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This issue of *Catalyst* focuses on challenges to the political elites, both in the United States and in its wards. In a far-ranging essay, Dina Rizk Khoury examines the calamitous results of the US invasion of Iraq. In the wake of the military settlement and subsequent occupation, Washington not only managed to dismantle many of the institutional anchors for daily life, it incubated a ruling elite that has only maintained its predecessors' contempt for democratic rights and popular sovereignty. Khoury cogently lays out the political economy of this new ruling class, then provides an analysis of the subaltern forces coming together against it.

Despite cheering on the invasion and the occupation that followed, the mainstream media has been largely silent on events in Iraq since then. The same cannot be said for Israel, which has always had an outsize position in the public eye. While Israeli brutality toward the Palestinians has largely been either ignored or, more scandalously, defended, the tenor of public debate has shifted quite dramatically of late. American media has suddenly woken up to the brutal human costs of Israel's occupation and its periodic military attacks on the Palestinian territories. In this issue, we publish a symposium with Noam Chomsky, Rashid Khalidi, and Gilbert Achcar, in which the three analysts consider how and why the US coverage of Israeli policy has shifted so dramatically.

The changed attitude toward Israel is only part of the rapidly changing political discourse in the United States more generally. One of the most dramatic developments in this respect has been the crisis within the Republican Party since Donald

Trump's election. On the one hand, the party is even more brazenly attacking democratic institutions than it ever has before. But on the other, some of its most visible leaders are calling for an embrace of the working class, with a pronounced tilt toward economic populism. Making sense of this phenomenon is one of the most pressing tasks for the Left. In an ambitious analysis, Paul Heideman debunks the claim that the GOP is gaining real traction with the working class. He then examines the longer-term forces that are roiling the party, rendering it incapable of maintaining its place as the favored political vehicle for US capital.

And, in the latest entry in our "Radical Classics" series, Jeremy Cohan and Ben Serby take up Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*, one of the most influential books in the American New Left as it emerged during the 1960s. Marcuse's great work is frequently cited, but it no longer carries much weight among today's student left. Cohan and Serby advise that there is much in the book still of value, and hence that it ought to be revived — but that some of its central arguments are quite dubious, even mistaken. *One-Dimensional Man* deserves a place on today's bookshelves — but with a warning label.


مرفوض
من قبل الشعب


مرفوض
من قبل الشعب

ABSTRACT

Iraqi protests of the last decade are products of the contradictions and corruption that marked the American project in Iraq for the last thirty years. They are an indictment of the confessional and neoliberal order the United States created after the 2003 US invasion. Against insurmountable odds, Iraqi citizens have created a movement that seeks a political and social order that is both civic and nonsectarian.

Iraq After US Occupation

Dina Rizk Khoury

In early October 2019, Iraq was shaken by one of the biggest waves of popular protest since the American occupation. During yet another of the periodic negotiations among Iraq's political elites on the formation of a new government, thousands of young unemployed university students, joined by other Iraqis, gathered in Baghdad's Tahrir Square to protest their unemployment, their poor living conditions, and the corruption of the political class. Iraq's protests were part of the recurring eruption of global protest movements against the privatization of state resources, political corruption, and increased inequality. The protesters in the streets of Iraqi cities, particularly Baghdad, reproduced symbols and

repertoires used by protesters since the Arab Spring in 2011, as they did of the 2019 protests in Lebanon and Chile.[1]

The government's loss of great swaths of northern and northwestern Iraq to the Islamic State in 2014 marked the beginning of mass organized protest movements against Iraq's corrupt and kleptocratic political elite and their militarized parties in the southern and central Iraqi cities. The 2019 protests were spearheaded and dominated by youth who had come of age after the fall of the Ba'ath regime. The protesters were largely drawn from the Shia population, in whose "interests" the political elite of Arab Iraq ruled. They called for a "homeland" that included Iraqis irrespective of their religious sects and a state that protected their social and civil rights: "I am out here to take my rights," they chanted. They eschewed the politics of injury and redress that had dominated the political discourse of the post-Ba'athist political class. They asked for a democratic government that would jettison the apportionment of power and economic resources according to sect.[2]

Like a series of protests that had started in 2015, the 2019–20 demonstrations drew on cross-class and group alliances in the capital and the southern provinces of Iraq, developed new repertoires of protest, and produced distinctive cultural symbols. By early November, the protesters had articulated clear political demands. Despite their violent repression by the government and lack of a unified leadership, they refused to be assuaged by the

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1 I thank Hamza al-Anfasi, graduate student at the George Washington University, for his help and insights in researching this article.

2 See Harith Hasan, "al-ihtijajat al-tishriniya wa bunyat al-sulta fi al-Iraq," ("The October and November Protests and the Structure of Power in Iraq") and Faris Kamal Nazmi, "Fuqara' al-Shiá wa íádat bina' al-wataniyya al-iraqiyya," ("The Shia Poor and the Rebuilding of Iraqi Nationhood"), both in *al-Ihtijajat al-tishriniyya fi al-Iraq: ihtidar al-qadim wa isti'sa'al-jadid* ("The October/November Protests in Iraq: The Death of the Old and the Difficulty of the New"), eds. Harith Hasan and Faris Kamal Nazmi (Baghdad: Dar al-Mada, 2020).

The Tree of Protest. "And we do not dream of a life more than life, and that we die in our own way: Iraq, Iraq, and nothing but Iraq."

government's promises of new public-sector jobs, a knee-jerk reaction to the demands of earlier protests. They wanted radical change: a new election, reform of the electoral law and its system of confessional representation, and the appointment of an independent electoral commission. In other words, they wanted to overturn the neoliberal and confessional form of democratic politics and the economic and political distributive order that undergirded it, an order created and enforced by the United States and its Iraqi allies after the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

The demands of the protesters for a homeland and the conspicuous presence of the Iraqi flag in the iconography of the protests represented a call for a nonsectarian form of rule and for a state

that guarantees their rights.[3] Although the protest leaders did not clearly articulate a vision of a state, they evinced a rejection of the kind of distributive corporate state that had existed under the Ba'ath regime and pushed instead for a state that guarantees the conditions for the provision of care and social goods: jobs, electricity, health care, education, security, and a semblance of what some have called, using a stanza from Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, "a dream of life, no more than life."[4] The protesters organized outside and against the politics of party, drawing on the support of labor, professional, and women's organizations as they did on the support of tribal networks in the southern cities of Iraq. They deployed, according to sociologist Zahra Ali, a notion of "madaniyya," a form of civicness that is post-sectarian.[5]

While the wave of protests did eventually recede, the factors that led to its eruption did not. Indeed, the underlying contradictions, conflicts, and power constellations that were behind the upsurge are still very much in place. They can be traced directly to the settlement cobbled together by the United States after invading the country and, even further, to the sanctions regime of the 1990s. While Iraq no longer commands the attention of the American media, the catastrophic effects of the invasion and subsequent occupation still define much of the current political scene.

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3 Writing on the protests that had started in Basra in 2015, the late sociologist Faleh Jabar characterized the kind of state that the protesters called for as a civic state. See Faleh Jabar, "The Iraqi Protest Movement: From Identity Politics to Issue Politics," LSE Middle East Centre Papers, no. 25 (June 2018).

4 This was the slogan added to a Christmas tree of Iraqi flags by al-Mada, the publishing house founded by exiled communists and their allies in Syria, now based in Iraq. See image.

