

THE CRISIS OF LABOUR AND THE LEFT IN THE UNITED STATES

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The 2008 economic crisis and its aftermath were viewed by many as the ‘Lazarus moment’ for the US left. After all, here was a crisis brought about by the classic contradictions of capitalism playing out on a political landscape shaped by vast and growing disparities of wealth and power. In familiar left foundational mythologies, this was a moment that would give rise to revolution or, at the very least, a ‘new New Deal’. And there was no shortage of commentary proclaiming no less than neoliberalism’s death agonies.¹ Yet the left has been spectacularly unsuccessful in crafting a coherent response to this crisis, much less influence the terms of debate about its causes and solutions. The exaggerated proclamations of the beginning of the end of neoliberalism, unjustifiably inflated expectations of the Obama presidency, and the irrational exuberance stimulated by Occupy all point to the same reality: there is no left worth talking about in the United States and there has not been one for quite a while. That judgment may seem harsh, even sectarian, to some readers because many claimants to the labels radical, activist or left dot the political landscape.

By left we mean a reasonably coherent set of class-based and anti-capitalist ideas, programmes and policies that are embraced by a cohort of leaders and activists who are in a position to speak on behalf of and mobilize a broad constituency. Such a left would be, or would aspire to be, capable of setting the terms of debate in the ideological sphere and marshalling enough social power to intervene on behalf of the working class in the political economy. Some measures of that social power include: ability to affect both the enterprise wage and the social wage; power to affect urban planning and development regimes; strength to intervene in the judicial and regulatory apparatus to defend and promote working-class interests; power not only to defend the public sphere from encroachments by private capital but also to expand the domain of non-commoditized public goods; and generally

to assert a force capable of influencing, even shaping, public policy in ways that advance the interests and security of the working-class majority. By any of these measures there is no longer a functioning left in the United States; nor has there been for a generation. Not only is there no organized left capable of contending for hegemony; in more mundane terms, the left is no longer even capable of affecting the wage structure in the auto industry or intervening in urban development decisions in Brooklyn. Whole swaths of the population, no doubt the vast majority, never come in contact with left institutions or ideas.

Historically, a left of the sort we describe has been anchored to a vibrant labour movement, which has provided the institutional resources, the living and breathing constituency, the core agenda and feet on the ground for any significant counterhegemonic intervention into the political economy. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how a left capable of challenging corporate power and capitalist hegemony could be built, much less survive, without being linked to a dynamic labour movement. George Soros's Open Society Institute or other liberal foundations will not fund challenges to capitalist class power. Nor can a left capable of mounting such challenges be galvanized through appeals to an evanescent 'public' or the 'people'. For one thing, such appeals have to be projected through the corporate news and public information industry, which will never give serious left critiques or agendas fair hearing. Moreover, formation of a serious anti-capitalist force in American politics will not be sparked by dramatic actions or events, not least because the constituency for that sort of left does not yet exist; it must be created. That is a lesson that must be taken from the reality of our defeat: on the one hand, the relentlessness of the post-crash capitalist offensive understandably feeds a sense of urgency in fighting back; on the other hand, their relentlessness is possible only because we do not have the capacity to challenge them.

THE POSTWAR ROOTS OF TODAY'S DEFEATS

Of course, the left was always weak in the postwar US relative to other advanced capitalist nations. The simplest and most direct explanation of that difference is that, while European capitalist classes came out of the Second World War weakened politically and economically and discredited by their associations with fascism, the American bourgeoisie emerged from the war more powerful than ever and largely rehabilitated in public opinion. American capitalists were determined to curtail, if not roll back, the advance of the labour-left, and they had the social and political power to do so. The effects of the business mobilization were visible in the defeat of the

1945 Full Employment Bill, which would have established full employment as the cornerstone of national economic policy and mandated the federal government to take affirmative action, including public works jobs, to 'assure the existence at all times of sufficient employment opportunities for all Americans able to work and seeking work'. And this was matched by the defeat of the Wagner–Murray–Dingell bill that would have created national health insurance. Then came the Republican congressional victories in 1946, and in the following year the passage, over President Truman's veto, of the Taft–Hartley Act, which severely limited trade unions' occupational and geographical scope of operation and outlawed several important sources of their leverage against employers. The anti-communist offensive associated with the Cold War also isolated leftists and effectively proscribed anti-capitalist perspectives from public discourse – even within the labour movement.²

With respect to making sense of the state of the left today, however, that defeat of working-class politics in the late 1940s is less significant than the compromised terms on which it was possible to construct second-best victories within the framework of unchallenged capitalist power.³ Even into the 1980s, the labour movement retained the capacity to negotiate basic wages and conditions for the first tier of the economy and, to some extent, trickle down conditions in the other tiers. On issues of broader working-class social power, the labour-left helped create and administer the regulatory state, set labour standards and minimum wages, establish and enforce equal pay provisions and win a series of incremental expansions of the social wage and the public sphere including food stamps, public housing, Medicaid, Medicare, publicly funded early childhood and higher education and more. The decline of trade union strength since the 1970s has obscured the extent to which other progressive movements, including what now are known as the 'social movements of the 1960s', depended on organic links to labour for their political capacity and popular successes.

As important as they have been, however, those successes were crafted within the context of the postwar 'grand bargain' of substantive class compromise that contained the seeds of its own undoing. The postwar system rested crucially on: cession of decisions concerning planning and production entirely to management; acceptance of a system of employer-provided social wage benefits negotiated through privatized collective bargaining rather than their universalization through the state; commoditization of housing security through federal subsidy of the private real estate market and suburbanization; and reliance on an economic policy of growth stimulation to sidestep a class politics of redistribution, which tied even left-liberals to support of

military Keynesianism and thus Cold War interventionism.⁴ Even though some labour-leftists continued to press for social-democratic policies into the 1960s, it is unlikely that more favourable arrangements for the working class could have been won in the context of the postwar reassertion of capitalist class power. Nevertheless, the grand bargain was struck on terms that assumed the inviolability of capitalist property rights and, to the extent that social wage provisions were tied to the privatized collective bargaining system, they were ultimately vulnerable to shifts in employers' prerogatives and a changing balance of class forces. Moreover, the two-tier framework of protections and benefits reinforced social hierarchies within the working class itself, in particular along racial lines. Racial and gender segmentation built into the semi-private social wage system created by New Deal social policy and the collective bargaining regime implanted a logic that reproduced a pattern of invidious inequalities over time.

