuss the significance of the disappearance of the references to Marxist categories like working class, class struggle, common ownership of the means of production. We question the parallel affirmation of an "ethical" or democratic socialism and try to understand what it has concretely meant and implied for the European socialist parties.

Thinking with the socialists: labor, democracy, gender

Teaching about socialism does not mean "glorifying" this or that thinker but analyzing the various and often diverging visions that they offer as well as the various strategies they propose to achieve a better society. These projects as well as these strategies stemmed from political choices, but they were also linked to specific contexts in which they have been elaborated. This contextualization is key and allows us to understand the progressive abandonment of the reference to Marxism in most socialist and social democratic parties nowadays. Nevertheless, all the authors who claimed to be socialists or were labelled socialists shared to a certain point a belief that a better society was desirable and possible. These projects varied, but they all offered alternatives which still open up avenues of reflection that in one way or another can resonate with the questions of the present. In what follows I will discuss three topics which we generally discuss during the class. Other important issues like the environment, religion, or internationalism that I also discuss with the students could have been added to this list.

Up to the 1950s, a central element common to all these socialist currents concerned the nature and place of work and workers. They all insisted on the centrality of work seen as self-fulfillment and on the necessity of preserving its creative part and its emancipating dimension. This is one of the important lessons that should be drawn from English Luddism at the beginning of the 19th century. The movement was not directed against the machines themselves but against the way they were used to dispossess the workers of their agency and the meaning of work (Kevin Binfield, *Writings of the Luddites*, Northwestern Documents, 2004). Moreover, because the socialists saw work as a central element of the social fabric, the ones who performed this work -- craftsmen, peasants, industrial workers -- should be entitled to participate fully in political decisions. This meant abolishing the domination of a minority of owners and/or capitalists, who were living from the work of others. In the various socialist traditions, this view was not necessarily associated with the idea of class struggle, but all 19th century socialist thinkers insisted that work was ennobling and should confer rights. The French Socialist Louis Blanc (1811-1882) is emblematic of this orientation. He proposed to organize "social workshops" with the financial support of the state in which the workers would organize themselves in production cooperatives. The management would be elected by the workers among themselves. Only workers would be allowed to invest money in these cooperatives (*The Organization of Labor*, French original 1839, English translation, 1911). This conception of labor and labor organization remained an important reference in certain segments of the socialist movement as in the French Parti Socialiste Unifié, (Unified Socialist Party) founded in 1960.

This centrality of work is something that students have difficulties understanding in a world in which work is rather seen as alienating. Again, the history of socialism offers some food for thought since the socialists themselves have turned their back to this positive vision of labor. Since the 1950s, the trade unions and the social democratic parties accepted the Fordist compromise whereby productivity gains and the deskilling of labor were exchanged for increases in workers' living standards and a reduction in working hours. Until then, the question of the standard of living had tended to prevail over the value and meaning of work and this emphasis on the emancipatory dimension of work has tended to get lost. In a post-COVID period during which the meaning of work has been deeply questioned, this prompts us to think about the new forms of alienation through work in the case of the "uber workers" who become dependent on algorithms on a platform. More broadly, the lack of decision-making power of workers in private companies still underlines the devaluation of the role of labor in favor of that of shareholders.

The expression "dictatorship of the proletariat", often misinterpreted and largely misunderstood by the students, tends to give credence to the idea that socialists were not really interested in democracy, or even rejected it.

This point leads us to reflect on democracy. The expression "dictatorship of the proletariat", often misinterpreted and largely misunderstood by the students, tends to give credence to the idea that socialists were not really interested in democracy, or even rejected it. This representation is reinforced by the existence of communist dictatorships and, in the US, by strong anti-communist and anti-socialist propaganda that has deliberately confused the socialist projects with the authoritarian regimes led by communist parties. It is therefore necessary to discuss the difference between the long socialist tradition and the new communist parties which have been founded in the wake of the Bolshevik revolution. For the revolution to triumph the Leninist parties were organized according to the model of democratic centralism in which there was no room for disagreement within the party itself. This disciplinary/authoritarian path diverged from the socialist and social-democratic traditions. During the Tours congress in December 1920, the French socialist Léon Blum pointed to this authoritarian drift to explain why he would not join the Communist party and would "keep the old house." He was not alone in his condemnation; even Rosa Luxemburg, who founded the first German communist party in 1919, expressed serious doubts about Lenin's authoritarianism. We read these texts in class and we discuss them thoroughly because contrary to the communist model, democracy lies at the heart of the socialist project. Representative democracy and universal suffrage were seen by the Chartists or the reform socialists until the end of the 19th century as a powerful instrument for political and social change. The British Chartists ("The People's Charter of 1838"), as well as socialists and social democrats, were the first to commit themselves to real universal suffrage (even for some of them including women), which they saw as a means for the people to make themselves heard and to exercise their full power. For the students, this vision of suffrage as empowerment resonates with the campaigns against voters' suppression in today's United States.

Besides, Louis Blanc or Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865) offered another definition of democracy in the workplace. They were both proponents of ownership of the means of production by the workers and of workers' self-management. This workers' democracy was promoted by various socialist currents and has been experimented with in Spain during the Popular Front government between 1936 and 1939 and in Socialist Yugoslavia under Josip Broz Tito (1948-1980). In Germany, it gave rise to provisions encouraging *Mitbestimmung* (Co-management) under the Weimar Republic (1919-1933). This becomes a central element of the discussion in class because it opens up new ways of thinking about democracy.

This deep belief in the virtue of democracy did not prevent some socialists from criticizing bourgeois representative democracy which was confiscated by a social elite. That is the reason why the French Proudhon, who has been classified among the libertarian socialists, saw in direct local democracy even at the workshop level the only real democracy *(Principle of Federation*, French 1863). This bottom up "federalism" has inspired recent direct democracy movements. The "indignados" in Madrid, "Occupy Wall Street" in New York, the "Nuit debout" in Paris are all part of these new ways of doing politics from below that have been practiced by young people since the second decade of the 21st century. Some of the students I had in the past have been involved in these or similar movements or have followed them closely and they share their experience or criticism with the class, leading to interesting discussion about how our own democracies are functioning and the current multiplication of illiberal democracies. They question the relationship, which was far from obvious in the19th century, between liberalism and democracy.

Another misconception, widely shared among students about the socialists, is their alleged indifference to other forms of division besides class conflicts. They often accused them of neglecting the role of patriarchy in their analysis of capitalist society. I always point to the fact that the reality is much more complex and that, even if it has been forgotten, the socialists were at the forefront of the struggle for women's rights up to the 1950s. This did not mean that they were "feminists" as we now understand it, but in their time some of them were very progressive. Since the beginning of the 19th century some socialists have condemned social and political inequality between men and women. In this respect, Charles Fourier can be regarded as a precursor who exerted a great influence on the socialist movement. In excerpts of *The Theory of the Four Movements* (French, 1808) that we read in class, he affirmed that "Social progress and changes of historical period take place in proportion to the advance of women toward liberty, and social decline occurs as a result of the diminution of the liberty of women." In the society of his

time, Fourier criticized the enslavement of the woman in marriage and pleaded for free love. Women and men should receive the same education and engage in the same activities. Therefore, women should not be confined to the domestic sphere. Fourier's "feminism" (he was credited with inventing the term) had a great influence on the socialist and feminist Flora Tristan, who knew him and quoted him in her *Peregrinations of a Pariah* (French, 1833-English 1985), as did Léon Blum in *On the Marriage*, published in 1907, in which the French socialist asserted that "as soon as she comes of age, a woman will be the master of her own body". Among early socialists, Fourier was far from alone. In Great Britain Owenists, like Anna Wheeler (1785-1848), advocated in favor of equal civil and political rights. During the years 1830-1840, many French women, among them Eugénie Niboyet (1796-1883), Désirée Gay (1810-1891), and Jeanne Deroin (1805-1894), attracted by the Saint Simonians school, spoke out against the domination of men along with the exploitation of proletarians. As socialists and as women, they denounced the family, the civil code, and the political and social inequality of which they were victims. If they found the support of a large part of the socialists, they were also scorned by Proudhon, who, although a libertarian socialist, developed a very patriarchal conception of society. What the students see as a contradiction in Proudhon's work always gives way to controversial discussions. I have to point to the fact that the male workers, and Proudhon was part of them, rather saw in the equality of rights between women and men a threat to their own position in the family and society. This may have led to contradictions between the socialist leaders and their social base, something that we discuss abundantly in class.

Nevertheless, socialists were among the ones who have been at the forefront of the criticism of male domination. Engels proclaimed that "within the family the wife represents the proletariat" (*Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, German 1884), something which had already been expressed by the socialist Flora Tristan in 1833: "The most oppressed man finds a being to oppress, his wife: she is the proletarian of the proletarian." Engels, like Rosa Luxemburg after him, was in favor of a recognition of unpaid reproductive domestic labor ("Suffrage and Class Struggle", 1912, Second Democratic Women's Rally, Stuttgart). A little later the leader of the German social democratic party, August Bebel, in *Woman and Socialism* (first published in German in 1879), also denounced the exploitation of women in capitalism.

However, this correlation between the denunciation of capitalism and the oppression of women had its limits. For Engels, as for Bebel, male domination was essentially thought of in economic terms and was seen as a by-product of capitalism: revolution and the victory of socialism would solve the "women" question. This point of view was also held by the German socialist Clara Zetkin (1857-1933), who organized socialist women (*German Socialist Women's Movement*, October 9, 1909) in opposition to "bourgeois" feminism. For Clara Zetkin and a large part of German social democratic women, the political struggle against capitalism had priority over the feminist struggle. Although it was a common view of the time, it had been challenged by the French feminist and socialist Madeleine Pelletier (1874-1939). As a member of the French Socialist Party (SFIO) in 1906, she succeeded in passing a resolution according to which the SFIO would introduce a bill in favor of women's suffrage, a demand that was already in the first program of the German social democratic party (1875). Nevertheless, she had to come to terms with the lack of real involvement of socialists in the cause of women. At the end of the 19th century the situation was not different in England, where the Labour party refused to make women's suffrage one of its priorities. This led to the constitution of an independent suffragist women's organization. While remaining a socialist until 1920, Madeleine Pelletier progressively developed feminist thought which was incredibly ahead of her time. Before Simone de Beauvoir, she emphasized that it was the social environment that "made" women; she denounced the subjection of women to maternity and advocated in favor of the right to abortion (*Le Droit à l'avortement*, 1911). Against her socialist colleagues, she emphasized that male domination was not only a product of capitalism and that women's demands could not be reduced to the socialist program. This leads us to explore the relationship between the second wave of feminism and the demand for reproductive rights, with the first wave focused on political and civil rights, as well as the role that certain socialist figures, even marginal ones like Madeleine Pelletier, played in linking the two waves.

Even though in all the European socialist parties women were a very small minority (about 3% in the French SFIO in 1940), even though socialists were late to acknowledge the specificity of the gender issue, they also were the first to bring women into government. This was the case in France with Léon Blum's government in 1936, while in François Mitterrand's socialist government a ministry for women's rights was created. Women obtained the right to vote in Germany in 1918 with the support of the social democrats. The first country which granted abortion rights was the Soviet Union in 1920 -- it was forbidden again between 1936 and 1955.

Revolution, reforms, or "third way"

Beyond the study of programmatic and theoretical texts, I also consider it essential to work with students on socialism as a practice and an experience.

Socialism was first expressed as a political current through protests that took various forms. Nevertheless, it is important to revisit the misconception, among many students, that 19th century socialists were systematically promoters of violent revolutions. Most of the first socialists, who were still under shock from the violence of the French Revolution, were fiercely anti-revolutionary and believed that they would succeed in spreading their model of an ideal society thanks to the successful example of ideal communities that they intended to create. On the other hand, insurrectionary episodes, brutal and violent revolutions, and the seizure of power by arms were far from being the prerogative of socialists. The European revolutions of 1830 were liberal; those of 1848 -- except perhaps for June 1848 -- and even the Paris Commune of 1871 were primarily national. Only the revolutionaries at the beginning of the 20th century in Russia, Germany, and Hungary aimed

at establishing socialism violently, but they were led by communists. As we find out with the students, during the 20th century the extreme right has made more use of political violence than the socialists, as demonstrated by the attack on the US Capitol on January 6, 2021. This leads to interesting discussions in class.

Indeed, instead of violence, socialists and, more generally, the workers' movement invented and deployed repertoires of actions that have become resources and models for all forms of popular protest. Among these we discuss various forms of mobilization like petitions, demonstrations, strikes, the planting of freedom trees, and the organization of banquets or funeral processions but also the development of political clubs. This often gives way to lively exchanges in class during which European students -- it is less the case in the US -- who have been involved in political activities share their experience and try to evaluate the effectiveness of these different forms of action.

Only at the end of the 19th century would mass parties become the preferred mode of socialist political organization. In this respect, German social democracy offers a kind of paradox. Founded in 1875 it became a mass party after 1890, with a clear program and a political project aimed at promoting a socialist society. Meanwhile, it also became the place of an organized counter-society. Through its various associations of leisure and mutual aid, it developed a socialist working-class community next to and yet inside the global society. Nevertheless, as historians have shown, this alternative community largely reproduced the models of the bourgeois society that it was supposed to challenge. In the end, German social democracy has largely contributed to the integration of workers into capitalist society. This also opens discussions, in particular in the US, where involvement in political parties is not seen as a way to make one's claims heard. I must explain how socialist parties, often without changing their overall revolutionary discourse, have in fact developed new strategies and set new goals.

By the end of the 19th century most European socialist and social-democratic parties had lost their revolutionary impetus and saw participation in local and national governments as a means of rapidly improving the situation of the working classes, who by then constituted the bulk of their voters. In 1899, Alexandre Millerand was the first French socialist to enter a bourgeois government. This enabled him to pass a law reducing working hours. Criticized as too reformist by his fellow comrades, he was expelled from the Socialist Party in 1904. In France, as in other socialist parties in Southern Europe, the recognition of the legitimacy of reformist practices took time; this path was not really acknowledged until the1970s. It was different in Northern Europe, where social democratic parties became openly reformist by the beginning of the 20th century and even joined forces with the liberals to be able to govern. The German social democrats came to power several times during the Weimar Republic (1918-1933); the Swedish Social Democratic Party came to power in 1930 and kept it with some interruptions until 2022. In the second half of the 20th century, social democratic governments have been in power at various times in almost all European countries. Until the 1980s, socialist and social democratic governments implemented social policies and a generous redistribution financed by progressive taxation and high-level taxes on the wealthiest. Here we examine in class the programs of the Swedish and French social-democrat and socialist parties. We discuss the achievements of the government of Pierre Mauroy between 1981and 1983, which was established after the election of François Mitterrand in 1981, the first socialist president of the Fifth French Republic (1958-now). Among the very progressive social measures that were put in place at the time that we discuss are the fifth week of paid vacations, the 39-hour work week, the tax on large fortunes, and, on another note, the abolition of the death penalty. All of this looks very progressive to US students. Nevertheless, I also remind the students that the socialists were neither the first nor the only ones to implement social legislation. In Germany, the first social insurance laws of the 1880s were put in place during the authoritarian regime of Chancellor Bismarck with the aim of strengthening national cohesion. By then, the German social democrats, still very much influenced by the letter of Marxism, were hostile to measures which they interpreted as "crutches" for capitalism. But from the end of the 19th century, German social democrats, like most of those in other European countries, saw labor legislation protecting the workers as well as social insurance and the financing of education, all as means of improving the condition of the working classes, of reducing social inequalities, and creating the conditions for a more harmonious society.

These social reforms have become an essential feature of the program and the government action of the different socialist and social democratic parties up to the 1980s. Those who oppose these social policies accuse them of being an instrument of excessive strengthening of the state at the cost of individual freedoms. Again, to overcome misconceptions, in particular for US students, I point out that, in many countries, such as Germany and France, social redistribution was and still is largely based on self-managed organizations of social insurance systems and has thus greatly contributed to increasing forms of social democracy from below.

Moreover, during the interwar and the post-World War II period, many social measures promoted by socialists were implemented locally, some under the label of "municipal socialism." The municipalization of water, gas, and public transportation was intended to provide the population with basic infrastructure at a reasonable price to guarantee a decent life for all and create a solidarity among the people. In addition, schools were built, subsidized housing was constructed, municipal baths and swimming pools, health clinics, sports fields multiplied, and, especially, after the Second World War, a variety of cultural activities were offered to the population. Together with a colleague who specializes in the history of architecture, we studied in depth with a group of students in Geneva, the case of Vienna, a city continuously run by social democracy since 1918 except during 1934 through 1945 (the period of Austrofascism and Nazism). We studied several housing complexes like the Karl-Marx-Hof erected between 1927 and 1930. Through its measures in favor of social housing, the social democratic municipality of Vienna not only ended the overpopulation of the slums but also promoted the construction of true

"workers' palaces." These "palaces" established the working class as an important and dignified part of the society while spreading progressive esthetical canons. In these "palaces" common spaces and services were developed and created the conditions for a collective life. This in-depth study allows for a better understanding of the nature, objectives, and results of these social/socialist measures which, without radically challenging the inequalities generated by capitalism, led to the creation of a more harmonious and less violent society.

Nevertheless, European students are now confronted with a new type of socialism, and this raises many questions about the true nature of socialism today. Since the 1990s and the end of the communist alternative in Europe, social democrats who governed in Germany with Gerhard Schröder (1998-2004), in England with Tony Blair (1997-2007), in Sweden with Göran Persson (1996-2006), or in the Netherlands with Wim Kok (1994-2002) have drastically revised this social-reformist agenda and abandoned the language of class. They all committed to what they have labelled the "third way," advocating in favor of private entrepreneurship and the valorization of personal responsibility against collective organization. Concretely they developed measures which aimed to reduce taxes on higher incomes and to cut social spending. Schroeder has been responsible for the large dismantlement of the generous German welfare state while Göran Persson had initiated pension reform on the model of the Swiss three-pillar system, which privatized part of the pensions. Even more left leaning socialists began cutting social spending and promoting more business-friendly politics. It was the case with François Hollande (2012-2017) in France and even in Greece with Tsipras, the leader of the more radical new left party Syriza (2015-2019). They all have offered weak resistance to the neo-liberal turn by promoting the disengagement of the State in the economy and did not stop the financialization of capitalism that they had previously condemned.

For students, it appears -- and rightly so -- as a contradiction with what we had studied so far. In order to question this contradiction, we look at the room for maneuver that socialists and social democrats still have in a highly entangled world where multinational corporation are more powerful than many states. But we also take a closer look at the orientations of these "third way socialists" by studying the program of New Labour and some of Tony Blair's statements. We try to understand what they mean when they claim to promote an "ethical" socialism, free of any Marxist influence, and propose to draw inspiration from the writings of the first socialists.

At the end of a semester during which we have dealt with the first socialist currents, the diversity of Marxist inspirations, the reformist social-democratic turn at the end of the 19th century, and municipal socialism, the students are well equipped to discuss this alleged return to the "roots" of socialism and more broadly to look critically at our world.

Sandrine Kott is a full professor of Modern European History at the University of Geneva and visiting professor at New York University. Her main field of expertise is the history of social welfare and labor in modern Europe and in a global perspective. Among her latest publications: *Organiser le monde : Une autre histoire de la guerre froide*, Paris, Le Seuil, 2021 (to be published in English by Columbia University Press under the title *A World More Equal*); *Communism Day to Day: State Enterprises in East German Society,* Michigan University Press, 2014; *Sozialstaat und Gesellschaft: Das deutsche Kaiserreich in Europa*, Göttingen, Vandehoeck & Ruprecht, 2014, ed. with Kiran Klaus Patel; *Nazism across Borders: The Social Policies of the Third Reich and their Global Appeal*, Oxford University Press, 2018 (ed. with Michel Christian and Ondrej Matejka); and *Planning in Cold War Europe: Competition, Cooperation, Circulations* 1950s-1970s Oldenburg, De Gruyter, 2018.

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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Teaching About Democratic Socialism, American Style

by Peter Dreier

MEMBERS OF THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA GATHER OUTSIDE OF A TRUMP OWNED BUILDING ON MAY 01, 2019 IN NEW YORK CITY. SPENCER PLATT / STAFF / GETTY IMAGES

Introduction

In response to students' growing interest in democratic socialism, I decided to teach a new course in the Spring 2020 semester called "Democratic Socialism, American Style." I taught it again in Spring 2021 and Spring 2022, and will likely teach it again. I describe the course in some detail below.

My own political trajectory might be of interest in putting this course, and my general approach to teaching, in context.

I've thought of myself as a socialist since I was in high school, when I attended a talk by Michael Harrington. A few years earlier, his book *The Other America* (published in 1962) had helped inspire the nation's War on Poverty. Because this was still during the Cold War, and because he wanted it to have an influence, he didn't discuss socialism in the book. But I knew he was a socialist and when I heard him speak, I agreed with everything he said, so I figured I must be a socialist, too.

I didn't explore the idea of socialism while I was in college. I was more involved in Alinsky-style community organizing, the United Farm Worker boycott, and anti-Vietnam war activism than left-wing politics. In fact, the ideological squabbles among leftists at my university turned me off.

I always thought it was important to get progressives and radicals elected to office. After all, the 1965 Voting Rights Act was considered a major victory for the Civil Rights Movement. I worked for Robert Kennedy's 1968 presidential campaign. Some of my college friends worked for Senator Eugene McCarthy's presidential campaign that year, but my more "radical" friends didn't think that electoral politics was a pathway toward serious radical change.

Since graduating from college in 1970, I've been a newspaper reporter, graduate student, community and tenants' rights organizer, government official (deputy to Boston Mayor Ray Flynn), and college professor at Tufts University and Occidental College. In each role, I encountered opportunities and dilemmas in advancing a progressive movement and agenda.

In graduate school at the University of Chicago in the 1970s, I joined the New American Movement, an explicitly socialist post-New Left organization. I learned a great deal through my activism and discussions with my NAM colleagues – more than I did in my UC classes -- but I thought that NAM was too isolated when it came to involvement with unions, community organizing groups, Democratic Party electoral campaigns, and other forms of "mass" politics.

In 1975, I moved to California for a year and worked on Tom Hayden's campaign for the U.S. Senate in California. He surprised the political pundits by winning 37% of the vote in the Democratic primary and then transformed his campaign operation into an effective statewide advocacy group, the Campaign for Economic Democracy. Many leftists at the time believed that Hayden was "selling out" simply by running for office. I recall attending a weekend retreat of left-wing sociologists from the West Coast and finding myself on a panel where I was the only one who believed in the potential of electoral politics to help move the country in a progressive direction. Many leftists at the time often used Marx and Engel's famous statement that "The executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie" to justify their stance against working in elections. They viewed "the state" (elections and government) as an unremitting capitalist tool that inevitably repressed or co-opted left-wing movements.

But the history of the American Left suggests that *both* electoral politics and mass movements are necessary to challenge the capitalist status quo. During the 1970s and 1980s, a number of influential books – including *Socialism* by Michael Harrington, *The State in Capitalist Society* by British socialist Ralph Miliband, *Strategy for Labo*r by French radical Andre Gorz, Saul Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals*, and *Poor People's Movements* by Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward – helped stir that debate.

When I moved to Boston in 1977 to teach at Tufts, I left NAM and joined Harrington's Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, whose members were involved in much of the vibrant community and labor organizing in the Boston area. When NAM and DSOC merged in the early 1980s to form Democratic Socialists of America, I was elected to DSA's founding national executive committee and served for several years. I got to know Harrington well and, like many other radicals of my generation, was profoundly influenced by his view of socialism as an idea, a movement, and part of a broad progressive coalition. His notion that socialists should pursue the "left wing of the possible" became a guiding principle.

I was active in DSA at the national and local levels when I lived in Boston in the 1980s, but I haven't been actively involved since I moved to Los Angeles in 1993 to teach at Occidental College, although I've continued my membership, occasionally been invited to speak at DSA events, have written a handful of articles for its national magazine *Democratic Left*, and still consider myself a democratic socialist.

Most of my activism has involved working closely with unions, tenants' rights groups, community organizing groups, and progressive candidates and elected officials. For example, I serve on the board of the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, which has built coalitions of unions, and environmental and racial justice groups to win successful policy campaigns in Los Angeles and other nearby cities. I've also conducted research that supports progressive ideas and issue campaigns among Disneyland workers, UNITE HERE members, grocery store workers, and others. Most recently I coauthored a report that supported a successful ballot measure to tax expensive property sales to provide funding for affordable housing and renter protections. (For example, Dreier, 2023; Dreier, et al, 2022; Dreier and Flaming, 2018; and Dreier and Flaming 2022). In addition, through my journalism and opinion writing for newspapers and magazines like *The Nation, American Prospect, Jacobin, Dissent*, and others, I try to influence public discussion and build movements for social justice.

Since joining the Occidental faculty, I have taught three courses about social movements and activism. One is called "Movements for Social Justice," which reviews the major American movements (populism, labor, feminism, civil rights, environmentalism, LBGTQ rights, anti-war, civil liberties) since the late 1800s. Another is "Community Organizing," which is both an exploration of the history and different approaches to organizing and a nuts-and-bolts how-to seminar. The course also requires students to do an internship with a union, community organizing, tenants' rights, or other activist group in LA. A third, which I've only taught a few times, is called "Work and Labor in America," which focus on the past, present, and future of the U.S. labor movement as well as the nature of work in different capitalist societies. Since 2008, I have also coordinated a program called Campaign Semester that every two years, in the Fall semester, gives between 10 and 35 Occidental students an opportunity work full-time for 10 weeks (Labor Day through Election Day) on an election campaign in a "swing" or "battleground" race anywhere in the country, and then return to campus for the last five weeks of the semester to participate in a seminar that helps them put their experiences in context (Lovett 2012; Occidental College). It is, so far as I know, the only program of its kind in the country. For students who want to pursue activism, I help them find internships and jobs with my network of organizing and advocacy groups, think tanks, and elected officials.

The Importance of Movements as an Antidote to Cynicism and Hopelessness

One of my ongoing concerns is that many leftist professors in the humanities and social sciences are much better at critiquing "the system" than at offering students some sense of hope or possibility for change. In their courses and scholarship, these so-called radical faculty seek to "problematize" and "interrogate" the failures of capitalism, racism, sexism, and the liberal welfare state, but don't bother examining how these can be challenged and reformed in ways that improve people's lives, give people a sense of their own power, and change the structures of power.

In my discussions with many leftist faculty on my own campus and around the country, I see a profound cynicism and pessimism about the possibility for real change, which is reflected in much of the scholarship in the social sciences and humanities of the past few decades. Many don't acknowledge, or can't see, that the civil rights, women's rights, gay rights, environmental, and labor movements have actually made progress. Their emphasis on social injustice might appear to be radical, but their failure to acknowledge the success of movements and the potential for future change is nihilism.

Throughout human history, people have organized social movements to try to improve their lives and the society in which they lived. Powerful groups and institutions have generally resisted these efforts in order to maintain their own privilege, although there are always people from privileged backgrounds who join forces with the oppressed. I encourage students to think about: How did these movements come about? What did they do to force society's elites to compromise and enact reforms? What did these movements accomplish in terms of improving people's day-to-day lives?

Back in 1900, people who called for women's suffrage, laws protecting the environment and consumers, an end to lynching, the right of workers to form unions, a progressive income tax, a federal minimum wage, old-age insurance, dismantling of Jim Crow laws, the eight-hour workday, and government-subsidized health care and housing were considered impractical idealists, utopian dreamers, or dangerous socialists. Now we take these ideas for granted. Many of the radical ideas of one generation have become the common sense of the next.

But, in fact, the incremental changes that have occurred during the past half-century, and before – in response to protest movements – have added up in ways that have improved the lives of most Americans.

Progressive social movements have transformed radical ideas from the margins to the mainstream, and from polemics to policy. It is understandable that radicals who look at U.S. history are disappointed. But, in fact, the incremental changes that have occurred during the past half-century, and before – in response to protest movements – have added up in ways that have improved the lives of most Americans. Thanks to these movements, the U.S. is a more humane and democratic society than it was in the early 1900s or the 1960s.

Many obstacles to democracy and fairness have been removed or weakened. More Americans have the right to vote, including people of color and those between 18 and 21, despite Republican efforts at voter suppression. Gay couples have the right to marry. Cars, trucks, factories and other facilities have to control toxic emissions. Corporations have to provide warning labels on consumer products and medicines. Banks, landlords, developers, and employers face penalties if they are caught engaging in racial discrimination. Workplaces are safer, thanks to government regulations and enforcement.

Since 1961, the number of African American members of Congress has increased from four to 59. Since 1985, the number of Hispanics in Congress has grown from 14 to 52. Since 1977, the number of women in Congress has grown from 18 to 150. (Manning 2022)

Since the 1970s, wealth and income inequality has widened and labor union membership has declined. These facts – which are obviously interconnected -- are perhaps the most important trends that explain a great deal about the power of big business to shape our destiny in the absence of a stronger labor movement. (Economic Policy Institute 2021)

That said, progressives should be able to acknowledge progress when it does exist and take credit for those victories. In fact, most Americans are better off than they were in 1960. Since 1960, the overall size of the nation's pie has gotten bigger. Per-capita income has increased about four times. (St. Louis Federal Reserve Bank, May 2023) This, however, doesn't tell us how aggregate income is divided up. Even as the top 10 percent and top one percent of Americans have increased their share of aggregate income, most Americans are better off in objective, if not in relative, terms. The overall standard of living has increased. Since 1960, median household income has increased overall and for all racial groups, despite significant disparities by race. (Semega and Kollar 2022, Figure 2). Despite the fact that the U.S. has an outrageous level of poverty, the overall poverty rate has declined from 22.4 percent in 1959 to 11.6 percent in 2021. (It has been as low as 11.1% in 1973 and fluctuated in different periods). (Creamer, Shrider, Burns, and Chen 2022, Figure 1) Of course, 11.6 percent is too high – higher than in other democratic countries – but it demonstrates that tight labor markets and government policy intervention can make a difference. The poverty rate has particularly declined for elderly Americans. It has also declined for all racial groups, but there are still significant racial disparities. (Creamer Shrider, Burns, and Chen 2022, Table A-5).

Since 1960, Americans' life expectancy has increased significantly, despite persistent racial disparities and a dip in life expectancy in the last few years. (Medina, Sabo, and Vespa 2020). America's health care system is outrageously unequal, wasteful, and profit-oriented. On most measures, the US ranks very low compared to other wealthy countries. Even so, the creation of Medicare and Medicaid in the mid-1960s, and the creation of Obamacare a little more than a decade ago, have provided health insurance coverage and a measure of health security unknown in the U.S. in 1960. In 1959, only 67.1 percent of Americans had health insurance. It reached 80.8 percent in 1968. (Cohen, at al. 2009) By 2021, 91.7 percent of Americans had some form of health insurance. (Keisler-Starkey and Bunch 2022). There are many problems with cost and access – overall and by race and gender -- which is why progressives favor Medicare for All. Even so, we should be able to acknowledge that health care for most Americans is better now than in 1960, even though our lifestyles and diets may contribute to bad health outcomes.

Of course, it is not a tale of steady progress. At best, it is a chronicle of taking two steps forward, then one step backward, then two more steps forward. The successful battles and social improvements came about in fits and starts. When pathbreaking laws are passed -– such as the Nineteenth Amendment (which granted women suffrage in 1920), the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (which gave workers the right to unionize), the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (which created the minimum wage), the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (which outlawed many forms of racial discrimination), the Clean Air Act of 1970, the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, Title IX of the Education Act of 1972 (which outlawed gender discrimination in education), the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977 (which outlawed bank redlining), the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990, and the American Care Act (Obamacare) of 2012 – we often forget that those milestones took decades of work by activists, thinkers, and politicians. This is not meant to downplay the ongoing problems and serious setbacks, including the many states with anti-union "right-to-work" laws, the Supreme Court's ruling against *Roe v Wade* and affirmative action, and the persistence of racism, inequality, sexism, nativism, and militarism. Due to the COVID pandemic, Americans are more isolated. Wages are up, but work is more precarious. The number of Americans in prison is declining, but mass incarceration remains a reality.

But we should recognize that progressive movements, including socialism, have played an important role in making the U.S. a better society, for all its many flaws. Without recognizing that progress is possible, if not inevitable, students have a hard time imaging how we might overcome the problems of systemic racism, climate change, and poverty. If we can't acknowledge victories, why should anyone want to engage in political struggle? We shouldn't wear rose-colored glasses, but neither should we be blind to the victories of progressive movements.