5 Zahra Ali, "Protest Movements in Iraq in the Age of a 'New Civil Society,'" Conflict Research Program Blog, LSE, October 3, 2019.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE PROTESTS

The protesters demanded an end to an order created by the twinning of political power to privatization of state resources that was forged by what political economists Christopher Parker and Pete Moore have characterized as a war economy. Iraq's war economy was born in the 1980s during the Iran-Iraq war, but it was transformed and sustained in the context of the United States' long war (1991–2011) against Iraq.[6] Three features of Iraq's political economy are relevant to our understanding of the protesters' demands for their rights and a homeland. The first is the erosion and dispersal to social, political, and military organizations of what they perceive as the state's imperative to provide a measure of security, social rights, and employment; the second is the peculiar form of corruption and distributive politics of the post-2003 political order; and the third is the increasing precarity in employment and access to services created by the privatization of the public sector and the insecurity of life.

Most analyses of the current impasse in Iraqi politics and the protest movement against the government begin with the post-invasion destruction of the Iraqi centralized state, its various coercive and bureaucratic institutions, and the privatization of its public sector. This process, "state rebuilding in reverse," entailed the disbanding of the army and the devolution of security and military functions, particularly after 2005, to an amalgam of US military forces, foreign contractors, and private militias of Iraqi allies of the United States.[7] The de-Ba'athification of state institutions led to

6 Christopher Parker and Pete Moore, "The War Economy of Iraq," *Middle East Report* 243 (Summer 2007).

7 Khalid Mustafa Madani, "State Rebuilding in Reverse: The Neoliberal 'Reconstruction' of Iraq," *Middle East Report* 232 (Fall 2004).

the economic and political disenfranchisement and criminalization of tens of thousands of Sunnis.[8] It fueled an insurgency and a sectarian civil war in the predominantly Arab regions of Iraq, even as it empowered Shia parties who held control of the government. Paul Bremer, the chief executive officer of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), the US governing body that oversaw the US "experiment" in Iraq and its reconstruction into a free market democracy, enacted Order 39, which permitted private and foreign ownership of Iraqi state-owned companies (excluding those of natural resources), allowed for total overseas remittances of profits, and imposed a flat tax of 15 percent, replacing a progressive taxation regime that had existed under the Ba'ath regime. By 2006, most state institutions had become arenas for competition between militarized political parties for the distribution of patronage and capital from income generated by public goods.

The post-invasion political and economic order, however, has a longer history, one that renders it challenging for the protesters to uproot. Iraqi state policies during the 1970s had followed what Isam al-Khafaji has called "state incubation of capitalism." The government financed private capitalist enterprises, particularly in the construction industry. The pressures created by the costs of the Iran-Iraq War (1980–88) led the Iraqi government to expand the scope of this policy as it sold state-owned enterprises and land to private investors often connected to the Ba'ath leadership.[9] It was, however, the US long war against Iraq that radically transformed and weakened the Iraqi state's capacity to allocate capital, distribute social goods, and monopolize the means of coercion.

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8 Shamiran Mako, "Institutionalizating Exclusion: De-Ba'thification in Post-2003 Iraq," *Religion, Violence, and the State in Iraq*, eds. Marc Lynch and David Siddhartha Patel, POMEPS Studies 35, October 2019.

9 Isam al-Khafaji, "State Incubation of Iraqi capitalism," *Middle East Report* 142 (September/October 1986).

The post-1991 Gulf War settlement and the thirteen-year United Nations (UN) sanctioned embargo compromised the territorial and economic sovereignty of Iraq and its military capabilities. The government lost effective control of three predominantly Kurdish provinces in the north to Kurdish parties as well as control of its airspace in both the north and south of the country. Resolution 661 prohibited all UN member states from importing or exporting goods from Iraq and established an invasive weapons inspection regime. As Iraq's economy was dependent on income generated from oil sales, and two-thirds of its food consumption came from imports, the impact of the embargo was devastating. Iraq's GDP fell by one-half to two-thirds of its prewar levels by 1997. By 1996, under pressure from international humanitarian organizations, including its own, the UN Security Council established the Oil-for-Food Programme, which allowed the Iraqi government to sell some of its oil to purchase food, medicine, and goods deemed essential for the survival of the population. The proceeds from the sale were placed in an escrow account managed by a special UN committee, the "661 Committee," tasked with overseeing that the proceeds from the oil sales were divided among reparations to Kuwait, its own administrative costs, and the Iraqi government, which received 50 percent from the sale of its own oil.[10]

The sanctions regime created a unique situation for the Iraqi government. It stripped the government of the capacity to finance its various ministries and social welfare organizations, it limited its ability to continue "incubating" a class of capitalists through state projects, and it deprived it of funds to continue building the various sections of its security/military apparatus. Moreover,

10 Joy Gordon, *Invisible War: The United States and the Iraq Sanctions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 20–5. See also Nida Alahmad, "The Politics of Oil and State Survival in Iraq (1991–2003): Beyond the Rentier Thesis," *Constellations* 14, no. 4 (2007).

it reduced the regime's ability to trade as an independent state within the international system and inserted an international body to manage its economy and determine through specialized rules, often made on the fly by the Security Council, what were considered licit and illicit international transactions.[11] The result might be described as an internationally enabled regime of privatization riddled by corruption due to the very nature of the embargo's limitations. The Iraqi government was forced to generate income by circumventing the sanctions regime. It engaged in an illicit trade in oil and goods through alliances forged in the shadowy world of international, regional, and Iraqi entrepreneurs who were adept at moving goods and currency.

Within Iraq, much of the official economic activity of the state was carried out through the Office of the Presidency, which had become a shadow state disbursing state contracts in construction, land cultivation, and transport of oil and other goods, mostly funded by a parallel economy based on currency dealings, trade, and smuggling. Clan and family networks loyal to Saddam Hussein and drawn from areas in central and western Iraq, later characterized as the Sunni Triangle by the US occupying forces, played a critical role this economy.[12] Illicit transports of oil to Jordan and Turkey were monopolized by favored clans, as was trade in goods coming across from Jordan, Turkey, and Iran. The Iraq of the 1990s saw the emergence of a new class of entrepreneurs, the "cats of the embargo," as they were known in Iraq, drawn from different ethnic and sectarian groups, embedded in an illicit economy and in social/tribal and familial networks of control that crossed borders

11 Alahmad, "The Politics of Oil and State Survival."

12 On the concept of the shadow state, see Charles Tripp, "Militias, Vigilantes, Death squads: Charles Tripp on the Grammar of Violence in Iraq," *London Review of Books* 29, no. 2 (January 2007).

with Jordan, Turkey, and Iran.[13] The sanctions regime served them well. Most other Iraqis found employment and tried to survive through working the system, helping in the transport of oil and goods as truck drivers, using brokers to get funds out of or into the country, paying bribes to Ba'athist cadres and others to access jobs, and working with networks to smuggle goods that ranged from cigarettes to medicines. These petty trade and brokerage networks constitute what Parker and Moore have described as a "grassroots political economy" that the US occupation disrupted but ultimately reproduced on a wider scale.[14] The wholesale privatization of state-owned enterprises by the United States and its Iraqi allies after 2003 brought in new actors and further fragmented the sovereignty of Iraq, but it built networks of capital transfers on a grassroots economy of war and sanctions that had developed in the 1990s.

Equally important to understanding the political economy created by the sanctions regime and its long-term impact on post-invasion Iraq was the devolution of welfare and security to a host of social and paramilitary organizations, effectively leading to a retribalization of Iraqi society and the dispersal of the relatively centralized coercive power of the state and the Ba'ath Party. Clan and tribal networks are part of many Iraqis' politicization and their sociability. During the 1990s, much of the illicit trade in oil and goods, as well as the state contracts to entrepreneurs, took place through clan and kin networks approved and encouraged by the Office of the Presidency. These networks fed into the paramilitary organizations set up by the regime or sustained by tribes that became means to provide patronage and employment.