For example, proliferation of the postwar 'American Dream' of privately owned, single-family housing, while providing many workers with a sense of wellbeing and relative economic security, also created space for articulation with a conservative 'home owner populism' based on commitments to property values and low taxes. That approach to housing policy materially reinforced racial and other starkly clear hierarchies because the privatized system of real estate valuation assigned a premium to white exclusivity in neighbourhoods, and federally subsidized mortgage financing adopted the industry's valuation framework. The real estate market was therefore structured on a racially discriminatory basis that all but denied minorities, especially but not only blacks, access to that important tier of the semiprivate welfare state. Worse, the threat that non-white 'encroachment' on a neighbourhood would ensue in reduction in residential market value gave material force to racial bigotry and exclusion, which occasionally erupted in violence against non-whites perceived as interlopers. In addition to direct disadvantage with respect to access to desirable housing, the pattern of discrimination and exclusion had intergenerational effects inasmuch as home equity was a primary source, along with defined-benefit pensions won through collective bargaining, of workers' asset accumulation and financial security.⁵

The postwar grand bargain in effect constituted a two-tier social compact. Its limited character created a secondary, more precarious labour market, disproportionately made up of non-whites and women, that was available to undercut concessions won by workers covered by collective bargaining and eligible for benefits accessible through the semiprivate welfare state. Despite the system's inherent fragility, the dominant trend within the

labour movement, industrial relations experts, left-liberals, academics and pundits was to proclaim a new natural order, a distinctively American capitalism that had transcended class contradictions and antagonisms. The postwar regime was touted as a new era of post-ideological capitalism in which classes had been supplanted by interest groups united in a shared commitment to enhancing the general wellbeing through sharing in the proceeds of continuing growth. The mythology of the 'affluent society' had been so thoroughly consolidated as the normative truth of American society by the end of the 1950s that it spawned a genre of simultaneously celebratory and doleful ruminations on the supposed cultural malaise and crisis of values associated with having attained satiation of material needs and having transcended class conflict.⁶ Trade unionists were more likely than others to recognize the system's limitations and mystifications, as they faced the realities of employer resistance and the exaggeration of working-class affluence. At the same time, labour leaders participated in propagating the ideology of American class harmony and economic growth internationally as a component of the Cold War programme.

Persisting and dramatic racial injustice presented a substantive challenge to exultation in the harmonious postwar order, but, when represented as a backward, pathological deviation from the American Way, it was just as easily incorporated as affirmation.⁷ The racial liberalism that became orthodoxy in the postwar years detached racial inequality from its roots in political economy and addressed it as the product of benighted prejudice and intolerance, antecedent and therefore exogenous to the new arrangements. Characterization of 'racism' as an autonomous force in American life – the national 'disease' or its 'original sin' – gave the essentially psychologicistic formulation an appearance of insurgent political criticism, but, notwithstanding a sometimes breathless rhetoric, attribution of the source of black inequality to racism was compatible with the premises of the grand bargain. In fact, by the early 1960s, conservative University of Chicago economist Gary Becker, who also had recently popularized the 'human capital' idea that similarly made class and political economy disappear, laid out an extended, albeit ahistorical, argument that racial discrimination was an irrational impediment to capitalist efficiency.⁸

That leftists were more likely than others to support struggles for racial equality fed an impression that support for equality of opportunity on racial lines was intrinsically a radical programme, particularly as southern segregationists and other opponents denounced racial egalitarianism as communist. But the struggle for racial justice was not at all necessarily tied to broader radical agendas, as was indicated in the popularity of the

trope that racism was a betrayal of American ideals. The central thrust of postwar black political insurgency, understandably, was for inclusion into American political, economic and social institutions on more egalitarian terms and elimination of racial hierarchy. The victories on that front were and remain tremendously important, as anyone who can recall the racial *ancien regime* would attest, and have contributed greatly to democratizing American society writ large. However, those victories and the terms on which they were won, as well as the movements that produced them, were not directed at challenging the fundamental tenets of growth liberalism, and in fact generally took them as given. Even what appeared to be the radical turns in black activism, first to Black Power, thence to the various Marxist/nationalist hybrids of the 1970s, sidestepped systemic critique of the structural tensions at the core of the grand bargain and growth liberalism and focused on the postwar order's apparent racial disparities. Characterization of the black American situation as a form of domestic colonialism suggested a connection with Third World insurgencies that provided a radical-seeming patina to what was at bottom only a more militant version of hegemonic racial liberalism. As they became marginalized by the emerging political class of black officeholders and functionaries, radicals often slid into cultivation of fanciful, apocalyptic discourses of revolution which still abjured systemic critique of contemporary American capitalism.⁹

THE NEOLIBERAL ELIMINATION OF WORKING-CLASS OPPOSITION

When the project that would come to be known as neoliberalism began to take shape in the 1970s, most of the left was under the illusion that the postwar liberal consensus was an order set in stone.¹⁰ The labour movement, as we have indicated, remained through much of the 1980s just barely capable enough of asserting itself against employers' demands for concessions so as to be able with some shred of credibility to override dissidents' arguments that a new class offensive was underway. Even though retrenchment actually had begun under Jimmy Carter's presidency, trade unionists and the broader left turned to Democrats for support and reinforcement against the accelerating onslaught then typically described as Reaganism. What ensued was a cycle of increasingly desperate defensive struggles aimed at preserving the last shards of the grand bargain. Ronald Reagan's preemptory firing in 1981 of more than 11,300 striking members of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) symbolically punctuated an orgy of union-busting and deindustrialization that fundamentally altered the left in the United States and its capacity to intervene politically.¹¹

The intensifying counterattack by capital and the political right also targeted broader social wage policy and Keynesianism in general. Culminating a decade of internal struggle within the Democratic Party, the Clinton presidency consolidated neoliberalism as the new baseline of the thinkable in American politics, consistent with Thatcher's infamous TINA. Clinton's original campaign for healthcare reform defined a single-payer insurance system on the Canadian model – the only option that enjoyed significant congressional or public support – as 'off the table' from the outset. His concern to placate the insurance and pharmaceutical industries accelerated the burgeoning crisis by setting in motion the debacle of corporate managed-care. Clinton ran on a pledge to 'end welfare as we know it'. The workfare component of Clinton's welfare reform effectively transferred public subsidies from poor people to employers of low-wage labour and terminated the federal government's sixty-year commitment to provide direct income support to the indigent. The Clinton administration also began the retreat from direct provision of affordable housing for the poor, with its HOPE-VI housing programme, which razed existing low-income public housing complexes and replaced them with combinations of market-rate owner-occupied and reduced numbers of subsidized rental housing units and offered rental vouchers for those displaced to use in the open housing market. The effect was to shift subsidies up the class ladder, from poor residents to real estate developers, landlords and middle-class homeowners. Clinton also pushed through the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) over intense opposition from much of his own party and its core constituencies, most of all labour. He advanced financial sector interests in other ways as well, most conspicuously in supporting and signing the Financial Services Modernization Act, which repealed the 1933 Glass-Steagall law that had established a firewall between commercial and investment banking (although it had been effectively breached long before its repeal with the support of the regulators and the Treasury during the 1990s). And his administration conducted nearly as many military interventions as Reagan and the elder Bush combined, and in four fewer years.¹² Clintonism completed the defanging of a labour-left that had subordinated itself to the Democrats less by suppression than by demanding accommodation to redefined limits of political possibility.