Faculty who identify as liberal far outnumber those who view themselves as conservative, particularly in the humanities and social sciences (Abrams 2016). There are, of course, many progressive and even leftist college faculty who are deeply engaged with movements in the larger society. This is heartening and helpful to students. It isn't necessary for progressive professors to be activists, but many of them are, ironically, apolitical. They are out of touch with the world of activism and movements. They don't trust politics or politicians. They may not even know the name of their City Council member, state legislator, or Congressmember. They wouldn't recognize a picket line if they fell over it. This kind of teaching fosters political paralysis and hopelessness. I consider this indifference to helping students engage in real-world solutions a form of academic malpractice.

That cynical view among many of today's college faculty, even those who consider themselves leftists, doesn't come out of nowhere. Much of it is due to troubling trends – including the rise of Trumpism and growing white nationalism – that can lead to either activism or demoralization. But in some ways, the current sense of political paralysis among many college faculty is a legacy of much of the New Left scholarship of the 1960s and 1970s, which argued that during the 19th and 20th centuries, most efforts at social and economic reform had been co-opted and undermined by America's corporate ruling class. Many of their studies focused on the Progressive Era of the late 1800s and early 1900s and the Depression and the New Deal of the 1930s, although some focused on more recent periods that included the civil rights, anti-war, and feminist movements. Such books include Gabriel Kolko's *The Triumph of Conservatism* (1963), James Weinstein's *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State* (1968), G. William Domhoff's *Who Rules America?* (1967) and *The Higher Circles* (1970), and Alan Wolfe's *The Seamy Side of Democracy* (1973) – all influenced, in some way, by C. Wright Mills' earlier book *The Power Elite* (1956).

These scholars were responding to the post-World War 2 Cold War celebration of American "exceptionalism" – the claim that our history, democratic institutions, middle-class standard of living, and political pluralism were unprecedented in world history. The underlying theme of these books was, in contrast, that American liberalism, the Democratic Party, and reform movements cannot overcome the dominance of the capitalist class and that efforts to make capitalism more humane or democratic are mostly futile.

Given that outlook, it is understandable that many radicals were and still are reluctant to engage in mainstream politics. For some, it has led to a belief that capitalism, racism, and global warning are so overwhelming that they are immutable.

The democratic socialist movement, however, recognizes the importance of not only participating in mass movements but also taking part in election campaigns, even serving in government, and pushing for reforms that challenge and change the relations of power. During the last decade, radical activists, including DSA chapters, have helped elect more progressives and leftists to office than at any time since the Depression. In fact, it was democratic socialist Bernie Sanders's 2016 campaign for president that persuaded many progressives and radicals that protest and politics are not mutually exclusive.

The Resurgence of Democratic Socialism

According to a 2019 Gallup poll, 43% of all Americans, and 58% of those between 18 and 34, believe that socialism would be a "good thing" for the country (Younis). A 2021 Gallup poll found that 65% of Democrats, compared with 14% of Republicans, have a positive view of socialism (Jones).

But when people say they support the idea of socialism, what do they mean? Or do they even know what they mean?

The students who have taken my "Democratic Socialism, American Style" range from those who are skeptical but curious about socialism, to those who think of themselves as socialists but know little about what it means, to those who are political activists, even DSA members, but want to learn more about the past, present, and future of democratic socialism.

Much has been written about the polls revealing the growing acceptance of socialism among the American public, Sanders's surprising showing in his 2016 and 2020 presidential campaigns, and his ongoing influence within the Democratic Party. Sanders was defeated both times, but his ideas prevailed and changed the Democratic Party on issues like the Green New Deal, the minimum wage, and universal health care. In the past decade, Democratic Socialists of America has grown from about 6,000 to roughly 100,000 members, with 222 chapters in blue, purple, and red states (DSA). The rapid increase has been accompanied by many growing pains, but many DSA chapters have played key roles in building progressive coalitions, winning issue campaigns (on rent control, police reform, and union drives, for example), and electing progressives to office. For example, DSA members helped catalyze the growing nationwide union effort among Starbucks workers (Scheiber 2022; Eidelson 2023). As of 2022, more than 100 DSA members were serving in local and state office in addition to six in Congress: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib, Cori Bush, Jamaal Bowman, Summer Lee, and Greg Casar (Dreier, 2020). In a few cities (Portland, Chicago, Los Angeles), DSA members and DSA-endorsed candidates have gained considerable influence in municipal politics. This is also true in a handful of states, including New York and Pennsylvania.

The current Generation Z – those born after 1997 -- came of age and political awareness during this period (Dimock 2019). Sanders's campaigns and persona, in particular, inspired them and captured their imaginations. These trends are particularly remarkable because there had been no significant socialist movement in this country for decades. After Barack Obama was elected president in 2008, the word "socialism" started making a comeback. But it wasn't because the socialists were gaining momentum. It was because Obama's opponents—the Republican Party, the Tea Party, the right-wing blogosphere, the Chamber of Commerce, and conservative media gurus like Glenn Beck, Ann Coulter, Sean Hannity, and Rush Limbaugh—labeled anything Obama proposed, including his modest health care reform proposal, as "socialism." During the 2012 presidential election season, every GOP candidate attacked Obama for being a socialist, or for trying to make America more like Europe, which has become a code word for socialist.

The Republican and right-wing attacks on Obama may have backfired with respect to the Millennials. Young people generally liked Obama, even if they were somewhat disappointed in what he was able to accomplish. In 2008, 66% of under-thirty voters favored Obama (*New York Times* 2008). So when Glenn Beck, Rush Limbaugh, or former House Speaker Newt Gingrich (who wrote *To Save America: Stopping Obama's Secular-Socialist Machine* in 2010) attacked Obama as a socialist, many young people reacted by saying, in effect, "Well, then maybe socialism can't be that bad." It made them at least skeptical of those who demonize the word socialism.

Americans are more liberal than most people believe (Dreier 2017). A 2022 Gallup poll found that more Americans (71%) think unions are a good thing than at any time since 1965 (McCarthy 2022). Support for same-sex marriage has increased from 27 percent in in 1996 to 71% now (McCarthy 2023). Most white Americans think police racism is a problem – a big increase from, say, 10 years ago, even though there's been a decline since the height of the BLM protests in 2020. (Smith 2020)

A Pew Research Center survey released in December 2011 found that most Americans (77%) — including a majority (53%) of Republicans —agreed that "there is too much power in the hands of a few rich people and corporations." Not surprisingly, 83% of eighteen-to-twenty-nine-year-olds shared that view. Pew also discovered that 61% percent of Americans believed that "the economic system in this country unfairly favors the wealthy." (Pew 2015). A significant majority (83%) of Americans now believe that corporations don't pay their fair share of taxes,

82% think that wealthy people don't pay their fair share, and 61% think that Congress should increase taxes for households earning over $400,000 – a significant shift in opinion over the past decade (Drake 2013; Oliphant 2023).

The Occupy Wall Street movement changed the national conversation on these issues, among the public and in the media. For example, between October 2010 and September 2011, the number of newspaper stories with the word "greed" fluctuated between 452 and 728 per month. But in October, only weeks after the Occupiers gained a foothold in New York and elsewhere, newspapers ran 2,285 stories with that word. A similar trend occurred with the word "inequality," according to a Lexis/Nexis search (Dreier 2011).

Since then, many politicians and pundits have changed their rhetoric to give voice to the growing anger toward Wall Street and big business. In his December 5, 2011 speech in Osawatomie, Kansas, Obama sought to channel the growing populist outrage unleashed by the Occupy movement. He criticized the "breathtaking greed" that has led to a widening income divide. "This isn't about class warfare," he said. "This is about the nation's welfare." Obama noted that the average income of the top 1 percent had increased by more than 250 percent, to $1.2 million a year (Sulzberger 2011). He returned to those themes in his January 24, 2012 State of the Union address, in which he called on Congress to raise taxes on millionaires. "Now, you can call this class warfare all you want," he said, "Most Americans would call that common sense" (Obama 2012).

"I'm so scared of this anti-Wall Street effort. I'm frightened to death," Frank Luntz, an influential GOP pollster and strategist, warned Republican office holders in December 2011, referring to the burgeoning Occupy movement. "They're having an impact on what the American people think of capitalism." Luntz offered Republicans tips for fighting back and framing the issues that the Occupiers raised. For example, he urged GOP politicians to avoid using the word "capitalism." "I'm trying to get that word removed and we're replacing it with either 'economic freedom' or 'free market,'" Luntz said. "The public…still prefers capitalism to socialism, but they think capitalism is immoral. And if we're seen as defenders of quote, Wall Street, end quote, we've got a problem." (Moody 2011).

Even billionaire Donald Trump, in his first campaign for the White House in 2016, excoriated Wall Street and the "swamp" of corporate lobbyists that controlled national politics. Of course, Trump didn't mean what he said – and in many ways created a more toxic swamp during his own presidency – but he was politically savvy enough to understand that distrust and disgust that many Americans have for big corporations and their allies among politicians.

At the same time, throughout his presidency, Trump used red-baiting to mobilize his followers. "We are alarmed by new calls to adopt socialism in our country," he said in his 2019 State of the Union speech in January. "Tonight, we renew our resolve that America will never be a socialist country" (Trump 2019). That April, at a rally in Las Vegas, Trump proclaimed: "Over 120 congressional Democrats are supporting a socialist takeover of our health-care system" (Murphy 2019). Then-Vice President Mike Pence claimed that Democratic candidate Joe Biden was "advocating a socialist agenda" (Breuninger 2019). Warned former Trump aide Sebastian Gorka at the March CPAC conference, socialists "want to take your pickup truck. They want to rebuild your home. They want to take away your hamburgers. This is what Stalin dreamt about but never achieved" (Wise 2019). House Republicans even formed an "Anti-Socialism Caucus," chaired by Representative Chris Steward of Utah, to "defend individual liberty & free markets and highlight the dark history of socialism."

But that red-baiting didn't work among today's young people, many of whom associate capitalism with inequality, big corporations, climate change, and poverty. The positive poll results for socialism among young people contrasts with negative results for capitalism. Most Americans over 60 today think of socialism in terms of the Soviet Union. It is a viewpoint from the Cold War, when socialism was identified with Communism, which meant totalitarianism and dictatorship. But things have changed since the Berlin Wall fell in 1989. If today's young people have any image of what socialism looks like in practice, it is probably northern Europe, particularly Scandinavia. They know that northern Europe has less poverty, more equality, and more social mobility. That's why Sanders often said that he'd like the U.S. to look more like Denmark.

The high levels of under-unemployment among today's youth (not just college students and graduates), and the enormous increase in debt owed by college students and recent graduates, has something to do with their growing doubts about capitalism. So does their uncertainty about their own future and the country's future.

The resurgence of democratic socialism as an idea and a movement has also spawned a growing number of books on the subject. In my course, the primary guide to America's radical history is Michael Kazin's *American Dreamers: How the Left Changed a Nation.* Other recent books that could be incorporated into courses on the topic include sociologist Lane Kenworthy's *Would Democratic Socialism Be Better?, Social Democratic Capitalism,* and *Social Democratic America*; Paul Adler's *The 99% Economy: How Democratic Socialism Can Overcome the Crises of Capitalism;* Heather McGhee's *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together*; John Nichols's *The S Word: A Short History of an American Tradition…Socialism*; John Judis's *The Socialist Awakening: What's Different Now About the Left*,; Bhaskar Sunkara's *The Socialist Manifesto: The Case for Radical Politics in an Era of Extreme Inequality*; and Bernie Sanders's new book, *It's OK To Be Angry About Capitalism*.

Whether or not my students think of themselves as socialists, I want them to recognize that most Americans, even most liberals, don't necessarily agree with that perspective, and that it is important to be able to understand others' point-of-view and not dismiss them out-of-hand. So I encourage them not only to read left-leaning publications like *Jacobin*, *The Nation*, *In These Times*, and *American Prospect*, but also liberal and conservative publications that challenge many of their taken-for-granted assumptions.

Even if they identify themselves as democratic socialists, I want them to understand its many dimensions. So the course examines democratic socialism in America from several angles – as a utopian vision, as a social and political movement, as a set of practical public policies, and in contrast to more progressive social democracies in other countries.

Democratic Socialism as a Utopian Vision

Socialism has always been both an idea and a movement. As an idea, it is about advancing human progress by creating laws and institutions that give people the chance to reach their full potential and to tame the forces of greed, racism, inequality, and exploitation inherent in capitalism. As a movement, socialism is about promoting those ideas through education, grassroots activism, and elections. During the past half century, activists and thinkers have embraced the phrase "democratic socialism" to emphasize the importance of such democratic ideals as free speech and voting rights, and in part to distinguish their movement from authoritarian communism.

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Socialism began as a utopian idea -- the notion that human nature was neither inherently cooperative nor competitive but a consequence of social conditions and culture. It was a product of the Enlightenment, which included a belief in progress, science, human rights, and the perfectibility of humankind. In the course, students read Danny Katch's *Socialism…Seriously: A Brief Guide to Human Liberation* for its accessible look at these topics. We examine early experiments in creating socialist communities – like Brook Farm – that sought to test the ideas of European and American philosophers in the real world. Students also read essays like Bertrand Russell's "In Praise of Idleness" (1932), and read utopian novels like Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915) and Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975). We discuss the contemporary co-operative movement, from food and housing co-ops to Spain's large-scale Mondragon enterprises. Students wrestle with Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto* as a treatise about human nature and capitalism as well as a call for action and blueprint for reform.

To explore these larger issues – and to help students examine their own beliefs and values – I ask them to consider this quotation from Eugene Debs:

> Now, I ask this question, and it applies to the whole field of industry: If a hundred men work in a mine and produce a hundred tons of coal, how much of that coal are they entitled to? Are they not entitled to all of it? And if not, who is entitled to any part of it? If the man who produces wealth is not entitled to it, who is? You say the capitalist is necessary and I deny it. The capitalist has become a profit-taking parasite. Industry is now concentrated and operated on a very large scale; it is co-operative and therefore self-operative. The capitalists hire superintendents, managers and workingmen to operate their plants and produce wealth. The capitalists are absolutely unnecessary; they have no part in the process of production – not the slightest.
>
> Now I insist that it is the workingman's duty to so organize economically and politically as to put an end to this system; as to take possession in his collective capacity of the machinery of production and operate it, not to create millionaires and multi-millionaires, but to produce wealth in plenty for all. That is why the labor question is also a political question. It makes no difference what you do on the economic field to better your condition, so long as the tools of production are privately owned, so long as they are operated for the private profit of the capitalist, the working class will be exploited, they will be in enforced idleness, thousands of them will be reduced to want, some of them to vagabonds and criminals, and this condition will prevail in spite of anything that organized labor can do to the contrary (Debs 1908).

There is no correct answer to Debs' question. It forms the basis for considerable disagreement within American society, and even within the Left, over its assumptions about capitalism, work, and human nature.

Throughout the course, we look at what critics of socialism have said in the past, and today, about the idea of socialism and the practice of socialism in actual societies.

In 1906, a leftist German sociologist named Werner Sombart wrote a book, *Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?*, that sought to answer this question. According to Sombart, the U.S. was a much more open society than European societies that emerged out of feudalism. Americans believed in the possibility of upward mobility because class boundaries were more porous. Even if Americans didn't believe in the possibility or virtue of social equality, they believed in the opportunity to escape the lower class. Although the "rags to riches" idea was mostly myth, there were many well-known examples of people who rose from poverty to wealth. Moreover, Sombart argued, America's workers had a pretty decent standard of living compared with their counterparts in other capitalist countries. "All Socialist utopias," he observed, "came to nothing on roast beef and apple pie." In addition, America's white working class won the right to vote before European workers did, so, Sombart concluded, they have a greater sense of political equality.

For over a century, historians, sociologists, political scientists, and others have debated Sombart's thesis. Without doubt, socialist ideas and movements in the U.S. were far weaker than those in Europe.

Despite growing support for the concept, most Americans are still wary of "socialism." Why shouldn't they

be, after a century and a half of hostility and repression from the powers that be? I ask students to entertain the idea that, in the United States, the word "socialist" is so controversial that it inhibits the ability of progressives to advance their ideas. Are American socialists operating with one hand tied behind their backs? Why isn't "democracy," or "economic democracy," or "social democracy" good enough to describe what socialists want to win? Would it be easier to pass Bernie Sanders's proposal for a single-payer universal health plan if he didn't call himself a democratic socialist? Would conservatives and even some liberals call it "socialist" no matter how Sanders described himself?

Democratic Socialism as an Historic Social and Political Movement

Has American socialism been a success or failure? If success means that the United States has become a democratic socialist country, then the movement has certainly failed. But if success means that many Americans now accept ideas that were once considered radical, even socialist, and made the United States a more egalitarian and humane society, then it has accomplished a great deal. Coming to grips with that debate is at the heart of the course.

The course looks at the history and current status of socialism as a social movement – a political battle fought in workplaces, communities, and elections – to change both the culture and public policy.

Most students come to college woefully uninformed or miseducated about American history. So it is always necessary to provide students with the historical context in order to understand why and how the socialist movement and closely-aligned reform movements emerged. The course involves considerable discussion about the history of the Left in general and socialism in particular since the mid-1800s. Kazin's *American Dreamers* is the primary guide, but we also draw on other readings and watch several films, including *Debs and the American Movement*, *The Big Scary 'S' Word* and *We Have a Plan* (about socialist Upton Sinclair's campaign for California governor in 1934).

We explore the history of the Socialist Party and its efforts to elect candidates to public office, but we also focus on the role that socialists played in so-called "reform" movements that we not explicitly socialist and as advocates for radical ideas that, over time, were incorporated into the mainstream. For example, in the early 1900s, socialists played key roles in the movements for women's suffrage, child labor laws, consumer protection laws, and the progressive income tax. In 1916, Victor Berger, a socialist congressman from Milwaukee, sponsored the first bill to create "old-age pensions." The bill didn't get very far, but two decades later, during the Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt persuaded Congress to enact Social Security. Even then, some critics denounced it as un-American. But today, most Americans, even conservatives, believe that Social Security is a good idea (Sanders 2023). What had once seemed radical has become common sense. Much of FDR's other New Deal legislation – the minimum wage, workers' right to form unions, and public works programs to create jobs for the unemployed – was first espoused by American socialists.

Socialists were in the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement from the founding of the NAACP in 1909 through the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Socialists have long pushed for a universal health insurance plan, which helped create the momentum for stepping-stone measures such as Medicare and Medicaid in the 1960s, as well as Obamacare.

All movements have a division of labor. We explore the differences and overlaps between three kinds of movement activists.

First, there are organizers, leaders, and rank-and-file activists who build organizations and mobilize people for action.

Second, there are writers, journalists, musicians and singers, artists, intellectuals, and clergy who investigate social justice and inspire people to consider alternatives. All movements involve both creating an internal culture for its participants and an effort to shape society's larger culture. So we look at how music, leaflets, speakers, religion, slogans, and other elements of socialist movements got people to participate in efforts that may not succeed and/or may take a long time to win. Socialists also played an important role in shaping American culture. In the 1890s, for example, a socialist Baptist minister, Francis Bellamy, wrote "The Pledge of Allegiance" and a socialist poet, Katherine Lee Bates, penned "America the Beautiful." Many socialists influenced American culture through novels, poetry, plays, film, painting, and other means. Each semester, we've done a reading of Clifford Odets's 1935 play *Waiting for Lefty* to explore these issues and listened to the music of Woody Guthrie, Yip Harburg, Paul Robeson, and other radicals. Odets, Guthrie, Harburg, and Robeson were Communists, not socialists, but the questions remain the same.

Third, there are politicians, lawyers, and judges who popularize radical ideas and turn them into public policy. Some socialist electoral campaigns, like Debs's and Norman Thomas's presidential runs, don't expect to win, but to engage in the battle of ideas. Others, like Upton Sinclair's 1934 campaign for California governor, come close to winning but, even in defeat, change the political landscape. Four years later, California elected a progressive governor, Culbert Olsen, who adopted many of the radical ideas that Sinclair has espoused.

Throughout American history, some of the nation's most influential activists, artists and thinkers, and politicians, such as Eugene Debs, John Dewey, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Helen Keller, Rose Schneiderman, Frances Perkins, Margaret Sanger, W.E.B. DuBois, Albert Einstein, A. Philip Randolph, Walter Reuther, Arthur Miller, Martin Luther King, Michael Harrington, and Gloria Steinem, embraced democratic socialism. We stand on their shoulders. So I ask students to read profiles of earlier generations of reformers, radicals, and idealists, to consider what inspired them to become socialists, and to explore the different strategies they adopted to change hearts, minds, and public policy.

I encourage students to avoid "presentism" – judging yesterday's Americans by today's standards – which is widespread on many college campuses these days. We discuss how all of them were products of their times – "heroes but not saints" (Dreier 2012 and 2018). Many accepted ideas that we now find troublesome and offensive. We need to consider the totality of people's contributions to the struggle for justice. All reformers and radicals are human beings. They are trapped by and seek to escape the social and political straightjackets of their times. If we require our progressive and radical heroes to be saints — if we eliminate leaders from the progressive pantheon because they held some views or engaged in behaviors that were conventional in their day but problematic today — we won't have many people left to admire.

Movements are usually more successful when they can persuade a significant slice of the public that their cause is just and should be supported. Thus, they must engage in the battle of ideas to influence public opinion. I ask students to consider how the socialist movement – or the reform movements that socialists were deeply involved in – tried to appeal to a wider audience – how, in contemporary parlance, movements "framed" their goals and demands to gain the moral high ground.

In the course, we look at the repertoire of strategies and tactics that socialists and radicals have employed to change hearts and minds and to shape public policy. How important are strikes, boycotts, demonstrations, sit-ins, music, and the mass media? What is the relationship of protest movements to conventional politics — elections, political parties, voting, lobbying, and so on? How do activists and movements balance the tension between being outsiders and insiders? Martin Luther King explored these questions in his famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail," one of the readings I always incorporate in the course.

We also explore how some of the Left's failures have been self-inflicted and some have been due to repression by business, hostile public officials, and the criminal justice system.

No course on democratic socialism can avoid the divisions among the Left. So we delve into the triumphs and travails of the socialist movement as it competed with movements to its left and right for the loyalty and involvement of Americans. Throughout its history, socialists have argued with each other over race, gender, US foreign policy, and the Russian Revolution.

The socialist movement has always been characterized by splits within its ranks over philosophy and strategy. Milwaukee's Victor Berger was the nation's first socialist Congressman, serving intermittently from 1911 until 1928. He sponsored bills providing for government ownership of the radio industry and the railroads, abolition of child labor, self-government for the District of Columbia, a system of public works for relief of the unemployed, and women's suffrage. He introduced the first bill in Congress to provide old-age pensions, an idea that eventually was adopted in 1935 when President Franklin Roosevelt created Social Security.

Despite these radical stances, Berger was criticized by the Socialist Party's left wing because, they argued, these measures, even if passed, would not add up to socialism. They criticized Berger's "step at a time" brand of socialism. Berger disagreed. One of his favorite mottos was, "Socialism is coming all the time. It may be another century or two before it is fully established" (Shannon 1955).

Socialists and feminists have often been politically aligned, though sometimes at odds. In 1905, Eugene Debs had a speaking engagement in Rochester, New York and went to visit the aging women's rights pioneer Susan B. Anthony at her home there. They exchanged memories of their previous meeting; then Anthony took Debs's hand and, with good humor, said, "Give us suffrage and we'll give you socialism." Debs's good-natured reply was: "Give us socialism and we'll give you the vote" (Debs Foundation, n.d.; Dreier 2016).

The American socialist movement has not been immune from racism. Particularly in the first half of the 20th century, some in the movement struggled over whether or how to organize Black Americans within socialist organizations and within the unions in which socialists were deeply involved (Allen 1974).

Another factor in accounting for the Left's fortunes is the repression of radical movements and ideas. We explore the Red Scares after World War 1 and World War 2 that were designed to stifle both the right to dissent and the will to dissent. We discuss how these periods of repression had a chilling effect on American culture and politics and that had ripple effects for decades after. The documentaries *Paul Robeson: Here I Stand* and *Hollywood on Trial*, the War Department propaganda film *Red Nightmare*, and the controversy surrounding the Billie Holiday song "Strange Fruit" give students a flavor of Cold War culture and Red Scare repression.

Democratic Socialism as a Set of Practical Public Policies

Through its history, socialism has also been a set of public policies and practices designed to make the U.S. a more humane and inclusive society. Occasionally, socialists had enough power to govern – in places like Milwaukee, for example -- but there have been many times when socialists had sufficient influence to get elected officials to take their ideas seriously and adopt them as public policies, even if in somewhat water-downed form.

We look at the 1912 Socialist Party Platform and discuss how many of those radical ideas – from old-age pensions to women's suffrage to the minimum wage to national parks -- are now part and parcel of American life (Labor History Links, n.d.). We take a deep dive examining Milwaukee's "sewer socialists" and their counterparts in other cities. We consider how the influence of socialists in movements like the Non-Partisan League in the early 1900s led to the adoption of radical policies like the creation of the state-owned Bank of North Dakota (which still exists) and the role of socialists in the New Deal and other governmental administrations.

The upsurge of democratic socialism in recent years has borne fruit in the electoral and policy arenas. So in the course we examine what kinds of policies help improve people's lives while also moving the country in a more socialist direction.

Students are always curious about whether democratic socialists really believe in transforming society or simply want to make incremental reforms. This leads to the question: What does "success" mean for a socialist movement? So we examine the age-old question: reform or revolution? How important is "reform" — pressing for short-term gains (such as a moratorium on evictions during COVID or a shutdown of a nuclear power plant) — in achieving longer-run changes?

As Mick Jagger observed: "You can't always get what you want...But if you try sometimes, you'll find you get what you need."

In *Strategy for Labor* (1964), French writer André Gorz coined the phrase "non-reformist reforms," which captured Jagger's insight. Activists who believe in all-or-nothing change are ineffective and self-destructive. The goal of progressive and radical politics is to reduce suffering and improve people's lives. That comes by winning steppingstone reforms -- victories that can lead to further victories that can lead to further victories. Major democratic structural change doesn't happen overnight. Sometimes progressive change happens slowly, sometimes more quickly, but always by winning victories that whet people's appetites for further victories. There is an ongoing debate within the Left over how far left, and how explicitly socialist, a movement should be if it wants to have a significant impact. Too many radicals view "compromise" as a defeat rather than a steppingstone. It depends on whether a movement builds on that compromise victory. In the 1800s, workers first fought for the 10-hour day, for example, before they demanded and won an eight-hour day. Lots of leftists understandably criticized the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) for not being radical enough. But, in retrospect, we can see that it not only provided millions of Americans with subsidized health care, but it also established a new baseline/standard, and so now we're able to push for an even more progressive health care system that is closer to a universal and single-payer approach.

The essays in *We Own the Future: Democratic Socialism – American Style* (2020), the book I co-edited with Kate Aronoff and Michael Kazin, provide proposals for moving the U.S. in a more progressive direction on education, health care, cities, the family, criminal justice, racism, immigration, corporate regulation and banking, sports, and other topics. Students grapple with the practical and political feasibility of these ideas, which range from reformist to radical to revolutionary.

I've been fortunate to be able to invite several local and national DSA leaders, Yael Bridge (director of the film *The Big Scary S Word*), and LA City Councilmember Nithya Raman to speak to my students.

Democratic Socialism in Comparative Context

Is it possible to create a more humane, fair, and equal society? Many students – even activists – are skeptical.

I call my course "Democratic Socialism, American Style" because any progressive movement has to resonate with the society it is trying to change. On the other hand, there is much that Americans can learn from the successes and challenges of democratic socialism and social democracy in other countries, particularly those in Europe, but even in Canada.

In class, we discuss how much inequality and how much poverty is acceptable. How far can we go in changing our racist criminal justice system that breeds mass incarceration? How quickly do we need to address climate change before it is too late? Can we dramatically reduce our reliance on cars and fossil fuels the way other societies have done? If we reduce the availability of guns, would America have fewer gun deaths and be a less violent society? Can we imagine a society without homelessness and the deep levels of poverty that most Americans take for granted? Is it possible to have a society that is both prosperous and still dramatically reduces the average number of hours people work over the course of a year? Can we construct a higher education system that doesn't burden low-income and middle-class students with decades of debt? Can we give everyone four weeks of paid vacation a year, or provide all parents with high-quality, low-cost childcare?

Some of students' skepticism is a legacy of the Cold War and the Red Scare. During that era, many Americans confused socialism with communism. Such thinking was encouraged by the mainstream media, public schools, most colleges, and popular culture. In fact, democratic socialists opposed the totalitarian governments of the Soviet Union, China, and their satellites, including Cuba. But many New Leftists in the 1960s and 1970s entertained romantic views about Communist countries as the major bulwark against U.S. imperialism. Michael Harrington and DSA tried to steer the Left toward am embrace of what many call social democracy or democratic socialism, viewing aspects of European societies, particularly Scandinavian ones, as exemplars. We can see in the attacks on Bernie Sanders, even on Barack Obama, that many Americans view government in general as a hostile force and anyone who calls for more government regulation of business as a dangerous socialist. But we can also see, simultaneously, that the post-Cold War chill has started to wear off, as evidenced by Sanders's popularity and the Gallup polls showing a greater openness to socialism.

Although Sanders often says that America needs a "grassroots political revolution," he is actually a reformer, not a revolutionary. His version of democratic socialism is akin to the New Deal, which sought to make capitalism – specifically, American hyper-capitalism – more humane, and which undertook a dramatic shift in values and politics at the time.

This is why Sanders says that the U.S. should learn from Sweden, Norway and Denmark – countries with greater

equality, a higher standard of living for working families, better schools, free universities, less poverty, a cleaner environment, higher voter turnout, stronger unions, universal health insurance, and a much wider safety net.

A thought-provoking way to address these questions is to look at America from the perspective of people living in more social democratic societies. We read articles that explore how social democratic countries approach social well-being very differently from the U.S.

It is often said that a fish has a hard time imaging water because they are so immersed in it and they know nothing different. The readings, films, and videos we discuss in this part of the class are a real eye-opener for American students.

We begin with a four-minute video, *How Europeans See America*, produced by the *New York Times*, that depicts young Europeans expressing shock and dismay at many aspects of American culture and policy (NYT, 2019). We watch Michael Moore's film *Where to Invade Next*, which explores with humor but great seriousness the ways that Europeans take for granted their more vibrant health care system, employee participation on corporate boards, elementary and college education, prisons and police, and other elements. In *The Nordic Theory of Everything: In Search of a Better Life* (2016), Anu Partanen, a Finnish journalist who spent many years living in the U.S. with her American husband, examines how daily life differs dramatically in the two countries, including parenting, spouse relationships, anxiety, economic security, and other matters. Additional articles look closely at the strengths and weaknesses of different institutions in social democracies.

But is this enough? Social democracies have many flaws. As conservative forces gain influence, in part in response to rising immigration and economic challenges, even some Scandinavian countries have started to rethink some of their egalitarian policies.

Conclusion: The Moral Imperative

Each generation of Americans faces a different set of economic, political, and social conditions. There are no easy formulas for challenging injustice and promoting democracy. But unless we know this history, we will have little understanding of how far we have come, how we got here, and what still needs to change to make America (and the rest of the world) more livable, humane, and democratic.

A consistent theme of every course I've taught is to give students an understanding of the root causes and symptoms of our current problems, and an appreciation of past and current struggles to make our society more livable. I also want them to recognize that the ruling class is not invincible, and that opinions, policies, and systems can be changed. It is possible to imagine a better world – for themselves, for their children, and for future generations beyond that.

But it doesn't happen overnight. Michael Harrington used to say that activists for justice had to be long-distance runners. But I prefer the metaphor of a relay race. Each generation does what it can to change society, and then hands the baton to the next generation to continue the struggle for justice.

Ultimately, movements are about real people making choices about how to use their time, talents, and resources.

Most sociologists and historians believe that, in everyday parlance, movements emerge when the "time is ripe." That's what Carl Oglesby, a leader of Students for a Democratic Society in the 1960s, meant when he observed, "It isn't the rebels who cause the troubles of the world; it's the troubles that cause the rebels" (Carlson 2011).

But it is also true, as Oglesby and all other activists understand, that human beings are actors in their own history (Flacks 1988). They don't wait for the time to be ripe. Instead, they "ripen the time."

For that to occur, people must believe not only that conditions *should* be different, but also that they *can* be different, and that they have a responsibility to participate in collective efforts to bring about a more just society.

"An individual has not started living," said Rev. Martin Luther King, "until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity" (King 1960). Similarly, the Jewish tradition says, "No one is required to complete the task, but neither are we free to refrain from it."

King's famous statement that "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice" is often misinterpreted. He did not mean it as a prophesy that progress is inevitable. He saw it as a call to action to join movements that bend the arc.

This is what abolitionist Frederick Douglass meant when he wrote in 1857:

> If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing up the ground; they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters…. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress (Douglass 1857).