13 Joseph Braude, *The New Iraq: Rebuilding the Country for Its People, the Middle East, and the World* (New York: Basic Books, 2003)

14 Parker and Moore, "The War Economy."

More insidious was the erosion of the civil and legal rights of citizens, evidenced by their hesitancy to use civil and criminal courts to get things done, as more of the business of everyday life, particularly on questions that dealt with legal disputes, inheritance, and women's rights, devolved to tribal and clan leaders.[15] The legalization of the tribal code of honor killings served as the most dramatic example of the ceding of security of life and rights to social organizations sometimes linked to paramilitary groups and sanctioned by the regime. By 2003, the Iraqi state was neither sovereign nor centralized. It was fragmented and networked, its various administrative and bureaucratic institutions linked to the Office of the Presidency. It functioned through patronage and clientism, the devolution and privatization of social control and security, and was sustained by an economy linked to regional and international networks of licit and illicit trade.

THE UNITED STATES INVASION AND THE NEOLIBERAL POLITICAL ECONOMY OF WAR

Despite the erosion of the rule of a centralized sovereign state during the 1990s, the vision of a national government working through its institutions to disburse public goods remained a powerful one to the political elite of the Ba'ath, as it did to most Iraqi citizens. The US occupation of Iraq brought a violent end to this vision. The American political and economic blueprint for a democratic Iraq drew on an amalgam of ideas. The leadership of CPA came armed with a colonial/imperial narrative of the nature of Iraqi society as fragmented between sects and tribes whose primordial loyalties had to be managed within a democratic structure that apportioned political power and

15 Dina Rizk Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime: Soldiering, Martyrdom, and Remembrance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) and Alissa Walter, "Sex Crimes and Punishment in Baghdad," *Religion, Violence, and the State in Iraq*.

state resources to ensure proportional representation of sects. A new demographic logic, violently imposed through occupation, dominated the apportionment of power. Sunnis, as the perceived primary beneficiaries of Ba'athist Iraq, were rendered a minority and Shias a majority. Kurds, predominantly Sunni, were regarded as a proto-nation within the Iraqi national space. The Iraqi Constitution of 2005 enshrined a confessional order, similar to the Lebanese system, in which representation in parliament, as well as the country's leadership, were apportioned according to confessional and ethnic divisions in the country.[16] The neoliberal economic order imposed by the CPA privatized and deregulated the public sector and spearheaded a "reconstruction" dominated by US companies and a parasitic class of diasporic entrepreneurs tied to political parties who funneled their profits to investments outside the country. The emerging regime, described in Arabic as "muhasasa ta'ifa" — that is, the division of power and state resources among political parties organized around sectarian and ethnic agendas — made the system of patronage emanating from the Office of the Presidency and the privatized and networked circulation of capital of the 1990s seem relatively orderly and predictable.

In its crudest form, muhasasa ta'ifa is a political and economic bargain among Iraq's post-invasion political class to divvy up state ministries and institutions and privatize its resources according to an ethno-sectarian quota system. Iraq's main Shia political blocs — the Da'wa and its offshoots, the Sadrists, and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq in its various iterations — continue to be its main beneficiaries, with Sunni parties as junior partners in areas outside the Kurdistan Regional Government's control. Despite the

16 The literature on the muhasasa ta'ifa is extensive. For a brief analysis, see Toby Dodge, "Muhasasa Ta'ifiya and Its Others: Domination and Contestation in Iraq's Political Field," *Religion, Violence, and the State in Iraq*.

fractious nature of the new political class, their parties developed remarkably similar mechanisms of patronage.

Elaborate and opaque networks of clientism dependent on the strategic distribution of political office, employment, and contracts of public-sector companies were set in place. The networks are created and managed through brokerage that covered a wide range of activity. Brokers close to parliamentarians known for their corruption introduce the portfolio of a person interested in a position for a set fee. Certain leaders of parliamentary blocs are known for farming out short-term or long-term positions for a brokerage fee.[17] The main political parties jockey every parliamentary election for control of certain ministries. The ministries of oil, health, interior, electricity, and water are the most lucrative, as their ministers determine the allocations for the most profitable of the state-owned enterprises that could be farmed out to clients.[18] Economic committees of the main political parties are the primary sources of funding for party activities and militias. Together with the election committees of parties, they are responsible for nominating persons for positions in ministries. The committees then act as brokers of government contracts for favored clients. In 2014, for example, government ministries had issued contracts for six thousand projects at a total value of $220 billion. Around five thousand of these projects were fake or not implemented. Employment in ministries of ghost hires helped win clients. Under Nouri al-Maliki, head of the Da'wa Party, prime minister, and commander in chief of the armed forces, some fifty thousand ghost soldiers were hired by the Ministry of Defense.[19]

17 Kadhim al-Sayyadi, "Bazaar bay' wa shira' manasib fi al-'iraq" ("The Sale of Office Bazaar in Iraq"), *Azzaman*, February 21, 2020.

18 Ali al-Mawlawi, "Public Payroll Expansion in Iraq: Causes and Consequences," LSE Middle East Centre Report, October 2019.

19 Faleh Jabar, "The Iraqi Protest Movement," 16.

For most Iraqis who are not part of the entrepreneurial economic and political class, employment in the army, security service, militias, and various ministries is dependent on networks of brokerage and clientism. University graduates, workers, and young Iraqis find that they must be plugged into this system of patronage through a broker, not necessarily linked to a party, who, for a fee, can provide them with access to jobs, medical care, and other public goods.[20] Mapping the links between party and hiring practices in the public sectors is often difficult, as it varies from ministry to ministry. Although patronage is transactional, it is often deployed for political parties to curry favor with supporters, particularly for managerial positions in the public sector. In some ministries, such as oil, defense, electricity, and higher education, no unitary party has held sway without contestation, and brokerage is often dependent on personalities rather than parties.[21] Despite the formation of parliamentary judicial and investigative committees to fight corruption that purport to draw a clear distinction between licit and illicit, public and private, much of the work of its members is performative, designed to punish opponents, appease international funders, and deal with critics.

This neoliberal "developmental" project has features of privatization projects elsewhere but has some distinguishing characteristics. The privatization of state resources took place as a result of war and in the context of severe limitations on the country's sovereignty. Moreover, it is enabled by systemic militarization and securitization of economic, political, and social life. Violence and intimidation are essential to the theft of national resources. Such violence started with an occupation that imposed

20 Ahmed Maher, "Iraq Corruption: How Ministry Officials Make Millions in 'Cash for Jobs' Schemes," *National*, March 26, 2021.

21 Ali al-Mawlawi, "Public Payroll Expansion in Iraq."

a confessional democratic order at the barrel of a gun and was sustained by political parties that imposed their power through the deployment of militias. The corruption that pervaded the dismantling of the Iraqi state began by the pilfering of the funds of the UN Oil-for-Food Programme by the Department of Defense to the tune of more than $8 billion and is enabled through the transfer of part of the oil proceeds through the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, an agreement sanctioned by the UN as part of monies earmarked for development projects in Iraq.[22] In addition, the extractive rather than productive and developmental use of Iraq's resources is largely the result of an alliance of US, international, and regional corporate interests with a parasitic class of Iraqi entrepreneurs connected to Iraqi centers of power.[23] It is instructive to trace the twin roles of violence and international capital flows in the primary sector of the economy: that of oil and energy.