With few exceptions, even militant responses to the Clintonist consolidation in the 1990s and George W. Bush's further retrenchment failed to generate systemic critiques of capitalism. The NAFTA fight condensed frustrations among trade union activists and led to the changing of the guard in the leadership of the AFL-CIO. The 'New Voice' slate elected in 1995

reflected a shifting balance of power in the federation toward public sector unions, but it also was the institutional expression of a moment of labour insurgency, albeit a brief and in some ways self-limiting one.

THE LABOR PARTY EXPERIENCE AND AFTER

The most extensive and coherent expression of this insurgency was the effort in the 1990s to launch a Labor Party in the US.¹³ Early in the decade, even before the NAFTA fight, several unions and labour leaders undertook systematic exploration into the possibility of establishing a labour-based political movement independent of the Democratic Party. The effort was led by veteran labour radical Tony Mazzocchi and fully supported by his union – the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers. It quickly caught fire and drew in thousands of union leaders and activists and hundreds of local, regional and national unions. Organizers focused on the need to build the party based on the felt concerns of the working-class constituency that would grow up around it. Mazzocchi was famous for stressing his ‘union hall dictum’: if you can’t get something passed at your own union hall, don’t bring it to the Labor Party. As organizers often had to point out to progressives whose initiatives focused either on electing candidates and/or agitation for more incremental objectives that accepted the prevailing neoliberal policy constraints, the Labor Party’s objective was not to organize the left, or become yet another platform for leftists to bear witness against injustice, but to be an institutional venue for articulation of a working-class politics.

The 1996 Founding Convention adopted a programme that had wide working-class support and gave a glimpse of what politics would look like if it were conducted on behalf of the vast majority of Americans who work for a living. The delegates also adopted an ‘Organizing Model of Politics’ centred around issue campaigns focused on identifying, educating and mobilizing supporters in unions and working-class communities. The first such campaign was for a constitutional amendment guaranteeing the right to a job and a living wage. Others subsequently adopted were for single-payer healthcare, reorientation of federal labour law around the 13th Amendment’s protection against involuntary servitude and for free public higher education.¹⁴ Subsequent Labor Party conventions adopted and refined an electoral strategy that grappled concretely with what it would take to disengage labour from a winner-take-all two-party system and run serious candidates that could challenge the neoliberal consensus and be held accountable to a living, breathing constituency. A principal focus was on preempting capricious protest candidacies or hopeless spoiler candidacies;

thus the electoral strategy required that prospective candidacies be supported by organized labour in a district and demonstrate access to adequate financial support and base of volunteers.

Although it won endorsement of a substantial section of the institutional labour movement, the Labor Party was never able to develop the 'exit strategy' that would make it feasible for unions to disengage from the two-party system. This flaw proved fatal in the early years of this century as labour experienced a series of strategic defeats and went into retreat. The last major effort of the Party was to establish a state party in South Carolina – one of the most conservative and least union-dense states in the US. Through one-on-one conversations with predominantly non-union working-class South Carolinians, organizers convinced more than 16,000 registered voters in the state to sign public petitions in support of the South Carolina Labor Party, proving that it was possible to build a party of labour in the heart of the right-to-work South. The South Carolina Labor Party was recognized by the state and awarded an official ballot in 2007. By that point, however, a diminished and defeated national labour movement was unable and unwilling to put in the necessary resources to capitalize on this advance. Many of the Labor Party chapters not connected with trade union organizations had devolved into little more than debating societies. To avoid becoming a Green-style party more concerned with a politics of personal testimony, Labor Party leaders decided it was best to put party-building efforts on hold until it could build a movement that could speak with an authentic working-class voice.

The Labor Party experience was in sharp contrast to two distinctive assessments of the state of the left and the task of movement-building. The electoral approach, exemplified by the Greens and its many offshoots, assumed that a constituency for a left politics already exists in a dormant state in the society and could simply be convoked around the properly appealing candidacy. The incrementalist approach abjured larger strategic vision and presumed that agitating for reforms imaginable within the context of Democratic neoliberalism could eventuate at some point in systemic change. The New Party and, after its meltdown, the Working Families Party in New York and elsewhere exemplified this latter approach. This tendency's fixation on fusion voting – endorsing a major party candidate and asking constituents to vote for her or him on a minor party line in hope to gain leverage for working-class issues – assured that it would never stray far from the Democrats' orbit.¹⁵ At its worst, it has succumbed to a cynical collaboration with the anti-worker agenda of mainstream Democrats in order to achieve minor and temporary political gains.

Despite other heroic efforts to revive and reorient a political opposition,

what we see today is a left devoid of agency and power. To some degree, this reflects the social experience of a working class that has been largely decollectivized. The catastrophic decline in union density means that in some sections of the US entire working-class communities have no organic relationship to labour organizations. But decimated unions are not the only nexus of decollectivized social experience. From flipping houses to accessing benefits under the Affordable Care Act, workers have been conditioned increasingly to believe that public goods and security are not the outcomes of collective struggle and are inferior to individual initiative and responsibility. This tendency has become more pronounced as bipartisan attacks have sharpened on the public sector, which is also among the last bastions of decent social-wage benefits like defined-benefit pensions.

The left has exhibited two dysfunctional responses to this new reality. One is to persist in the old forms of struggle with the hope that doing so will bear different fruit this time around. This mode assumes that there is still a terrain where assorted interest groups compete for power and resources within the framework of postwar pluralist liberalism. It hinges on an inside strategy of elite negotiation and an outside strategy of mobilizing popular forces to influence negotiations. This strategic approach assumes: 1) that all parties have a vested interest in maintaining the core relationships at the centre of the model; 2) therefore, that threats to walk away from the table carry significant weight; and 3) that elites purporting to speak on behalf of the popular forces actually have the capacity to foment social disruption if their concerns are not taken into account. Although clearly obsolescent since the beginning of the 1980s and the defeat of the PATCO strike, this model persists both as a cynical pageantry of protest as prelude to defeat and its mirror image in the magical thinking that produces the rank-and-file fetishism and 'activist' fantasies that this or that spontaneous action will spark a mass movement.¹⁶ This approach persists despite the failure of massive worldwide mobilizations to prevent the Bush administration's 2003 invasion of Iraq, and Occupy is its most flamboyant, if not its most desperate, expression to date.

The other mode openly accommodates neoliberalism. This is the version of a left that Clintonism, currently represented in the White House by Barack Obama, enables and cultivates within the Democratic Party; it is a left whose political horizon is limited to making the neoliberal order more equitable on its own terms. This is the left for which disparity and diversity have replaced inequality as the animating normative concern.¹⁷ This accommodation ultimately preempts confronting capitalist class relations and power. If the core value of the labour-left was solidarity, the core value of this sort of

left in the neoliberal era is diversity. Thus, for example, issues of structural unemployment become framed as problems of racial or gender justice, and low wages are problematic because they disproportionately affect women and people of colour. In naturalizing categories of ascriptive identity as the fundamental units of political life, this politics simultaneously naturalizes the social structures of capitalist reproduction by displacing contradictions rooted in those structural dynamics from political economy into the realm of culture – exactly as did postwar interest-group pluralism.