The point is to introduce students to the possibility that their actions can radically transform their society into a more egalitarian, democratic, and inclusive one. Not every student, or even most of them, will fully embrace democratic socialism. Many will find different ways – in college, after they graduate, and as they pursue their lives and careers – to engage in movements for social justice that embody socialist ideas even if they aren't explicitly socialist.

When that happens, it reminds me why I enjoy being a college professor. Such was the case, when I received this email at the beginning of 2023:

> I hope you are doing well. I took your class on Democratic Socialism last spring. I took my newfound

knowledge with me that summer as I worked with two Colorado state legislators, Elisabeth Epps and Javier Mabrey. They were the only DSA-endorsed candidates in Colorado this past election cycle. Elisabeth had a tough primary with a much more moderate candidate but was able to overcome her. Javier did not face any challenges in his primary, and ultimately both were able to be elected to the Colorado State Legislature. In the past couple of weeks, Javier has introduced bills to repeal the prohibition of rent control in Colorado and also introduced a bill to require just cause before the eviction of tenants! Building off that, this semester I am taking Lawyering for Social Change and learning about the intersection between lawyering and organizing. I want to continue my explorations of these spaces outside of this classroom.

Feedback like this reminds me how lucky I am to be able to do what I do.

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Peter Dreier has been involved in urban policy as a scholar, government official, reporter, and advocate for 40 years, and served as senior policy advisor to Boston Mayor Ray Flynn. He is currently E.P. Clapp Distinguished Professor of Politics and Professor of Urban & Environmental Policy at Occidental College. Dreier is author or co-author of seven books, including *The Next Los Angeles: The Struggle for a Livable City* (2005), *The 100 Greatest Americans of the 20th Century: A Social Justice Hall of Fame* (2015), and *Baseball Rebels: The Players, People, and Social Movements That Shook Up the Game and Changed America* (2022). He is also engaged in civic and political efforts at the national and local levels. http://www.peterdreier.com

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Looking Back: Towards a Socialist America

by Mary Ann Clawson

PEACE, FREEDOM, SOLIDARITY BY JESSICA THORNTON VIA JUSTSEEDS.ORG

As its title, "A Student-Initiated Course in Socialism," proclaims, the creation of "Towards a Socialist America" (TSA) at Wesleyan University in 1976 was remarkable in two ways: 1) as a course that placed the question of socialism squarely on its agenda, and 2) as a challenge to a dominant narrative that locates agency in the actions of inspired teachers.

For TSA was not, as Arnesen, Ebbe, Rome, and Ward emphasize in their remarkable account, a faculty initiative. Nor was it based on students' request that a professor create the content of such a course. Instead, TSA was initiated by a single student, Andy Polsky, who approached English Department Professor Dick Ohmann in the fall of 1975, requesting that he sponsor a group tutorial using Polsky's own reading list, "a kind of working syllabus of sorts of things I thought we should read" (Polsky interview). Ohmann confirmed this account. "It would be very much a student run course," Ohmann recalled. "I certainly didn't run discussions or run the course. And I was in any case, as I've indicated, the learner at that point."

Following their discussions, Polsky recruited seven additional students who would comprise the "Towards a Socialist America" group tutorial, which then formed the basis for the large Fall 1976 course that followed, and that survived for many years with Ohmann's continuing and essential sponsorship.

What can be learned by looking back at this unusual case? What explains its emergence, its survival, and at least some of its influence? Here I draw on original course documents and interviews with early participants, including Ohmann himself, to further illuminate the TSA experience so well captured in Arnesen, Ebbe, Rome, and Ward's 1978 account of a seventies model for "teaching about socialism."

Origins

When asked about TSA's origin, Ohmann began by pointing to institutional factors that may have facilitated such a course. Wesleyan's "pedagogical and curricular liberalism," its "openness to new ways of learning" and faculty receptiveness to student demand, had led, in the late 60s and early 70s, to student-faculty apprenticeship programs and group tutorials reflecting student interests. It was Wesleyan's emergence as "a place where students were invited to be sources of educational change and innovation" that gave students, in Ohmann's view, a framework and a vocabulary for course creation.

Moreover, Wesleyan had developed a very vigorous political culture by about 1966 or 67. Indeed, Ohmann remarked, "if anybody was thinking about in 1967 . . . what would be the best college in the country to institute a course called 'Towards a Socialist America,' somebody might have said Wesleyan. Now that's not how it happened, of course. But it may have something to do with why it took roots and lasted so long and went through so many changes." Why then '76 rather than '67, widely seen as a peak year of New Left activism?

Galvanizing role of anti-war protest

The Vietnam War stretched into the seventies, and both Ohmann and student respondents allude to a long experience with anti-war protest and the larger questioning of the system that increasingly accompanied it. Ohmann thus describes years of on-the-ground protest, "going around and participating in demonstrations at draft boards helping support students who were declining to be drafted. And sometimes going to support faculty or student uprisings at other universities." By the seventies, his activism had led to a questioning of his teaching and scholarship, and ultimately to an engagement with Marxism.

> "I began thinking of ways that I might narrow the divide between my politics and the teaching that I was doing, moving to an emphasis on literature as a form of rebellion or protest . . . . And meanwhile, in my spare time, I was trying to catch up learning something about . . . the Marxism that had taken root in England, the UK, and the United States" among "a younger generation of political activists . . . . And I was . . . learning what I could take from and put to use from those traditions – cultural Marxism and also the kind of Marxist developments that were being proposed in the Union of Radical Political Economics." "So I was belatedly becoming," he concluded. "a left intellectual, as opposed to somebody who went to demonstrations and raised hell."

Perhaps more surprisingly, anti-war activism also figured in the politicization of students entering college in the early seventies, a time when many high schools had become sites of organized anti-war protest. While the peace treaty that ostensibly ended the war was signed in 1972, fighting continued until the fall of Saigon in 1974, so the war was a continued presence during these students' high school years, as they observed older peers facing the draft and, in a few cases, encountered efforts by Students for a Democratic Society to extend organizing to younger teens. Jay Kilbourn, a member of the founding group tutorial, describes a student strike at his suburban high school, culminating in a march to the state capital, while Polsky's intense involvement extended over many years.

> "I had been myself an anti-war activist beginning at the end of junior high school…. We had staged, we had many events, protests, marches. We had gone to Washington for big demonstrations. We had Tom Hayden and Jane Fonda come through. We had done a rally with them in 72 . . . so I had done a lot of anti-war activism." And when the war ended, Polsky reflected, "I was basically saying, 'What do I do now?' Because I had been an anti-war activist since I had been an adolescent and I wasn't sure where to go at that point."

For both Ohmann and Polsky, a larger engagement with radical thought emerged as an answer to the "what do I do now?" question, a question being asked by activists more generally. In this context, TSA's socialist perspective, Arnesen et al. suggest, offered "an understanding of the connections among various issues . . . and a firmer base from which to become politically involved." Most participants "had been politically active but lacked a unifying theoretical

framework" as a guide to action. And the theory they embraced at that moment was Marxism.

The decade's broad-based feminist mobilizations, along with continued movements for Black and other ethno-racial empowerment, are well-known, and rightly so. But the seventies also saw the growth of redistributive projects targeting class inequality and corporate power. These included labor organizing, especially fueled by Marxist-Leninist groups; democratic socialist initiatives associated with Michael Harrington (DSOC/DSA); community organizing sparked by ACORN's 1970 founding; and the citizen action/public interest movement with Ralph Nader as its figurehead. What they shared was the conviction that organizing against class inequality could unify and mobilize people across race and gender lines. Within that context, an engagement with Marxism flourished in many circles.[1]

Content and intent

The course structure thus mandated an early introduction to "the basic tools of Marxist analysis needed to deal coherently with later portions of the course" (24). Readings such as Ernest Mandel's *Introduction to Marxist Economic Theory,* Magdoff on imperialism, and the Poulantzas-Miliband debate on the nature of the capitalist state, along with Marx's own writings were assigned (TSA, Spring 1976). If some found this section "the most enlightening," others saw it as not just "challenging" but "unyielding, . . . the least satisfying part of the course" (Arnesen et al.) The continued commitment to including this demanding literature, in the face of resistance, reflects the centrality of Marxist thought to this project and the combination of scholarly rigor and political engagement that it espoused.

The Marxist and socialist commitments of the original TSA project are precisely articulated in "A Word About the Course," the statement that prefaces the group tutorial reading list of Spring 1976: "We are presuming some background in Marxist and/or other socialist thought." This meant not only background familiarity but political commitment: while "not only a course *for* socialists [italics mine}, but the statement also read, "it accepts as a given an affirmative answer to the question, 'Do we need socialism in America?' and uses this as a point of departure" for a course "prepared from a democratic socialist perspective" while including "material from the whole spectrum of the Left."

Perhaps most importantly, the "Word About the Course" defined the tutorial itself as an organizing project. "I wanted and we wanted to make it about the activism, about how we get there," Polsky recalled. "This course has been prepared for those who have an interest in combining their academic life with progressive political organizing… It is our hope that the seminar will lead to some sort of socialist organizing/intellectual group at Wesleyan." This goal, to reach beyond the small group comprising the tutorial to the broader campus, led to the creation of TSA as a larger course the following year (F76), an initiative enabled by and resting on the commitment made by the tutorial group members to serve as TAs that following semester.

The Fall 76 "Word About the Course" removed the tutorial introduction's explicit affirmation of socialism, characterizing the course more ambiguously as a consideration of "radical criticisms of modern America, various strategies for change, and some visions of alternative ways of organizing our social life." Despite this "somewhat looser approach," Arnesen et. al, observe, the course has "at all times . . . taken an anti-capitalist stance" (Arnesen et. al., 22).

Process – the politics of pedagogy and the replicable model

The Fall 76 version of TSA, which opened it to the wider campus and enrolled some 70 students, introduced a second agenda of "close attention" to "the process of study." Thus, "we will encourage cooperative learning, combining academic theory and social practice, and developing democracy within the class." That is, they proposed to center a politics of pedagogy alongside the explicit critique of capitalism. The authors describe a classroom dynamic based on a "non-hierarchical structure and shared responsibilities, in which rotating facilitators took responsibility for stimulating and moderating discussion. In its challenge to hierarchy and affirmation of self-governance, the classroom becomes a political space, a pre-figurative institution of a kind."

In pursuing this goal, the creators of TSA had devised what surely must be a cardinal achievement, their eminently practical creation of a replicable model for continuing the TSA project. Key to this was the fact that its version of a student-centered course went beyond classroom dynamics to give the future TAs, in consultation with class members, the central role in planning curriculum and choosing readings for the following year's offering. Each successive iteration of the course thereby produced the next year's TAs and the next year's syllabus, a practice that ensured its continuity over many years. One cannot sufficiently emphasize the difficulty of maintaining such a project in an undergraduate environment with the constant turnover of its population. When Arnesen, Ebb, Rome, and Ward wrote in 1978, TSA had been offered as a course over six semesters, already a significant success. Yet TSA as a course conducted by students, with the support of a faculty sponsor, and especially with Ohmann's support, continued, on a yearly basis, for more than two decades. The enactment of student empowerment had led to the very practical outcome of long-term survival.

Outcomes

To reiterate, longevity was in and of itself significant. What did it mean to have a course titled "Towards a Socialist America" in the curriculum at a time when that concept had largely disappeared from popular and scholarly discourse, even though it was arguably the case that its socialist content contracted over the years, in accord with the changing spirit of the time?

Second, it arguably contributed to a major resurgence of activism on campus. Following their high school antiwar

activism, both Kilbourn and Polsky had been disappointed by the quiescence of the campus. If Polsky's initial response was to create the *Activist Call*, a simple listing of upcoming meetings, events, and initiatives, TSA, with its explicit goal of organizing, was a bolder step forward. Arnesen et.al. clearly understood that TSA would be judged by the levels and forms of activism it stimulated:

> We would be presuming too much to think that the course has been solely responsible for the recent resurgence of political activism at Wesleyan. But we would certainly be justified in linking in some way the evolution of the course and the growth of the Socialist Organizing Committee, the Nuclear Resistance Group, the South Africa Action Group, the Workplace Committee. . . . We believe that the course has offered structural, analytical, and personal cohesiveness to activism here. It has given the conception and direction of activism a unity that it formerly lacked (25).

Yet it should be noted that feminist activism, such as the Women's Center and the efforts to create a Women's Studies program, are absent from this listing, as are groups like Ujamma, Wesleyan's principal Black student organization. This narrow perspective was similarly reflected in the paucity of women (one of eight total participants) in the Spring '76 tutorial, and in the content of its syllabus, which contained not a single reading on either gender or race. The fall version that followed showed only the most minimal progress, combining (or confining) assignments on race and gender to a single day. Confronted with this some forty years later, Polsky acknowledged its solipsism. It was, he quipped, "basically white male socialism. Nobody was thinking outside the socialist, the male socialist box." But "that would [have] come later," he presumed.

Consistent with Polsky's retrospective speculation, Arnesen et.al. reported that half the TAs were women by Fall 1978, in distinct contrast to the seven men/one woman composition of Fall 1976. Moreover, the "several meetings deal[ing] with personal and institutional racism and sexism, relating those forms of inequality to class and to the productive system . . . have consistently been among the most exciting of the semester." By 1983-84, the University catalog showed TSA listed in both American Studies and the nascent Women's Studies Program, another student-initiated project in which Ohmann played a significant role.

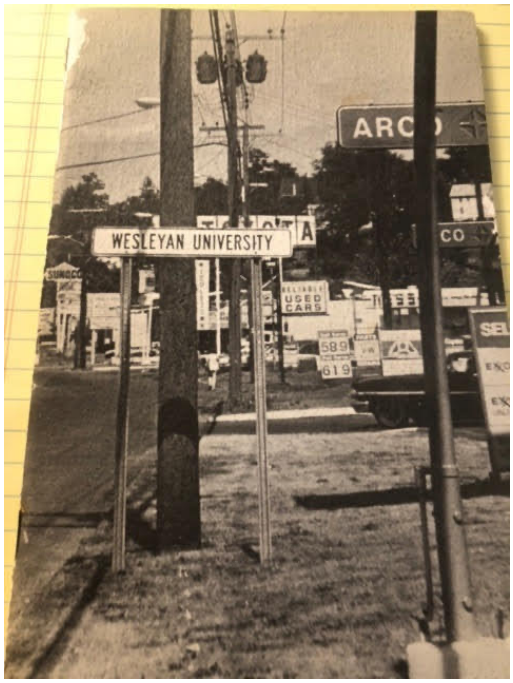
Initiated by a student, enthusiastically supported by a faculty member, TSA produced a synergistic relationship among its participants. Ohmann himself identified three outcomes as especially significant: the *Wesleyan University* booklet; "Bread and Circuses," the course he developed coming out of TSA; and the journal *Politics & Education* established by recent alums.

In addition to course reading, the original tutorial established the precedent of doing some sort of political work or project. *Wesleyan University,* a thirty-page booklet based on student research, was a product of this expectation. Building on the tutorial's Marxist analysis in locating Wesleyan within the dynamics of a capitalist system while drawing on Ohmann's insider knowledge of academic life, it characterized the university as the product of and participant in a capitalist economic and political order. Two factors emerged in this analysis: dependence on investments and class reproduction.

Stock market complicity:

The university's dependence on endowment income for a third of operating expenses formed the basis for its reliance on stock market investments, an engagement pictorially communicated by the front and back covers of the booklet.

The



WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY PAMPHLET FRONT AND BACK COVERS. 1975

front cover locates Wesleyan in a tawdry landscape of gas stations and used-car lots, suggesting an institution up for sale, and not to the highest bidder. The back cover explicitly linked Wesleyan with Exxon, conveying the University's complicity, via stock ownership, with authoritarian and racist regimes – e.g., South Africa – and with energy companies implicated in the 70s energy crisis. Today's student demands for fossil fuel divestment by their universities clearly echo divestment campaigns of the 70s and 80s.

Class reproduction

Wesleyan is located in a capitalist economy, not only through its stock market engagement but also by the way "the context of the university experience reproduces the values and relationships of American society," for "Learning at Wesleyan is usually an individualistic and competitive endeavor" (17). Building on students' disproportionately privileged backgrounds, the booklet argues, Wesleyan outfits them to fill positions – "doctors, lawyers, professors, business executives [that] have a considerable measure of autonomy" within a capitalist system. Yet the University's "liberal arts rhetoric" serves to obscure such economic relationships. Challenging the view of the University as a kind of free space, the authors instead characterize it as a place where "power and economic relationships are obscured by liberal arts rhetoric" and ask students to confront the implications of their own class position. Through its emphasis on these larger engagements, the students developed a sophisticated analysis which resisted simple characterizations of heroes and villains; rather, they argue, "societal forces indirectly shape the content/values of learning more clearly than the willful acts of trustees, administrators, or professors ever could" (14).

"Bread and Circuses"

Ohmann pointed to the creation of the course he himself devised, "Bread and Circuses," first taught in 1978-79, as the second important outcome of TSA. Keep in mind that TSA itself happened at a very particular moment. *Radical Teacher* was co-founded, in 1975, by Ohmann and his comrades in the MLA Radical Caucus, while 1976 marked the publication of *English in America: A Radical View of the Profession*, so one might say the creation of a course like Bread and Circuses was on the agenda, regardless of a TSA connection.

Given this, it's striking that Ohmann explicitly identified it as "an idea that came from the TSA TAs. And that was . . . an exciting development for me, because Bread & Circuses had enormous appeal. . . there were 225 students" and "the TAS were all people who'd had Towards a Socialist America." "The foundation of Bread & Circuses," he concluded, "is something that would not have happened without TSA." Bread & Circuses was not just an innovative contribution to the Wesleyan curriculum but an important advance in Ohmann's engagement with the field of cultural studies, an engagement culminating in his 1996 book *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century,"* a study of the origins of consumer society, the culture industry that helped create it, and the making of a professional-managerial class that comprised both its creators and its clientele.

Politics & Education

Described by Ohmann as "an excellent magazine" throughout its six issues, this TSA outgrowth was the creation of a group of recent graduates who saw higher education under attack and sought to highlight it as a political issue. Thus, the first issue analyzed the Bakke case, recounted sexual harassment at Yale, and discussed the Brazilian student movement, while the following issue looked at job concerns for the college educated, highlighted the South African divestment movement, and featured an interview with Ralph Nader on democratizing the university. But while expressing their concerns about fiscal retrenchment, threats to affirmative action, racism on campuses, and the push toward vocationalism, the editors were hopeful about what they saw as an increase in campus activism. At the same time, they observed with concern, "these efforts have been made in seeming isolation, without the knowledge of or support from others with similar goals at other institutions." Their goal, therefore, was to establish a "common channel of communication" and to "provide concrete proposals for change." Like its TSA forerunner, the goal of *Politics & Education*'s "was to organize." Written for "those who want to do more than read about change," it was "an activist periodical contributing to building a college-based progressive movement," a larger goal which *P & E* would not be able to realize. ("About *Politics & Educatiion," Politics & Education,* Volume 1, Number One).

Politics & Education was a group project, based in Middletown; most recent Wesleyan graduates would, of course, strike out as individuals. TSA had sought to address the challenge of how graduates could live lives consistent with their "political beliefs and values" in "any job they became involved in" (Arnesen et al., 25). Community organizing, jump-started by ACORN's 1970 founding, was reported as an option taken up by some recent TSA grads, at least for a time. Groups such as ACORN, MASS Fair Share, Carolina Action, and Citizens Action League, which actively recruited and trained recent college graduates, were a logical next step for those who abjured Marxist-Leninist sectarian groups but sought opportunities to challenge class inequality through on-the-ground organizing and collective empowerment and led in some cases to jobs with unions and non-profit organizations. Free-lance journalism and cultural work were reported as options pursued by some TSA grads, while Polsky, speaking from a much later vantage point, comments on the number who became academics.

It is, of course, impossible to learn the long-term impact of TSA involvement on the lives of the many who took the course, and especially for those most committed ones who served as TAs. What is clear is that the redistributive initiatives of the seventies, of which TSA was a part, stood at the cusp of an oncoming neoliberal regime that would dominate subsequent decades, structuring life choices, experiences, and political opportunities in ways that could not have been anticipated.

Notes

1. TSA may then be seen as concurrent with the 1975 founding of *Radical Teacher* and the 1976 publication of Ohmann's *English in America: A Radical View of the Profession.*

2. *Radical Teacher*'s own introductory editorial exemplifies this socialist moment, as it positions *Radical Teacher* "as a means for maintaining communication among socialist

teachers." Acknowledging the importance of "third-world and feminist criticism and ethnic and minority studies, including women's studies, gay studies, black studies, and third-world studies," it arguably foregrounds class, as when it asks, "how reading and discussing a text with a particular group of people promotes or hinders the development of a working-class movement "and "can the teaching of literature be socialist organizing and consciousness raising?" *Radical Teacher*, No. 1 (December 1975) 36.

Thanks to Susan O'Malley for her insight and support, and a special acknowledgement to Joey (Joel) Lefkowitz - documentarian extraordinaire - who preserved and generously provided the course documents that were central to this project.

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"Toward a Socialist America: Some Critical Issues," Fall, 1976 (large course syllabus)

Mary Ann Clawson taught sociology at Wesleyan University from 1980 to 2018, with courses on social movements, popular culture, and sociology of gender and family. Her longterm scholarly interest in the construction of masculinity ranged from studies of nineteenth-century fraternalism to the gender dynamics of rock bands. She's also written on the contemporary United States labor movement.

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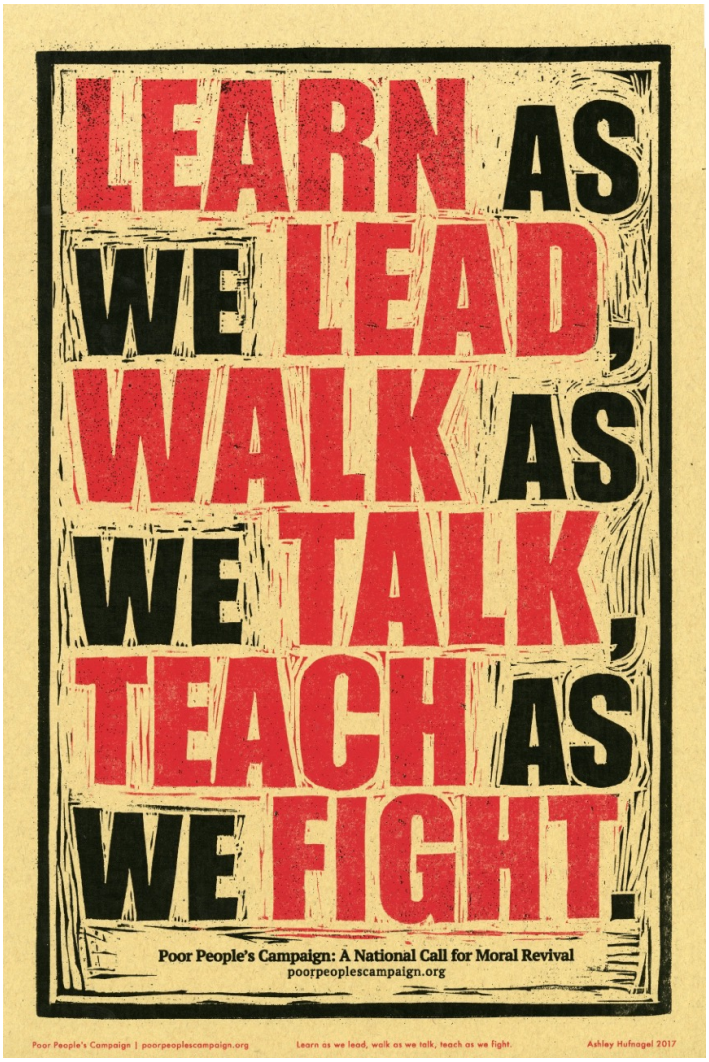
RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

A Student-Initiated Course in Socialism

by Eric Arnesen, David Ebb, Stephen Rome, and Stephen Ward

reprinted from *Radical Teacher* #9 (1978)



LEARN AS WE LEAD, WALK AS WE TALK, TEACH AS WE FIGHT BY ASHLEY HUFNAGEL VIA JUSTSEEDS.ORG

"The most effective way to cope with change is to help create it."

- Salada Tea Bag

"Before coming to Wesleyan I was in an undergraduate foreign service program at Georgetown University. There, theory had neither morality nor personality. TSA [Towards a Socialist America] has given me the confidence to unlearn the myths of neo-classical economic and federal process. I also now realize a commitment to alternative ideology in every classroom. It's funny, but TSA is a presence on campus. It challenges all disciplines, theories, and formulae."

"I guess TSA was like my first feminist consciousness-raising group in that it was concerned with that area of politics which is experienced as personal. What was so thrilling for me about the course was to be given a chance to participate in the educational experience, instead of just sitting back and accepting the facts of capitalism as gospel truth because a professor was offering them to me to swallow whole, as had been the case in my professor-taught courses. TSA has meant taking a step out of thinking those symptoms of capitalism are 'natural' or o.k., by articulating them and trying to put them into an intellectual framework."

"It was really perfect for me. I knew I was Left politically, I knew that things had to be changed, but I had no coherent framework to help me put these feelings together. I actually learned more Marxist analysis from another course, but in TSA I had a chance to talk these things over with people. It made me realize how little time we spent actually discussing ideas in other courses, because we were always so busy reading this or that book and listening to somebody's lectures. I really enjoyed being in a class where we could exchange ideas about things that are important to our lives."

"First semester, Freshperson year, my faculty advisor suggested I look into a course called Towards A Socialist America. What a way to begin a college career! I was one of two freshpeople in the course and spent the next 3 1/2 months totally overwhelmed; mental and emotional overload; I left the course on a liberal note, telling the class, 'You haven't fully convinced me ....' They smiled. A year later I was heavily involved in Wesleyan's Socialist Organizing Committee, South Africa Action Group, Nuclear Resistance Group and the Clamshell Alliance. My college course load looks like I'm majoring in radical studies...."

- four TSA alumni

Introduction

What would life be like in the USSA (United Socialist States of America)? How do we get there? Taking a college course won't provide all the answers. But that didn't deter a Wesleyan University Junior, Andy Polsky, from organizing the original version of Towards a Socialist America (TSA) during the winter of 1975-76. He initially hoped that a Government Department professor would sponsor the course. When this seemed unlikely, he contacted Dick Ohmann in the English Department, who agreed to help set up a group tutorial for the spring semester of 1976. Eight people were involved in that seminar, and they became the TA's (Teaching Apprentices) for the course in the fall.

Many students felt the need for a course of this nature. Over 70 took it the next fall, and 35 more in the spring. In 1977-78, a total of 70 students have taken the course, and we expect at least as many next year. In addition, the course has consistently been able to generate future TA's from within the class, thus ensuring its continuity.

TSA was originally intended as an advocacy course for people who felt themselves to be on the political Left, and were seeking creative solutions to the problems of advanced capitalism in the U.S. It has since taken a somewhat looser approach in order to accommodate the varying expectations that people have brought to it. But at all times it has taken an explicitly anti-capitalist stance, and so dealt with material in a way that was unique at Wesleyan. In fact, because there were no Marxist professors in the Economics or Government Departments, the course content itself was at first unique in the university. It developed because of the need people felt to integrate their political and academic experiences. As Polsky said, "We wanted to bring a number of our political concerns into the classroom." Clearly, many others felt the same way, and for six semesters students have continued to be responsible for developing the course.

The Students

With a title like "Towards a Socialist America," a deliberate rejection of supposed objectivity, and a student-led format, how would anyone dare to take this course? As Wesleyan is an elite university, the student body is mainly white, middle- and upper- middle class; so are the students in TSA. During the first two semesters it was offered, students in the class were mostly juniors and seniors. Recently more freshpeople have begun to take the course. Most had been politically active but lacked a unifying theoretical framework. TSA attempts to link issues with ideology and to suggest what socialism could mean in this country. In doing so, it serves an important function by providing politically active people with an understanding of the connections among various issues and by giving them a firmer base from which to become politically involved. And it helps unify the various political movements at Wesleyan. For the already politically active, TSA responds to a real need, and this is a good part of the reason why it has been a successful and continuing course in the university.

At first, few black students took the course. This spring, however, TSA had its first section with a substantial number of black students -- 7 of 12 members in one of the sections. They were mainly from New York City, and from private or parochial schools, indicative of their middle-class background. They brought a more hesitant commitment, not only to the content of the class, but to the form as well. They were generally less comfortable with the non-hierarchical classroom structure and with socialism as a future goal. At the same time, this was a rare opportunity for black and

white students at Wesleyan to come together and talk openly about their expectations and concerns in school and beyond. Integrating students who bring significantly varied desires to the course will remain a challenge for TSA in the future.

Form and Process

In addition to the anti-traditional content of the course, TSA's uniqueness owes much to its alternative classroom format. John Houston, one of the original participants, explained: "The emphasis on form evolved because of the student initiative in starting up the course. Students had put the energy into forming the course and felt that an open, supportive structure was important." Jay Kilbourn, also an original participant, added: "We wanted to create a learning environment in which people could explore a new style of education -- where they could both learn and teach and where they could really share their thoughts with each other."

TSA departs from a number of traditional classroom conventions. A single faculty member roves among several sections. These sections usually have ten to twelve people in them, with near sexual parity. We leave the lecture hall to meet in someone's living room or kitchen. Grades are scrapped in favor of comments and conversations. For those who do opt for grades, these are arrived at through continuing discussions and criticism with the TA's and the faculty member. Some sections have experimented with games or exercises at the beginning of some class meetings, in an attempt to build trust and participation. In short, we are committed to a class with a non-hierarchical structure and shared responsibilities.

The dynamics among people are of vital concern. Two "facilitators" -- usually not TA's -- get the meeting started and moderate discussion. Respecting each other's opinions, listening well, supporting each other, and criticizing and self-criticizing (usually at the end of a meeting) are emphasized. True to Movement for A New Society guidelines, facilitators volunteer in advance to make sure voices aren't stepped on and egos aren't subsidized. They are responsible for providing flexible agenda and central ideas from the reading around which to wrap discussion.

Sometimes the process breaks down. We had our share of absenteeism, uncompleted reading, and pre-emptive monologues and dialogues. These problems can subvert even the most engaging topics. And there were even more vexing problems, given the goals of the class. Often men would dominate and women would defer.[1] It has sometimes proven difficult to integrate the few antagonistic students into constructive conversation. We find that we cannot entirely undo twenty years of political and sexual socialization, but we are constantly confronting it through the process that we have established. After everyone is familiar with the technique of facilitation, members of the group alternate intaking the responsibility of facilitator. Some of the best learning takes place the night before class as the pair of facilitators prepares. During this time, it is often a struggle to stick to the material of the course as bits of political autobiography are exchanged. This dimension of the class defies description. Other more planned efforts at getting to know one another are frequently arranged -- pot-luck brunches and dinners are opportunities to flesh out theory with anecdotes and attitudes. Although some of the readings may intimidate us, the process tends to instill solidarity and a feeling of unity that is a very real and exciting aspect of the course.

Content

The organization of topics and readings in the course changes with every semester that TSA is offered. Each new generation of TA's, chosen from the students who have already taken the course, plans the syllabus for the following semester. Any changes they make in the syllabus reflect their re-evaluation of the course's purpose and design. Some fundamental characteristics of the course, however, remain unaltered. These include an openly socialist-feminist orientation, and constant dedication to the synthesis of theory and practice. Another important aspect of the content that has remained significantly unchanged is the order in which the primary themes of the course are developed.

The course is generally divided into five major sections, each of which builds on theoretical and historical knowledge and the critical skills that have been developed in the previous section. The introductory sessions of the class are devoted to an overview of such problems as sexism and imperialism, and to brief accounts of socialism in other countries. Our readings this semester included The Communist Manifesto. the Barbara Walters/Fidel Castro interview, and selections from The Capitalist System (Edwards, Reich, and Weisskopf, eds., 2nd ed. [New York: Prentice-Hall, 1978]), a text which is used frequently throughout the semester. In this section, we encouraged people to deal openly with their preconceptions about socialism and to familiarize themselves with some of the more pressing concerns and critical perspectives of socialist thought and activity. This is also a time for people to become acquainted and comfortable with the other members of the class and with the dynamics of collective learning.