OIL AS THE FULCRUM

Iraq has the third-largest oil reserves in the world and some 78 trillion cubic feet of gas reserves. Crude oil sales constitute 95 percent of the state's budget and fund all public-sector expenditures.[24] The exploitation of Iraq's vast oil and gas reserves was a critical factor in the US invasion of Iraq and the neoliberal project of "reconstruction" and "democratization" that it envisioned. The Americans and their Iraqi and Kurdish allies thought that the only way to refurbish Iraqi's moribund oil industry after years of sanctions was through privatizing state-owned oil industries and the development of Iraqi

22 On the lost $8.7 billion, see "U.S. Can't Account for $8.7 Billion of Iraq's Money," *Reuters*, July 27, 2010. For the funneling of oil money through Federal Reserve Bank of New York, see Robert F. Worth, "Inside the Iraqi Kleptocracy," *New York Times*, July 29, 2020.

23 Pete Moore, "Making Big Money on Iraq," *Middle East Report* 11 (2009).

24 Munir Chalabi, "Views on the Prospects of Iraq's Oil and Gas Resources," *Znet*, March 21, 2009,

reserves through production-sharing contracts. The privatization of the oil industry was, from the beginning, a hard sell for many Iraqis, including labor unions, economists, gas experts, civil society organizations, and some major political parties like the Sadrists. Although the Iraqi cabinet, under US pressure, had approved an Iraqi oil and energy law that would have privatized oil production and marketing, it came under attack from parliamentarians who insisted that Iraqi oil, nationalized in 1972, was the property of the Iraqi people.[25] By 2010, no oil or gas law had been passed, but the Iraqi government, with the support of key political blocs in parliament, had devised a method to circumvent the legal and political constraints imposed by the pre-invasion oil law.[26]

Most of the oil reserves outside the areas controlled by the Kurdistan Regional Government are in southern Iraq. Basra, Iraq's second-largest city and its only point of access to the Persian Gulf, is the main port for trade with the Gulf, Iran, and the Indian Ocean. By 2009, all Iraqi oil and gas development was allocated to international oil companies in production-sharing contracts at a ratio of 51/49 percent split of profits between the companies and the Iraqi government.[27] More problematic for prospects of national development and employment of Iraqis, these oil companies had

25 Kamil Mahdi, "No Law for Oil," Transnational Institute, August 1, 2007,

26 Chalabi, "Views on the Prospects." The Iraqi government used a Ba'athist Revolutionary Command Order issued in 1987 that moved the decision for awarding contracts to international oil companies from the Iraq National Oil Company to the Ministry of Oil, so that the current government gives the decision to award contracts to the Ministry of Oil on the condition that parliament approves every contract. The Ba'athist decree was issued to help Iraq contract with international oil companies to repair its infrastructure destroyed during the Iran-Iraq War. The Ba'athist government had also contracted with Chinese, French, and Russian companies to develop oil fields in the south of Iraq, but these contracts fell prey to the embargo. There was precedent, therefore, for contracting out to companies, but these contracts remained limited in number, and the Iraqi government retained general oversight.

27 Munir Chalabi, "Iraq Oil: Are the 1st and 2nd Bid Round Part of a Wise Resource Development Strategy?" *Znet,* November 15, 2009.

the right to develop and manage the oil fields with very little oversight by the Iraqi government, a fact not lost on workers in the Iraqi oil industry who objected to the new deals, particularly over the contracts allocated to the Chinese National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and British Petroleum (BP) to develop eight oil and gas fields in the Rumaila basin in southern Iraq.[28]

The privatization of Iraq's energy resources proved to be lucrative for international oil companies and subcontractors in the construction, security, shipping, and transport of oil products. From the beginning, however, the allocation of contracts, the pricing, and the execution were riddled with corruption and low returns. Iraq's oil production levels did not attain their pre-2003 levels until 2010, and the increase in returns on oil sales was, until the 2013 dip in oil prices, a result of high prices on the international market. Even more problematic, there is no dependable measure of Iraq's oil production, as there are no updated meters installed yet, in part to allow for the theft of oil to sell on the black market.[29]

Where did all the money go? To Iraqi and international brokers for contracts, and to various party militias for protection money against the sabotage of construction, electricity lines, and pipelines. The biggest beneficiaries, however, were the large construction and drilling companies that were subcontracted by the major oil corporations. In the case of the Rumaila oil field, the Iraqi Ministry of Oil signed a profit-sharing agreement to drill for oil with CNPC (37 percent) and BP (38 percent), with its own State Organization for Marketing of Oil (SOMO) acquiring the remaining 25 percent. CNPC and BP then subcontracted the drilling to five companies, three of them US-owned, at inflated prices amounting

28 Aref Mohammed, "Iraq's Weakened Unions Fight Foreign Oil Firms, *Reuters*, July 13, 2009.

29 Munir Chalabi, "Iraqi Oil: Transparency and Corruption," *Znet*, September 26, 2011.

to more than three times what these companies charge per well for drilling in other Gulf countries.[30] Inflated salaries for experts and money funneled to European and American brokers, among them diplomats, were also part of the bonanza for Iraq's oil.[31]

International corporations and their brokers are not the only beneficiaries of the development of Iraq's oil industry. The transport and sale of oil has provided a great arena for competition among parties and Iraqi and regional business interests, with Iran, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia as the major hubs for trade and movement of capital. In 2017, Iraq's state oil transport company signed a profit-sharing agreement with Arab Maritime Petroleum Transport Company, which is owned by Arab oil-producing states, to ship Iraqi oil, since Iraq's twenty-four oil tankers were in a state of disrepair. The new company, AISSOT, was headquartered in the UAE and run by an individual with close ties to the Al-Hikma party, an offshoot of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, a close ally of Iran. The Iraqi government was to provide oil to the company at a discounted price to sell at market value. With very little government oversight and to circumvent the sanctions against Iran, the company began to transport Iraqi oil to Iran, mix it with Iranian oil, and sell it on the market as Iraqi oil. In the two years of its operation, AISSOT sold, according to some estimates, some $87 billion of Iraqi oil. Money was funneled through the company's headquarters in the UAE.[32]

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30 Chalabi, "Iraqi Oil."

31 Peter Galbraith, an American diplomat, received stakes in oil production in the Kurdish region in exchange for negotiating with the Iraqi government to guarantee Kurdish autonomy in the 2005 constitution, a task he accomplished admirably as a diplomat for the occupying power. He also received kickbacks from a Norwegian company for oil development in Iraqi Kurdistan. James Glanz and Walter Gibbs, "U.S. Adviser to Kurds Stands to Reap Oil Profits," *New York Times*, November 11, 2009.

32 "Naft al-Iraq, mazij min alhadr wa al-fasad" ("Iraq's oil: a mixture of water and

In addition to the pilfering of oil resources through state agencies and their corporate allies, oil smuggling, which had started under the sanctions regime, is no longer illicit.

Smuggling feeds the coffers of party militias that control the Basra port and collect import taxes, particularly those associated with the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq and its leader Ammar al-Hakim, an offshoot of the Da'wa Party headed by former prime minister Nouri al-Maliki, and a branch of the Sadrist movement. According to Pete Moore, smuggling has now developed into a "self-regulating" system, with pop-up ports along the Shatt al-Arab waterway acting as points of entry for small ships and converted barges. The UAE provides businessmen with a haven for the capital made from smuggling, as it does for the export of the stolen oil, which is sold to regional buyers.[33] The system is undergirded by protection money rackets maintained by militias and tribal groups in southern Iraq. In the words of an Iraqi trader, "Under Saddam, you could be robbed by the public sector or forced to pay bribes. Now you lose your money, or your life, or your brother's."[34] If the UN-sanctioned embargo of the 1990s had produced "cats of the embargo," then democratic and neoliberal Iraq has created, according to Iraqis, the "whales of corruption." They constitute, as Isam al-Khafaji has observed, a ruling class defined by its ownership of assets created by the privatization of state-owned enterprises and offices, and possessed, despite its politically fractious nature, of the consciousness and ability to reproduce itself. While dominated by a Shiite oligarchy, it includes Sunnis, Kurds, Turkomans, and Christians.[35]

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corruption"), *al-hurra*, May 31, 2020.