Attempts to combine identitarian and political-economic perspectives – e.g., via constructs like institutional or structural racism – demonstrate the primary commitment to the former. They effectively ontologize racism (or sexism or xenophobia) by vesting it with historical agency that rests on a ‘takes on a life of its own’ reification and acknowledges capitalist class dynamics only gesturally. Despite occasional, pro forma acknowledgments that it is important to oppose capitalism, this politics is strikingly dismissive of Marxism, when not viscerally anti-Marxist.¹⁸ Defences of this view typically rest on appeals to realpolitik and claims that whites’ racism and/or males’ sexism have historically overwhelmed efforts to mobilize working-class unity. This perhaps explains the spasmodic recurrence of reparations talk in black American elite discourse since 2000; it reinforces assertion of the primacy of race and racial identity as the determinative force in American politics. Similarly, arguments that contemporary racial inequality is best understood via analogy to slavery or the southern segregationist regime that held sway in the first half of the twentieth century serve more to insist on the primacy of racism than to shed light on the reproduction of contemporary patterns of inequality. Michelle Alexander’s popular book, *The New Jim Crow*, is a prime instance of this phenomenon. The analogy’s appeal to Alexander is precisely that it asserts the ongoing and overriding causal power of racism by means of a rhetorical sleight-of-hand, yet even she finally acknowledges that it does not work because mass incarceration today is not significantly like the segregationist order.¹⁹

LABOUR AND THE IDENTITARIAN LEFT

The assertion of a fundamentally antagonistic history between labour and social movements, particularly those based on ascriptive identities like race, gender or sexual orientation, is a reflex in the discourse of the identitarian left fuelled by liberal stereotypes of the organized working class as definitively white, male and conservative. This political lore, despite having some basis in historical fact, has hardened into unexamined folk knowledge among many activists. The labour movement has hardly been immune –

either institutionally or as individual union members – from racist, sexist, homophobic or nativist currents in American political culture. The story of labour's inadequacies in that regard has been well told.²⁰ But labour hardly stands out from federal, state and local government, the academy, industry, organized religion or any other social institutions in generating and sustaining that framework of inequality or the hierarchies that constituted it. Moreover, the lore depends on denying or devaluing the significant connections between labour and other egalitarian social movements in the past as well as the present.

No matter what post-class self-images those who embrace identitarian politics may cherish, it is a politics rooted in neoliberal class dynamics. Its effacement of class as both an analytic and a strategic category dissolves working people's interests as working people – which have no place in neoliberalism – into populations defined by ascription or affinity rather than by location in the system of capitalist reproduction. The groupist discourse of diversity and opposition to disparity enables harmonizing the left's aspirational commitment to equality with neoliberalism's imperatives. From that perspective, the society would be just if one per cent of the population controlled ninety-five per cent of the resources so long as significant identity groups were represented proportionately among the one per cent. This is, after all, the goal of liberal equality of opportunity in the market, as articulated historically by both elements of progressive social movements (e.g., a strain of the black civil rights movement and bourgeois feminism) and Becker's neoclassical brief against racial discrimination. It is also the only standard of social justice that neoliberalism recognizes.

Unsurprisingly, the impulse of this politics is not to organize and unify a single constituency defined by its broad relation to capitalism's class dynamics. Insofar as its notion of social justice centres on group parity and recognition, it is inclined toward courses of action that undermine the core unity necessary to build a movement strong enough to attack the roots of structural inequalities. Instead of unions, parties and civic organizations with living, breathing memberships whose financial support and votes bind leadership to some measure of accountability, much of the left's model in the neoliberal era is founded on the image of an NGO that is accountable only to its funders. In ventriloquizing population categories reified as groups or 'communities', the left is like NGOs that define their bases as helpless victims and/or abstract groups without real agency of their own. Other left-oriented tendencies that embrace broader social objectives continue to frame issues in those terms out of either pietistic habit or failure of political imagination. They substantively, and often enough explicitly, reject class politics.

Labour organizations often feel obliged to frame their issues using the language of disparity in pursuit of broader acceptance or do so in expression of the dominant normative reflex.²¹ The national AFL-CIO conspicuously celebrates labour's diversity along lines of race, gender, age and sexual orientation. This is certainly defensible as union membership is, and has been, far more diverse along those lines than any other Democratic constituency. Celebrating labour's diversity is a useful affirmation directed toward both members and a general public steadily bombarded with anti-union propaganda, but that celebratory rhetoric also is embedded in and reinforces an implicitly penitent narrative of 'progress' from a benighted past of union bigotry. Popular catch phrases like 'this is not your father's labour movement' may cede too much to the discourse that disparages unions as backward-looking bastions of male, white and/or nativist privilege.²² Defense of trade unionism through celebrating its diversity rather than through asserting its challenge to capital also marks the labour movement's acquiescence to neoliberal hegemony.

Within labour, concessions to neoliberalism go much deeper than disparity talk. Much of the movement has been hollowed out, and a dynamic relationship between a leadership that is accountable to a broad and active constituency has been displaced by a realpolitik that too often treats the felt concerns of the actual membership as an impediment to institutional survival. Thus unions, particularly at the national level, are now more a conduit from the Democratic National Committee to the labour movement than the reverse. They have become more like NGOs whose members are reduced to props in a shallow and anachronistic symbolism, all in the name of realism. The 'new unionism' commonly associated with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) has exemplified this approach most clearly in combining what critics have described as a class collaborationist trade unionism with identitarian pageantry – choreographed representations, both rhetorical and visual, of non-white and female workers as embodiments of a new spirit of insurgency. This combination has been refined and advanced through a highly staff-driven organizational model that minimizes accountability to members and a technicistic discourse – propelled by neologisms like 'union density' – that repackages business unionism as a modernizing programme of rational worker-employer partnership. This aspect of the new unionism tends at least logically to reinvent the labour movement in the image of an industrial relations NGO.²³

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

Any serious discussion of the prospects for rebuilding a left must start from the understanding that the left in the US, as in the rest of the capitalist world, suffered a strategic defeat, and that capital has reorganized and emerged from the 2008 economic crisis even stronger.²⁴ While the extreme financialization of capital is likely to increase the frequency and intensity of episodic crises, this crisis once again confirms that there is no necessary correlation between crisis and revitalization of the left. In fact, notwithstanding glimmers of hope like SYRIZA in Greece and strong showings by anti-austerity parties in the spring 2014 European elections, the history of the post-2008 crisis politics in Europe would indicate that the more intense the crisis, the more deeply reactionary the response.