This brief introduction is followed by a section on Marxist economics and the structure of modern capitalism. We intend this part of the course to give people the basic tools of Marxist analysis needed to deal coherently and effectively with later portions of the course. To this end we use Ernest Mandel's Introduction to Marxist Economic Theory (New York: Pathfinder, 1970), Marx's "Wage Labor and Capital," and a large assortment of articles including a slick piece of propaganda assembled by the American Advertising Council, presumptuously titled "The American Economic System." Through these texts we introduce such fundamental terminology and concepts as "proletariat," "bourgeoisie," "surplus," "monopoly," and the "labor theory of value." We also discuss the historical impact of changing modes of production on the relations of production. The second half of this section illustrates these concepts with empirical studies such as Richard J. Barnet and Ronald E. Muller's Global Reach (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974) and The World of a Giant Corporation: A Report from the G.E. Project (John Woodmansee, et al. [Seattle: North Country Press, 1975]).

With its application of Marxist tools of analysis, this section is probably the most enlightening part of the course for some of the students. It has also proved to be the most challenging to teach and to learn. We have tried hard to avoid the pitfalls of over-simplifying and bastardizing a subject as vast and complex as Marxian economics. But as carefully and conscientiously as we have designed and presented this vital section, we find that it remains the most unyielding and least satisfying part of the course. Part of the problem is inherent in the lack of time available to spend on any one subject in a course that aspires to accomplish so much -- perhaps too much -- in so little time. Given this problem and the ease with which overviews can turn into caricatures, the emphasis we place on constructive self-criticism -- the class time devoted to reappraising and revising content and process -- is all the more important.

The third major section focuses on work and production. It offers a more detailed, more personal, accounting of the broader, theoretical categories of the previous section. Emphasis on the work process is especially important because few students at Wesleyan have much contact with the working-class world, particularly industrial production and management. Many students, however, find that they can relate this section to their own part-time and summer work experiences.

We spend about three weeks on this section, reading all of Harry Braverman's Labor and Monopoly Capital (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), which serves as our primary text on work and production. Braverman's book is supplemented with selections from The Capitalist System, Richard Sennett and Jonathon Cobb's The Hidden Injuries of Class (New York: Vintage, 1973), and Studs Terkel's Working (New York: Avon, 1975). In addition, some people who took the class this semester went to see Blue Collar, a film which confronts many of the issues we had been discussing.

To conclude this part of the course, several meetings deal with sexism and racism, relating these forms of inequality to class and to the productive system. These meetings have consistently been among the most exciting of the semester largely because of the immediate, personal nature of these issues and the way they are deepened by the perspective of the course. Our consideration of sexism and racism is meant to demonstrate how capitalism reinforces and manipulates these prejudices to rationalize inequality and to prevent the development of working-class unity.

The next important section, following closely on our discussions of personal and institutional racism and sexism, deals with hegemony and theories of the state. Here we concentrate on understanding the dialectical relationship between the economic base of capitalism, discussed in the previous two sections, and the political and ideological superstructure of capitalist society. In analyzing this relationship we try to account for the lack of broad-based support for revolutionary change in a society so fraught with inequality. Readings for this section include Lenin's State and Revolution, selections from The German Ideology (Marx, Engels), an exposition of Gramsci's thought, and a variety of articles dealing with Marxist and non-Marxist views of the state. We wind up this part of the course with several classes in which we consider the hegemonic role of the media. For next year, plans are underway to expand this section to include a study of ways in which the arts and sciences reflect and legitimize prevailing ideologies.

Having developed a historically-based critique of capitalism using the tools of macro- and micro-analysis acquired during the semester, we spend the final two or three weeks examining various strategies for change. Much of our discussion focuses on the problem of raising class-consciousness and weighing the plausibility and probable outcomes of reform vs. revolution. This unit includes articles about populist movements such as Tom Hayden's, Community Organizing efforts such as Mass Fair Share, Workers Cooperatives, the Communist Party, the Spartacist League, NAM, DSOC, and the anarchist and ecological Left. Speakers were invited this semester from Mass Fair Share, NAM, the Spartacist League, and Movement for a New Society. In addition, students were strongly encouraged to attend talks given by Ralph Miliband, Barbara Ehrenreich, Eli Zaretsky, and Stokely Carmichael. Beyond looking at organized political strategies, we make an effort to discuss how people can bring their political beliefs and values to any job they become involved in. This is done to avoid the impression that being politically concerned and active means giving up everything else.

Though the sequence of the sections has remained fairly constant since the course was first offered, the readings have varied. Changes are made on recommendation of both the TA's and the students taking the course. This evolution makes for a stronger, more flexible course and for one that depends less on faculty initiative than is usual at Wesleyan.

Evaluation

It is difficult to assess the impact that this course has -- both upon the people who take it and upon the rest of the Wesleyan community. We would be presuming too much to think that the course has been solely responsible for the recent resurgence of political activism at Wesleyan. But we would certainly be justified in linking in some way the evolution of the course and the growth of the Socialist Organizing Committee, the Nuclear Resistance Group, the South Africa Action Group, the Workplace Committee, and department organizing, as many TSA alumni are integrally involved in these organizations.[2] We believe that the course has offered structural, analytical, and personal cohesiveness to activism here. It has given the conception and direction of activism a unity that it formerly lacked. Nor has political activity been limited to Wesleyan's campus. Graduates of the course have pursued their political and social concerns through such activities as community organizing (Mass Fair Share, Carolina Action, ACORN), working for DSOC, free-lance writing (for Seven Days, In These Times, The Progressive), starting a radical journal about higher education (Politics and Education), teaching, and working in the arts and media. Finally, it would be insufficient to evaluate the success of the course strictly in terms of the number of people who become active in movements, as important as that is. Speaking of consciousness-raising may be a bit trite, but we feel confident in claiming that TSA has

been responsible for generating a degree of critical thinking far beyond the number of students who have taken the course.

Notes

1. Doubtless this has something to do with under-representation of women in the leadership of the course. All three faculty sponsors have been men, though two women have declared an interest in assuming this role later on. This semester (Fall. 1978) will be the first time that half of the TA's are women. The authorship of this article reflects the same problem; several women had an interest in sharing the task, but other political and academic claims on their time were too great.

2. Socialist Organizing Committee -- an omnibus left political organization, with which perhaps 100 students of various tendencies affiliate themselves. South Africa Action Group -- a group that was formed last fall to support divestiture as a means to weaken the racist regime in South Africa. They have done much educational work and have organized actions, including a mass rally and the occupation of President Campbell's office in support of their demands. Workplace Committee -- a group that helped publicize the concerns of university employees and supported their efforts to unionize over the past year. Department organizing -- students in various departments organized to become involved in the hiring of new faculty members and in curriculum review.

Eric Arnesen, Wesleyan Class of 1980, is the Teamsters Professor of Modern American Labor History at The George Washington University. He is the co-chair of the Washington History Seminar, a joint project of the American Historical Association and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and the author of Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics (1991); Brotherhoods of Color: Black Railroad Workers and the Struggle for Equality (2001); and Black Protest and the Great Migration: A Brief History with Documents (2002). He is currently finishing a biography of the African American socialist, labor leader, and civil rights activist A. Philip Randolph.

David Ebb, a 1978 graduate of Wesleyan, University, is a pediatric hematology-oncology physician at Massachusetts General Hospital who works with Partners in Health to bring children from poor countries to Mass General for cancer treatment. A 1978 graduate of Wesleyan University, he was an early participant in "Towards a Socialist America."

Stephen Rome, Wesleyan Class of 1978, taught social studies for thirty years at Yorktown High School, where he created a Human Rights elective and led the largest Amnesty International Club in the Northeast, (which included Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez as a four-year participant).

Stephen Ward, Wesleyan Class of 1980, lost his life in an automobile accident in 1985.

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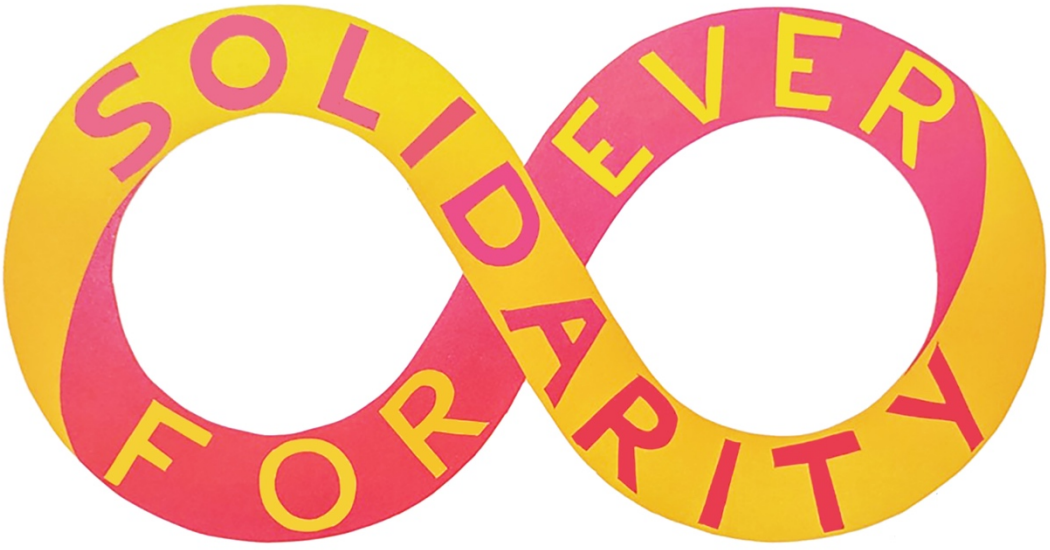
RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

That Student-Initiated Course in Socialism: Reflections on "Towards a Socialist America" Forty-Six Years Later

by Eric Arnesen



SOLIDARITY FOREVER BY ROGER PEETVIA JUSTSEEDS.ORG

When I arrived at Wesleyan University in the Fall of 1976, socialism was not a subject on my mind. My exposure to the concept was limited to twelve novels by Upton Sinclair – the *World's End* series featuring Lanny Budd, a socialist-turned-FDR supporter-turned secret agent, whose life story became a vehicle for Sinclair's sometimes melodramatic (but always interesting) history of the world from the Great War to the early Cold War. The first few were gifts from a theater teacher who directed a number of productions in which I had acted, but I searched out the rest and read them in my high school years. I arrived at college as a liberal coming from a family of liberals. My first vote in a presidential primary shortly before stepping onto campus was for California governor Jerry Brown; I recall cheering when Jimmy Carter defeated Gerald Ford that November. When I arrived on campus, I had no predetermined career path or preference of study, though I leaned toward theater and music. Serendipitously, Wesleyan's administration had assigned me an academic advisor, Vera Schwarcz, in the History Department. Before selecting classes, we met to discuss a possible course of study. It was then, in my first week of college – I think I'm recalling this correctly – that Vera recommended a student-run tutorial, "Towards a Socialist America." I readily agreed and enrolled in the class that Fall, the second time the course had been offered. "What a way to begin a college career!" one anonymous student – it was me, actually -- declared in an article about the course in a 1978 *Radical Teacher* article about the course authored by Stephen Ward, David Ebb, Stephen Rome, and me. It is that article and its subject that I reflect upon in the paragraphs that follow.

My political and intellectual world changed dramatically as a result of the class. I recall intense weekly discussions, a variety of perspectives on the table. By the semester's end, I told my fellow students that I hadn't yet been fully convinced by what we had read to declare a new political allegiance. ("They smiled," I noted in the article). But I set out to learn more. In the Spring, I took Vera's Maoism and the Chinese Revolution; the following fall I enrolled in a team-taught course on Marx, Lenin, and Mao with Professors Schwarcz, Philip Pomper, and Oliver Holmes. Somewhere along the line I took English professor Dick Ohmann's "Bread and Circuses" lecture class – or did I just serve as a teaching assistant? I participated in a small student-run tutorial on politics and education; took multiple seminars in Latin American history with a Marxist sociologist… and I'm sure there were other classes taught by progressive instructors that I can't remember. ("My college course load looks like I'm majoring in radical studies," I wrote as one of the four TSA alumni quoted at the beginning of the article). Along the way I wrote papers on Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*; the economic case against nuclear power generation; Marcuse's revision of Freud; the state, the individual, and freedom in Hegel and Marx; the morality of thought reform in the Chinese revolution; the aborted Chilean road to socialism; activism and determination in the thought of Li Ta-Chao, an early 20th century Chinese Marxist; and political repression in American history. (I only recall these topics because I just found a notebook containing all of them in a storage container in a crawl space in my basement.) My interest in theater diminished significantly, though I did at some point act in an adaptation of Studs Terkel's *Working* directed by fellow student Paul Hammer. I no longer studied music but did perform radical songs at coffee houses and at various demonstrations. In the semester following my TSA experience I joined the campus chapter of the Clamshell Alliance. Toward the end of the Spring 1977 semester, I participated in a mass protest against the construction of the nuclear power plant in Seabrook, New Hampshire, an act of civil disobedience that put 1,414 people – including a good number of Wesleyan undergrads – in jail (which, in this instance, was a National Guard armory) for up to two weeks. I missed my final exams but, thankfully, Wesleyan being Wesleyan, we were granted academic amnesty and didn't have to make them up. In my remaining time in college, there were more demonstrations, take back the night marches, South African divestment occupations of administration buildings, and many semesters of writing for *Hermes*, the campus's radical newspaper. In retrospect, it's safe to say that my encounter with my freshman advisor set me on a path rather different than the one that I anticipated or that my parents appreciated.

Looking back at the original syllabus for the Spring 1976 class and the co-authored article on the course from *Radical Teacher* in 1978 (which, I must confess, I have no recollection of writing, though I recognize some of my phrases even today), I'm struck by the expansiveness of the required readings. I'm pretty sure that I first encountered the text of *The Communist Manifesto* in the class; I certainly hadn't encountered Lenin's *State and Revolution* before that semester. I have no idea how we managed to discuss Ernest Mandel's *Introduction to Marxist Economic Theory* or what I made of Marx's pamphlet, "Wage Labor and Capital." I still have my copy of Harry Braverman's 1974 *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, a classic which helped me pass a French translation exam in grad school in the early 1980s. (I selected a cognate-filled passage from the French edition of Braverman and managed, barely, to translate it back into the original English). I also retain my copies of Sennett and Cobb's *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, Terkel's *Working*, and James Weinstein's *Ambiguous Legacy: The Left in American Politics.* At some point over the past four or so decades my copy of Murray Bookchin's *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* disappeared. I also recall reading excerpts from Shulamith Firestone's *Dialectic of Sex* and other early second-wave feminist works, though these don't appear either on the original syllabus or in the *Radical Teacher* article; perhaps I read them in a different class.

What did those of us under the age of 20 and the facilitators who must have been either 20 or 21 make of Marx, Lenin, Mandel, and the rest? At the distance of a half century, I have no idea. But back in 1978, my colleagues and I put it this way with regard to the "basic tools" provided in the "brief introduction to Marxist economics and the structure of modern capitalism": The readings introduced "such fundamental terminology and concepts as 'proletarian,' 'bourgeoisie,' 'surplus,' 'monopoly,' and the 'labor theory of value," allowing us to discuss "the historical impact of changing modes of production on the relations of production." (Re-reading these words today, would I be wrong to think that ChatGPT could put it better?). Our 1978 article noted that the "application of Marxist tools of

analysis" was "probably the most enlightening part of the course for some students" but also "proved to be the most challenging to teach and to learn." That section of the course remained "the most unyielding and least satisfying." That's not surprising. My sense is that we picked up the jargon; muddled our way through theoretical texts without much guidance (or actual understanding), and channeled a post-New Left sensibility about capitalism's oppressiveness. Beyond that, I don't think Ernest Mandel sank in very deeply. (An aside: I did take a summer class at Boston University in 1979 that was team taught by Mandel and Andre Gunder Frank; I recall little but I did get an "A" on my fuzzy theoretically final paper – or at least that's the way I remember it. I suspect that neither of the two instructors bothered to read it).

In retrospect, TSA equipped us less with a set of analytical tools -- and certainly not with tools that most of us could coherently deploy on paper or in practice -- than with a general left critique of American society, a vocabulary to describe (or misdescribe) a host of issues, and a sense that we were part of a longer history of radical struggle that had changed and could still change the world. "Although some of the readings may intimidate us," our article conceded, "the process tends to instill solidarity and a feeling of unity that is a very real and exciting aspect of the course." And what we didn't nail down in the tutorial we might pick up from the various left-of-center faculty to further our understanding.

Then there was a steady stream of progressive speakers who graced the campus. TSA organizers might have been responsible for bringing Michael Harrington-- we had read chapters of his *Socialism* in the tutorial -- to Wesleyan. I recall lectures by Herbert Marcuse, Dick Gregory, and Kwame Touré (Stokely Carmichael, whose memorable words have stuck with me over the decades: "Capitalism is a stupid system. It is a wicked system. It is an evil system," I think he declared before a packed room of enthusiastic undergrads), among others. For many of us, our education took place both in and beyond the classroom.

After more than thirty years of university teaching and a brief stint in academic administration, I find it hard to imagine a course like TSA being offered in most institutions of higher education today. To the best of my knowledge, there are no "student run tutorials" allowed at my university, and if they exist, they wouldn't be actual courses-on-the-books for credit. Besides, in this day and age, many concerned-about-their-children's-job-prospects parents would be none too happy to pay good (i.e., exorbitant) tuition money for credits in a class taught by … other students. More problematic today, though, is TSA's stated purpose: the course was, our 1978 article explained, "originally intended as an advocacy course for people who felt themselves to be on the political Left and were seeking creative solutions to the problems of advanced capitalism in the U.S." A "looser approach" was adopted shortly thereafter to "accommodate" students' "varying expectations." In both its harder and softer variants, the course assumed an "explicitly anti-capitalist stance" and its very title – "Towards a Socialist America" – aimed to explore what life in a USSA (yes, that second "s" is for socialist) would be like and entertained various pathways toward arriving at that very different America. If such a course remained on the books today, one can picture columnist George Will holding it up as proof positive that the academy has lost its mind (he writes such columns on a regular basis) or Tucker Carlson raging furiously on Fox "News." Even before Governor Ron DeSantis and other red state legislators started banning classes, concepts, and books they find problematic; even before the *1619 Project* became a flashpoint for culture warriors; even before "woke" became a slur promiscuously employed by a turbo-charged right – conservatives, at least since the 1980s, were complaining about tenured radicals and their supposedly left-leaning universities. Of course, leftists are hardly alone in bringing their politics (on occasion) into the classroom. I took an introductory economics seminar at the same time I enrolled in TSA, and I can assure you that its pro-capitalist stance-- might one call it advocacy? -- was squarely on display; almost fifty years later, I doubt that the real estate concentration at my current institution's School of Business is a hotbed of pro-rent control or multi-family housing construction sentiment. (I actually don't know about that last point… but I bet I've got that right). Politics… kinda hard to avoid 'em.

Then there are the academic bureaucracy and the external accreditation agencies. Could a TSA-like course pass muster at my own institution these days? First, a multidisciplinary faculty committee in the college of arts and sciences would undoubtedly look askance at both the explicit politics and the instructional model. (Upon reflection, a cost-conscious Dean's Office might, for a moment, entertain the financial benefits from collecting tuition dollars from students without having to pay full-time or even appallingly low-paid adjunct faculty….). But then, the powers-that-be who vet and give final approval to sample course syllabi would insist that we render unto Caesar powers that be and spell out clearly, and with strong verbs (!), the learning objectives. If a TSA syllabus included them, they might read:

By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

- Historically critique capitalism "using the tools of macro- and micro-analysis" in the Marxist tradition
- Imagine life in a socialist America and explore pathways to that life;
- Develop "creative solutions to the problems of advanced capitalism in the U.S.";
- Demonstrate how "capitalism reinforces and manipulates" sexism and racism "to rationalize inequality and to prevent the development of working-class unity";
- Apply "hegemony and theories of the state" to grasp the "dialectical relationship between the economic base of capitalism… and the political and ideological superstructure of capitalist society";
- "Account for the lack of broad-based support for revolutionary change in a society so fraught with inequality."

(Lest you wonder, I haven't just invented that quoted language above for effect; our 1978 *Radical Teacher* article used those phrases to convey what TSA sought to accomplish). Econ and political science classes with their own decidedly non-left biases escape scrutiny by accreditors who share their decidedly non-left biases. And courses with noticeable (if vague) left biases toward "social justice" also escape accreditors' scrutiny for other reasons. But TSA and its learning objectives? I see them hitting a proverbial brick wall even in blue states that still recognize the value of the social sciences and humanities; in red states where demonization and censorship have become the law of the land, they would elicit howls of protest and merely confirm the Right's vision of tenured radicals run amok and universities as the last sanctuary of the revolutionary left. In either case, between academic administrators and regional accreditors, a proposal for a TSA-like class would likely be dead on arrival.

And here let me take a position that is at odds with the one I and my colleagues expressed in 1978: That's not a bad thing. Consider TSA's objectives, stated unapologetically in full view. Its originators did not frame the course as an introduction to socialism per se. They accepted "as a given an affirmative answer to the question, 'Do we need socialism in America' and uses this as a point of departure," according to the original syllabus. Although they prepared the tutorial "from a democratic socialist perspective" that approached the "material critically and undogmatically," the tutorial's originators hoped that the class would "lead to some sort of socialist organizing/educational group at Wesleyan." I'm sure in many cases it did. But today, *promoting* leftwing student activism in my classes is not and should not be one of my learning objectives as a university faculty member. If students find the material in my classes useful in their subsequent political activities, great. Indeed, I hope that that some do. If they don't, I am content if they find the material challenging, compelling, or thought-provoking. I know I and many of my progressive colleagues would raise objections if a group of conservative undergraduates proposed a kind of reverse TSA -- say, a tutorial called TACA (Towards an Anticommunist America) or TFMA (Towards a Free-Market America) -- that advanced an overtly and largely unquestioned libertarian or otherwise rightwing political agenda. A course that automatically denigrated every government intervention in the economy from the New Deal through Obamacare and that aspired to serve as a recruiting center for the Federalist Society, Turning Point USA, or some Koch-funded operation? I'd neither trust those students to arrive at credible readings that genuinely reflected a range of critical perspectives nor appreciate their efforts at using a college course as a vehicle to turn back the clock even further on social progress. Ditto for a faculty member attempting to do the same.

I agree with the editors of *Radical Teacher*, who believe that there is ignorance in the U.S. today "about socialism domestically and internationally." I would extend that point to highlight ignorance about the history of almost everything, socialist and other progressive movements included. But addressing the ignorance of history is different from deploying history in the service of a cause. As a historian, I have confidence in my reconstruction of the past, though I am willing to both entertain alternative understandings and debate my own findings. As a teacher, I have little interest in instructing my students on what the future should look like – something I would find presumptuous and inappropriate. Even if I were so inclined, I lack confidence in my ability to apply my historical insights to predict or inform the future. Whenever historians offer their "lessons" or apply their knowledge of the past to justify some course of future action, my eyebrows go up. Back in 2007, many of my distinguished progressive colleagues penned a "Historians for Obama" open letter that invoked their knowledge of the past to promote the Democrat's candidacy. "As president," they wrote, "Barack Obama would only begin the process of healing what ails our society and ensuring that the U.S. plays a beneficial role in the world. But we believe he is that rare politician who can stretch the meaning of democracy, who can help revive what William James called 'the civic genius of the people.'"[1] It didn't exactly work out that way, once again demonstrating that historians who know the past don't necessarily have great insight into the future.

We delve into "radical discontent" in the 1960s through explorations of the New Left, second-wave feminism, and the antiwar movement; we pay considerable attention to the building of a New Right, from its earliest stages in postwar America through the Goldwater campaign and movement building efforts in the 1970s and 1980s.

My reservations about the predictive power of history or the legitimacy of deploying it to further an explicit political agenda don't lead me to downplay a commitment to addressing the ignorance of the past in general or of social movements in particular. Both animate my teaching. In my bread-and-butter lecture class on the "U.S. since 1945," we spend significant amounts of time – in readings and in lectures – exploring the civil rights movement of the 1940s as well as its evolution in the 1950s and 1960s. We delve into "radical discontent" in the 1960s through explorations of the New Left, second-wave feminism, and the antiwar movement; we pay considerable attention to the building of a New Right, from its earliest stages in postwar America through the Goldwater campaign and movement building efforts in the 1970s and 1980s. In my research seminars on 20th century African American civil rights, we cover a wide range of activism, both top down and bottom up, from the 1930s through the 1970s. We address Communists' engagement with the "race question," the March on Washington Movement of the early 1940s, struggles to desegregate the military, and the economic dimension of the 1963 March on Washington, as well more "conventional" subjects like the emergence and evolution of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Freedom Rides, Mississippi Freedom Democratic Summer, and the rise of Black Power. Along the way, students encounter a number

of activists who don't always or even usually find their way into high school civil rights coverage: Floria Pickney, Bayard Rustin, Pauli Murray, A. Philip Randolph, and Gloria Richardson, among others. And in my seminar on "Communism and Anticommunism in 20th Century America," we engage the problematic history of the Communist Party -- I'm upfront about my critical perspective[2] - through readings by orthodox, revisionist, and post-revisionist scholars, as well as various primary sources. We similarly work our way through the multiple varieties of anticommunism, from the paranoid right to the social democratic left. In my classes I make it clear to my students that while I have a perspective, one informed by decades of research and writing, I don't actually care *what* they think--that is, what positions they take on the material we tackle -- only that they engage with that material, understand that material, and formulate independent and informed judgments about it.

TSA in the 1970s was a genuinely ambitious course in the many themes it attempted to cover, in the difficulty of its subject matter, and in its goal of forging socialist activists. Almost half a century later, I look back and see the tutorial resembling an introductory class, albeit one that imposed a workload few first-year students would consider reasonable today. Our 1978 *Radical Teacher* essay did note that grades were "scrapped in favor of comments and conversations" and that for those "who do opt for grades, these are arrived at through continuing discussions and criticism." That might still be appealing in 2023, at least for some. The essay also highlighted "our share of absenteeism, uncompleted reading, and pre-emptive monologues and dialogues," problems that could "subvert even the most engaging topics." Even if students did complete all of the reading – and actually managed to understand it – they would gain only a glimpse into the rich and sometimes problematic world of radical scholarship. Take the history of socialism and the American left tradition, for instance. In 1976, there was an older literature that explored the Socialist Party in the early 20th century and the U.S. Communist party from 1919 onward, much of the latter written by staunch anticommunists whose politics ranged from the McCarthyite to the Social Democratic. We didn't read any of that. Rather, we took on a few essays by the polemical but always interesting Christopher Lasch and chapters by the democratic socialist James Weinstein. That was hardly enough to give undergrads a clear sense of the left's American traditions, much less allow them to grapple with its moral and political complexities or apply its lessons to their political work. In a sense, what we got was a New Left Cliff Notes version of that history.

In the decades that followed TSA's early years, the scholarly literature on the American Left, some of it critical but much of it downright adulatory, exploded in quantity. Even the Communists, once the target of "traditionalist" or "orthodox" critics who harped on their subservience to Moscow and rigid party lines, underwent a historiographical reinvention at the hands of New Leftists who went to graduate school and used their new academic skills in an attempt to recover a useable past. (That resurrection of the CP's reputation evinced pushback from those still in the traditionalist camp, whose anticommunist case was bolstered, to a degree, by the revelations of espionage by a not insubstantial number of party members). I tackle elements of that history in my "Communism and Anticommunism" seminar, with the aim of assisting students in engaging that complicated story as well as the ways different camps of historians have understood and framed the Communists' record. The broader history of the 20th century left – which I don't cover in the seminar but do examine in my research – is a messy one; there is much to admire and much, frankly, to abhor.[3] And the "Left" came in countless varieties – the Socialist Party, the Social Democratic Federation, the Communist Party, the Communist Party (Opposition), the Communist League of America, the Socialist Workers Party, the American Workers Party, the Socialist Labor Party, and more (and that only gets us to the 1940s) – each with their distinctive if often related vision of social transformation yet often at each other's throats. Some historians approach their subjects as just that – subjects; others are true believers who want to put their protagonists on a political pedestal and still others are academic fellow travelers who want to highlight the good and downplay the bad in the hope of inspiring a new generation of activists. To understand the Left's history in the 20th century, one must study not only its individuals, associations, and currents but the historians who reconstruct the Left's past as well. And to do justice in the classroom to the history of the Left, students might be reasonably expected to devote an entire semester to the task, and even then they'd just scratch the surface. Given the abundance and complexity of the scholarly literature today, it would be impossible to treat the subject in a week or two, as we did – albeit with a much smaller literature – over four decades ago.

Perhaps one way of thinking about the "Towards as Socialist America" tutorial of 1976 is to see it not as a dated model or prototype for a revised radical class but as a part of the Left's longer history. If the 1960s are remembered as a decade of rebellion, upheaval, and unrest, the 1970s are often recalled in popular lore as the "Me Decade" -- years of private self-absorption, spiritual introspection, and the pursuit of self-fulfillment – or as an era marked by a crisis of democracy and legitimacy, on the one hand, and of stagflation, on the other. The '60s – and all that they signified -- might have ended in much of America, but those of us students living in the dorms or off-campus in Middletown, Connecticut joked that the '60s were alive and well at mid-'70s Wesleyan. TSA was a self-conscious project by those who, I believe, considered themselves as a part of an extended New Left, determined to rekindle and keep the flame alive and learn from the successes and failures of the immediate and more distant past. To do that, its founders created a model of a learning environment, in the words of original participant Jay Kilbourn (who I'm almost certain was my resident hall advisor in the Foss 4 dorm that year), "in which people could explore a new style of education – where they could both learn and teach and where they could really share their thoughts with each other." Small groups, no grades, discussion and criticism, games and exercises, rotating facilitators – TSA was conceived as a "class with a non-hierarchical structure and shared responsibilities" that rejected "supposed objectivity." It assumed an unabashedly anti-capitalist stance, drew upon a sampling of recent

political and academic Marxist literature from a number of disciplines, and served an "important function" of "providing politically active people with an understanding of the connections among various issues," offering them a "firmer base from which to become politically involved," and helping to "unify the various political movements at Wesleyan." It served as both a political incubator for those involved and a reminder, to those of us looking back at it, that the 1970s were hardly the quiescent years they are so often remembered as, at least in some places. TSA, then, kept alive the legacies of the New Left of the 1960s – at least for a while (the course, I was surprised to learn while writing this reflection, survived into the 1990s) and inspired many to think critically about the nature of American society.

In my case, TSA was a springboard first to other left-tilting courses and to political activism in in my college years and, later, to an academic career devoted to the study of race and labor in 19th and 20th century U.S. history. TSA, then, is part of my history, the first time I was introduced in depth to the themes of inequality and the possibilities of social transformation. I have left behind many of the concepts and much of the vocabulary the course popularized. The Marxism that infused its curriculum is more interesting to me as an ideological artifact of the moment to be studied and contextualized than as a guide to understanding the world; and whatever appreciation I once had for the advocacy dimension that characterized the course I eventually jettisoned in graduate school. But the course inspired my fascination with the history of the Left, racial and economic inequality, and the power of social movements. If I didn't follow the path my younger self and TSA's originators had intended, TSA did lead me to ask questions and pursue paths of inquiry that have genuinely engaged and sustained me over almost half a century, have informed my teaching and research, and, I hope, have resulted in historical writing that others, in and beyond the academy, have found interesting, useful, or inspiring.

Notes

1. "Historians for Obama," History News Network (2007) at https://hnn.us/articles/44958.html.

2. My perspective on the American Communist Party and its history, which one Trotskyist historian has dismissively termed "*nouveau arriviste* traditionalist" [Brian D. Palmer, "Introduction: James P. Cannon and the 'Prince's Favors'" in Palmer, *James P. Cannon and the Emergence of Trotskyism in the United States, 1928-38* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 16] can be found in Eric Arnesen, "Civil Rights and the Cold War At Home: Post-War Activism, Anticommunism, and the Decline of the Left," *American Communist History* 11, No. 2 (Spring 2012): 5-44; Arnesen, "The Traditions of African-American Anticommunism," *Twentieth Century Communism* Issue 6 (2014): 124-148; "Faction Figure: James P. Cannon, Early Communist History, and Radical Faith," *Labour/Le Travail* No. 63 (May 2009): 243-258; and "Henry Wallace's Flawed Crusade," *Dissent* 60, No. 4 (October 2013): 93-97.

3. For a recent appreciative but not uncritical history of the American Left, see Michael Kazin, *American Dreamers: How the Left Changed a Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2011); for a polite critique of that book, see Eric Arnesen, "Ambiguous Legacies: Michael Kazin's *American Dreamers: How the Left Changed a Nation," Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 10, No. 1 (March 2013): 123-135.

4. Coming to Wesleyan in the Fall of 1976, I did not have any sense of the political environment that preceded my arrival. John Houston, a campus socialist and later an editor of *Politics and Education*, told a reporter that his class came to "a politically quiet campus" in 1973, but "by the time its members were graduated in 1977, there was a biweekly activist newspaper, a Socialist organizing committee, numerous issue-oriented political committees – and even a new class called 'Towards a Socialist America.'" Tim Redmond, "Campus Activists Find New Goals," *Hartford Courant*, December 17, 1978.