33 Moore, "Making Big Money."

34 Quoted in Moore, "Making Big Money."

35 Isam al-Khafaji, "äl-milla al-sunniyya fi al-dawla al-shiíyya," ("The Sunni Mil-

It is difficult to exaggerate the disastrous impact of this misuse of public national wealth on working Iraqis who are not among the class of political, security, and business entrepreneurs that have amassed wealth and influence from the system. The political economy of muhasasa ta'ifa is fueled by a distributive logic that disburses offices, employment, and economic resources to clients at the expense of state investments in agriculture and industry. The official national unemployment rate in Iraq stands at 16 percent and is as high as 36 percent among youth.[36] More than 53 percent of Iraqis work in the grassroots economy with little or no job security, no social or health benefits, and no legal protections. They constitute a precariat that cuts across Iraqi social groups from university graduates to working-class migrants in urban centers such as Basra and Baghdad.[37] Many find employment in the construction business, the most successful of private enterprises. Others eke out a living as street vendors or tuk-tuk drivers, or they join one of the paramilitary organizations that provide a semblance of social and economic security.[38]

The most secure path to employment is in the public sector, which is largely financed by proceeds from oil. Public-sector employment has quintupled since 2005, funding for which had, by

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let in the Shií State"), *al-hiwar*, September 9, 2019.

36 Ali al-Mawlawi, "Public Payroll Expansion in Iraq."

37 Hana'Abd al-Jabbar Saleh, "al-Amal ghayr al-muhaykal if al-Iraq" ("Informal Labor in Iraq").

38 Iraqi political economists and activists have begun to discuss Iraq's current class structure in terms of a precariat that cuts across old class lines. See the Iraqi Communist Party's attempt at thinking through how to characterize this group of people that challenge Marxist definitions of class in Nadia Mahmoud, "al-tanzim al-úmali-al-batala, al-'amala al-hishsha fi al-íraq" ("Worker Organization, Unemployment, and the Precariat"), *al-hiwar al-mutamadin*, May, 8, 2018. See also Madhar Muhammad Saleh, "al-tabaqa al-ritha wa al-istibdad al-sharqi fi al-Iraq" ("The Precariat and Oriental Despotism in Iraq").

2019, exceeded the proceeds from the sale of oil.[39] The ministries of Defense and Interior have absorbed a significant part of Iraq's male population, particularly after 2019, when these departments incorporated 44,000 members of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) that had been marshaled to fight the Islamic State of Iraq. For most Iraqis, however, public-sector employment does not guarantee a secure income. The majority of the 176 registered state-owned companies are not profitable and depend on soft money drawn from state banks such as the Rafidain and Rasheed banks. A large part of the young labor in the public sector is hired on an hourly basis, with no social security or health benefits. In the eighteen state-owned enterprises run by the Ministry of Oil, older employees constitute two-thirds of the 140,000 workers and are hired on a full-time basis, while the rest are daily wage earners on short-term contracts. The precarity of Iraqi contract labor has been a main bone of contention between labor and professional unions and the government, and the issue has been repeatedly raised by protesters since at least 2015. In the elections that came about as a result of the 2018 protests, one of the main topics that dominated negotiations with the government were the demands of contractors in state-owned enterprises for fair working conditions, security, and pension schemes. Contract employees of the ministries of Education and Electricity took to the streets again in 2019 to demand work security.[40]

The privatization of Iraq's state resources and its embeddedness in war and militarization have not gone unchallenged. Unlike in Lebanon, the formal apportionment of political and economic resources on an ethno-sectarian basis does not have a long history

39 Ahmed Tabaqchali, "Will Covid-19 Mark the Endgame for Iraq's Muhasasa Ta'ifia?" Arab Reform Initiative, April 24, 2020.

40 Ali al-Mawlawi, "Public Payroll Expansion in Iraq."

in Iraq. While the ruling class of the new order is entrenched, its hold remains precarious and must be sustained by continuous negotiations and strategic use of violence against Iraqi citizens, who have been protesting the new order since its imposition by the United States and its Iraqi allies.

THE IRAQI PROTESTS AND THE MAKING OF A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

Iraqis have been protesting the inequalities of the political and economic order and the precarity of life it has spawned since 2011, when protests across Iraq led to the resignation of several governors and leaders of security agencies and pushed the al-Maliki government to promise tens of thousands of jobs for the young unemployed and provide better public services. However, the series of protests that began in 2015 in predominantly Shiite south and central Iraq and culminated in 2019 marked a departure from the earlier uprisings. They heralded the formation of a social movement constructed through significant, if tenuous, alliances among different civic organizations and social groups. While Sunnis in Baghdad and Basra did participate in the protests in 2019, most Sunnis in the rest of Iraq were exhausted by the occupation of Mosul and the war against the Islamic State and fearful of being accused of terrorism by the Iraqi government.

The demonstrations of 2015 erupted during an economic and political crisis and were a dress rehearsal for the protests that followed in 2018 and 2019. The precipitous decline in oil prices in 2013 cut into the government's ability to pay salaries to public-sector employees. The monopolization of power by Nouri al-Maliki and his Da'wa Party created discontent across the sectarian divide in Iraq. The disillusionment with the corruption and ineffectiveness of sectarian politics was exposed with the fall of Mosul to the Islamic State in 2014. Despite Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani's

call for Shias to unite and join militias to fight the Islamic State, protesters did not heed the spiritual leader's call for unity. They began by demanding basic rights to electricity, water, and social services, but their demands became more political as the movement acquired coherence and spread to other cities. They called for a civil nonsectarian national state and an end to the corrupt quota system.

The demonstrations began in July in the city of Basra by people protesting electricity cuts and soon spread to Baghdad, Kut, Amarah, Nasiriyya, and Diwaniyya. By mid-August, protesters had set up coordinating committees across cities to organize sit-ins and protests in major squares and in front of government offices every Friday. Supported by clerics and young theology students in the holy city of Najaf and joined by Sadrists, the protests drew more than a million supporters. They culminated in a joyful New Year's Eve party in which millions participated. Five months later, at the beginning of 2016, they had petered out due to fatigue and opposition from political parties allied with Iran, including the Sadrists, who buckled under the pressure of Shia parties, which argued that the protests were depleting government resources at a critical time in their fight against the Islamic State.[41] The protesters, however, managed to bring about a change in government and extract a promise from the new prime minister to improve services, implement administrative changes in provincial councils, and set up effective investigative parliamentary committees to fight corruption.

Several factors contributed to the change in the organizational abilities and political agendas of the 2015 protesters. Perhaps the most important is the coming of age of a generation of Iraqis born in the 1990s who had only a vague memory of Ba'athist rule and

41 Faleh Jabar, "The Iraqi Protest Movement."

who were socialized into Islamist and sectarian politics. Their rebellion marked a rejection of a militarized political culture that had securitized large parts of their daily lives, from crossing barricades within cities to go to work to their ability to access social goods. Roughly 60 percent of the demonstrators in Iraqi cities in 2015 were under thirty, drawn primarily from the lower and middle classes of society.[42] They had no experience of a secular order and knew little about the nationalist ideologies that dominated the Arab world in the 1960s and '70s. Nor were they interested in the politics of Shiite grievance against the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein that had given legitimacy to the power of sectarian political parties. Some even expressed a nostalgia for the days of Saddam Hussein, when, they imagined, a semblance of security existed.[43] Their call for a civil nonsectarian order drew on models gleaned from their experience of civil society organizations formed over the previous decade and from the examples of protests that had rocked the Arab world since 2011. They were adept, as well, at the use of social media platforms to project their message, articulate their demands, and organize protests, a skill that allowed them to get people into the streets, even as it did not help create a unitary organizational structure that could give a stable form to their movement. Like others of their generation, they shunned formal organizations such as parties and insisted on the strength of the fluidity of their movement, which they described as "al-hirak" (the movement).