This does not mean that those who embrace a transformative vision must abandon all hope. Rather, the priorities, activities and resources of those who would rebuild a real left must be informed by this strategic sensibility. Building or rebuilding an effective left presence will be quite likely a decades-long process. This means that we are not well served by clambering after the Next Big Thing. We must start by excising the impulse – quite understandable for a political movement devoid of any real agency – toward utopian dreaming and wishful thinking. The spark will not ignite the prairie fire. Nor will the Ark float on its own account no matter how carefully we construct it.

Recognizing the left's political irrelevance can be emancipating, as it reduces the sense of urgency to try to mobilize around every one of neoliberalism's daily outrages. That should provide space for serious strategic discussion of how to begin to build a mass socialist movement based in the working class and the creation of new institutions capable of mobilizing cross-class solidarity, as Sam Gindin has articulated in a particularly clear and compelling way.²⁵ Certainly, the US left could benefit from a non-sectarian, organized force with a coherent strategic vision and programme. The absence of a disciplined, unified and sophisticated group of cadre is a major source of the left's incoherence, and helps explain why moments of spontaneous political upsurge have had, at best, an episodic impact and remain unconnected to similar moments in the past – even those in which the same activists have participated. Such organization, however, cannot be created in a vacuum. It can only emerge in tandem with a growing working-class movement.

We fear that in the specific context of US history and practice, the socialist project is too narrow a platform from which to launch a broad and far ranging left revitalization. Socialist practice in the US has become

the domain of sectarian groups that drive away working-class support, and socialist consciousness has not embedded itself in any significant sections of the working class or a left capable of exercising social power. That failing reflects the cultural and ideological triumph of neoliberalism and the identitarian ideologies and programmes that serve as its left wing. In this environment, building socialism is exclusively a project of cadre development, albeit one that cannot hope to succeed apart from broader movement-building. Broad movement-building requires mobilizing around an agenda of substantively anti-capitalist reforms that directly and militantly assert the priority of social needs over market forces, bourgeois property rights and managerial prerogative in the workplace and production process. Struggles to preserve and expand public institutions and to decommoditize basic human needs like housing, transportation, healthcare and education could begin to address the immediate challenge, which is to create a new popular constituency for a revitalized movement, instead of reorganizing or re-mobilizing an already existing but totally marginalized left.²⁶

Some question whether the current US labour movement is too narrow a platform on which to rebuild a left. In a widely circulated article, 'Fortress Unionism', Rich Yeselson correctly highlights the atrophy of the labour movement and shows how its decline began with the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947. He contends that labour's 'current institutional expression cannot, via a creative conceptual breakthrough ("tactics or broader strategy"), engender a vast growth in union strength comparable to its former peak. In short, "organized labor" can no longer create a space for workers to join their organizations by the millions'.²⁷ In grim statistical detail, Jake Rosenfeld's *What Unions No Longer Do* gives fuel to this thesis. He points out that despite decades of exemplary, heroic and pioneering organizing by Justice for Janitors in the immigrant community, 'Today only one in seven Hispanic janitors in the United States belongs to a union, down from one in five back in 1988, when Justice for Janitors began'.²⁸ Yeselson calls for a 'fortress unionism' that would 'defend the remaining high-density regions, sectors and companies' and then 'Wait for the workers to say they have had enough. When they demand in vast numbers collective solutions to their problems, seize upon that energy and institutionalize it'.²⁹

This approach correctly identifies the urgent need to preserve the remnants of the current labour movement as an institutional base upon which to build a future revitalized movement. And it also correctly points out the haplessness of willy-nilly organizing schemes that do little to build power for working people while exposing their best leaders in unorganized workplaces to massive employer retaliation without any ability to defend

them. But a strategy of waiting for workers to say they have had enough ultimately relies on magical thinking not unlike that of isolated Japanese soldiers scattered on island outposts at the end of the Second World War waiting for reinforcements from a defeated empire. Many of Yeselson's critics, however, are equally quixotic. Bruce Raynor and Andy Stern, two of the most cynical practitioners of a unionism that disempowers workers and is based on a model of global class collaboration, point out that the 'fortress' strategy will do little to reduce inequality. Instead, they place their hopes in 'strategic alliances with willing employers'; in unions developing value-added services to complement human resource departments; and in leveraging union and public-sector pension funds to rebuild union density.³⁰ This strategy would liquidate the very concept of an independent labour movement.

Given its decimation and marginalization, any revitalization movement would need to be built from a base that is far broader than the current institutional labour movement. A revitalized labour movement will have to embrace new organizational forms and some of the models emerging from new labour organizing show significant potential. Some are driven by necessity as the legal status of many immigrants and of workers in industries such as trucking, taxi driving and residential construction make organizing under current labour law virtually illegal. Much of this new organizing is being done by Worker Centers with heavy foundation funding and has the character of social work along the settlement house model of the early twentieth century. Much of it seems also, more or less openly, to fold class analysis into identitarian discourses that both substitute moralizing for political critique and fit comfortably within the NGO model. Such impulses, as well as the popularity of neologism, underlie arguments that current conditions have generated a new social formation, a 'precariat' that lies outside the traditional capitalist class structure.³¹ But some associated with this category have begun to evolve into substantial, self-conscious worker-run organizations. The Taxi Workers Alliance grew from a small New York City advocacy group to become a national organization (whose members are classified as 'independent contractors' and thus ineligible for union representation under US labour law) and was recently admitted to the AFL-CIO.³² In Vermont and elsewhere, strategic Workers Centers have built organic alliances with the labour movement and gone on to lead significant campaigns for healthcare for all, paid sick days and economic justice through the mobilization of a working-class constituency.³³

Some argue that these campaigns and projects have the capacity to coalesce into geographically based class-conscious organizations and have called for

the building of worker assemblies to give voice to this new movement.³⁴ Such an effort would require a level of ideological sophistication and institutional independence that does not currently exist. Attempts to establish these structures on the ground have been premature and could actually inhibit the kind of broad, class-based organizing that inspires this movement in much the same way that many Labor Party chapters became captured by an ‘activist’ mentality that focused more on preaching to the converted than building a constituency, while driving away real working-class voices who represented something more than themselves.

New models are most successful when they can leverage existing organization and power to build outwards into new organization. Recent experiences organizing healthcare and homecare workers, hotel and casino workers and building services employees are fruitful examples of smart and strategic organizing that have leveraged existing union relationships and/or political opportunities to build power for working people. We also look to the logistics organizing campaigns – which focus on the chokepoints of global capitalism and build on existing union power on the docks and other shipping centres – as having the potential to develop a particularly powerful form of a strategic union presence in economic sectors at the very core of contemporary capitalism.³⁵

THE CENTRAL TASK: REBUILDING THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

Despite all of the excitement and pageantry of ‘new labour’, its efforts to rebuild a real workers’ movement cannot progress without a class-conscious trade union movement providing the institutional structures, organizing capacity and working-class base to animate it. Transformation and revitalization of the institutional labour movement remains the central task. While much needs to change within labour if it is going to rebuild, our effort is not well served by those, like Robert Fitch, who see unions as a ‘protection system’ defined by ‘poles of corruption and apathy’.³⁶ Such wrong-headed and irresponsible charges play to the peanut gallery and do nothing to engage with those who need to be in the room to start any conceivable revitalization project. They provide nothing of use for those who seek to embark on the long journey of reconstructing a left with the social power to be a transformative force.