Eric Arnesen, Wesleyan Class of 1980, is the Teamsters Professor of Modern American Labor History at The George Washington University. He is the co-chair of the Washington History Seminar, a joint project of the American Historical Association and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and the author of *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics* (1991); *Brotherhoods of Color: Black Railroad Workers and the Struggle for Equality* (2001); and *Black Protest and the Great Migration: A Brief History with Documents* (2002). He is currently finishing a biography of the African American socialist, labor leader, and civil rights activist A. Philip Randolph.

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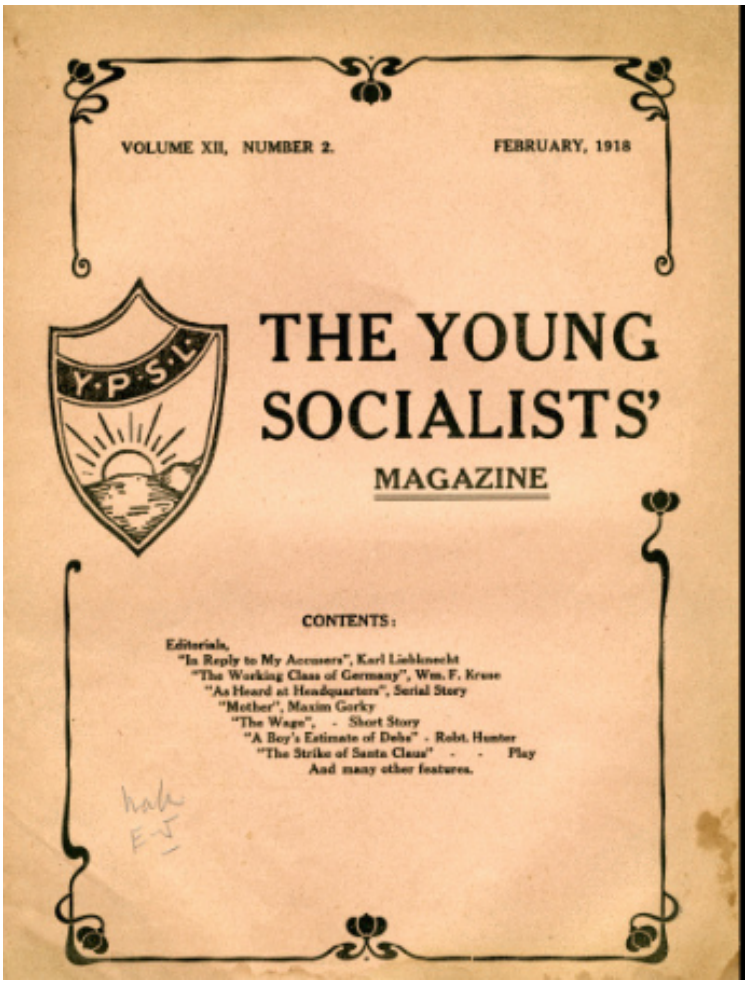
RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

A Radical Culture for Children of the Working Class: *The Young Socialists' Magazine, 1908-1920**

by Florence Tager



THE YOUNG SOCIALIST, VOL. XII, NUMBER 2. 1918

Education is traditionally seen as a contested site, a place where multiple views of the past, present, and future are explored and challenged. However, the reality is often quite different. Politics and power play a leading role in determining what is taught in our schools and which books are appropriate for children and young people to read.

As a sixties radical educator, a professor of education for 35 years, a teacher of seven-year-olds for ten years, and a mother and grandmother for over fifty years, I constantly ask myself and my students to examine the ways we, as educators, can open up and challenge the current climate in schools and how we can bring a critical perspective to the education of our young people. As we continue to live under a racialized capitalism with expanding inequality where books such as *Maus* and *The Bluest Eye* are banned in some states and where teaching about the history of slavery is wrongly redefined as "Critical Race Theory" and, therefore, banned in some schools, we need to rethink and reexamine our role as radical educators.

These are, however, not new questions or concerns for socialist/radical educators. During the Progressive Era at the turn of the 20th century, again during the Great Depression, and during the 1960s alternative school movement they created curricula that questioned the fundamentals of our political, economic, and educational system. Some of us may recall the impact of alternative institutions as *This Magazine is About Schools* published in Toronto in the1960s as well as the 1960s Freedom Schools of Mississippi, the curriculum of which is included in issue 40 of *Radical Teacher*.

In the 2016 presidential campaign Senator Bernie Sanders and House Representative Alexandria Ocasio Cortez continued in this tradition by raising questions concerning the exploitation of the working class, the increasing disparity of wealth, the lack of access to adequate healthcare particularly during the pandemic, and inadequate education for the poorest children, who often go to bed hungry. As radical teachers, these concerns are our concerns as well as the philosophy of Socialism. Within this context *The Young Socialist Magazine*, 1908-1920 emerges as a significant archival resource for activist educators who are rethinking curricula in a more radical, challenging, and inclusive way.

While some of the material in the magazine may seem dated, many of the stories and activities can be reconfigured or reimagined to promote critical thinking and a questioning attitude toward today's gross inequality, sexist rhetoric, and racialized economic/political system.

Sometimes pedantic, often instructive, and at times greatly inspiring, *The Young Socialist Magazine* provides an important model by including sophisticated reading materials by prominent literary figures and politicians such as Leo Tolstoy, Maxim Gorky, and Eugene Debs. In this way the magazine inspired and expanded the children's knowledge base while encouraging a critical examination of the political/economic system. Too often teachers today ignore or water down controversial issues. Seldom are the critical voices of prominent literary figures, historians, or political activists brought into the classroom. Too often only uncritical and distorted views of America's past and present are taught. *The Young Socialist* magazine challenges us as radical educators to bring big voices to young people. As Bernie Sanders argues, confronting today's fictions must be the basis of our teaching as radical educators.

From 1908 to 1920 members of the American Socialist Party published *The Young Socialists' Magazine,* the first working-class children's magazine in the United States. Designed to "make young rebels who would put an end to the capitalist system" (Kruse *YSM*, XI.1), the magazine encouraged a critical perspective in its young readers while also constructing a radical culture and politics for working-class children and youth. This article examines the ways in which *The Young Socialists' Magazine,* an alternative working-class children's publication, constructed a complex culture and politics, distinct from the dominant culture and appropriate for working-class children and socialist politics. Through an analysis of the materials in this magazine, we can examine how marginalized groups generated new categories of thought, new cultural forms, and new imagery for children. We can also understand how cultural issues can be tied to a politics committed to altering oppressive living conditions.

In my research for this article, I examined *The Young Socialists' Magazine* from its inception in 1908 until its demise in 1920. I also read extensively in the children's magazines of the period and on the history of anarchism and socialism. To present this research and analysis of the magazine, I divided the articles in *The Young Socialists' Magazine* into two categories: those materials that emphasized such cultural issues as history, values, and character development, and those articles and stories that overtly proselytized socialism as the only solution to working-class exploitation. I have done so because I am interested in understanding the ways in which a children's press links cultural identification with a political assessment of power and domination so that children learn not only their history but also how to challenge domination through political movements designed to change society. *The Young Socialists' Magazine* is a useful vehicle for developing this understanding because it represents a historical model of a community in struggle against cultural and political domination.

British-Canadian educator Harold Entwistle has pointed out the relevance of earlier working-class institutions to present social and cultural movements: "Although 19th-century working-class institutions may be obsolete and irrelevant to 20th century needs, it is not clear how disadvantaged groups could liberate themselves without similar if different socio-political institutions." He suggests that liberatory institutions adopt organizational forms and cultural ideas used by workers in the 19th-century, while updating content to be more appropriate to the history and culture of marginalized groups today. From this perspective, an analysis of *The Young Socialists' Magazine* could be relevant today. The magazine presents a model for challenging domination through the reconstruction and recovery of the historical and cultural experiences of marginalized groups. In addition, it provides a critique of domination and a vision that includes alternative possibilities for a social democracy.

The Young Socialists' Magazine began publication in 1908 and continued through 1920. This was a period of intense political activity and social change: there was mass immigration (20 million immigrants arrived between 1890 and 1920), the growth of slums in cities, and intense radical political activity. Women such as Margaret Sanger and Emma Goldman crisscrossed the country advocating free speech and birth control. Strikes broke out throughout the United States with major showdowns between labor and management at Homestead, Lawrence, and Paterson, and in the Rockefeller-owned mines of Colorado. It was a time when radicals like Big Bill Haywood, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, and Eugene Debs organized workers into the IWW or the Socialist Party. It was also a time when socialist mayors were elected in Milwaukee and Berkeley, and Eugene Debs received over a million votes as the Socialist Party candidate for president. The mainstream children's magazines and schools often ignored these events. The articles in *St. Nicholas,* one of the more popular children's magazines, emphasized the virtues of rural American family life and ignored the immigrant experience, as well as labor strikes.

When poverty or working-class people became the central focus of a story in a mainstream children's magazine, they were often romanticized. In these stories the strong and honorable rose above the hardships of their class through hard work, honesty, and thrift, or through the benevolence of a concerned boss. In one story in *St. Nicholas,* the benevolence of the boss was made apparent when a miner was rescued from the mine. The often distorted messages presented to Americans claimed that capitalist benefactors looked out for workers, and that if these workers were honest, diligent, and virtuous, they too could succeed and leave the working class.

These messages, which were also commonplace in other children's magazines of the period, were antithetical to the socialist ideal. Socialists argued that the "master class" was using the printing press with its books and papers for its own class interest and "feeding dope to the young, day and night, so as to keep them in subjugation by means of funny papers, baseball and other forms of ball, motion pictures and the tango craze …. The young have no time and no energy and no thought for vital things" (1915*,* VII.8).

If their children were to become involved in "vital things," socialists believed they needed to wage war against the imagery, ideology, and history found in mainstream texts or popular magazines by creating their own alternative structure consisting of Sunday Schools, children's magazines, and youth groups. In 1908 members of the Socialist Party began to publish a small 15–18-page newspaper called *The Little Socialist Magazine for Boys and Girls.* The magazine defined itself as an organ of the Socialist Sunday School movement and the Young People's Federation. Both groups were affiliated with the Socialist Party and were established in order to bring socialist ideas to the youth. The Socialistic Cooperative Publishing Company located in New York, published the magazine, and it was sold for 5 cents a copy or 50 cents for an annual subscription.

The purpose of this newly created magazine, though stated differently in different periods, was essentially to bring socialist politics to the consciousness of working-class children and to help them understand their class history and culture. In 1915 the magazine defined itself as "a magazine for the young socialist by the young socialist" (March, *YSM,*18). In 1917 editor William Kruse broadened this perspective when he defined the aims of a socialist education and implied they were the goals of the magazine. In his editorial he stated, "The first aim is to get the children to think for themselves, to subject everything that is presented to them in the light of reason, to refuse to believe anything merely because it is said to be so and to fearlessly question…. The second great aim is to get children to feel themselves a part of the great community of work folk that live and toil all over the world" (1917, *YSM,* XI.10).

The purpose of this newly created magazine, though stated differently in different periods, was essentially to bring socialist politics to the consciousness of working-class children and to help them understand their class history and culture.

Each issue of the magazine was composed of about 15-18 book-size pages and contained interesting graphics, pictures of party leaders, cartoons, photographs, essays, and stories. It was often sophisticated, intellectually challenging, and international in scope. Stories and poetry of well-known writers like Leo Tolstoy, Maxim Gorky, and Eugene Debs were a regular feature, while socialist theorists like Morris Hillquit simplified complicated social and political ideas for the children.

Though *The Little Socialist Magazine for Boys and Girls* was geared to the younger reader, it included a column for older students entitled "For Our High School Reader" that featured excerpts from novels such as *Call of the Wild* by Jack London and *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair. Photographs or paintings were used to talk about moral values and the meaning of socialism followed by discussions of issues such as laziness or drunkenness. Editorial pages addressed current political issues like Roosevelt's imperialist policies. The stories in the magazine covered a wide range of subjects and were often fanciful morality tales or realistic fiction. The magazine's monthly columns reported on the activities of Socialist Sunday Schools in the United States and Europe. Fred Kraft's column "A History of Our Country for Boys and Girls" reinterpreted American history from a socialist perspective. Articles focused on the daily lives of the settlers rather than on wars or presidents and were critical of the government. In the back pages of the magazine, progressive reading material for both adults and children was advertised.

As the targeted readership of the magazine changed, the format also shifted. In June 1911, when the magazine became known as *The Young Socialists' Magazine* and the material became oriented toward an older audience, the magazine began to include more information on the Young People's Socialist League (the youth group was the arm of the Socialist Party). A new page entitled ''Your Own Page" provided space where children could publish their original

essays and stories. In January 1918, when the magazine became the organ of the Young People's Socialist League, the number of articles on movement activities and political theory increased, although the column entitled 'The Little Comrade" was retained for the younger readers.

The magazine reached many children. In the early years the readers of the magazine were encouraged to show the magazine to their friends and were told they would receive "a handsome storybook" when they sent in the names of ten new yearly subscribers. In addition, the magazine was part of the curriculum of over 100 English-speaking Socialist Sunday Schools that existed in over 64 cities of the United States from 1900 to 1920 (Teitelbaum 547, 554), reaching over 2,000 children in these schools including foreign language schools (Patterson 25). By 1915 the magazine was available to a substantial number of youth in the Young Socialist League, and in 1918 its editor, William Kruse, asserted that the magazine was reaching over 5,000 young people (Editorial, 49).

The editors of *The Young Socialists' Magazine* took seriously the task of creating an alternative worldview for children. They argued that socialism not only transformed economic power from a system based on private property to one on state ownership but also included an ideological construct and world view that could reshape the character of young children. The intention was to create a "new person," one who embraced communal values, heroism, selflessness, and a genuine concern for the fate of working people and worked for the socialist transformation of society.

In order to create this "new person," the magazine included two different types of materials: those that fostered identification with working-class culture and those that explicitly advocated socialism. Materials that emphasized cultural identification focused on areas such as the history of working people, the contributions of workers to society's daily life, and character development. More political materials proselytized socialism as the only solution to working-class exploitation. Although the distinction between the cultural and political materials of the magazine is not entirely clear-cut, it provides a useful framework for examining the magazine's form and content and for understanding the ways in which children's material can tie together cultural and political issues.

Unlike mainstream children's publications, which advocated escape from working-class life through upward mobility, *The Young Socialists' Magazine* promoted identification with the working class through stories, poems, and articles that valued work and emphasized working-class history and culture. In these materials, working-class culture was associated with workers' activities in and around the workplace, the home, and the community. Working people were presented as having a unique history and a distinct relationship to other social classes. It was believed that through cultural articles the magazine could create a common set of values and experiences that would help children identify with the working class as distinct from other classes whose ideas and interests were often different from and in opposition to their own. The magazine constructed working-class culture out of historical experiences of working people and offered stories or articles that never appeared in mainstream magazines. Through short stories, parables, poetry, songs, illustrations, and historical pieces, the magazine persuaded children of the value and importance of their class history and background. It created a "world view" that could guide socialist children as they grew and related to the surrounding world.

A central theme of these cultural materials was the dignity of work and of the worker. Manual labor was not presented as alienating or degrading; on the contrary, manual laborers were applauded for their contributions to furthering the progress of society. Work that was frequently invisible to the children of an industrial society was made visible through the stories in the magazine. Some stories highlighted simple products that children used in their daily life, describing the labor required to produce them. For example, one article emphasized the labor involved in producing a bar of chocolate and traced the history of the chocolate bar from its beginnings on a cocoa tree in the Caribbean. This essay focused on the hard work required to pick the beans, ship the beans, and transform them into the candy bar that children bought at the corner store (Wainwright, 25-27). In a parable, "The Story the Needle Told," a needle talks to a thread about how she was manufactured, polished, and used until she arrived at her present sewing machine. The thread compliments the needle, "And you are getting lovelier every day through the work you are doing here" (1912, *YSM*, V.9).

At the same time, articles dealing with manual labor often emphasize that, despite enormous contributions, workers remain exploited, and their bosses become rich off their hard labor. In a series on international labor, the activities of longshoremen are described, and the owners of the steamship lines criticized. The author, in talking about the bosses, states, "Why, they even say they work harder than the longshoremen and yet if you look at their hands and their faces you will notice that they are white and clean. The longshoremen's look like alligator skin, all crusty and cracked" (1910, *LSM,* II.6). Another article on shipbuilders asks children to look at the huge ships these men had built and realize the significance of their work when they think about how these ships carry people, machinery, and coal: "they never stop to think of all these wonderful things they see made by the men in overalls, the sturdy ship builders and other mechanics who swing the heavy sledgehammers all day and who get very little pay for building such wonders" (1909, *LSM*, II.3). In these articles, workers are neither daring nor exotic, but productive, hard-working people who do not receive a just reward for their labor.

Similar work themes were the focus of the fiction and folktales in *The Young Socialists' Magazine.* In "The Triumph of Labor," Maxim Gorky describes the perseverance, heroism, and exploitation of the laboring man when one of the laborers who had worked his way through the side of the mountain died before the project was completed (1914, *YSM*, VII.5). In another piece of realistic fiction, about a dying young girl, Fred Powers describes the extreme suffering of the poor. He makes it clear that life in this bleak setting is a result of the uncaring employers. When the hod carrier's daughter is dying, he cannot stay home to comfort her for fear of losing his job; he is forced to come home after

she has passed away. The story closes with the following statement: "Her father and mother said they will tell everyone to change the world so that no people need be so poor and suffer so much" (1909, *LSM*, II.6). In "The Working Girl and the Judge," one of the few stories in which the heroine is a female worker, a young girl loses her finger because of a faulty machine. The court refuses to award her compensation; the story ends with an iconoclastic comment: "And the worst of it all is that God does not punish the rich man nor help the poor." This story, with atheistic overtones, implies that the poor must struggle to secure justice for themselves" (1910, *LSM*, III.13). Sometimes religious symbolism is used to highlight specific working-class issues. In the parable, "The Passing of Judas," the author describes a scab who crossed the picket line as Judas and the working class as Christ. The story states, "And if he was Judas, the Christ he sold for thirty pieces of silver was the cause of the working class" (1914, *YSM*, VII.7).

The French sculptor Constantine Meunier and French painter Jean-Francois Millet are also praised: Meunier for capturing the dignity of labor, and Millet for highlighting the daily life and work of ordinary peasants. The cover story of one issue honors Meunier because his sculptures (The Miners, The Sowers, and The Fishermen) illustrate the dignity of the worker. Meunier is valued as a working-class artist who "finally came to think and see all things in terms of labor" (1918, *YSM,* XII. 2-4).

In the middle years of *The Young Socialists' Magazine* poetry was used to illustrate the life of the working poor. The front page of each edition had a drawing of a worker and a poem about work. "Slaves of the North" compares the life of a worker to that of a slave. In ''The Worker," Berton Braley states,

I have broken my hands on your granite

I have broken my strength on your steel

I have sweated for your pleasure . . .

And what is the way you have paid me?

You masters and drivers of men.

How to transform working-class life rather than how to make it out of the working class is also featured. Characters who attempt to rise out of the class are portrayed as class traitors who seek to advance their own interests at the expense of their fellow workers while vivid reports of workers' struggles encouraged working-class identification in young readers. A series of articles on the history of labor include material on strikes won and lost and the fight for the eight-hour day.

An article on the Ludlow Massacre (1914), as the strike in Colorado came to be known, reports from the workers' perspective the murder of striking workers in Rockefeller-owned mines. The article, written by a Senator from the state of Colorado, is radically different from reports presented in the mainstream press because it describes the violence of the bosses and the suppression of the workers by the economic interests of the country and concludes by saying, "All evidence shows the gunmen and mine guards in the pay of the operators with headquarters in Wall Street" (1914, Robinson VII, 3). While the article at times seems rhetorical, it critically dissects the perspective of mainstream news that blamed the workers for the troubles in the mines. An article on the Lawrence Strike extolled the virtues of class solidarity by describing how the children of the Lawrence strikes were housed, fed, and cared for by workers in other cities when their parents were out on strike. The workers were "infused with a boundless faith in the love and comradeship of the working class" (1912, *YSM*, V.13). This series of articles presented positive perspectives on working-class solidarity and strike activities. Class identification was also reinforced through the creation of new holidays and the revitalization of traditional working-class holidays. The holiday of May Day received a huge spread on the front page of the magazine. In the May 1910 edition, an article about May Day introduced the holiday to the children by saying, "Many of you say you never heard of the holiday and that schools are not closed on that day. True. Because the working people do not make official holidays" (1910, *LSM,* III.10).

A new holiday, Children's Day, was created to spread the spirit of socialism in youth and replace Christmas. On Children's Day movement leaders spoke directly to children in the Socialist Sunday schools and celebrated the day with cakes, candles, dancing, and songs. The Socialist Party newspaper also published a children's edition in honor of the day. Other articles in the magazine debunked patriotism and poked fun at traditional American holidays like July 4. These articles questioned America's commitment to freedom and liberty on a day when it was shooting and arresting striking workers.

Fred Kraft in his column ''The History of Our Country for Boys and Girls" demystified historical heroes: ''The more we study history the so-called great patriots and statesmen always become great either by deception, brutality, or some evil propensity." Kraft described President Washington as someone who was not the hero that he had been made out to be, particularly in his relationship to Native Americans: "Sly and tricky as any other white man he saw his opportunity to gain their friendship" (1910, *LSM*, III.5). On the other hand, John Brown, who was often portrayed as a madman in mainstream texts, was recreated as a hero who was a genuine friend of the Black man. The installments of Kraft's revision of American history spanned the pre-Revolutionary War period through Reconstruction. While these revisions sometimes seem simplistic, they always provided a critical vantage point from which to examine traditional historical writing.

Historical data was also featured in a monthly column of important dates to remember. In the column "December Events," John Brown's birthday, William Lloyd Garrison's birthday, and the day the Czar was assassinated were highlighted (1909, *LSM,* II.2), while the May events included the uprising of workers in Barcelona, Spain, and Robert Owen's birthday (1910, *LSM*, III.13). These columns emphasized dates, people, and events significant to working people but omitted from traditional school texts.

Another type of cultural article found in *The Young Socialists' Magazine* sought to develop the character and personality traits appropriate to the new individual who

would transform society. These articles demonstrated a socialist awareness that the transformation and creation of a new social order required more than a restructuring of economic and political power relationships:

> Let us not forget: Socialism is not merely the adoption of a system of government, based on common ownership of the means of production and distribution of the necessities of life. Political socialism, in order to be a success, must be preceded by psychological socialism. In other words, the human family must learn to think socially instead ofindividually as it now does (1917, *YSM*, XI.8).

While these socialists spoke of psychological socialism, the language of their discourse remained rooted in cognitive and rational terms and ignored the emotional and irrational dimensions of the subconscious. Their use of the terms "personality," "psychology," and "character" reflected a model of character training common to textbooks of the late nineteenth-century. In these books, personality and character traits were believed to be consciously developed through controlling the child's environment and finding role models that helped children emulate desired behaviors. Socialists labeled these traits "psychological," when they really reflected a cultural orientation concerned with shaping values and beliefs through role models and value clarification.

Reading biographies of movement heroes and heroines, artists, and historical figures was the most popular method used by *The Young Socialists' Magazine* to generate role models for its young readers. These biographies illustrated examples of industriousness, idealism, and positive action. For example, a biography of the sculptor Rodin focused on Rodin as a rebel and hard worker. The article said to "every young socialist" that "nothing will take the place of persevering in study and understanding" (1918, Kruse, *YSM,* XII.2). A short biography of John Brown described his rebel spirit and indomitable courage: "He was as firm as a rock in his convictions and his principles, and his tactics were in complete accord with his innermost nature" (1917, Baginsky).

Role models were also presented through the magazine's fiction and in a column for younger readers entitled "Little Comrade," a series of folktales, advocating values appropriate to the new world view. "The Selfish Little Woodpecker" emphasized the importance of communal efforts over individual accumulation. It ended with the moral that those who do not work shall not share in the products of labor (1919, *YSM,* XIII.9). In another parable, a king and a bootblack argue over who would enter heaven first. In the end the bootblack entered first because he was judged to have sacrificed the most in the face of great suffering for the new society (1910, Ruseter).

The story, "The Only Hero," pointed out that character formation was a function of social environment. In this story, the young "fighter hero" tried to find a place for his aggressive instincts in a world where aggression was obsolete. Having found no men interested in a hero, he searched for a woman, claiming that all women love heroes. However, in the new society, the women asked him what he could do or make rather than how strong he was. He replied that he could not do or make anything, but only fight wars. The women answered that since there were no more wars and everyone lived in peace and harmony, there was no need for a hero, implying that being a hero was anachronistic. The story showed how a changed social order might induce children to grow up without aggressive, combative, and destructive traits. The story ends by saying, ''You are the only hero. Go to the museum with the other specimens" (1917, *YSM,* XI. 4-5). The stories demonstrated those traits needed to bring about the new society such as rebelliousness, diligence, hard work, and leadership, as well as those traits that would ensure the continued existence of a cooperative commonwealth based on cooperation, communal activity, and a sense of social justice.

In addition to providing role models, the magazine published lists of books whose main characters exhibited the values prized by the socialists and that countered the "pernicious influence" of mainstream texts whose heroes and heroines embodied competitive and aggressive individualism. Letters of praise from parents were also published. One letter stated, "I am glad I subscribe to *The Little Socialist Magazine.* It is instructive for young and old, and I hope it will help to kill the poisonous American literature for young folk" (1915, *YSM*, II.5).

The magazine also included articles that specifically linked class pride to socialist political activity. Underlying the political articles was a set of specific principles: that working-class liberation would come through socialism; that poverty was the result of the organization of work rather than a lack of individual initiative or skill; that workers must develop a healthy respect for the dignity of labor and the laboring classes; that workers must condemn those who leave their class rather than work for its liberation; and, most significantly, that capitalism created the poverty and social injustice that only socialism could transform. In these articles, socialism was advocated as the only way to alter the exploitative conditions of work in America. Overtly political, they utilized socialist code words and phrases like "cooperative commonwealth," "industrial democracy," "exploitation," "sharing," and "worker control" to counter the code words and phrases of the capitalist press, which included "pulling oneself up by the bootstraps," "individuality," "thrift," and "working hard to get ahead."

One technique for bringing socialist ideals to children was to imbue fables, fairy tales, and allegories with socialist doctrine. In the allegory "Two Steamers," a capitalist and socialist steamship were described. Children were directed, "When you read the story and think about it, you must tell your mother and father which ship you think would be best for most people to travel in" (1915, Montenore, *YSM*, IX.5). The capitalist ship was described as being made up of three classes. In the first class, there was room for 200 people, but only 68 passengers were accommodated. Meanwhile in the third class, over 400 people were forced to live in a space designed for 200. Illness and poor work conditions characterized the third-class section. In contrast, the owners of the socialist ship planned how to feed and accommodate a thousand people in a single class where no one had more than he needed. Here all the passengers were asked to make their own beds and help with tasks on the ship so that

everyone could enjoy the trip equally. The steamship allegory depicted socialism as the more appealing ship, showing a sharp distinction between the capitalist and socialist ways of life.

Another more complex allegory with a socialist message was presented in "The Common Man" by Walter Crane. In this story, donkeys roamed freely until two-legged men brought them hay and forced them to carry a load in return for some hay. As more men came into the area, the donkeys were forced to carry goods long distances, becoming "beasts of burden." When donkeys were forced to run in a cart race, they began to feel a return of their old freedoms. Quickly they rushed forward to overthrow their masters and refused to be subjugated again. An addendum explicitly explained the socialist message of the story: "If one should read 'natural man', or 'workers' for donkey, 'land monopolist' for the first master, 'capitalist' for the second, we can easily find the details to fit 'commercial competition', 'the industrial system', the relationship of labor to employer, etc. into this homey fable" (1919, *YSM*, XIII.15). Through the use of such allegories, *The Young Socialists' Magazine* presented to its young readers not only the terminology and ideas involved in capitalist exploitation but also complex ideas such as the rise of capitalism and the subjugation of the working class.

Dialogues between father and son attempted to foster socialist views and action in children. In "Inquisitive Tommy" by Ida Crouch Hazlett, a father and son discuss the fact that "Banker White" got the money to buy his beautiful new car by exploiting workers. The boy's father told him that the workers' plight could not be changed until there was socialism. The child responded, "Well, papa, I hope we will get socialism then," and was told by his father, "Then we must tell everyone to be a socialist." "Papa, I am going to do that," promised the son (1919, *YSM,* XII.4).

The Young Socialists' Magazine made socialist ideology more powerful to its readers by linking theory to movement activities. A column in the magazine explained ongoing socialist activities, international socialist events, and the activities of children in the Socialist Sunday Schools or in the Young People's Socialist League. Children were asked to participate in socialist projects like sending money or letters to jailed comrades. The pictures next to one article defined a comrade's responsibilities to the movement. It showed a man in jail; the heading underneath the picture stated, "Remember! We are in for you." The statement underneath the second picture of a forlorn woman behind bars is "While you are out for us" (1919, *YSM*, XIII. 4). Often, prominent leaders like Eugene Debs and Morris Hillquit addressed the children in a monthly magazine column. In this way, ideas were actively connected to an ongoing movement, and children were given the feeling that they were part of a larger sociopolitical community.

While *The Young Socialists' Magazine* was far-reaching in its linkage between working-class cultural identification and explicit socialist political theory and action, its treatment of issues such as racism and sexism was limited. Though the pages of *The Young Socialists' Magazine* made some attempt to confront the racism of the dominant society and to decry mistreatment of African Americans and Native Americans, these attempts were minimal. Sometimes issues of Jim Crowism, slavery, prejudice, and the annihilation of Native Americans were discussed. Nevertheless, even in these discussions, the racism of the dominant society crept in through stereotypes of the stories' main characters.

"Black Rosie," which appeared in the June 1912 issue, demonstrated this limitation. Rosie, a young Black girl, was ostracized by white children in her neighborhood. She was befriended by a tough white girl who ultimately helped her win the friendship of the other whites in the community. While this story encouraged all races to play together, the details reinforced a number of racial stereotypes. Rosie was described as having short woolly hair and teeth that contrasted with her dark skin, a portrayal that remained within the bounds of racist stereotyping. In another section, Rosie's mother, a former slave, decried the horrors of slavery, saying, ''You dear children, who look at me in wonder, can hardly understand today how such terrible things could have been true." At the same time the story took pains to point out that some whites were good masters and kept slaves only because everyone else did so. We are told that Rosie's mother refused to leave her wonderful mistress: "I don't want to be free. Let me stay with you!" In this way the story perpetuated the stereotype of the loyal Black "Mammy," faithful to her benevolent owner (1912, Meta Stern, *YSM*, V. 7).

In an article on "The Fate of the Indians" Charles Sprague calls on the reader to recognize their unhappy fate. Yet there was no active organizing by these socialists on behalf of the Indians. In fact, there seemed to be a fatalism about the inevitability of their demise and an acknowledgment and acceptance of this unjust situation (1910, *LSM,* III. 9).

Only occasionally did the magazine focus on the contributions of women. In the poem "Bread and Roses" by James Oppenheimer, a strong statement was made about the women involved in the Lawrence strike:

As we come marching, marching, marching

We bring the Greater Days

The rising of the women means

The rising of the race.

(1914. *YSM*, VII.1)

A dialogue entitled "Mother Goes to Work" offers a feminist analysis of housework: a young boy describes how he gets up at 5:30 to go to work and eats the breakfast his mother had prepared for him. When he and his father return from work, his mother fixes them dinner and tea, cleans up, and then continues with her sewing. Asked about his mother's wages, the boy replies, "She don't do no work" (1912, *YSM,* V.4). In this dialogue, the boy's statement was examined and the exploitation of women in the home made visible. However, materials such as this were the exception. In general, there were few stories with women as heroines and few articles about women leaders. The magazine remained geared to the white working-class male.

Not only did *The Young Socialists' Magazine* exhibit a limited understanding of racial and sexual oppression but also it offered only a limited model for developing an

alternative, oppositional culture. The magazine focused only on the rational aspects of consciousness and personality formation, ignoring individual creativity and the psychosexual basis of personality development. In this respect it differed from anarchist publications of the period, in which concepts of freedom, self-exploration, and creativity in education became a significant part of the political and intellectual orientation. Rather than exploring new forms of creativity in poetry and fiction, the material in *The Young Socialists' Magazine* remained conventional in form if radical in content. Today the *YSM* literature would be termed socialist-realist and would be distinguished from the experimental poetry or stream-of-consciousness writing that characterized anarchist and alternative magazines of the period.