While the socialization of a new generation of Iraqis was an important factor in the transformation of popular politics, the development of civic, labor, and professional organizations after 2005 was equally crucial. The 2015 and 2018 protests that swept

42 Faleh Jabar, "The Iraqi Protest Movement."

43 Marsin Alshamary, "Authoritarian Nostalgia Among Iraqi Youth: Roots and Repercussions," *War on the Rocks*, July 25, 2018.

through southern and central Iraq began in Basra, the hub of the most ambitious development projects of the country's oil and gas reserves and the only maritime port for export and import in Iraq. Basra and, to a lesser degree, the southern city of Nasiriyya had a long history of labor activism and were, until its elimination by the Ba'ath Party, centers for recruitment and activism by the Iraqi Communist Party. Soon after the US occupation, Iraqi trade unions began to reconstitute themselves, drawing on the help of returning Iraqi labor activists and trade unionists, particularly members of the Iraqi Communist Party, and with the advice of international labor organizations in the United States and Britain. Until 2015, Iraq had no labor law, and workers in public-sector enterprises and institutions were not allowed to unionize. This restriction, however, did not prevent workers in Basra from founding the General Union of Electricity Workers and Technicians (GUEWT) and the Southern Oil Company Union (SOCU). The Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions (IFOU) was founded in 2005 as a consortium of unions of Iraqi workers in the oil industry. The southern unions are now among the largest in the country.

Although workers in the oil and electricity sector were officially employees of the oil and electricity ministries, their wages and working conditions were managed by multinational corporations that were tasked with developing and reconstructing these sectors. Labor activism in its initial phases focused on labor issues. Unions asked that companies use Iraqi rather than imported labor, construct housing, provide adequate social security benefits, and turn all contract workers into full-time employees with the attendant benefits. While labor activism focused on issues relating to jobs, the centrality of the oil and electricity sectors to the economic and social welfare of Iraqis lent national consequence to labor actions. Labor actions often led to government suppression or attacks by militias and supporters of political parties who benefit from the

pilfering of oil and electricity.[44] Hashmeya al-Saadawi, the president of the GUEWT in Basra, the first women voted to head a labor union in Iraq, and, since 2018, a member of the Iraqi parliament, spoke to the threats she experienced not only as a woman but as an advocate against the corruption of a government incapable of controlling the systematic theft of funds allocated to development of the electric grid.[45]

Workers in the oil sector were at the forefront of opposition to the privatization of the oil industry and the reconstruction of port facilities. Strikes by oil workers forced Halliburton to leave the oil-producing districts it had taken control of after 2003.[46] The Iraqi government's attempt to issue a new oil law to privatize the oil industries in 2007 brought the oil unions to national attention as protectors of Iraq's national wealth. Al-Saadawi, head of the GUEWT, and Hassan Jum'a Awad, president of the IFUO, toured the United States, trying to drum up support for their opposition to the proposed oil law, while oil workers in Basra went on strike. Prime Minister al-Maliki called on the army to surround the strikers and issued warrants for the arrest of the union's leaders.[47] The oil law did not pass because of opposition within parliament and among wide sectors in Iraqi society. Opposition by Iraqi labor unions directly affected by privatization served to highlight the dangers of losing control of Iraq's main national resource.

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44 In 2011, for example, the General Federation of Workers Councils and Unions in Iraq issued a statement condemning the pilfering of some $1.5 billion in contracts to fake companies meant to develop electricity in Iraq. *Iraq Trade Union Rights* 2, no. 3 (Third Quarter 2011).

45 Interview with Hashmeya al-Saadawi, IndustriALL, January 2016, industriall-union.org/interview-hashmeya-alsaadawe.

46 David Bacon, "Iraq's Workers Strike to Keep Their Oil," *Dollars & Sense* (September/October 2007).

47 Bacon, "Iraq's Workers Strike." See also Shawna Bader-Blau, "Iraqi Unions vs. Big Oil," *Middle East Report* 243 (Summer 2007).

By 2018, when the second wave of protests broke out across southern and central Iraq, labor activism had compelled the government to draft a labor law and a social security law that included benefits for contingent workers. Equally important was the emerging activism of professional unions, particularly those dependent on public employment, against government delays in payment of salaries and dilapidated schools and hospitals, despite the unions' infiltration by Islamist political parties. The 2018 elections that came about as a result of protesters' demand for a new government led to the formation of a new coalition with the Sadrist party that included secular civic parties and brought the election of al-Saadawi to parliament.[48]

Iraqi streets are dominated by men, but since 2015, women activists have become increasingly visible in mass protests. The gendered nature of public spaces has a great deal to do with the insecurity of life as well as the dominance of conservative Islamist political parties. It is also a result of the increase in the religious sociability of both women and men in Iraq that began in the 1990s and continues, as it does elsewhere in the Arab world, in the present. Despite the impediments to women's visibility, women's organizations have played a critical role in the politics of post-invasion Iraq. Some are affiliated with Islamist and ethnic parties, while others remain independent from party affiliation. They work against difficult conditions that are marked by threats of violence, harassment, and corrupt institutional and party practices.[49] Women's organizations mobilize over women's legal rights, particularly those that have to do with the personal status law, welfare, and social protection laws. Women activists come from

48 See Isam al-Khafaji on the significance of the 2018 elections, "Iraq 2018 Elections: Between Sectarianism and the Nation," Arab Reform Initiative, July 12, 2018.

49 Zahra Ali, *Women and Gender in Iraq: Between Nation-Building and Fragmentation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

a large political spectrum, and their activism covers a wide array of issues. As elected officials to city councils, for example, they often deal with corruption and interparty rivalries in their attempts to address municipal concerns. As heads of civic organizations that focus on social welfare matters, they must navigate the social politics of family and the local bureaucracy. They also take on national problems. The Iraqi Women's Network, for example, an umbrella of independent women's organizations, has mobilized against armed violence, sectarianism, and corruption.[50] By 2011, women's presence in the periodic demonstrations that erupted in Iraqi cities became visible. In the 2015 protests, women constituted 14 percent of protesters on the streets, according to one survey.[51]

While the development of civic groups like labor and professional unions and women's organizations played an important role in supporting a new post-sectarian politics, the Sadrists, a populist mass movement deeply enmeshed in sectarian politics despite its embrace of nationalist and anti-imperial agendas, played a critical role in the post-sectarian popular protests of 2015, 2018, and 2019. Like the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Sadrists insist that they are not a political party but a movement that depends on the mobilization of the oppressed and marginalized among the Shia community. Muqtada al-Sadr, its founder and the son and nephew of two venerated scholars murdered by Saddam Hussain, built his movement and a political machine on mobilizing the Iraqi underclass in Sadr City along with supporters of his late father in the southern cities of Iraq. Unlike the Shiite parties that were installed by the US occupation, who had spent much of the 1980s and '90s in Iran and whose politics remained pro-Iranian, al-Sadr could claim that his is a grassroots activism that never resorted to alliances with foreign powers, be they Iranian or American.