There are indications that at least some sections of the institutional labour movement are reviving a social unionist orientation. Many unions are beginning to redefine their battles against voracious profiteers and privatizers not as defensive struggles to preserve rights, privileges, benefits

and conditions already lost by most of the working class, but as far reaching campaigns for the public good, and they are sinking resources into building the kind of alliances necessary to win. The Amalgamated Transit Union has begun to call for free public transportation that is integrated into a planned urban ecosystem and to build bus riders' groups and other initiatives to advocate on behalf of the overwhelmingly working-class consumers of mass public transportation.³⁷ The Utility Workers Union, representing both public and private sector workers, has called for public ownership of all utilities and begun the difficult task of determining how the work done by their members can be disengaged from the carbon-based economy.³⁸ The California Nurses Association/National Nurses United has consistently linked organizing to the larger public struggle for quality healthcare, and the union is a stalwart voice on the AFL-CIO Executive Council urging support for single-payer healthcare. CNA/NNU has also been a driving force in the broader campaign for a financial transactions tax – the 'Robin Hood tax' – that resolutely asserts the interests of working people and their communities over Wall Street. And the new leadership of the American Postal Workers Union has characterized the current crisis in the postal service as a looting of an essential public resource by a gang of profiteers and has called for the revival of a postal banking system as a counterweight to the despicable payday loan, check cashing and other financial service industries that prey on the most vulnerable sections of the working class.³⁹

Fights over public education are also central to a reconstructed and revitalized movement. The work of the Chicago Teachers Union in building a community and labour response to retrenchment and privatization of public education has been widely embraced by urban organizers and is sparking a wave of victories by union reformers in teachers' unions from Massachusetts to Los Angeles.⁴⁰ Higher education is also in crisis both from increasing debt burdens on students and a labour crisis of providers, and recently successful unionization efforts by faculty at the University of Oregon and the University of Illinois-Chicago have been linked to fights against corporatization and privatization of public universities. This situation is crying out for a unifying message such as free public higher education to pull the diverse organizations together around a common theme that will allow them to turn their defensive fights into a unified offensive against the power of capital in higher education.⁴¹

The recent election of big city mayors in New York, Boston, Minneapolis and elsewhere around economic populist agendas and critiques of inequality also deserves some attention, as does the rise of some local independent political victories in Seattle, Lorain County Ohio and elsewhere. Likewise,

the emergence of viable campaigns for a real living wage (rather than a minimum wage) like the ‘Fight for 15’ campaign in Seattle and the recent calls to expand social security (rather than just defend the current inadequate system) also bode well. However, it is important not to be overly exuberant about these currents. In the absence of an organized left, the likely outcome is either outright marginalization and defeat or reabsorption into the neoliberal consensus, because most of them are forced to rely on structures embedded in a two-party system thoroughly under the control of capital.

In the ideological sphere, we need to take a page from the right-wing playbook and invest in a long-term project to seize the terms of debate. As Richard Seymour points out, ‘The traditional ruling class is not merely good at exploiting opportunities; it thinks long-term in a way the left must learn to do’.⁴² We must present a vision of a world outside of the constraints of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is all about commodification and the inescapable dictatorship of the market over all of human activity. This movement must work to decommoditize the public and civic spheres by asserting the values of public goods and the public sphere in healthcare, education, housing, etc. It must work to revive the values of industrial and economic democracy and assert the right of people to participate in determining the conditions under which they work and distribute and consume the products of their labour. We need to begin to assert the possibility of a life beyond the constraints of capitalism.

The almost faddish embrace of Piketty’s *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* is an indication of how eager many are for an analysis that identifies structural tendencies of capitalism itself as a driver of inequality. A critical understanding of the dynamics of capitalism and the mechanism of neoliberalism is no longer foreign at all levels of the labour movement, including some members of the executive council of the AFL-CIO. However, this understanding is often still coupled with a deep scepticism about the possibility that any radical organizational initiatives can succeed in building a substantial anti-capitalist movement. In practical terms, this analysis amounts to either an excuse for doing nothing or an embrace of magical thinking about some outside force that will arise to drive change. Its coupling with the pursuit of inconsequential and limited reforms will do little or nothing to undermine the system or build a movement. Piketty’s own global wealth tax is an idea that scores the hat trick: it is utopian, devoid of any agency and therefore inconsequential.

The left must begin to build out from this ideological understanding by working to construct movements and campaigns around issues that facilitate an organic learning process and bring together a community of

leaders and activists that is broad enough to actually coalesce as a social force. Organizations such as the Labor Campaign for Single-Payer Healthcare follow the Labor Party organizing model and challenge the underpinnings of neoliberal social policy around a demand that is central to the well being of the working class. Building a movement powerful enough to win such a demand under the conditions of neoliberalism would be a powerful learning experience and serve as a building block for a new, transformative political movement. Other initiatives, such as US Labor Against the War, serve a similar function. They pull together the best and the brightest in an expansive project that goes beyond narrow jurisdictional lines and seeks to affirm an agenda that exists beyond the next election cycle.

There are many other potential organizing initiatives that a revitalized left could work to organize and empower. The environmental movement is crying out for a class-based vision able to take on the entrenched corporate power at the heart of a system that is driving ecological degradation on a worldwide scale.⁴³ Movements to recapture some of the massive productivity increases of the global working class since the 1970s also have the potential to build out. These include fights for living wages, guaranteed income and a massive and systematic reduction in working hours and the working life.

None of these initiatives on their own will have the capacity to rebuild an effective left in the United States. The crisis is deep and profound. Merely rebuilding union density to numbers similar to the early 1980s is a task that is all but inconceivable under current conditions. But that does not mean that we cannot begin. We must start with the understanding that the grand coalitions of 1946 and 1968 have been defeated, and that these defeats, as we have suggested here, were rooted in their own limitations. In any case, conditions today are radically different. Capital and labour have become internationalized. There is no 'socialist model' in ideological and material contention with international capital; nor is there a hegemonic international socialist movement linked to such a model. Labour has become immensely more productive, but the labour process has become more fragmented and unintelligible. The political practice of decades obscures the centrality of class to any revived left movement. Therefore, we must marshal our forces around a structural critique of capitalism and its impact on those with the social power to change things. We need to focus on rebuilding a constituency. This requires a slow, steady, systematic organizing effort connected to the felt concerns and real daily struggles of working people. Such long-term organizing must be strategic and divorced as much as possible from the exigencies of the electoral cycle and the reactive circle-the-wagons politics that only feed the downward spiral.