In addition, while family life and schooling were critically examined and infused with socialist content, the traditional structure of these institutions was not questioned as they were in anarchist publications devoted to free love and libertarian schooling. In this sense, *The Young Socialists' Magazine* remained conventional.

In spite of its limitations, *The Young Socialists' Magazine* makes a significant contribution to the history of education and the teaching of socialism. It remains one of the few children's publications that challenged the power and domination of the elite classes by creating an alternative voice for the marginalized poor. Articles and stories captivated the children's imagination and promoted their identification with working-class culture, history, and politics.

The Young Socialist Magazine, 1908 -1920, provides numerous examples of intellectually and politically challenging curricula that confront domination and question competition through the recovery and telling of the historical experiences of the working class, through alternative visions of how we might all live together, as well as through the voices of prominent literary and political figures of the day, using stories, songs, historical analysis, poetry, illustrations, and texts by famous political and literary figures of the day, *The Young Socialist Magazine* provides a pungent critique of the society of its time and a positive approach to its transformation.

Shouldn't our children learn about workers that produce the sweaters they wear or about the child migrants forced to work in our factories, including the meat processing plants, for extremely low wages and under dangerous conditions. Stories in *The Young Socialist Magazine* revealed the underbelly of society and allowed children to explore issues usually omitted in children's reading materials. Through its articles, stories, songs, artwork, and poetry, the magazine encouraged young people to fight injustices and embrace a socialist democracy. For all of these reasons, *The Young Socialist Magazine* remains an important resource to encourage generating alternative/radical teaching materials for today's youth.

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Florence Tager is a professor emerita of Medgar Evers College, CUNY, where she worked for thirty-five years. Her expertise is in the history and philosophy of education and her research has focused on alternative educational experiences for children. She has written articles on Anarchist and Socialist education experiences and she has done research on Summerhill and kibbutz education. Her concern has always been on ways to encourage children and young people to think outside the conventional ideology in order to reimagine a more equal and just society, a society which they will struggle to bring to fruition!

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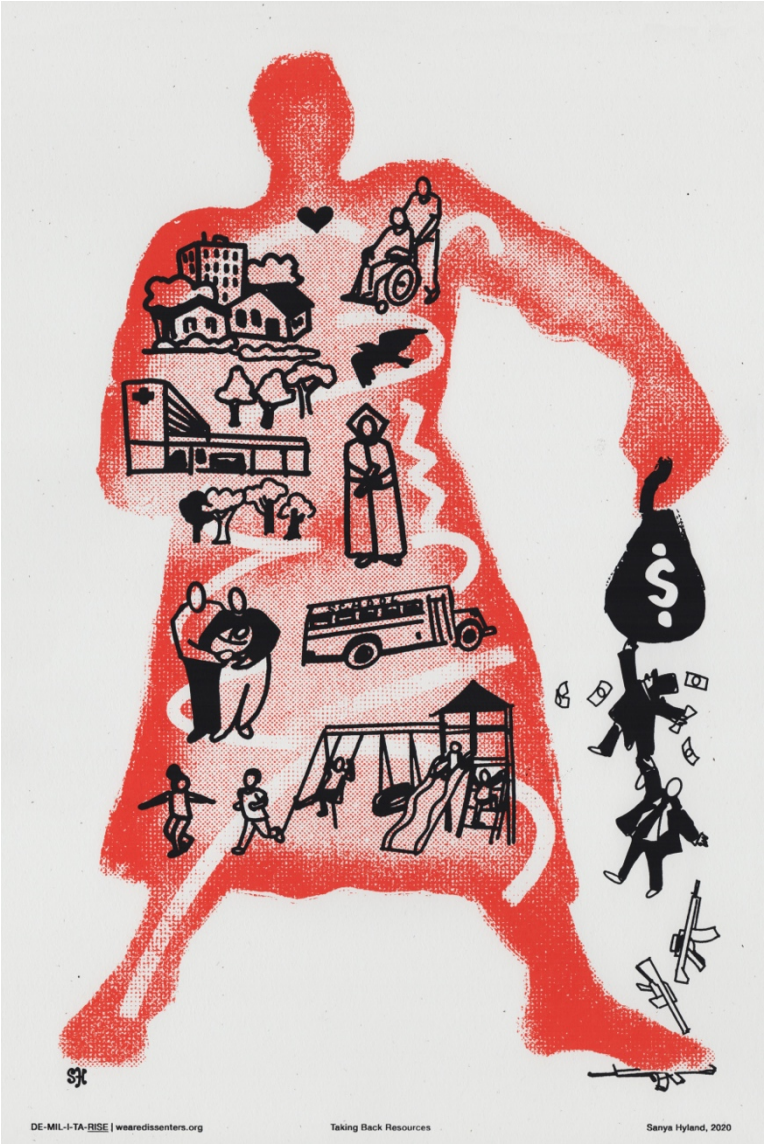
RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Red Ed: Teaching Toward a New Internationalism

by Stephen Paur



TAKING BACK RESOURCES BY SANYA HYLANDBY VIA JUSTSEEDS.ORG

1. Trolling the Teacher

"Why do you have to teach *communism* in your *English* class?"

It was a loaded question. I could tell from the tone that its motive was something other than genuine curiosity. It was, rather, the kind of antagonistic question most commonly encountered on Twitter threads and Reddit forums: the kind of question preferred by so-called "trolls" and usually posed to strangers, the goal of which is to provoke irritation or anger, not to initiate a polite exchange of ideas.

Often, the best way to respond to such questions is to laugh them off. So, I kept erasing the whiteboard, my back still turned, as it was when the student asked his question — not my own student, I should say, but a student in the class after mine who'd arrived as I was packing up — and chuckled in response, as if the student was making a joke, parodying a troll. It probably sounded a little forced, but I did my best.

It wasn't that I was unwilling to engage this student in a lively debate about radical pedagogy or critical language awareness, some principles of which I had been trying to explain and explore that morning with my international students in our second-language college composition course — principles which do, in fact, have more than a few roots in critical social theories like Marxism. I just figured that, since he wasn't my own student, and since his own class would be starting soon, the best option was, in this particular case, to retreat as swiftly and gracefully as possible.

As I walked out (muttering something to myself under my breath about "picking my battles"), I heard one of this student's classmates turn to him and say, "Huh? What are you talking about?" Now that was a fair question. Indeed, my whiteboard scribbles (which I'll describe in more detail below) had included neither the words "communism" nor "Marx." I only caught the beginning of the student's response before I was out the door: "Oh, you know, universities these days…"

2. Gagging the Teacher

It's not hard to guess at probable endings to that sentence. Especially given the recent hand-wringing over so-called "critical race theory" in K-12 schools, or charges of ideological stridency on college campuses, it's easy to imagine this student rehearsing some version of the tired complaint that education has become "too politicized" or "too woke," and that teachers are no longer neutral, objective dispensers of apolitical knowledge — as if we ever were (see Berlin; Graff) — as much as socialist (or worse: commie!) ideologues who weaponize teaching by spewing propaganda to captive audiences and punishing dissidents with Ds and Fs.

As the Idaho Freedom Foundation, a conservative think tank, recently put it: "Instead of creating a more educated populace, social justice universities are producing a group of degree-holding elitists who blindly believe in a radical Marxist worldview because the system never nurtured their minds enough to foster critical thinking. This transformative agenda at Idaho universities must be stopped" (Yenor).

How are radical teachers to respond to such charges?

We might point out that a *genuinely* radical Marxist worldview is actually quite hostile to the whole idea of having "elitists" in the first place.

We might simply shrug off the charges and proceed with our work, buoyed by the thought that, if the powers that be really do feel as threatened as they claim to, we must be doing something right.

Or we might point out that America's classrooms are, in fact, subject to censorship and the stifling of critical analysis of the status quo, but not quite in the way the Right would have us believe. Indeed, an August 2022 press release from PEN America titled "Educational Gag Order Proposals Spike by 250% in 2022" draws attention to the fact that, "consistent with last year's trends, this year's educational gag order bills have been driven overwhelmingly by Republican legislators. One bill out of the 137 introduced this year had a Democratic legislative sponsor."

One such gag order, in particular, merits further discussion here, as it echoes the sentiment voiced by the student above. In June 2022, the Arizona House of Representatives posted this press release: "New Law Sponsored by Representative Quang Nguyen Creates Anti-Communist Civics Education for Arizona High School Students."

The self-congratulatory title (Nguyen is a Republican) turns out to be a bit misleading, since the new law doesn't promote "anti-communist" education in any explicit way. The actual text of Arizona House Bill 2008 only mandates "a comparative discussion of the political ideologies, such as communism and totalitarianism, that conflict with the principles of freedom and democracy that are essential to the founding principles of the United States." (Don't ask me what to make of the tautology there: principles that are essential to principles?)

Still, the language is clearly asking us (1) to automatically equate communism and totalitarianism, implying that communism couldn't possibly be anything else, and (2) to automatically consider anything different from the US system to be bad — a perversion of freedom, democracy, etc. — simply by virtue of that difference. It's your run-of-the-mill American exceptionalism, in other words.

Read against the grain, however, there's nothing about the language in this law that actually prohibits high school teachers from advocating socialist, communist, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist principles, such as worker control over production, the self-emancipation of oppressed groups, organized resistance to exploitation and appropriation, the precedence of people over profit, and the defense of human flourishing and creativity. Such values do, after all, conflict with many of the US political economic system's founding (and reigning) principles. And this law creates new openings — new motives, even — to foreground those discrepancies (possibly with the help of something like

the Pew Research report on American attitudes toward socialism and capitalism; see "In Their Own Words").

3. Goading the Teacher

At least, it did for me. As a college teacher in the state, Arizona's new law isn't aimed at me. But the student's criticism was, and if his intention was to provoke a response, he succeeded. After a little soul-searching, I decided that I *should*, in fact, be teaching communism in a more explicit, direct way, if by "communists" we mean "those who attempt to use their resources for their own purposes, thus interfering with the right to rob and to exploit, the central doctrine of [US] foreign policy" (Chomsky 10).

So, I decided to tweak my syllabus in a way that leaned into the commie charge: I added an in-class screening of the 2005 film *Good Night, and Good Luck*, a dramatization of CBS newscaster Edward R. Murrow's journalistic fight against Senator Joseph McCarthy during the 1950s "Red Scare." (My students were in the middle of writing, recording, and editing their own podcasts, and I figured some historical context for this new media technology would be helpful.)

In the movie, Murrow and his producers refuse to kowtow either to military pressures or to their corporate sponsors, opting instead to call out McCarthy and his enablers for their anti-communist paranoia, whatever the risk to reputation or ratings.

There was one scene, in particular, after which I pressed the pause button so my students and I could unpack what transpired. It's a tense exchange between Murrow and his boss, news director Sig Mickelson. In the scene, they debate the merits of airing a segment on Milo Radulovich, an Air Force officer who was discharged after finding himself in McCarthy's crosshairs. The exchange went like this:

Mickelson: "I don't think you can call *this* a neutral piece."

Murrow: "Well, the other side's been represented rather well for the last couple of years…"

Mickelson: "You want to forego the standards you've stuck to for fifteen years? Both sides, no commentary?"

Murrow: "We *all* editorialize [. . .] I've searched my conscience, and I can't for the life of me find *any* justification for this. And I simply cannot accept that there are, on every story, two equal and logical sides to an argument. Call it editorializing if you like."

Mickelson: "Well, it *is* editorializing, Ed…"

Murrow: "They're going to have equal time to defend themselves."

The exchange allowed my students and me to discuss just what is meant by things like "bias," "objectivity," and "false equivalence," and whether it's true what Murrow says in this scene: "We all editorialize." Many of them agreed that complete neutrality just isn't possible — every utterance, every text, is motivated by certain needs and interests, which gives everything a certain slant. (Which doesn't, of course, mean that a given point of view, however limited, can't be legitimate or credible.)

In a well-known essay called "Technology and Ideology: The Case of the Telegraph," media critic James W. Carey suggested that monopoly capitalism was partially responsible for creating the semblance of apolitical news. News-as-commodity has to be readily exportable to wildly different markets, he argued, and thus emptied of any overtly political content that might inhibit rapid uptake by politically diverse audiences (162).

It's a truism for rhetoric and writing teachers that all discourse is situated, motivated, contingent, and therefore partial (in both senses: biased, and incomplete). Too often, however, such insights are themselves presented as politically neutral. The next logical step — one too rarely taken — would be to say that the modern conception of "objectivity" is itself a capitalist invention.

4. Language and Power

What, then, might alternative, anti-capitalist, and/or socialist conceptions of knowledge look like? One thing is clear: they wouldn't all be expressed in English.

Indeed, any vaguely socialist teaching must embrace a radical, dialectical internationalism, and this means rejecting a stubbornly parochial monolingualism in favor of a radically internationalist multilingualism (see Horner).

Socialism has always been internationalist, as Terry Eagleton points out: "If a socialist nation failed to win international support in a world where production was too specialized and divided among different nations, it would be unable to draw upon the global resources needed to abolish scarcity. The productive wealth of a single nation was unlikely to be enough" (16-17). But if socialism's internationalist aspirations have never been fully realized in practice, its multilingual aspirations have been even less so (Cameron). Indeed, multilingualism has too often been co-opted by private interests whose goal is global domination, not global equality or global justice.

To help my L2 writing students identify, understand, and critically analyze monolingual ideology, I screened a Coca-Cola commercial that aired during the 2014 Super Bowl in which a group of young American bilingual women sing "America the Beautiful," alternating between seven different languages. I followed it up with an ABC News segment about the racist backlash on Twitter to this Coke commercial by adherents of English-only ideology.

My students, of course, were quick to align themselves with the messaging of the Coke commercial, understandably rolling their eyes at the outraged Twitterers. Nor did they need my help to identify the exclusionary interests[1] served by the English-only attitudes evident in tweets like "Never buying coke again… America The Beautiful in a language other than English is just wrong" [sic], which included the hashtag "#boycottcoke." One student, from Nigeria, even drew a parallel between English-only attitudes and the F1 visa restrictions that prevent international students from working off-campus, rules which are "just about preventing American workers from facing competition from non-Americans," he said, and which make international students

more vulnerable to workplace mistreatment since they have fewer employment alternatives.

That was indeed a good example of one of the points I'd hoped to make: that linguistic prejudice and discrimination, whether interpersonal or institutional, are not just about being mean for the sake of being mean. Often, they're part of an ideological strategy that — like racism, sexism, and other forms of domination — is part of the global class struggle, in which ruling elites rely on the coding of out-groups as somehow "deficient," "sub-standard," or "inferior" — labels sometimes used to describe the language practices of my international students — and thus less valuable, more exploitable.

But I wanted to push them further, to read against the grain, to identify some of the hidden contradictions in these media texts — the mismatches, that is, between explicit and latent messaging, intended and unintended meanings.

For instance, obnoxious and intolerant as the featured tweets might be, I said, do two whole tweets really count as a "national firestorm," as the newscasters had characterized the backlash? And, if not, why might the newscasters go out of their way to exaggerate the backlash? Whose interests were served by doing so?

"Sensationalism," one student suggested. "They're a news outlet, but also a business. To sell ads, they have to get your attention. They have to exaggerate."

Maybe they think they're following in Edward R. Murrow's footsteps, another student offered: "You know, taking on the forces of prejudice, standing up for what's right. Something like that."

"Ah, interesting," I said. "Wait a minute, though, aren't they a news outlet? Aren't they supposed to be objective? But it sounds like you're saying they have a point of view that comes across…"

"Oh, they're definitely on Coke's side." And indeed, the students marshaled plenty of evidence to support this reading, such as ABC's inclusion of behind-the-scenes interviews with some of the young singers — sympathetic portrayals that contrasted sharply with the impersonal belligerence of the tweets. "We just have different backgrounds, and that's okay. We're all Americans, and we can come together," one of the singers says.

Our discussion took an unexpected swerve, however, when a student wondered if the tweets were even authentic.

"That '#boycottcoke' part got me thinking," she said, "what if the whole Twitter backlash thing was a conspiracy by Pepsi? You know, criticizing the commercial's message just to get people to stop drinking Coke, their main competitor?"

"I mean, I guess that's not impossible," I said, stroking my chin a bit too elaborately. "But, if that's the case, are you saying these undercover Pepsi users on Twitter are only spouting this xenophobic, English-only stuff because it might help them financially? Not because they actually believe it?"

"Exactly," she said.

"Hm, okay," I said. "Let's flip that back onto Coke, then. What about the original commercial? Are you saying Coke might not necessarily believe its own messaging, either? That it might not actually be as inclusive and multicultural as it's claiming to be with this commercial?" She nodded.

Once the class started thinking in this vein, other dimensions of the commercial began to trouble them. For instance, the commercial's subtle suggestion that the only real barrier to US citizenship is a person's beverage preference. Or the idyllic melting-pot aesthetic that seems to ignore, or at least minimize, the real and persistent hurdles to full and equal participation that non-English-speakers in the US face. Or the idea that "Coke doesn't discriminate: it's for everyone, regardless of age, language, or nationality," when the truth is that soda, in general, is only really "for everyone" in the sense of being "bad for everyone" (see: sugar content, etc.). Or the fact that Coke is only really "internationalist" in the sense of being a *multinational conglomerate* whose profits depend, in large part, on the exploitation of workers around the world. (The last one was my own contribution.)

My students were lively, engaged, perceptive. They didn't need much prompting at all to surface some of the relevant contradictions lurking in these media texts, tensions indicative of the kinds of ideological strategies — some more subtle than others — often employed by powerful, moneyed interests. With minimal nudging from me, they proved quite adept at this style of dialectical thinking, a style that requires a sensitivity to the contradictory, back-and-forth, give-and-take, advance-and-retreat rhythms of historical change, social struggle, and meaning-making.

The major takeaway here — for me as much as for them — was that to think dialectically about multilingualism and internationalism is to attend equally to their dark and light sides. The dark side is a bourgeois multiculturalism (a.k.a. neoliberal multiculturalism, or melting-pot pluralism) that celebrates essentialized differences because those differences are something capital can make use of, sorting people into categories, and ascribing different levels of value to those categories (Kubota).

But there's a dialectical multiculturalism, too, that can serve the interests of the planetary underclass if it "draws struggles across many axes of difference into relation with one another, and unites ourselves, our students, and our society in the examination of a shared and contested history," a history that is the source of our differences, and which can help us learn to more gracefully, humanely navigate them (Mahala and Swilky 187; see also Trimbur 248). In the process, we might discover strategic openings where torque and leverage can be applied, domination resisted, norms subverted, solidarities forged, flourishing approximated. As Suresh Canagarajah writes: "There is evidence that learners understand the norms better when they deviate from them."[2]

5. Benefit of the Doubt

This dialectically internationalist value system — in contrast to an anti-universalist apartheid, on one hand, or

some "vague and amorphous global society," on the other hand — is another thing I was trying to get at with my whiteboard scribbles (Foster). So, let's return to the specter of communism supposedly haunting that whiteboard.

I had introduced the major unit project, a Language Event Analysis, a few days earlier. The project asks students to analyze a recent language-related international news story, which they select from the up-to-date archive of such stories on GlobalVoices.org/-/topics/language/.

They ended up stumbling on topics as varied as a story about the death of the last living speaker of the indigenous Chilean language Yaghan; a story about how terms like "witchcraft" are often used to denigrate ancestral medicinal knowledge, such as that of Ecuador's Montubio people; a story about the risks faced by Russian social media posters who express support for Ukraine; and a story about African animators' efforts to use cartoons not only to boost representation, but to preserve endangered African languages. From that last article, they learned that "the African continent hosts roughly one-third of the world's approximately 7,000 living languages," but "the relentless dominance of international languages such as English and French" means that "native languages are increasingly coming under threat" (Wangari).

After students choose a story to serve as the fulcrum for their analysis, they start to think about what their news story reveals about the links between language, society, and power. I ask them to use evidence from personal experience, as well as lens concepts from course readings and other scholarly texts, to support and illustrate their thesis. Along with the film, commercial, and news segments already mentioned, some of our course texts included:

- the transcript of an 1878 debate in the California assembly over a proposed revision to the state constitution that would restrict the rights of Spanish-speaking residents (this was the beginning of the English-only movement, led by anti-immigrant nativists, which eventually spread to other parts of the country);
- a 2019 news article titled "'English-Only' Laws in Education on Verge of Extinction," which summarizes research documenting the harm done by anti-bilingual education policies (Arizona remains the only US state where such legislation is still in effect; some students ended up making connections between the Spanish/English asymmetries in the US we discussed in class, and some of the linguistic hierarchies and tensions in their home countries — between Igbo and Yoruba speakers in Nigeria, for example, or between Uzbek and Russian speakers in Uzbekistan);
- an article by Adrian Holliday about *native-speakerism*, a racist ideology that uses race and ethnicity to judge communicative competence, insisting on a false hierarchy (between "native" and "non-native" speakers) that serves the interests of a lucrative US- and British-based English Language Teaching (ELT) industry;
- articles about *linguistic imperialism* (whereby users of local, non-standard language varieties are forcibly assimilated into the linguistic norms and cultural values of an imperial power), and its flipside, *linguistic apartheid* (whereby users of stigmatized languages and dialects are systematically denied access to prestige dialects and the discourse practices associated with dominant groups) by Robert Phillipson and Augustin Simo Bobda, respectively;
- a TEDx talk called "Embracing Multilingualism and Eradicating Linguistic Bias" delivered by Karen Leung, a bilingual US college student who speaks Cantonese and English;
- the well-known TED talk by Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie called "The Danger of a Single Story";
- a clip from South African comedian Trevor Noah's standup routine called "Trevor Noah Orders His First Taco"; and
- an episode of NPR's Code Switch podcast called "Talk American" detailing the origins of the "standard American accent" and following a Baltimore resident's attempts to master the speaking style prized in TV news settings.

I had used the whiteboard to tease out some of the unifying themes and recurring motifs from the course materials so far. One of the common threads, I suggested, was that questions about what it means to use standardized English, other varieties of English, or languages other than English "effectively" and "successfully" are questions that are often answered in advance in a way that serves the interests of a few at the expense of the many.

I presented it as a kind of hypothesis, one that the first part of the Language Event Analysis assignment was designed to test by eliciting student experiences that could capture the everyday stakes of language choice and language difference. Taking a cue from I. A. Richards's definition of rhetoric as "the study of misunderstanding and its remedies," this first part of the project asked students to narrate a personal experience they had with misunderstanding or misinterpretation, reflecting on why it happened the way it did, including whether or not there was any imbalance in who was expected to accommodate whom — who was blamed for what went wrong, and why.

I hoped students would feel authorized to consider personal experience a valid source of evidence and scholarly knowledge (if not the only valid kind, of course). But I wasn't quite prepared for what they ended up sharing. Some of the stories involved the kinds of innocent trip-ups any language-learner expects to have. But others had a more sinister cast.

One student, from Saudi Arabia, wrote about being extorted by her landlord, made to pay an extra security deposit because she couldn't furnish a social security number. Another, from Kuwait, described being detained

and interrogated for several hours in Heathrow Airport on his way to the States.

One student, also from Saudi Arabia, wrote about the shame and embarrassment he'd felt when he was mocked by his roommate after mistakenly asking for a "hooker" for his clothes, when what he wanted was a hanger. Another student, from India, described a similar misunderstanding when he asked a classmate to borrow a "rubber," by which he meant an eraser.

One student, from China, wrote about being accused by an eavesdropping neighbor of casually peppering his speech with the n-word while speaking Mandarin, and had to explain that a common Chinese word (那个, meaning "that one") has a similar sound. Another Chinese student included an anecdote about accidentally offending his female Uber driver when he pronounced the address of his destination, 444 Beach Road, in a way that the woman misheard as "bitch."

What many of these stories of misunderstanding seemed to have in common was an English-speaking interlocutor who was either unable or unwilling to give any of these students the benefit of the doubt. It was as if they were assumed to be guilty until proven otherwise, as if people were actively looking for excuses to accuse them of something. In each case, language was a lever of othering, the pretext for an indictment.

I hoped the act of sharing these anecdotes, at least, was cathartic. It seemed to be. And many of those who shared their experiences in class had clearly learned to appreciate the humor or the absurdity in some of the situations. I considered it a small victory, too, that, in their essays, many of them were confident and agile enough to shuttle deftly between two languages, and, in one case, three (English, Spanish, Arabic), so as to more vividly evoke their attempts to traverse the minefield of misconstrued meanings, argue their case, and awake intact at the start of the next day.

6. Schooling the Teacher

These stories were a lesson for me. Perhaps I shouldn't have been so surprised — maybe I was too naive. But they were a humbling reminder that theoretical firepower and elaborate conceptual maneuvers of the sort offered by, say, the assigned reading on "linguistic imperialism" can only get you so far, and that any truly radical teaching must get not only "to the root" of social ills, but must also be *rooted* in the everyday needs, fears, desires, and experiences of the real people — student or otherwise — whose daily struggles and unnoticed triumphs are, after all, the foundations on which genuinely transformative learning happens. Radical teaching, in other words, means teaching *from below* (inductively, as much as deductively; see Seitz), just as the kind of multilingualism and internationalism it advocates must also be *from below* (dialectical, rather than bourgeois).

Instead of guiding them in the mechanistic, point-and-shoot application of pre-fab theories,[3] then, we can enlist students in the messier, never-finished process of actively constructing new knowledge — and retrofitting old knowledge — to suit new problems and new circumstances. This sort of *bottom-up* teaching praxis will be, by definition, radical, because it will be *rooted*.

One goal with this unit on language and power was to give my students some new tools — new conceptual vocabularies, new rhetorical sensitivities, new sources of curiosity and communicative confidence — and to explore with them some new ways of looking, doing, and being. What they end up building with those tools or seeing with those lenses — which are never the only lenses, or always the best lenses — is, finally, up to them. My job, as I see it, is only to direct their attention, gently, to questions, problems, and other phenomena they might not have noticed or quite been able to name yet.

In return, of course — and this is what I should have been more prepared for — they draw my attention to questions, problems, and phenomena I hadn't noticed or had words for.

Meanwhile, the fact that talking about social inequality, linguistic discrimination, or capitalist exploitation could be mistaken for communist agitprop just shows how far the goal posts continue to be moved — shows, that is, the persistence of "communist" as a catch-all smear, like I said before, for anyone critical of the status quo, anyone intent on working toward something less separate and unequal, more radically internationalist — while still trying to remain open to the full range of unforeseeable hues, shapes, and textures a more humane, livable, postcapitalist future might take.

My students' stories keep me pointed in that direction.

Notes

1. As Cameron observes: "the conviction that multilingualism is only a temporary disruption caused by the uncooperative attitudes of *these particular* migrants (the claim is commonly heard that in the past, other groups of migrants 'made the effort' to assimilate) serves ideological purposes" and ignores the structural factors influencing migration patterns (76, emphasis in original).

2. It's worth keeping in mind that, as Mary Louise Pratt points out, "the case for multilingualism includes access to a lingua franca, as a path to civic power, connection, and political alliance" (27). The thornier question of *which* languages should play such a mediating, coordinating role is beyond the scope of this essay. (For a historical argument in favor of Esperanto as "the weapon of an auxiliary language in the class struggle," see Starr; for a brief history of Esperanto, see Benton.)

3. For instance: "linguistic imperialism." Some students found the term useful. Others, not so much. In retrospect, I didn't present this concept very clearly. I had wanted to show how language can be wielded both as a tool of oppression and of self-empowerment. But the assigned reading was dense and alienating, and at least one student thought I was saying he should feel ashamed for wanting to learn English. (I hadn't meant to say that, but that's what he'd heard.)

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Stephen Paur is a PhD candidate in Rhetoric, Composition, and the Teaching of English at the University of Arizona.

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Teaching Note

Hegemonic Wellness: A Post-Covid Assault on Teachers and Teaching

by Roger Saul

MAYDAY MARCH BY JOSH MACPHEE VIA JUSTSEEDS.ORG

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Most years, I teach a graduate seminar called Dismantling Educational Discourses. My students at the University of New Brunswick – a midsize university on Canada's East Coast – are schoolteachers and administrators working toward Master's degrees in Education, and our course prompts them to question what passes for truth and knowledge in schools. We think together about how and why schools elevate particular curricula, codes of conduct, relationships, and presentations of self. And we try to elevate notions like critical consciousness and emancipation from oppression in considering the work of teaching and learning. In past years, we've read and discussed works by bell hooks, Paulo Freire, Marie Battiste, and Henry Giroux, among others.

I tend to choose our readings year-to-year based on two intersecting criteria: the first based on whatever happens to be exciting me in my own reading life, the second concerned with choosing materials responsive to the times. So much has happened on the school scene in the few years since the onset of Covid-19. Discourses diagnosing competing crises proliferate. They recount issues like presumed knowledge gaps resulting from the accumulation of missed school days, growing student and teacher mental health challenges, online learning fatigue, emboldened government overreaches into schooling issues and practices, and an ever-widening gulf between advantaged and disadvantaged students. In this past year's version of the course, I wanted to think more resolutely with my students about how they're negotiating all of this and more. To this end, I came across an edited collection of essays, published in 2022, called *Critical Pedagogy for Healing: Paths Beyond "Wellness," Toward a Soul Revival of Teaching and Learning*. I made it our primary text.

Edited by Tricia M. Kress, Christopher Emdin, and Robert Lake, the volume takes up an array of issues, but one of its innovations stands out. It offers readers a language for thinking about care, community, and healing in ways that do away with the kinds of wellness discourses that, as I'll try to substantiate in a moment, are all the rage on the school scene today. It does so by proposing an intellectual path I'm not accustomed to seeing, suggesting that critical pedagogy – an orientation usually put into practice as a means of dismantling (and at times reimagining) dominant school discourses – might have something crucial to offer on opposite grounds, as a language of healing.

To hear many of my students describe it, discourses of well-being in schools have been overrun by allegiances to market-based notions of 'wellness' that elevate individual responsibility and bury institutional accountability in supporting their mental health. These discourses are bolstered by an array of murky terminologies and practices – amorphous notions like self-care, pausing, journaling, contemplation, breath work, mindfulness – and mandate that educators understand and negotiate their well-being in relation to them.

In the view of many of my students, teacher mandated wellness messaging seems to go something like this: if you're dissatisfied with teaching or struggling to keep up with the job's demands, the onus is on you to change your thoughts and actions to help you feel better about your circumstances. This functions as a convenient arrangement for schools. "Don't question our policies and practices, nor our structures and expectations," they seem to say. "Instead, just work on yourself." *Critical Pedagogy for Healing* locates to this emerging phenomenon and its tools on offer as a "marketplace" of healing (p. 2).

Student responses to our textbook and to each other in our various conversations over the semester was like nothing I've ever experienced in my teaching career, so much so that I've felt compelled to write about what I've learned here. The course, always inquiry based and conversational in past years, took on a confessional ethos this time around that to my mind revealed both a profession in crisis and a public that misperceives its depths. Beyond the common and significant challenges that always tend to come with the job of teaching, our course – comprising thirty or so teachers, spread out over two graduate seminar groups, delivered online to participants in geographic locations across Canada and beyond – revealed a staggering number of them struggling in deeply personal ways: with PTSD, generalized anxiety disorder, health anxiety, sleep disorders, depression, panic, secondary trauma stress, invisible chronic pain, and more. Many such issues were a consistent presence in our conversations, conditions that for them had become inextricable with a life of school teaching.

Some teachers shared that they'd admitted as much to their school administrators and colleagues and had received affirming responses from them. Others kept their struggles secret for fear of stigma, judgment, or reprisal. Yet an aspect that stands out as most interesting to me has to do with how the perceptions of their struggles – whether personally disclosed or broadly inferred – are being accommodated. A common historical complaint among teachers is that the demands of their work often go unseen or are misunderstood. Our conversations added a nuance. For these teachers, and presumably many more, the ways in which their challenges are being newly seen and addressed – through commercialized notions of healing – are proving to be as much of a challenge as the fact that they're being seen at all.

In what follows, a definitional essay, I want to propose a concept and then work to define it as a means of capturing some of what I've learned from the teachers I've worked with. I've taken to calling it *hegemonic wellness*. It refers to an emerging school movement aimed at positioning neoliberal wellness discourses as the most socially valued means of making sense of an educator's workplace health. Derived from Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* (2011), hegemony operates not simply through practices of overt domination, but through a misdirection, by coercing people to consent to their own oppression. As such, *hegemonic wellness* refers to the systemic tendency to re-imagine educator notions of healing and care as radically individualist pursuits, deeply anti-communitarian in theory and practice, which are positioned to better serve existing power structures rather than to contest them. The purpose of defining *hegemonic wellness* is therefore to offer educators a language for naming and contesting its operations once perceived.