50 Ali, *Women and Gender in Iraq*.

51 Faleh Jabar, "The Iraqi Protest Movement."

His anti-imperialist and nationalist stance gave him legitimacy and helped him build a popular base of support and a militia that played a leading role in the sectarian violence that pervaded Iraq between 2006 and 2007.

By 2010, the Sadrists had become part of the government, playing the politics of quota and corruption to the hilt despite al-Sadr's insistence on his movement's status as an outsider. It was a strategic position to take, as it allowed him to play the role of mediator between the politics of discontent of the Iraqi public and the government. In all the major protests since 2015, his directive to his followers to join the protesters added demographic heft and social legitimacy to the demonstrations, particularly among the dispossessed of Sadr City and Basra, where he had a strong following. Despite the hesitancy and ambivalence of protest leaders in 2018 and 2019 about Sadrists' participation, they were reluctant to forego the support of the constituencies they brought or the protection their participation provided against government repression. In 2018, the Sadrists were able to capitalize on the protests by embracing some of the protesters' demands for reform and forming a coalition with several non-Islamist parties, including the Iraqi Communist Party, to create Sairoon ("Moving Forward"), which became the largest parliamentary bloc after the elections. Sadrists' embrace of the post-sectarian agenda of the protesters was an admission that the new politics, as the director of their political office, Dhiaa al-Asadi, said, "constitutes a paradigm shift and a departure from the established norms that have characterized the political process since 2003."[52]

By October 2019, activists and civic groups had developed a set of organizational tools and repertoires they could deploy during

52 Ali Mamouri, "Iraqi Election Results Leave Iran Scrambling to Preserve Influence," *Al-Monitor*, May 17, 2018.

protests. Committees of popular protests called on certain groups to organize a demonstration in Baghdad, as happened at the end of September 2019, when a committee called on university graduates to take to the streets to protest political corruption and lack of jobs. Neighborhood and citywide coordinating committees set up across southern and central Iraqi cities during the 2018 protests were reactivated in 2019 to coordinate protests.[53] Committees called on protesters to organize sit-ins in front of government buildings, coordinate the flow of demonstrators across Baghdad's bridges and main arteries, and plan actions in front of Baghdad's Green Zone. In Nasiriyya, in southern Iraq, where the center of the movement shifted after its violent suppression in Baghdad in January 2020, committees coordinated between protesters in the city and tribal leaders to cut main highways connecting the capital to the south.[54] Other committees dealt with feeding protesters and caring for the injured. The tuk-tuk, a three-wheeled vehicle whose drivers lived on the margins of Baghdad's economy, became the symbol of the protests, as it transported food to activists and brought the wounded to tents set up by volunteers from the medical profession. "Tuk-Tuk" was also the title of the four-page pamphlet of the protests.[55]

More than any of the earlier protests, the 2019 protests drew on sustained support by labor unions and professional syndicates. The first to express their support of the protests and call on their local affiliates for a general strike were the Union of Iraqi Farmers.

53 See, for example, "Tansiqiyyat tadhahurat al-iraq tada' 10 khutuwat lil-taharuk wa al-tas'id fi October 25"("The Coordinating Committee for the Protests in Iraq Sets 10 Steps for Escalation on October 19"), *Kitabat*, October 21, 2019.

54 Suadad al-Salhy, "Dhi Qar: The Southern Province at the Heart of the Iraqi Uprising," Middle East Eye, February 2, 2020.

55 Harith Hasan, "al-thawra al-iraqiyya taseer 'ala thalath 'ajalat"("The Iraqi Revolution Moves on Three Wheels"), Aswaq al-Arab, March 5, 2020.

On October 28, the Federation of Unions of Teachers went on strike for two weeks. They were joined by the lawyers' syndicate, whose members took on defending protesters. By November, some twenty unions and professional syndicates in Iraq issued a set of demands that included reform of the electoral law, a call for early elections with international monitors, and a cessation of violence by security forces against the protesters.[56] The 2019 protests also saw a significant increase in women's participation. Women, like men, risked their lives and suffered the violence of security forces and party militias. They acted as shields to protect protesters, set up barricades, and helped coordinate protests. For many, the 2019 protests were their first initiation into activism. For others, like the collective of women's organizations Iraqi Women's Network, the protests marked a step toward their struggle for justice and security.[57]

A great number of protesters, however, did not belong to any of these civic organizations or unions. They were drawn from unemployed or underemployed youth who helped forge the organizational and cultural politics of a movement inflected by global pop culture symbols made Iraqi and by the inversion of Shia rituals and symbols. Thus, the road to Karbala, according to one poster, ran through Tahrir Square, and the fortieth day anniversary of the death of Imam Hussain became a venue to commemorate the dead of the movement.[58] The youth were joined by the demobilized

56 Ghufran Younis, "al-naqabat wa al-itahadat al-iraqiyya tushhiru silahiha bi wajh al-sulta" ("Iraqi Syndicates and Unions Deploy Weapons Against the Government"), Independent Arabia, November 22, 2019.

57 Zahra Ali, "Women and the Iraqi Revolution," Jadaliyya, March 13, 2020. On the participation of the Iraqi Women's Network, see "How a Collective of Iraqi Women Is Bringing the Country Closer to Peace," Reliefweb, November 1, 2019.

58 Uqail Abbas, "Al-rumuz al-husainiyya al-shi'iyya wa wath'ifuha al-wataniyya fi al-'ihtajajat al-'iraqiyya"("Shi'I Husaini Symbols and Their Nationalist Role in the Iraqi Protests"), *al-Ihtijajat al-tishriniyya* ("The October/November Protests"), eds.

young men who found themselves unemployed after fighting the Islamic State as members of the PMF. By the end of November, hundreds of thousands of Iraqis had spent at least a few days taking part in the protest movement.

Between October 1 and November 29, the movement grew in numbers and organization despite the violent reaction of the government, which deployed its security forces, often supported by snipers, against the protesters, resulting in hundreds of deaths, thousands of injuries, and a significant number of disappeared. Drawing on the support of Ayatollah Sistani and joined by the Sadrists, the movement succeeded, by November 30, in forcing the resignation of Iraqi prime minister Adel Abdul Mahdi, whose government was demoted to a caretaker role even as the protests continued in different parts of the country. On December 29, the United States targeted PMF weapons storage facilities in Iraq and Syria, killing twenty-five people. This was followed by a drone strike on January 3, 2020, that killed Qassim Suleimani, the leader of the Quds Force, the elite branch of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the head of the PMF. Muqtada al-Sadr's request that the protesters join in demonstrations against US interference in Iraq was snubbed by the movement. Accusing the movement's leaders of being agents of the United States and taking up the government's and the pro-Iranian political parties' line of argument, al-Sadr withdrew his support from the movement. He asked his supporters and those among the demonstrators who had been members of the PMF to leave the streets.[59] The departure of the Sadrists gave sanction for the government to escalate its violent suppression of the protesters.

Harith Hasan and Faris Kamal Nazmi, 47–62.

59 Yousef K. Baker, "Iraqi Protesters Thwarted by Trump's Iran Policy," *Middle East Report*, February 11, 2020.

Despite the heroic efforts to keep the movement alive over the next few months, the protesters could not sustain their uprising, defeated by international and regional forces, COVID-19, and the sheer fatigue caused by the violence directed at them. Sporadic protests continue in Iraq, however, and there is no doubt that the movement will reconstitute itself, given the persistence of the problems that have continued to push Iraqis to mobilize against the government for the past decade.