Despite all the roadblocks and difficulties, the time to begin is now, when we still have the historic memory and some semblance of working-class institutions and resources. We must embrace a long-term view that focuses on waging ideological struggle, confronting both the millennial and utopian illusions of a disorganized and toothless left and the defeatist accommodation to neoliberalism that has consumed so much of the so-called 'progressive' movement. We can start by urging the institutional labour movement and other significant left organizations to shift a portion of their resources away from limited and self-defeating defensive struggles and electoral campaigns and towards expansive and transformative projects that will rebuild a fighting left with its own vision of a just future and a real plan to get there.

We believe the Labor Party experience is instructive because it was the most self-conscious and institutionally grounded attempt to mobilize around an explicitly working-class politics in the US within at least a generation. As we have argued, without links to a dynamic trade union movement an openly working-class politics cannot sink deep enough roots to grow organizationally or to broaden an actual working-class base. Only strategies aimed at challenging the bipartisan neoliberal austerity regime directly can challenge the juggernaut facing us, and the only plausible route to the working-class constituency that such strategies require runs through the organized labour movement.

While the conditions that gave rise to the Labor Party in the 1990s no longer exist, its approach to organizing must underpin any project to rebuild a left in the US. Its style of work – rooting itself in a dynamic network of working-class institutions and leaders; a slow, methodical approach to base-building that expands upon the life experiences of workers and gives voice to their common grievances, concerns and dreams while connecting them to a broader and systematic critique of neoliberal capitalism; and a rigorous rejection of both the utopian daydreaming and the self-defeating cynicism of a *realpolitik* that characterize much of the self-described 'left' in the US – remains in our view the only plausible method for generating an organic movement against capitalism.

NOTES

- 1 Merlin Chowkwanyun catalogues and responds to many of these proclamations in 'The Crisis in Thinking About the Crisis', *Renewal*, 17, 2009, pp. 57–66. As he points out, the fantasy that crises generate spontaneous revolutionary responses is a venerable one. See Russell Jacoby's 'Towards a Critique of Automatic Marxism: The Politics of Crisis Theory from Lukács to the Frankfurt School', *Telos*, Winter 1971, pp. 118–46 and 'The Politics of Crisis Theory: Toward

the Critique of Automatic Marxism II', *Telos*, Spring 1975, pp. 3-52. Ralph Miliband provided an important historical antidote to the premise that the left makes its greatest gains in crisis moments, and the tendency to prelapsarian yearnings for days of yore when the left was strong in 'Socialism and the Myth of the Golden Past', *Socialist Register 1964*, London: Merlin Press, 1964, pp. 92-103.

- 2 There is a substantial literature on that moment in American political history, but Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002 and Kim Moody, *An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unionism*, London and New York: Verso, 1998 remain among the most astute accounts.
- 3 Sam Gindin, 'Unmaking Global Capitalism', *Jacobin*, 14, 2014, available at <https://www.jacobinmag.com>, lays out a perspective on the current state of the left and the sources of the current situation, and an argument about the necessary approach to rebuilding a credible left opposition that are almost identical with our own. That is not surprising, as we have been part of an ongoing conversation animated by shared perspectives and a common political project, although our view of the US labour movement in the 1950s and 1960s may be somewhat more sanguine than his. While agreeing with Gindin's larger point that the trade unions developed more as sectional and instrumental organizations, we would stress that even within that limited context the institutional labour movement and trade union culture provided space for articulation of a practice nearer class-struggle unionism and for cultivation of a more sharply politicized and broader class consciousness among rank-and-file workers.
- 4 Katherine van Wezel Stone, 'The Post-War Paradigm in American Labor Law', *The Yale Law Journal*, 90, June 1981, p. 1516. For a cogent overview of the postwar politics of growth at the national level, see Alan Wolfe, *America's Impasse: The Rise and Fall of the Politics of Growth*, Boston: South End Press, 1982; John Mollenkopf, *The Contested City*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983; and Robert Collins, *More: The Politics of Economic Growth in Postwar America*, New York & London: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- 5 See Jeffrey M. Hornstein, *A Nation of Realtors: A Cultural History of the Twentieth Century American Middle Class*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005, esp. pp. 119-55; and Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- 6 Ralph Miliband wonderfully debunked this mythology in his 'Professor Galbraith and American Capitalism', *Socialist Register 1968*, London: Merlin Press, 1968, pp. 215-29. The sleight-of-hand academics and pundits deployed to make class, and thus class conflict, disappear included shifting discussion of class as a meaningful social category from political economy to culture. This tendency is critiqued in Adolph Reed, Jr., 'Reinventing the Working Class: A Study in Elite Manipulation', *New Labor Forum*, 13, Fall 2004, pp. 18-26. Penny Lewis, *Hardhats, Hippies and Hawks: The Vietnam Antiwar Movement as Myth and Memory*, Ithaca and London: ILR Press, 2013, discusses the significance of this cultural construction of class in mystifying the sources of opposition to the Vietnam war and the notion of 'hardhat' patriotism.

- 7 Risa Goluboff, *The Lost Promise of Civil Rights*, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2007, describes a shift away from an approach stressing the roots of racial inequality in political economy to one focused on individual equal protection and equality of opportunity in civil rights litigation in the late 1940s, a shift that was the result of a combination of incentives and disincentives, including successful challenges to *de jure* segregation, and the chilling effect of anticommunist hysteria on expression of views that could seem like economic radicalism.
- 8 Gary Becker, *The Economics of Discrimination*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.
- 9 For critical discussion of those tendencies in late 1960s and 1970s black American radicalism, see Dean E. Robinson, *Black Nationalism in American Politics and Thought*, New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 70-136 and 'Black Power Nationalism as Ethnic Pluralism', in Adolph Reed, Jr., Kenneth W. Warren et al., *Renewing Black Intellectual History: The Ideological and Material Foundations of African American Thought*, Denver, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2010, pp. 186-214; and Cedric Johnson, *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders: Black Power and the Making of African American Politics*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.
- 10 Neoliberalism has become a catchword, of course, and taxonomizing it has become something of a cottage industry. Monica Prasad succinctly characterizes it as a practical programme consisting in 'taxation structures that favor capital accumulation over income redistribution, industrial policies that minimize the presence of the state in private industry, and retrenchment in welfare spending'. *The Politics of Free Markets: The Rise of Neoliberal Economic Policies in Britain, France, Germany, and the United States*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006, pp. 4-5. David Harvey cuts to the heart of the matter in describing neoliberalism as a programme for class power as well as a free-market utopia. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 2-3. From our perspective, neoliberalism is best summarized as capitalism that has effectively eliminated working-class opposition.
- 11 Joseph A. McCartin, *Collision Course: Ronald Reagan, the Air Traffic Controllers, and the Strike that Changed America*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- 12 Adolph Reed, Jr., 'Nothing Left: The Long, Slow Surrender of American Liberals', *Harper's*, March 2014, pp. 30-1.
- 13 In the spirit of full disclosure, both authors were intimately involved in that effort.
- 14 For discussion of the programme's specifics and more a thorough account of the Labor Party project and its history, see Mark Dudzic and Katherine Isaac, 'Labor Party Time? Not Yet', December 2012, available at <http://www.thelaborparty.org>; and Derek Seidman, 'Looking Back at the Labor Party: An Interview with Mark Dudzic', *New Labor Forum*, 23, Winter 2014, pp. 60-4 (and the response by Adolph Reed, Jr., pp. 65-7).
- 15 The New Party was formed to promote fusion voting as a model for national progressive political action. In 1997, the US Supreme Court ruled in *Timmins*