Hegemonic Wellness

What is hegemonic wellness and how does it operate? Taking my cues from the teachers I worked with, I've found it helpful to think through its meanings, operations, and effects on educational life through the lens of five tenets. I name, define, and critique of each of these tenets below, expecting that educators may find there a language of recognition, affirmation, and contestation that can come to bear upon their own practices.

1. Individualizes well-being

Hegemonic wellness, born of the liberal humanist, meritocratic, and capitalist relations valued in schools and mirrored in the dominant values of the societies that administer them, prizes individualism. Of course, our well-being is an individual matter, but is it only that? In its cultivation of inner focused activities for dealing with workplace stress and well-being, and in its resource allocation toward the same – in countless workshops, professional development, and textual materials on various corporatized 'wellness' movements of the current moment – hegemonic wellness creates an overdetermined language and matching set of practices for radically individualizing one's sense of well-being. Many teachers I spoke with saw these presumed solutions to their stress as convenient for their administrations, who often supported these (see Tenet #3), yet disrespectful of their actual experiences. On the other hand, teachers often wondered about the seeming disappearance of communal approaches and supports in view of their anxieties, approaches they longed for and, in many cases, viewed as much more consequential: the affordance of time within their busy schedules for better connecting with students and parents; the facilitation of intellectual spaces to jointly consider big issues like collective goals and visions as a way to offset the overwhelming weight of day-to-day minutiae that most often tended to occupy them; concrete policy protections for workplace well-being; or, even just the foresight to enable teachers to realize thriving out-of-school lives where they might pursue various issues and experiences that matter to them. All of these were viewed as needed, not to mention mentally, emotionally, and spiritually satisfying in the very ways that hegemonic wellness promises toward the same often felt empty.

2. Privatizes struggles

A consequence of individualizing well-being is that it signals to teachers that their health struggles should be kept private and perhaps even secret. How could it be otherwise? To encourage personalized solutions to social problems is to privatize them. Yet why should a teacher be pushed toward retreating to privacy when experiencing systemic struggles? Why could it not be possible to envision a scenario in which teachers feel comfortable putting those struggles into professional and public discourse, without fear of repercussion? The teachers I worked with suggested that repercussions in their schools most often came in the form of doubt about their professional competencies (often these doubts were couched in discourses of sympathy), which in-turn affected their ability to do their best work. On the contrary, in our course together, where teachers made space for each other to publicize rather than privatize their struggles, there was a stated sense of suddenly not feeling so isolated and alone, of healing through membership in a teaching community that was able to recognize and support each other through the sharing of its collective struggles. This was seen as a circumstance hegemonic wellness doesn't allow for.

3. Sustains inequitable arrangements

Hegemonic wellness's ascendency facilitates organizational exploitation in schools, offering a pathway for a mode of administration that more easily disregards the voices of teachers. It does so because it contains a built-in ethical justification for enacting policies, practices, and decisions that result in teacher dissatisfaction. If such policies and practices prove unpopular, unsatisfactory, or even unhealthy for teachers, the onus is on teachers to retreat to their private wellness practices. As per earlier, this becomes an incredibly convenient mechanism of organizational exploitation, a justification for preserving the system as is, in which teachers are invariably asked to consent to their own dispossessions rather than to change the structures that create them. Many of the teachers in our course felt trapped by this circumstance: trapped in the sense that perceptions of their well-being rarely led to talk of issues like altered workloads, more flexible teaching arrangements, better resourced classrooms, smaller class sizes, or otherwise. Rather, perceptions of their well-being were reduced to ways they might fix themselves.

4. Hinders community building

It will not come as a surprise to anyone acquainted with school teaching that a common complaint among the teachers I worked with is that they were perpetually overwhelmed by the relationship between their expected responsibilities and the time needed to properly achieve them. Many of the teachers I worked with came to believe that this condition was no accident, that teachers purposely kept busy had less time to organize and protest. The discourses of hegemonic wellness likewise came to be understood within this formulation. Its suggested practices of personalized self-care were seen as just one more set of things they were being asked to do, a latest addition to an already in-progress project of disciplining their bodies and minds. On the same note, our conversations also turned to how this new emphasis on hegemonic wellness – a new demand on their time – further precluded the kinds of community making many more aptly sought. Drawing on their collective experiential memories and supported by research, they were quick to recognize that good teaching, good schools, and, ultimately, their own well-being, rely on a communitarian ethos where efforts and supports are pooled (physical, mental, emotional, intellectual) rather than hyper-individualized.

5. Damages relations of trust

The offshoot of much of the preceding is that it creates mistrust between teachers and their leadership. In a context where teachers perceive the vocabulary for understanding their challenges to be pre-determined and agenda driven, it can be expected that there'd be little faith in confiding these challenges to those in positions of power. Worse, perhaps, is the possibility of an attendant lack of faith in the teaching profession itself. The latter was a definite subtext for several teachers I worked with in our course, who confessed to looking beyond teaching as exasperation continued to set in about their perceptions of the increasingly difficult demands of their jobs, as well as their attendant feelings of isolation in negotiating these demands. For sure, these difficulties are multi-sourced and multi-faceted – inextricably linked to a variety of intersecting and inequitable social arrangements that critical scholars know many schools to perpetuate rather than solve – yet opportunities for repair are jeopardized with hegemonic wellness's ascendency.

Conclusion

Many educators would attest to the fact that new educational enthusiasms bloomed against the backdrop of Covid's onset. Although it now seems paradoxical just a few years later, in my school community, for many of the teachers I worked with over the past year, and for countless others, Covid's forced school cancellations provoked widespread discourses of possibility: What might a school look like when unmoored from the strict disciplines of time and space? How might existing relations of exploitation be subverted – particularly those dispossessing the most vulnerable students and teachers among us? And how might educators organize accordingly? These questions, or rather the enthusiasms that undergirded them, now seem quaint. In many North American jurisdictions, the opposite has occurred. Governments have addressed the uncertainties prompted by Covid's school interruptions by creating school policies and practices at once more technocratic and inequitable. The educators I work with continue to resist these, as do countless others. They will better be able to do so by recognizing the functions of hegemonic wellness as a newest language of domination in their schools.

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Roger Saul is a Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick, where he writes and teaches about cultural studies, critical pedagogy, and sociocultural influences on teaching and learning. His recent writing appears in venues such as *Multicultural Perspectives;* the *Journal of Educational Thought; Pedagogy, Culture and Society;* and the *Review of Education, Pedagogy and Cultural Studies.*

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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Teaching Note

Engaged Hesitancy as (Queer) Activism

by Caleb M. Chandler

PROTECT QUEER LIVES: OUR SPACES ARE SACRED BY MOLLY FAIR VIA JUSTSEEDS.ORG

"Alright, everybody! Once you have chosen a book, come to the desk, and check it out," I shouted softly from the circulation desk. Every teacher knows the voice you use when you need everyone's attention but can't raise your voice too loudly because your class is in the library. Soon after, Malachi, a pseudonym for one of my sixth-grade students, approached me wide-eyed with thrill in his voice exclaiming, "I can't wait to read this one!"

"Oh, nice! What is it?" I asked. And looking down, I recognized that Malachi was holding Raina Telgemeier's (2012) graphic novel, *Drama*. Without spoiling the plot, *Drama* follows a group of seventh grade theater students who are navigating their friendships and sexual identities. Knowing that the book features queer characters, I smiled, patted him on the back, and said, "That's a great choice!"

Malachi presented as a more effeminate boy who shared interests with his mostly girl friends. While I knew that Malachi's choices of friends or interests did not indicate his sexual orientation, at points throughout the school year, I did wonder if Malachi might eventually come out as part of the LGBTQ+ community. I am not interested, though, in speculating about Malachi's sexuality then or now. Ultimately, I am not concerned with how his gender and sexual expression do or do not correlate with his sexual orientation, how he contributes to and/or resists the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990). Instead, I am interested in my engagement with Malachi's decision to read *Drama* and the subsequent consequences.

About a week after visiting the library, I received an email from the assistant principal: "Mr. Chandler, Malachi's mother, Ms. Harrison, has requested a meeting with us later this week. Can you let me know when you are available?" Unsure of what this would be about, we scheduled the meeting for later that week. The day of the meeting, I walked into the conference room, and I saw *Drama* sitting on the table. I immediately knew where this conversation was headed.

Cue Confusion

Ms. Harrison asked why I felt the book was appropriate for middle school students. She asked why I assigned the book for students to read. She asked why it was relevant to the standards that would prepare Malachi for a state-mandated end-of-grade test. And finally, she insisted that my acceptance of his choice to read *Drama* was because I "had an agenda" regarding her son's sexual orientation. My hesitance between her questions and final claim created space for Ms. Harrison's increased interrogation. I explained to Malachi's mother that I felt the book was appropriate by virtue of his interest in reading it, that I did not assign the book, that I was not interested in the book's relevance to a standardized test, and that I was not determined to influence Malachi's sexual orientation. Suffice it to say, we did not reach an understanding in the meeting, and Ms. Harrison returned the book to the assistant principal.

As much as I disagree with her, I believe Ms. Harrison sincerely thought she was doing right by her son. She had a particular agenda–a script she intended for her son and his life—that she believed would positively affect him. Still, despite her desire to do what she deemed best, I was angry a parent could act in the way she did toward me. I was also angry that Malachi was in such proximity to her bigotry. I left the meeting wanting to ensure Malachi was supported in a way that would allow him to navigate his mother's homophobia. However, in reflecting on this experience, like Boldt (1996), I realize that my intention and agenda of love and support for Malachi reflected "a modernist construction of the intelligibility of human lives" that, in some ways, was like his mother's (p. 128).

While Malachi certainly deserved to know that he can become who he wants, I assumed I needed to provide some sort of support. In some ways, I anticipated difficulty and struggle for him when, in reality, he may experience and narrate his life quite differently. In fact, Malachi may not have identified as queer then or now. But what if he did then or would in the future? The justice-oriented teacher in me wanted to offer him books, conversation, and outright support in the face of his mother's homophobia.

On a Monday just a few days later, Malachi walked toward my classroom door with such a smile on his face. He excitedly exclaimed, "Guess what, Mr. Chandler! My mom signed me up for a football team!" My heart sank with assumptions while Malachi also seemed genuinely enthusiastic. In that moment, my mind was spinning, and I could not muster much more of a response than an "Oh, wow!" I wanted to pull him aside and ask if he really wanted to join the team. Again, though, his excitement seemed genuine, so what if he really did want to play football on the weekends and hang out with the girls and do "their" things at school? Although less common, it would certainly be possible.

And More Drama

It was not but a few weeks after this when I was walking around my classroom, and something caught my eye. Sticking out of Malachi's bookbag, it was *Drama*. I got a funky feeling in my stomach because I was not sure how this would all unfold given the prior circumstances. After all, his mother believed me to have a set of particular intentions. These intentions were not entirely untrue: I was not intent on her son coming out as part of the LGBTQ+ community, but I was intent on promoting that as possible for him—and all of my students. As an advocate for Malachi, I wanted him to read the book if he wanted to read it. I hesitated for a few days, deciding whether to alert the assistant principal or whether to say something encouraging to Malachi privately. In the end, I chose to do neither.

For some time, I experienced some guilt around that decision. I always prided myself on being an outspoken advocate for kids and "activist" teacher regarding issues of social justice: I was not particularly hesitant when it came to speaking up for kids. In reading other texts, though, I have found a sense of comfort with how things unfolded with Malachi.

I want to preface any further discussion by saying that I do not support or encourage teachers who idly and unresponsively stand by as their students navigate social

and personal issues. At the same time, as Blackburn (2014) notes, "writing and rewriting one's self into the world as an activist in different ways in different contexts [...] might be exactly what is most needed" (p. 12). More often than not, I adopted what Blackburn (2014) describes as LGBT-inclusive discourses to combat homophobia (and other injustices) "by being seen and heard" (p. 10). In this instance, though, I did not–and, in some ways, could not. Some might interpret this as a failure in terms of activism, but to engage in queer activism for our students, we do not always have to put our own bodies on the line (Blackburn, 2014).

Engaged Hesitancy

From Malachi, and from Boldt (1996), Blackburn (2014), and Butler (1990), I have learned that my activism should be context-dependent and never one-size-fits-all. Sometimes raising hell and waving flags is just what is needed–for me and for my students. And other times, remaining somewhat hesitant might also be what is best–for me and for my students. Because sometimes I wonder if, in putting my own body on the line, I actually put my students' bodies on the line. In some ways, by adopting LGBT-inclusive discourses as opposed to queer discourses of activism, I might have placed my desire for activism and perception of justice above my students' actual, immediate needs.

Boldt (1996) taught me that "no solution is unproblematic, and that I must constantly reassess [my activism] with each new child and each new situation" (p. 129). With Malachi, I did not know (and do not know) how he identified in terms of his sexual orientation. Although I had inclinations, I hesitated to act upon those assumptions. His sexual identity was largely unintelligible to me, and in retrospect, I realize that I hoped it would become intelligible so that I could provide a specific kind of support. However, maybe that was not what he needed. Regrettably, maybe that is what I needed. Maybe I needed his identity to fit in a box, to make sense.

In the end, although I acted, I also hesitated: I hesitated in attempting to persuade Malachi not to be excited about football, and I hesitated in drawing positive attention to his choice to read *Drama* again. While these hesitations initially caused me guilt, Blackburn (2014) noted that one might also be read as an activist when they are simply kind, accepting, and helpful to (queer) students. In no way am saying I know that I got things "right" with Malachi because even if there was a way to get it "right," I probably will never know. Malachi's situation, however, has compelled me to reconsider what an activist approach looks like in the classroom with and for my students. I am learning that an engaged hesitation can also be activism, especially if that is what is best in that moment, both for ourselves *and* for our students.

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Caleb M. Chandler is a doctoral candidate pursuing a PhD in Educational Theory and Practice at the University of Georgia. His research agenda broadly aims to center the voices of youth regarding issues of social justice. More specifically, his current research examines how youths' literacy practices contribute to their understanding and expression of gender and sexuality.

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Teaching Note

Using Storytelling and Histories to Create Inclusive Spaces

by Marlee Bunch

YOU BELONG HERE BY SHAUN SLIFER VIA JUSTSEEDS.ORG

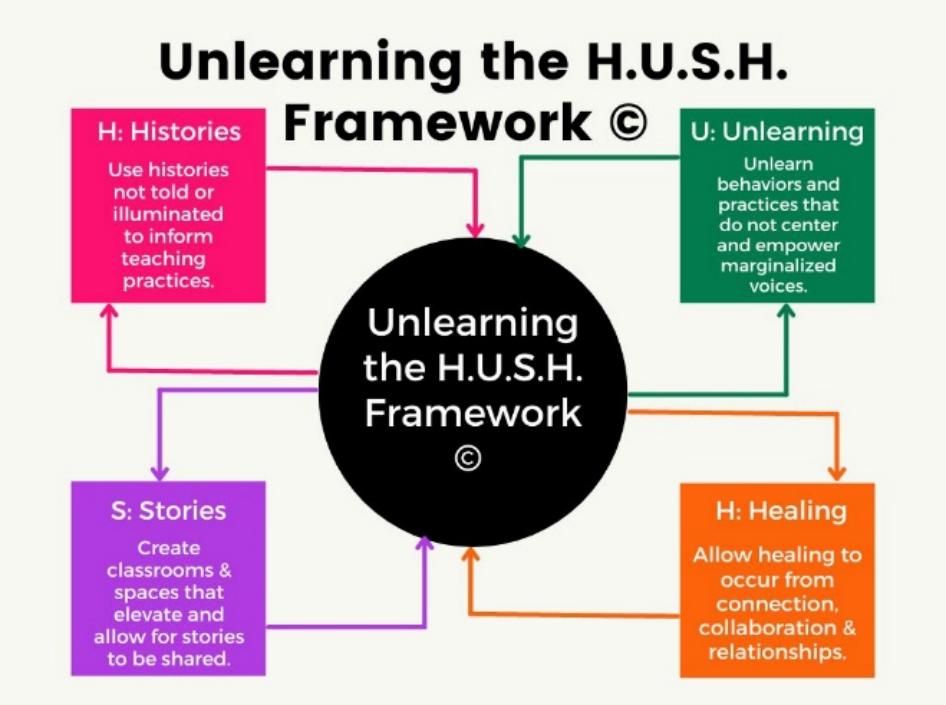
Given the challenges of 21st century education and as a Black, female educator, I have been reflecting a lot about the best ways educators can grapple with everything we are tasked with, and still find reasonable and intentional ways to ensure that we are creating inclusive classrooms that offer students the chance to celebrate and learn from the perspectives of others. I imagine that for white educators, this task feels especially daunting, given the complexities of historical struggles for marginalized communities and people. If we hope to bring out equity in classrooms, we must find ways to work together and support one another through the difficult task of creating classrooms that embody windows and mirrors—allowing for students to both see themselves represented and see the perspectives of others.

One of the best ways I have found to teach complex lessons or content is through the use of storytelling. When I reflect on successful teaching moments I have had throughout my career, they were the moments that helped validate student identities, exposed them to varied perspectives, and created opportunities to forge connections. Those moments involved stories, creative content, analysis, discussion, and a bridge for moments of self-analysis and engaged learning.[1] Ushering in diverse voices and content helped our space and learning endeavors excel. It not only opened a door for access but allowed students to consider academic content from multiple perspectives.[2] A poem that comes to mind and that I gravitate towards is Lucille Clifton's "lost women." This poem asks us to consider the voices and stories of the women and ancestors who walked before us. At closer glance, the poem also asks us to celebrate women and center their voices—it is a longing for knowing these women sooner and discovering their identities.

My recent research titled *Unlearning the Hush* examines how integration impacted the lives of Black, female educators in Mississippi between 1954 and 1971. This study taught me about all the lost voices and experiences that I could have learned from earlier—the classroom practices, the lived experiences, the wisdom, and the sacrifices made. I wondered what my own learning and identity development might have looked like, if I would have known these stories sooner? Could I enhance the experiences and classrooms of another teacher and/or student by helping others understand this rich history?[3] I again thought of Lucille Clifton's "the lost women" poem, as I was struck by the power of learning perspectives that I had never known. Consider for example, how many histories and stories we learned as an adult and wished we would have known sooner. How can we build lessons and spaces that use those unearthed stories as a foundation to build inclusive and brave spaces where we can explore, discuss, and learn from the stories that are not often centered? My own doctoral experience had allowed me to learn about greats like Bob Moses, Yuri Kochiyama, Dr. Joyce Ladner, Mary McCleod Bethune, and others whose stories reminded me of the greatness we can sometimes overlook. These histories made me feel a sense of empowerment and hope, and I realized that this was precisely what educators and students need today—a sense of hope and a way to empower and connect with one other.

Using Stories of the Past to Illuminate the Future

These histories and teaching practices are an important component to creating better classrooms for current day students and educators because they connect our pasts and future and allow us to learn and celebrate all backgrounds and perspectives. My goal is to help other educators include histories and stories such as these to allow culturally relevant pedagogy to be simplified and allow marginalized students to feel celebrated and affirmed. I created a framework to help pre-service and current educators find applicable ways to bring these relevant people and stories into classrooms for the benefit of all students. The framework is interdisciplinary, allows for flexibility, and can be utilized for any K-12 classroom. The framework asks educators to consider four key components to create rich and inclusive learning experiences: Histories, Unlearning, Stories, and Healing.



GRAPHIC COURTESY OF AUTHOR

Classroom Use Example:

Imagine that as a teacher you plan to implement a lesson called Lost Women inspired by Clifton's powerful poem. Objectives might include:

- Students will better understand Black history and/or diverse histories.
- Students will be able to create, synthesize and analyze.
- Students will present and speak about the content they have engaged with.
- Students will self-assess and reflect.
- Students will write a culminating original poem that illustrates the histories examined.

This lesson will illuminate three women who are formative in Black history, but not widely known: bell hooks, Ida B. Wells, Dr. Joyce Ladner. Choosing three individuals for this lesson is ideal because it allows student choice, offers opportunities for comparison and contrasting to occur, and highlights icons both living and gone. Another variation might be choosing three people from different diverse backgrounds (i.e. Yuri Kochiyama, Angela Davis, and Dolores Huerta). The lesson would use the poem "the lost women" as the anchor and ask students to research the three women named above -- thus applying the "H- histories" component of the framework by exposing students to new histories and figures.

Next, students and the educator would engage in the "U-unlearning" component of the framework, which might include discussing and/or journaling what "unlearning" needs to occur related to the lesson example. Are there any misperceptions related to these women or this history? A reflection question for this component of the framework might look like this: In what ways do you think history/society/systems have silenced these "lost women?" Do you think some voices and stories are not shared as much as others? If so, why? What might these women's stories challenge us to rethink or consider? Depending upon the classroom, these questions could be examined via writing, through discussion, or in groups.

Then, students would work on the heart of the assignment, which involves researching all of the women, taking notes, and then working in pairs post-research to compare notes and discuss the content that was discovered. This step allows students to analyze, compare/contrast, evaluate, and reflect. After researching, students will create a free verse poem using "the lost women" poem as a source of inspiration. Students will craft poems about the histories they discovered through their research. Students might craft a poem based on one of the women, two of the women, or all three. Students can use direct quotes in their poem from their research notes, or all creative and original verse. Poems do not need to rhyme/or they can, and the length of the poem can vary depending on teacher/student needs and preference. You might even ask students to create a cento poem that patchworks together lines already in existence. The possibilities are endless.

The "S- stories" component of the framework involves the sharing out of stories. This assignment offers the ideal opportunity to allow students to share their poems and offer a short connection to the poem/histories and their own lives and experiences. Again, how this is done, can be varied and fluid. The presentation (storytelling) aspect can be done with each student individually presenting, or in small groups with one group member sharing out a synopsis of the group's overall themes and poems.

Lastly, the "H- healing" component can occur through post-lesson reflection. This might consist of a classroom discussion, journaling, human continuum, the completion of the K-W-L chart, or a writing prompt for an exit ticket. A lesson such us this, though flexible and easily modified for the teacher, offers a tapestry of stories rich in history and legacies, that has the potential to benefit both educator and learners. Using a framework and content that unites, celebrates, and helps us consistently grow and connect is one that aligns with best pedagogical practices.

Conclusion

Perspective sharing, histories, stories, and relationships all create empathy and expands our knowledge about others. Creating inclusive spaces and centering marginalized voices works to ensure that students feel comfortable, safe, and successful in their learning spaces. We know that as educators, we must continue to make known the histories of people, moments, traditions, cultures, and stories not typically visible. This framework combines the best of multiple practices and approaches to usher in the inclusive classrooms that we hope to create for both current and future generations and learners.[4]

Notes

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Dr. Marlee Bunch is an educator with over 16 years teaching experience. She holds a doctoral degree from the University of Illinois and two graduate degrees. She holds a teaching certificate, gifted education certification, Diversity and Equity certificate, and an ESL (English Second Language) certification. Her experiences teaching at the secondary and post-secondary level have allowed her to write curriculum, mentor teachers, create workshops, tutor, advocate for inclusion, and most importantly mentor students. Her research, teaching, and educational advocacy work seeks to disrupt inequities, advocate for educational reform, and illuminate the power of storytelling and history. Her research focuses on the oral histories of Black female educators. You can learn more at drmarleebunch.com or unlearningthehush.com

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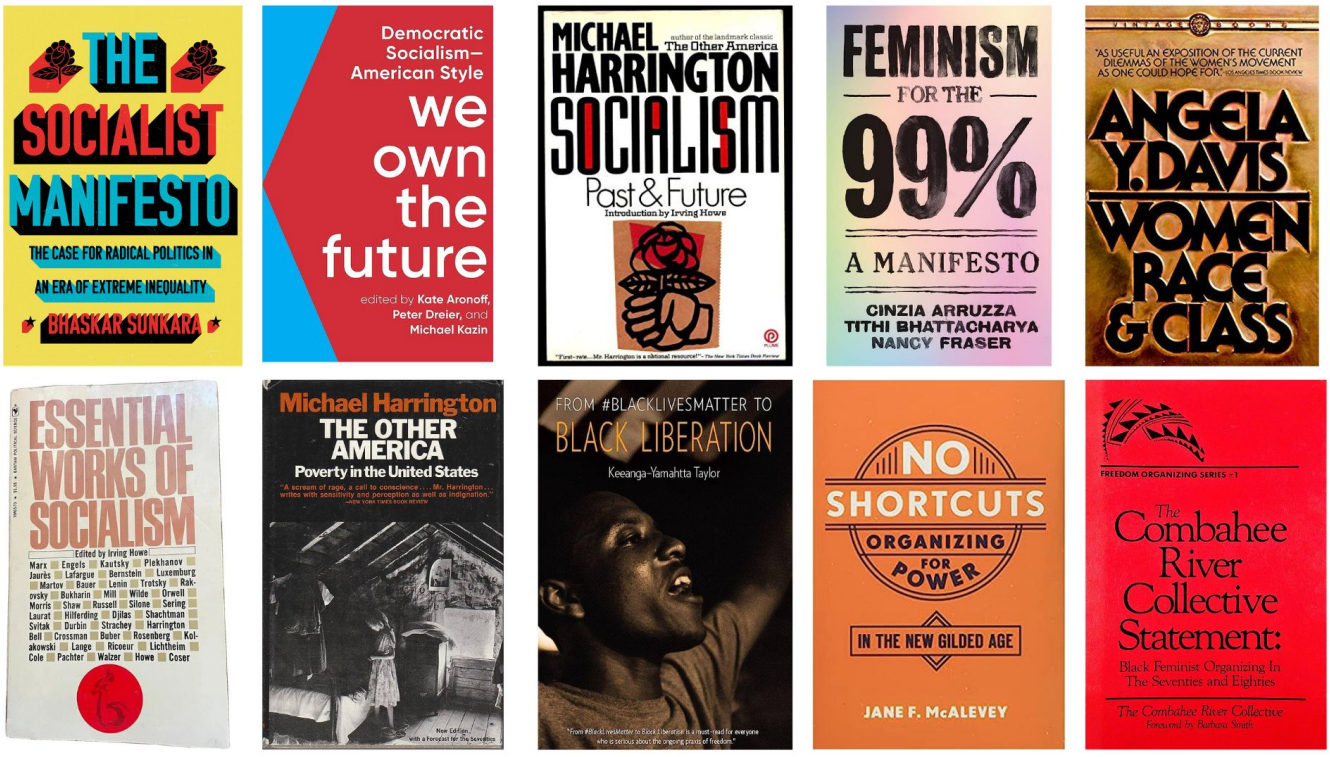
Review

Socialism 101

by Michael Bennett



TOGETHER WE GROW A NEW PATH BY ANDREA NARNO VIA JUSTSEEDS.ORG (2021)

There are many reasons why I took early retirement from my career as an English professor in 2016. Among them was my desire to engage in the kind of teaching I wanted to do, instead of the kind of teaching I was required to do, which was mostly composition and introduction to literature. During an historical moment featuring an urgent conflict between authoritarianism/fascism on the rise in the US and abroad (Casey and Nexon) and a socialist movement in the U.S. that is more vibrant than we've seen in recent memory, it seemed like the ideal time to leave behind the constricted space of a classroom for a broader public sphere.

The sphere to which I am most connected is the Democratic Socialists of America, which had rapidly grown of late to nearly 100,000 members, galvanized by Bernie Sanders's two campaigns for president and the election of more socialists to Congress than ever before. I had been a member of DSA since the late 1980s, a supporter of the DSA Fund (DSA's 501c3 sister organization focused on political education) beginning in the 1990s, and part of the editorial collective of *Radical Teacher* starting in the early 2000s. I opted to devote my time and talents as an educator to these national organizations that have done important work in socialist education since the 1970s. I stepped up to become Managing Editor (now co-editor) of *Radical Teacher* and Chair of the DSA Fund Board. I joked that I had made the wise decision to retire so that I could do just as much work for absolutely no pay. But at least now my labor was in alignment with my desires (a noble socialist goal); instead of spending time on lesson plans for 60 or so students and marking their essays, it was my "job" to think about how to engage with a national (or even international) group of students and educators who either already wanted to build the socialist movement or who might learn that this was what they wanted without knowing it.

The question I asked myself and others over and over was, "How can political education build the socialist movement?" More specifically, "What is the best way to teach about socialism?" Even more narrowly, "If you could teach anything you wanted on your syllabus for Socialism 101, what would it be?" In the essay that follows, I'm going to focus on the last question in hopes of providing a useful way of operationalizing the former questions.

When it comes to curriculum planning, I've always been a pragmatist. I don't claim that the following texts, films, and other educational tools are the best available, but only that they are the ones that grabbed my attention based on what neo-Pragmatist Richard Rorty used to call our "webs of beliefs and desires." These are tools that I either have used or thought about using as I constructed in my head, and sometimes in reality, my version of Socialism 101. I should point out that this version is subject to my predilections and limitations: my training as an African Americanist, my location in and focus on the US, and my belief that socialism must be "social" in theory and in practice, meaning that I am focusing on democratic socialism and not on authoritarian socialism and/or sectarian groups.

In the case of *Radical Teacher*, deciding what to focus on as managing (co-)editor was not much of an issue because the choice is made by an active and activist collective that hews fairly closely to the self-description of our subtitle*: "A Socialist, Feminist, and Anti-Racist Journal on the Theory and Practice of Teaching*." We don't see these adjectives as discrete but as connected. As I explained in a previous contribution to this journal for the issue called "Totally Radical," "I guess you could say that we are anti-racist and anti-ableist feminist eco-socialists, but I think it's easier to say that we believe in intersectionality" (2). The current issue is obviously most explicitly connected to the topic "Teaching About Socialism" since that is its title, but every issue involves socialist analysis, even when the issue is focused on climate change, Human Rights, #BlackLivesMatter, Migration/Immigration, or War & Empire (to mention the themes of recent issues). My ideal Socialism 101 course would definitely include essays from or entire issues of *Radical Teacher*.

When I became chair of the DSA Fund board in 2016, I inherited some educational materials that might be considered a bit dated, but these materials also contained some real gems. Most of these materials make up the category "External Links" on the DSA Fund website under the heading "Resources" (https://fund.dsausa.org/links/). They include a 2012 reading list called "Introduction to Socialism" (https://www.dsausa.org/strategy/introductory_reading_list/) and several essays on DSA's most famous founder and first co-chair, Michael Harrington, and his legacy. To these resources, I added "The Best Books for Understanding Socialism," which lists books that a writer for *New York Magazine* compiled based on interviews with several famous socialists (Schneider). Among these books were three favorites and one I had been meaning to read for a long time.

My three favorites include two classics: Volume 1 of Marx's *Capital* and Irving Howe's edited volume *Essential Works of Socialism*, a collection of Greatest Socialist Hits almost entirely by White males (shout out to Rosa Luxemburg!) from Marx to Howe himself. And one modern classic: Angela Davis's *Women, Race, & Class*. The mention of the latter had me reaching for my well-thumbed copy that was essential to my own work on the Radical Abolitionists of the 19th-century as the most significant anti-fascist, feminist, anti-racist, and often implicitly or explicitly socialist forbears of modern socialism. Moving to the present moment, Davis is an advocate for a different kind of feminist abolition, as evidenced by her co-authored collection *Abolition. Feminism. Now*. Let's add this to Socialism 101.

And then there is Michael Harrington's *Socialism: Past and Future*. I knew a fair amount about him, like most democratic socialists, as one of the founders of DSA. I had read his first book, *The Other America,* which is often credited with helping launch Lyndon Johnson's anti-poverty Great Society programs, and I had encountered various of his essays. I was not prepared for his brilliant and engaging final book. Written with a sense of urgency after Harrington was told he had inoperable cancer, it is a distillation of his understanding of and advocacy for socialism. I was awestruck by its distillation of Marxian, as opposed to Marxist, thought. For me, as for Harrington, this is a crucial distinction. His Marxian analysis distills Marx's thoughts and accepts most of his premises but falls short of taking his

words as gospel, while warning against those who seek an authority figure to catalyze their own authoritarian movements.

Harrington's book begins with three premises: socialism is "*the major hope for freedom and justice*" (1); "*the fate of human freedom and justice depends upon social and economic structures*" (3); and the socialist movement, "*if it is not subjected to democratic control from below, will subvert the possibilities of freedom and justice*" (7). I was impressed with this succinct description of democratic socialism, and its evocation of one of the most important concepts for understanding socialist analysis: the dialectic between structure and agency. If one sees human actors as free agents neither restrained nor shaped by socio-economic structures, you have classic liberalism/neoconservatism. If your theory and practice are all structure and little agency, you have wandered into authoritarian territory. Democratic socialism requires a balance of the two.