- v. *Twin Cities Area New Party* that states could not be compelled to permit fusion voting, and the national party quickly faded away. Its offshoot, the Working Families Party (WFP), has thrived in New York, which has a long history of minor parties gaining limited influence through fusion voting. The WFP has been less successful in the seven other states that allow fusion voting, and recently the party expanded into some non-fusion states.
- 16 On 'activism' see Liza Featherstone, Doug Henwood and Christian Parenti, "'Action Will Be Taken": Left Anti-Intellectualism and its Discontents', *Left Business Observer*, available at <http://www.leftbusinessobserver.com>. See also, Reed, 'Nothing Left'.
 - 17 Adolph Reed, Jr. and Merlin Chowkwanyun, 'Race, Class, Crisis: The Discourse of Racial Disparity and its Analytical Discontents', *Socialist Register 2012*, Pontypool: Merlin Press, 2011, pp. 149-75; Walter Benn Michaels, *The Trouble with Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality*, New York and London: Metropolitan Books, 2006 and 'Against Diversity', *New Left Review*, 52(July/August), 2008, pp. 33-6; Adolph Reed, Jr., 'Marx, Race, and Neoliberalism', *New Labor Forum*, 22, Winter 2013, pp. 49-57.
 - 18 Adolph Reed, Jr., 'The "Color Line" Then and Now: *The Souls of Black Folk* and the Changing Context of Black American Politics', in Reed, Warren et al, *Renewing Black Intellectual History*, pp. 271-3 and 'The Limits of Anti-racism', *Left Business Observer*, No. 121, September 2009, available at <http://www.leftbusinessobserver.com>.
 - 19 Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, New York: The New Press, 2010. For one powerful critique of Alexander's argument, see James Forman, Jr. 'Racial Critiques of Mass Incarceration: Beyond the New Jim Crow', *New York University Law Review*, 87, 2012, pp. 21-69.
 - 20 Eric Arnesen provides a careful consideration of the history of scholarship on race and the labour movement in 'Passion and Politics: Race and the Writing of Working-Class History', *Journal of the Historical Society*, 6, September 2006, pp. 323-56.
 - 21 Even the reliably working-class conscious *Labor Notes* sometimes lapses into this sort of formulation; see Steve Payne, 'Kellogg's Delivers Memphis a Slap in the Face', *Labor Notes*, 20 January 2014.
 - 22 Jo Ann Mort, ed., *Not Your Father's Labor Movement*, New York: Verso, 1998.
 - 23 See Herman Benson, 'Hybrid Unions: Dead End or Fertile Future?', *Dissent*, Winter 2009; Melvin Dubofsky, 'The Legacy of Andy Stern', *Dissent*, 12 May 2010, available at <http://www.dissentmagazine.org>; and Steve Early, *The Civil Wars in U.S. Labor: Birth of a New Workers' Movement or Death Throes of the Old?*, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011.
 - 24 For discussion of this issue see Sam Gindin, 'Puzzle or Misreading? Stagnation, Austerity and Left Politics', *The Bullet*, No. 920, 31 December 2013, and 'Underestimating Capital, Overestimating Labour: A Response to Andrew Kliman', *The Bullet*, No. 953, 21 March 2014, available at <http://www.socialistproject.ca>.
 - 25 Gindin, 'Unmaking Global Capitalism'.

- 26 Jane McAlevey, *Raising Expectations (and Raising Hell): My Decade Fighting for the Labor Movement*, New York and London: Verso, 2014, provides a pragmatically grounded and careful argument for developing a new social movement unionism in the US.
- 27 Rich Yeselson, 'Fortress Unionism', *Democracy*, Summer 2013, p. 76.
- 28 Jake Rosenfeld, *What Unions No Longer Do*, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2014, p. 158.
- 29 Yeselson, 'Fortress Unionism', p. 79.
- 30 Bruce Raynor and Andy Stern, 'Build Bridges. Not Fortresses', *Democracy*, Fall 2013, pp. 63-7.
- 31 Bryan D. Palmer criticizes these formulations persuasively in 'Reconsiderations of Class: Precariousness as Proletarianization', *Socialist Register 2014*, London: Merlin Press, 2014, pp. 40-62.
- 32 'Taxi! Taxi! Cabbies for Unlikely Union', available at <http://www.afcio.org>.
- 33 See <http://www.workerscenter.org>.
- 34 Bill Fletcher and Fernando Gapsin, *Solidarity Divided: The Crisis in Organized Labor and a New Path toward Social Justice*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009; and Sam Gindin, 'Working People's Assemblies: Can We Learn from American Activists?', *Canadian Dimension*, 40(September/October), 2006, available at <http://canadiandimension.com>.
- 35 G. Gonos and C. Martino, 'Temp Agency Workers in New Jersey's Logistics Hub: The Case for A Union Hiring Hall', *Working USA*, December 2011, pp. 499-525.
- 36 See Michael D. Yates, 'What's the Matter with US Labor? An Interview with Robert Fitch', *MRzine*, 30 March 2006, available at <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org>.
- 37 'Transit Workers and Advocates to Mobilize 20 Million Riders to Unite for May Transit Action Month', available at <http://www.atu.org>.
- 38 'Utilities Are a Public Good and Should Be Owned by the Public', available at <http://www.huffingtonpost.com>.
- 39 APWU President Mark Dimondstein's remarkable speech at the 2014 Labor Notes Conference, 'APWU Pres. Mark Dimondstein Calls For Defense Of The People's Post Office', is available at <https://www.youtube.com>.
- 40 Micah Uetricht, *Strike for America: Chicago Teachers Against Austerity*, New York and London: Verso, 2014; and Labor Notes, *How To Jump Start Your Union: Lessons from the Chicago Teachers*, Detroit: LERP, 2014.
- 41 For a recent revival of this idea, see: 'Why can't college be free?', available at <http://inthesetimes.com>; and 'What's Out? Student Debt. What's In? Free College', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 11 June 2014.
- 42 Richard Seymour, 'How the Right Sold Austerity as the Only Economic Solution', *The Guardian*, 28 March 2014
- 43 Some of this work has begun at Cornell's Global Labor Institute and with organizations like the Labor Network for Sustainability, available at <http://www.labor4sustainability.org>.