Harrington proceeds to analyze fundamental socialist concepts and challenges. He is particularly good at translating some of Marx's terminology and other socialist terms into a language that is accessible to non-specialized readers, explaining and sometimes critiquing such concepts as class formation, the labor theory of value, socialization, pre-Marxist utopian socialism and post-Marxist democratic socialism, economism, Post-Fordism, dialectical materialism, the social wage, social reproduction, and more. Harrington outlines what he sees as the policies of a then-contemporary socialist agenda: internationalism (in contrast and conflict with globalization), redistribution, countering financialization, qualitative rather than quantitative growth, democratic participation of workers, social movements, mass education, and anti-fascism (145-151). Actually, that still sounds contemporary today. Harrington warns against what the third chapter calls "authoritarian collectivisms," Leninism's transformation into Stalinism through "the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' turning into the dictatorship of the majority of the Bolshevik Party" (66) and the rise of "one-party states" like China and other parts of what was then called The Third World.

In the final three chapters of his book, Harrington talks first about the importance of blending the Old and New Left, as symbolized by the socialist image of a fist ("proletarian power") holding a rose ("an inheritance from the youthful revolt of 1968"), in new social movements (189). He then suggests in Chapter 8 that socialist democratic planning includes markets and "decentralized forms of social ownership" (242). He even maintains that markets are actually more compatible with socialism, which is interested in real needs, than with capitalism, which is based on artificial needs (246). And in the final chapter, Harrington argues that even Marx himself recognized, in *The Theories of Surplus Value*, that he was wrong when, in *The Communist Manifesto*, he theorized that a united working class meant that revolution was imminent and "there was no need to worry about the question of democracy since economic development was creating a homogenous and conscious majority, that is, an inherently democratic force" (249). Instead, Harrington argues for a "Gramscian strategy, with its emphasis on alliance between classes and strata" (253), what some would call coalition politics, what Andre Gorz labeled a movement for "non-reformist reforms" (Engler and Engler), and what Harrington calls, in the title of his final chapter, "Visionary Gradualism."

I would definitely make room for Michael Harrington's final work on my Socialism 101 syllabus, though some of the other older resources listed on the DSA Fund website, while strong on political economy, were not always as good at realizing the intersectional nature of class, race, sex, gender, and other factors. Thus, the DSA Fund turned its attention, during most of my tenure on the Board, to supporting and promoting more inclusive texts, particularly the book *We Own the Future: Democratic Socialism—American Style* and the documentary film *The Big Scary "S" Word*. A Study Guide for the former is available at: https://fund.dsausa.org/files/sites/10/2020/02/WE-OWN-THE-FUTURE.Study-Guide-1.pdf.

Of the twenty or so chapters in the book *We Own The Future*, we (and by "we" I mean a coalition planning committee with several of us from the DSA Fund and representatives of The New Press and *Dissent* magazine) created virtual events focused on eight chapters dealing with topics of major importance for democratic socialism: labor, education, race, banking, voting rights, health, and reproductive justice. Each event featured the chapter's author(s) and various workers/intellectuals/activists. I recommend checking out the full list, as any of these authors/speakers would be excellent resources for Socialism 101: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4mwqijxtqBGOFWxDwxOKNt9CVc6EPfx0. In 2021, we presented three virtual and one in-person event focused on the film *The Big Scary "S" Word*, with an equally diverse group of panelists and co-sponsors who would also be at home on our syllabus: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4mwqijxtqBFevJe1t6iuZPPpc2TWdBlj. The final event was an in-person screening of the whole film in NYC, followed by a Q & A with director/producer Yael Bridge and producer/actor Morgan Spector, which discussed several of the topics raised in the film, including the need for ecosocialism to combat climate change, universal healthcare, and economic democracy. The fact that the film spurred such diverse and interesting discussions indicates that it does a remarkable job of touching on crucial issues for the democratic socialist movement, and does so while interviewing an array of workers, academics, and activists. My one critique of the film is that it doesn't adequately talk about the ways in which DSA and other socialist groups worked for decades to shift the public discourse and keep alive the flame of socialism even during rough times. A major oversight is that the film doesn't interview Maria Svart, the National Director of DSA, or any of the staff leadership of recent years.

In addition to *Dissent* magazine, which co-sponsored all of these events, and The New Press, which sponsored all those connected to *We Own The Future* (a book that they published), there were a variety of co-sponsors for these events and the How We Win series (more about this below).[1] I've listed the various entities that made these events possible in an endnote to make an important point: democratic socialist education, and the movement as a whole, goes nowhere without coalition building. The Right has WAY more money than we do, so we depend, both by

necessity and based on our political and philosophical commitments, on people power. The organizing committee for these events took seriously the need for coalition building, which requires thinking in terms of true intersectionality, diversity, equity, and inclusion (not just the corporate DEI that is mostly window dressing). The panelists and organizations involved were diverse in terms of race, gender, region, sexuality, and ideology. We took seriously what Harrington calls the democratic socialization ("the possibility of a democratic, bottom-up control by the majority") that is the antithesis of capitalist socialization ("the growing centralization and interdependence of capitalist society under the control of an elite") (8). We were able to do so because we weren't working in a traditional academic environment, but working collectively as socialists committed to building the movement.

Probably the closest I came to this ideal situation when I was a professor at Long Island University (Brooklyn) was working with the Gender Studies Committee to reshape and implement a more active learning version of our course on feminist theory. I taught the course a few times, always with a small but enthusiastic group of students. We read about different kinds of feminist theory (Tong) and applied them to various topics, with the help of a reader (Kolmar and Bartkowski, or Jaggar and Rothenberg) and additional photocopied (this was the old days) essays: some of my choosing and some chosen by students. My favorite section was on socialist and Marxist feminism, including Tong's introduction to each and essays from the readers.[2] I would also add photocopies of some of my personal favorites by Angela Davis, Barbara Ehrenreich (the first co-chair of DSA, with Michael Harrington), and (always) *The Combahee River Collective Statement*.

As I wrote in the introduction to an issue of *Radical Teacher* called "Totally Radical," the *Combahee River Collective Statement* is for me a crucial starting point for thinking about the intersectional analysis that is inherent to socialist feminism, as the very designation calls for us to think about the relationship between class and gender. I had planned to update a version of my feminist theory syllabus focused on socialist feminism, but it turned out that wasn't necessary as I ran across two wonderful syllabi that already accomplished this goal: one for the Socialist Feminist Day School Organized by Alexandra Walling for the Socialist Feminist Working Group of the Democratic Socialists of America (https://docs.google.com/document/d/1szEZoecSrpCZZC_kbWem6omSomJ_pnrK_xi2IZ_mSc0/edit) and another Intro to Socialist Feminism Syllabus by the NYC-DSA Socialist Feminist Working Group (https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-cCpIHZC-Zae3GpEGxX6nrZ4CabBgP-cDbHE2DAv24Y/edit). The latter syllabus has a large section on "Socialism and Intersectionality," which includes the Statement; however, I found the former syllabus more congenial to my politics and used it to create my own reading group. It also includes the 1977 Combahee Statement and a 2020 reflection on this document and the movement out of which it came written by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor. Taylor notes that the Statement introduces the concept of intersectionality, without using the term, because it is about how race, class, gender, and sexuality must be seen as simultaneous identities to understand the specificity of queer Black women's experience. She goes on to argue that if intersectionality is central to understanding these women's agency, then solidarity is the structural political practice needed in response. This analysis is developed at greater length in Taylor's book *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, in which she argues that "solidarity is not just an option; it is crucial to workers' ability to resist the constant degradation of their living standards … [it] is standing in unity with people even when you have not personally experienced their particular oppression" (215).

For me, the real find of the former syllabus is Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser's *Feminism for the 99 Percent: A Manifesto*. It is concise, clear, and engagingly written, as evidenced in the 10 theses laid out in the first half of the manifesto:

1) A new feminist wave is reinventing the strike.

2) Liberal feminism is bankrupt. It's time to get over it.

3) We need an anticapitalist feminism—a feminism for the 99 percent.

4) What we are living through is a crisis of society as a whole—and its root cause is capitalism.

5) Gender oppression in capitalist societies is rooted in the subordination of social reproduction to production for profit. We want to turn things right side up.

6) Gender violence takes many forms, all of them entangled with capitalist social relations. We vow to fight them all.

7) Capitalism tries to regulate sexuality. We want to liberate it.

8) Capitalism was born from racist and colonial violence. Feminism for the 99 percent is anti-racist and anti-imperialist.

9) Fighting to reverse capital's destruction of the earth, feminism for the 99 percent is eco-socialist.

10) Capitalism is incompatible with real democracy and peace. Our answer is feminist internationalism.

These theses are supported with cogent analysis and clear examples. The document is especially good at explaining the crucial concept of social reproduction (20-25); the material causes of violence against women (25-33); and the containment of liberatory sexuality by both conservatives and liberals (33-40).

There are, of course, many other syllabi on socialist feminism, Socialism 101, and other topics circling in and around DSA. The NYC-DSA Socialist Feminist Working Group offers more reading lists than the one provided above: https://www.nycdsasocfem.org/political-education. Several local chapters of DSA have book clubs and/or Night Schools and/or other political education opportunities. New York City (which now has 8 DSA locals in various boroughs) is particularly active in this regard, but locals across the country have been as well, including those in Asheville, Duluth, Northeast Tennessee, San Francisco, Washington,

D.C., and the list goes on. And there is the DSA Fund's sister organization devoted to education, DSA's National Political Education Committee (NPEC). The NPEC's Resources page (https://education.dsausa.org/resources/) includes a very useful New Curriculum Website; their old Curriculum Guide; their podcast; and modules from DSA chapters in Austin, Chicago, East Bay, Olympia, Philadelphia, and Seattle. And be sure to check out the links on the main page of the NPEC (https://education.dsausa.org/), including a very insightful panel on Confronting the Far Right, with amazing speakers: Bill Fletcher, Jr., John Huntington, and Nancy McLean (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_HkXAp0a3Y). The main DSA webpage (www.dsausa.org) also includes a list of "Resources," though the real gems are under the heading "News": The magazine *Democratic Left* and its blog, plus the publication *Socialist Forum*.

When I originally envisioned this review essay, it was going to end right about here, with references to, and in some cases critiques of, several other books about socialism.[3] Then I realized that I wanted to focus on less conventional components of Socialism 101: tools for organizing, policy advocacy, and pop culture interventions.

However, I do want to single out one more book as particularly noteworthy: Bhaskar Sunkara's *The Socialist Manifesto*. There is something charming about the way it makes, as the subtitle suggests, "the case for radical politics in an era of extreme inequality" through a combination of a very brief personal narrative in the preface about what drew the author into the socialist movement; an introduction that provides an exercise in creative writing about "A Day in the Life of a Socialist Citizen," offering a fun journey in which readers imagine themselves working for Jon Bon Jovi's pasta sauce company in a capitalist economy and alternatives to this scenario; Part One's informed discussion of the history of socialism from Marx to the present; and Part Two's exploration of strategies of building socialism. The penultimate chapter, "How We Win," lays out a road map for "challenging capitalism and creating a democratic socialist alternative to it" (21) in fifteen not-so-easy steps which I am going to summarize as: 1) Be Radical; 2) Win elections; 3) Build power; 4) Combat opposition; 5) Make reforms; 6) Move beyond social democracy; 7) Recruit socialists; 8) Engage the working class; 9) Embed within the working class; 10) Democratize unions; 11) Build a party; 12) Democratize elections; 13) Democratize political institutions; 14) Make universal demands; and 15) Make history matter. All of this is, of course, easier said than done, but as plans go it's a pretty good one, and there is more to it than I can convey in one paragraph. The concluding chapter summarizes various answers to the question "Why create a socialist system?" that have been offered throughout the book. Empirically, we are surrounded by great suffering, so anything we can try to do to relieve it is a positive goal. Ideologically, capitalism is "built off wage labor, which rests on the exploitation and domination of humans by other humans" (240), so let's try an ideology not based on such subordination. Historically, we've learned that reforms will be continually "undermined by capital's structural power" (240), so a socialist transformation is required. Teleologically, capitalism has headed us into a climate crisis, so we need a way out. And pragmatically, nationalism leads to war, so we need internationalism as the best guarantee of peace.

Let's return to the DSA Fund's website for resources relevant to the three topics that would have been difficult to address if my Socialism 101 syllabus had to focus on conventional academic texts: tools for organizing, policy advocacy, and pop culture interventions. The first task I undertook when I joined the board of the DSA Fund was writing a study guide for Jane McAlevey's *No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age*: https://fund.dsausa.org/files/sites/10/2019/07/No-Shortcuts-Discussion-Guide-for-DSA-Fund-Website.pdf. This was not a text I would ever have encountered when I was an English professor and my approach was not that of a literary critic but of an activist trying to understand how to create and nurture other activists. As the first two introductory paragraphs state:

> Jane McAlevey's book *No Shortcuts* is about how and why unions need to focus on building "actual power" through organizing rather than "pretend power" through advocacy and mobilizing.
>
> This Study Guide is focused on understanding McAlevey's analysis and applying it to democratic socialist organizing inside and outside unions. It is suitable for everyone, whether for the general public at a community event, an entire DSA chapter, coworkers wishing to consider organizing their workplace, a labor working group, or other working groups.

The Study Guide then raises a series of questions particularly useful for socialist organizers, keyed to chapters and specific pages in the book, and follows up with possible answers that could be utilized by Discussion Leaders. In the process of writing this study guide at the request of Maria Svart (National Director of DSA and Executive Director of the DSA Fund), I recognized some of the tools that Maria had used to "organize" me, recruiting me to the Fund Board and seeing that I might be the kind of "organic leader" who could chair the Board. I also found these same tools to be helpful in recruiting new DSA Fund Board members and in making sure that there were viable options for someone to replace me when I left the Board last year.

The DSA Fund also introduced me to thinking about how to provide educational tools for organizers in terms of groups and events we supported with financial and logistical support, including what had always been one of our biggest expenses: the annual Conference of YDSA (the youth section of DSA composed of college-aged students/activists). DSA also provides tremendously helpful Leadership Training Workshops. During my tenure as DSA Fund Chair, I had the opportunity to see the useful curriculum of the DSA New England Leadership Training hosted by Southern Maine DSA in 2018. The weekend included trainings on Building a Healthy Working-Class Organization, Power Mapping & Coalition Building, Core Building and Member Engagement, and readings/trainings on DSA's national priorities: Medicare for All, Labor, Policy Campaigns, and Fighting for Racial Justice and Socialist Feminism. After I left the Board, the DSA Fund also supported the inaugural Multiracial Organizing Institute, a project of the Multiracial Organizing

Committee (MROC), as is described on the home page of the website: *https://fund.dsausa.org/*

One of my final tasks as DSA Fund Chair was to help launch a new series of events focused on policy advocacy, all but the first of which have happened since I left. The series, entitled How We Win, has so far hosted four online events (each featuring a mix of elected officials, DSA activists, and activists from other groups working in coalition with DSA) on a variety of topics, including Workers Rights Campaigns, Housing Campaigns, and Harnessing Collective Power (https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4mwqijxtqBHBJq4Dr0AvYS4S5iZqbN_T). Most importantly, the DSA Fund worked with *Jacobin* and *The Nation* to organize and host How We Win: The Democratic Socialist Policy Agenda in Office, the first gathering of socialist elected officials in decades. The event opened on June 16, 2023, with 80 democratic socialist elected officials and their aides hearing remarks from Rep. Cori Bush and a dialogue with Bernie Sanders hosted by John Nichols. Sessions over the course of the weekend addressed socialist policy in regard to labor, housing, and the environment; Socialist in Office formations (formal groupings that coordinate between the DSA chapters and elected officials); and messaging to working-class constituents (Duhalde). This historic event should definitely appear on our Socialism 101 syllabus, especially when videos become available to the public in the near future.

The final category I want to make sure is represented in Socialism 101 is popular culture interventions. For as long as I knew her, my dear departed friend Urvashi Vaid reminded everyone within earshot that "culture matters" (197). She argued that "Progressive think tanks generally do not communicate beyond a narrow elite base"; instead, we need to be "brave or sophisticated enough to articulate a competing cultural vision of America that counters the right" (199).

The DSA Fund's foray into this territory beyond included contributions to and promotion of the aforementioned documentary *The Big Scary "S" Word*, as well as the film *Sixteen Thousand Dollars*, a narrative comedy short film that imagines a world in which a struggling black college grad wakes up to find that reparations have finally been paid to descendants of slaves in America. With this new found capital, they will decide how best to spend their reparations, totaling a mere $16,000. Receiving reparations opens up old wounds of slavery, Jim Crow, and systematic oppression. One of the events we organized for this award-winning film, co-sponsored with DSA Afrosocialists and Socialists of Color Caucus (AFROSOC), included a discussion afterwards of the reparations movement: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=etwT7mTIEEq. We also got into the business of graphic narratives (i.e., fancy comic books) by supporting to varying degrees texts edited by Paul Buhle with various co-authors and artists: *Eugene V. Debs: A Graphic Biography*; *Red Rosa: A Graphic Biography of Rosa Luxemburg; A Graphic Biography of Paul Robeson: Ballad of an American;* and *W. E. B. Du Bois Souls of Black Folk: A Graphic Interpretation*. The Fund also distributed a Debs Study Guide to accompany the first of these: https://fund.dsausa.org/files/sites/10/2019/02/Study-Guide-2_18_2019.pdf. We co-sponsored an interview with popular science fiction writer and DSA member Kim Stanley Robinson, author of the Mars Trilogy (among other books): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UEMTfLoUIgw.

I understand that even these efforts will not reach a large audience, which is why Socialism 101 has to reach not just beyond traditional classrooms but beyond niche markets of already existing socialists and into the mainstream. Since I retired, the three social formations that have received most of my attention other than the DSA Fund and *Radical Teacher* are groups of friends who get together to watch or read and then talk about and promote left-leaning popular culture: Study Group, Sci Fi Sunday, and FFF.

Study Group is a book group that often has authors attend for great conversations over dinner. An array of anti-fascist and/or socialist and/or fellow traveler authors have discussed their writing with us, including Masha Gessen, Anand Giridharadas, Sarah Schulman, and Gloria Steinem. We have read selections from *The ABCs of Socialism* and *Imagine Living in a Socialist USA* (though the consensus during Study Group was that we preferred the more developed analysis and engagement of whole books or collections with more substantive entries) and all of Joseph Schwartz's *The Future of Democratic Equality* (which we loved for its cogent political analysis of how substantive, as opposed to merely formal, democracy cannot exist without equality and solidarity, and because Joe is a great person).

At the most recent gathering of Study Group, Alan Jenkins (a former member) came to talk to us about the first volume of his and Gan Golan's comic book, which will eventually be published as part of *1/6: The Graphic Novel*. This comic book/graphic novel imagines a world in which the Jan. 6, 2022 insurrection succeeded. The comic book is amazing, with its arresting front cover of the Capitol Building on fire behind an angry mob that has apparently just lynched Vice President Pence; a compelling narrative about the multiethnic and multitendency Left group that is fighting back; beautiful artwork by comics veterans Gan Golan, Will Rosado, Lee Loughridge, and Tom Orzechowski; and a useful Education and Action Guide compiled by the Western States Center: https://www.westernstatescenter.org/onesixcomics#Action. Alan Jenkins's discussion of the project was equally impressive, focusing on his long-held belief, shared with my pal Urv, that though the Left has the best arguments and analysis, it does a bad job of getting those narratives out to the general public. It was this belief that led to Jenkins co-founding The Opportunity Agenda, an organization devoted to "building narrative and cultural power to move our nation toward a vision of justice, equity, and opportunity for all" (https://opportunityagenda.org/), and eventually to co-creating this comic book to try to reach a larger audience about the dangers of Trumpism's authoritarianism and the need for a Left movement to combat it.

During the ensuing discussion, the question arose of which Left voices do the best job of reaching a large audience. I argued, and have since done the research to support my argument, that the most popular socialist filmmaker in the US is Adam McKay, a former head writer for *Saturday Night Live* who is perhaps most famous for the

films he has made with fellow SNL alum Will Ferrell: *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy*, *Talladega Nights*, and *The Other Guys* (Jax). McKay is probably not the first name that comes to mind when one thinks of US socialists, but he is a member of DSA, supporter of Bernie Sanders, and contributor to *Jacobin* magazine, which published an insightful profile of him in 2019. In this profile, Adam Davidson, an economist and frequent collaborator of McKay's, describes McKay's political movies as "*Jacobin* essays in movie form" (Kilpatrick).

Adam McKay's most recent film *Don't Look Up* logged 111 million viewing hours on Netflix, which "translates to around 48.3 million viewing sessions on Netflix worldwide. Multiply 48.3 million times the average U.S. ticket price ($9.16), according to the National Association of Theatre Owners, and you get $442.2 million" (Frankel). His three previous explicitly political films (*The Campaign*, *The Big Short*, and *Vice*) all grossed around $100 million, which, given the average ticket price cited above, means these films were each seen by about 11 million people. Did everyone, or even a majority of people, who saw these films know they were learning about antifascism and/or socialism? No. But it's a lot easier to teach people to become aware of and perhaps appreciate the political import of something they have already watched or read and enjoyed than it is to get them to plow through all three volumes of *Capital* or watch, for example, the documentary *American Socialist: The Life and Times of Eugene Debs* (worldwide gross, according to IMDB: $12,609).

I realize the irony of citing gross sales to discuss the impact of socialist cultural productions. But we live in a capitalist world, and our message can't reach people who aren't able to hear it. As my beloved socialist friend and colleague Joe Schwartz always used to say at DSA fundraisers, "You need socialist cash to fight capitalist trash." I'm suggesting that we need to think beyond traditional classroom texts to reach people where they are—everywhere they are: not only in classrooms or DSA meetings or union halls, but in movie theaters, watching TV at home, or at comedy shows. So, Adam McKay, welcome to the Socialism 101 syllabus.

Meanwhile, my two film groups that meet online have gravitated to a similar political orientation. Sci Fi Sunday, what my husband refers to as my "church" (and group therapy), met in our living room most Sundays starting back in 2006 and has continued to meet online since 2020. Many of the shows we have watched lately are some of the best anti-fascist cultural interventions, with touches of socialism or something like it, that I have ever seen. In *His Dark Materials*, our heroes from different worlds band together in solidarity to take on The Authority and eventually kill God. *The Boys* gives us protagonists who are trying to take down Homelander, a fascist amalgamation of Captain America and Donald Trump and (just in case we missed the fascism part) his "girlfriend" Stormfront, a character who fought on behalf of the Third Reich and whose superpowers have kept her alive long enough to continue the fight for the Fourth Reich (spoiler alert: for a while anyway). The struggle against Nazi-like authoritarians is central to the various television series set in the Star Wars universe, and likely will be for the promised Harry Potter series (with Voldemort and his "pure bloods"). The various streaming versions of Star Trek continue the series' space socialism in which a United Federation of Planets that has abolished money strives to fulfill an anti-colonial prime directive. Meanwhile, *Made for Love* and *Fired on Mars* give us working-class protagonists who are continually screwed over by their Elon Musk-like partner, in the case of the former show, or boss, in the latter.

By contrast, my FFF group, meeting online most Tuesdays, focuses on more esoteric fare. This group began when our most beloved NYC movie theater, Film Forum, had to close its doors during the height of the pandemic, and so began to offer its arthouse films online. Film Forum Friends (our publicly facing name, though the impact of the pandemic on NYC and beyond also gave us our private moniker: Fuckity Fuck Fuck!) began with whatever movies Film Forum offered for streaming that caught our attention, including many anti-fascist and/or socialist offerings: *Capitalism in the 21st Century*, based on Thomas Piketty's book; my favorite director Vittorio DeSica's *Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, about the effect of the rise of fascism in Italy on a well-to-do Jewish family; Ken Loach's indictment of the gig economy *Sorry We Missed You*; Lee Grant's documentary *Down and Out in America*; Bill Duke's *The Killing Floor*, highlighting the plight of workers fighting to build an interracial labor union in the meatpacking industry in the years leading up to the Chicago race riot of 1919; Margarethe von Trotta's *Rosa Luxemburg*; Barbara Loden's *Wanda*; *A Thousand Cuts*, about the effects of the rise of authoritarianism in the Philippines on freedom of the press; *Collective*, set in Romania; *Mayor*, set in Palestine; *Dear Comrades!*, set in Russia; *Bacurau*, set in Brazil; *Night of the Kings*, set in Ivory Coast; and more. We also watched some silly things like the *Quarantine Cat Festival* and *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* because even diehard socialists aren't focused on socialism all the time. After Film Forum reopened (Hurray!), we continued to meet, mostly watching films from the Criterion collection, and usually focusing on the oeuvre of various left-wing directors, including Chantal Akerman, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Mike Leigh, Ken Loach, and Satyajit Ray.

But popular culture is not, of course, composed only of movies and television. Some very funny comedians, including David Cross, John Early, and Sarah Silverman have declared their membership in DSA and talk about socialism in their acts. David Cross even helped the fundraising efforts of the DSA Fund by making a video for us (Thanks, David!). I'm not very familiar with the world of podcasts, but I'm told that there are some great socialist ones: The Dig and Know Your Enemy, as well as those of *Jacobin* and *Democratic Left*. A number of socialist artists, musicians, actors, and other cultural workers have participated in the annual Socialism Conference held in Chicago over Labor Day weekend (this would be an ideal Socialism 101 fieldtrip): https://socialismconference.org/. These conferences, along with the People's Summit, held in Chicago in 2016 and 2017, have served as veritable socialist universities/concerts/performance spaces, the latter including particularly moving productions of *The People Speak*, performances of speeches by historical figures featured in Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*. (https://www.howardzinn.org/people-speak-2016-

peoples-summit/). Live performances of *The People Speak* happen periodically around the world, and it is also available as a film (https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/people-speak-extended-edition-contents/).

This essay has covered a lot of ground, perhaps too much. But this is how you build a socialist movement, making connections between various individuals and groups that are constantly working to think, create, and build bridges to a future beyond capitalism. Looking back over the individuals, presses, journals, and organizations mentioned in this essay, any of them would fit well on a Socialism 101 reading list. A couple of them even have their own reading lists to offer: Haymarket Books' Socialism 101: A Reading List (https://www.haymarketbooks.org/blogs/107-socialism-101-a-reading-list) and The New Press's We Own the Future: A Democratic Socialist Reading List (https://thenewpress.com/blog/reading-lists/we-own-future-democratic-socialist-reading-list). Not surprisingly, these lists focus on their own books because another theme of this essay is that though we may be fighting for socialism, we live under capitalism. Even as we fight against capitalism, we need to take advantage of opportunities when socialist ideas break into the mainstream, from my favorite sci fi shows to the surprising socialism of *Teen Vogue*: https://www.teenvogue.com/tag/socialism. We are constantly fighting for a bigger share of the marketplace of ideas, whether what people are "buying" from us is Marx or McKay.

Friends say that I do a good job of "putting the social in socialism" because I constantly try to make connections between people and books and movies and ideas that I love. This effort is based on the socialist truth that we can do more collectively than individually, our organizations can do more in coalition than on their own, and society functions best when it is not atomized but exists in solidarity. With that focus in mind, I have tried to join my personal narrative with the story of the various groups of which I am a part. The result is that after several close-to-all-nighters (just like in my college days) I am exhausted writing this and you may be tired of reading it, but I hope that there is plenty here about the journey that will be of interest and help build the socialist movement. The best way to develop Socialism 101 is to build it in confluence with others. And with that thought, I'm going to head to bed and listen to the audiobook of Barbara Ehrenreich's *Had I Known: Collected Essays* (published just before she passed away in 2020). I will fall asleep listening to the beautiful narration by Suzanne Toren and dream socialist dreams. I hope we can dream these dreams together.

Notes

1. Co-sponsors of these DSA Fund events included various publications and publishers (*Dissent*, The New Press, *In These Times, Labor Notes, American Prospect, Lux, Left Voice*, *Dollars & Sense*, *Jacobin, Convergence, The Nation*, the University of Pennsylvania Press, Haymarket Books, and Verso); DSA and DSA entities, Afrosocialists and Socialists of Color Caucus (AFROSOC), National Labor Commission (NLC), National Electoral Committee (NEC), Medicare for All campaign, Ecosocialism Working Group, Green New Deal Campaign, Health Workers Collective, Housing Justice Commission, Charlottesville (VA) DSA, NYC-DSA's Housing Working Group, and NYC-DSA's Labor Branch and Debt & Finance Working Group); and other activist organizations (Save Our Postal Service, NYC for Abortion Rights, Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP), Sunrise Movement, Housing Justice for All, Housing Equity Now St. Paul, Housing Justice Center (MN), Local Progress, the Center for Working Class Politics, and the Sustainable Economies Law Center).

2. Favorite essays from the Feminist Theory readers included Heidi Hartmann's "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union"; Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto"; Juliet Mitchell's "Woman's Estate"; selections from Friedrich Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*; selections from Alexandra Kollontai's *Working Woman and Mother*; selections from Emma Goldman's *Anarchism and Other Essays*; Evelyn Reed's "Women: Caste, Class, or Oppressed Sex"; Mother Jones's "Girl Slaves of the Milwaukee Breweries"; The Charlotte Perkins Gilman Chapter of the New American Movement's "A View of Socialist Feminism"; and selections from *Women and Economics* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman herself.

3. I had considered including references to books by John Nichols, Danny Katch, and Gary Dorrien; a book by Bernie Sanders and one about his impact (Day and Uetricht); and Zillah Eisenstein's slender book of mini-essays on *Abolitionist Socialist Feminism*. Readers may want to explore these on their own.

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Michael Bennett is Professor Emeritus of English, Long Island University (Brooklyn). He is the Managing Co-Editor of *Radical Teacher* and the Former Chair of the Democratic Socialists of America Fund Board.

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A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Poetry

Two Poems

by Adnan Adam Onart

REPAIR BY MOLLY COSTELLO VIA JUSTSEEDS.ORG

From the Caucasus to Yemen

To the memory of my grand-parents, first generation immigrants,
who sought refuge in the Ottoman Empire

She walks back and forth,
our teacher Melahat Hanım,
and recites the same poem again
while the apple of her eye, the honor student Ali
distributes that orange substance,
with a rusty scoop from a crooked can:

A slim file of brave, light cavalry,
we crossed the blue Danube river;
and defeated that night joyfully,
an army of thousands in heavy iron gear.

She talks about mysterious countries:
Transylvania, Dobruja, Macedonia.
– Is she making these places up?
And rushes through a list of long-ago dates:
Kosovo (1389), Bosnia (1463) and immediately after
(1469) Herzegovina, so difficult to pronounce.
She announces the fall of Belgrade (1521) — excited
as if it were a victory of our soccer team.
She takes the Janissaries full force to the gates of Vienna.
Then she freezes with the heaviness of an unexpected defeat.
Now, she coughs, *who cleans the German toilets today?*
The filthy streets in Berlin, in Frankfurt, in Munich?
Who else, but the proud janitors from Anatolia!

I am about to throw up.
This stuff makes me really sick.

Don't be ungrateful, she scolds,
noticing, as always, my greenish face.
This is a gift from our Uncle Sam,
scientifically prepared
in the best laboratories of the world
specifically for the Turkish taste.

Of course, I don't know yet
what the Marshall plan is;
already I know though:
this is not our delicious feta cheese.

O, great great-grand children
of the magnificent Ottomans
who fed everyone from Algeria to Lebanon,
everyone, poor and rich, from Caucasus to Yemen…

Without finishing her sentence,
she comes closer to my desk,
in her breath the usual tobacco smell.
If you don't want your share, she whispers,
I'll gladly give it to someone else.
But your mom needs, she adds
tapping her pencil on my nose,
to get a medical note for your allergy
to American food
and our imperial epic poetry.

Boston MA, 1999 – 2008

From Sea to Shining Sea

To us just a piece of history,
to her a slice from her life.
She lectures as we eat
our daily ration –
international charity.
On the rusty cans an alphabet
we cannot decipher.

She paces the creaky floor,
pausing at the end of each sentence:
A period of anger.
A semi-colon for nostalgia.

She does not say it, but she means:
the broken black desks,
the filth on the white walls…
They are all our fault!
Even the high-rise ruins,
the sky-substitute in the windows.

On her way to the door,
she feels the map
as if it were silk:

The green was somewhat dusty in the South,
in the Northwest, everything vivid with the rain.
Our borders stretched from sea to shining sea;
you could touch the dreams in the air.

Suddenly turning back,
without looking at us, she asks:
Have you ever been
to the Everglades?

It is so cold in our classroom.
There are tiny stones in our rice.

Boston MA, 2008 – 2012

Adnan Adam Onart, a Turkish-American poet, lives in Cambridge, MA. His work appeared in Prairie Schooner, Massachusetts Review, among others. His first poetry collection, The Passport You Asked For, has been published by The Aeolos Press. He is one of the winners of 2011 Nazim Hikmet Poetry Competition.