Iraqi protest movements have a great deal in common with other protest movements in the Middle East. They are led by youth who eschew parties as a form of organization and insist on the integrity of their activism as a politics of movement. They utilize social media as an organizational tool and have developed a culture of protest that has mobilized a cross section of the population. They seek a social contract between their government and its citizens in which the government guarantees social and economic justice. They demand that the government ensures security of life against the violence of the political elite and the immiseration and precarious existence caused by neoliberal reforms.

Iraq's protesters, however, face a set of constraints and opportunities that distinguish their movement from other movements in the Middle East. Protesters' ability to achieve their demands is hemmed in by Iraq's vulnerability to the conflict of regional and international players, particularly the United States and Iran, who have economic and strategic interests in the country. The denouement of the 2019 protests provides ample evidence of limitations on the protesters' and the ruling class's ability to maneuver. In addition, because of the fragmented nature of power centers and the embeddedness of corruption in Iraq's political economy, the movement can only effect incremental change. The protesters' insistence on not creating a political organization means that their demands for justice do not develop a programmatic alternative

to the current economic, security, and political regime that dominates their life.

It is, however, important to conclude with the opportunities the protesters have created. Unlike other protest movements, the Iraqi uprisings had to build a sense of nation, and nationness, against the centrifugal politics of fragmentation wrought by the US invasion. The greatest achievement of the movement is the protesters' attempts to reconstitute Iraqi nationhood as a homeland that goes beyond sect and party. Their demand for a "watan" (homeland) in which social and economic justice issues take precedence over sect folds Sunnis into the homeland, a call that did not escape the attention of Sunnis, who expressed their support even if they did not go out on the streets. In addition, unlike the protest movement in Egypt, for example, the Iraqi movement faces a far more fragmented state and a political elite subject to pressures from a religious establishment in Najaf that has intervened at critical moments to pressure the government to answer the protesters' demands. Finally, Iraq's protest movement continues to erupt periodically, allowing it to build and sustain networks over time, which bodes well for its ability to push for reform in the long term.


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ABSTRACT

The Republican Party's boosters, and even many of its critics, attribute the party's rightwards radicalization to an increasingly working-class base. Unsupported by the evidence, this view neglects the deeper roots of the party's evolution in the uniquely American context of institutionally enfeebled political parties and a disorganized but still dominant employer class.

Behind the Republican Party Crack-up

Paul Heideman

Has the GOP become a working-class party? On its face, the question is absurd. Whatever the modern Republican Party is, its historical analogues are not the parties of the working class. The party has virtually nothing in common with the SPD (Social Democratic Party) of prewar Germany, the SAP (Swedish Social Democratic Party) of the Meidner Plan, or Lula's PT (Workers' Party). Even the decrepit Socialist International, which once counted among its member parties Hosni Mubarak's National Democratic Party, would surely balk at extending admission to the Republican Party.

Yet many Republicans themselves are convinced that their party has indeed made a turn to the working class. The night of

the 2020 election, Senator Josh Hawley of Missouri tweeted, "We are a working-class party now. That's the future."[1] A few months later, Representative Jim Banks, chair of the influential Republican Study Committee, wrote a memo to House minority leader Kevin McCarthy making this case in more detail. Banks argued that the two parties were undergoing "coalitional transformations," with the GOP becoming a party of the working class, and the Democratic Party becoming a party of professionals and the rich. The result was a historic opportunity for the Republicans to redefine themselves, and, in so doing, secure the "permanent Republican majority" the party has been chasing for the past two decades.[2]

Liberals have also expressed worry over this prospect. Since at least the 1990s, liberal writers have sounded the alarm about the defections of white workers from the Democratic coalition. At different moments, liberal analysts have pointed to different causes for their alleged abandonment by the white working class. In the 1990s, Thomas and Mary Edsall identified the backlash to the party's embrace of civil rights.[3] In the early 2000s, Thomas Frank highlighted Christianity and cultural conservatism.[4] More recently, Thomas Piketty has argued that the Democrats are but one example of a broader phenomenon across the advanced capitalist world, in which educational polarization replaces class polarization, with the highly educated voting liberal and the less

1 Benjamin Wallace-Wells, "Can Republicans Become a Multiracial Working-Class Party?" *New Yorker*, November 4, 2020.

2 Memo from Jim Banks to Kevin McCarthy, "RE:Urgent: Cementing the GOP as the Working-Class Party," March 30, 2021, documentcloud.org/documents/20534328-banks-working-class-memo; Janet Hook, "GOP Seeks Lasting Majority," *Los Angeles Times*, July 21, 2003.

3 Thomas Byrne Edsall with Mary D. Edsall, Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1991).

4 Thomas Frank, What's the Matter with Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America (New York: Picador, 2004).

educated voting for various forms of conservatism.[5] It is not only the hopeful right who sees the working class turning the wrong shade of red.

These arguments were, of course, given a healthy fillip by Donald Trump's election in 2016. And indeed, researchers have found real evidence that the white working class was quite important to Trump's victory. Mike Davis, writing in these pages, drew attention to the role of plant closings in key counties in pushing white workers toward Trump.[6] Other researchers have found that white workers comprised a crucial portion of the bloc of 2012 Barack Obama supporters or nonvoters who went for Trump in 2016.[7] Trump, in his own vulgar way, endorsed Piketty's argument about educational polarization, proclaiming, "I love the poorly educated."

Yet for all the noise about the GOP's transformation into a working-class party, the claim has remarkably little basis in fact. Examination of survey data reveals that the working class has undergone a slight shift toward the Republican Party, but it is nothing resembling the kind of "coalitional transformation" claimed by party boosters. Similarly, there is no evidence that workers are today a more important constituency in the Republican Party than in the past. The GOP, simply put, is not transforming into a working-class party.

There's no question, however, that it has become a different kind of party than American politics are accustomed to. Though complaints about political polarization in the United States are

5 Thomas Piketty, *Capital and Ideology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

6 Mike Davis, "The Great God Trump and the White Working Class," *Catalyst* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2017).

7 Stephen L. Morgan and Jiwon Lee, "Trump Voters and the White Working Class," *Sociological Science* 5, no. 10 (2018).

ubiquitous, it is by now widely accepted among political scientists that "the main cause of polarization has been a move to the right by Republicans." In comparative perspective as well, the Republican Party stands out. Analysis of its 2016 platform by the Manifesto Project places the GOP closer to the far-right Alternative für Deutschland than Angela Merkel's CDU (Christian Democratic Union), and to the right even of Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National.[8]

Moreover, the GOP has embraced politics that often run directly counter to the preferences of American capital. The government shutdowns it forced while in opposition in 1995–96 and 2013, and while holding the presidency in 2018–19, brought demand shocks and economic uncertainty with them, in the service of political goals (budget cuts, stopping Obamacare implementation, and a border wall with Mexico) that could hardly be said to be set in Fortune 500 boardrooms.[9] Tensions between the party and the corporate power elite reached new levels in the aftermath of the January 6, 2021, Capitol riot, when the bulk of congressional Republicans still refused to disavow Trump's claims of election fraud. In response, a number of companies, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, vowed to withhold campaign contributions from Republicans who voted against certifying the election results.[10] Although the boycott of election conspiracy pushers soon fell

8 Nolan McCarty, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal, *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 13; Manifesto Project, manifesto-project.wzb.eu. For a review of the evidence on Republican exceptionalism, see Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, "Confronting Asymmetric Polarization," in Nathaniel Persily, ed., *Solutions to Political Polarization in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 59–70.

9 "The Government Shutdown Is Bad. But It Could Get Much Worse," *Fortune*, January 15, 2019.

10 Alex Isenstadt et al., "Business Titans Pull Back From GOP After Capitol Insurrection," *Politico*, January 11, 2021.

apart, it underscored the growing distance between the Republican Party and the business lobby.[11]

This transformation in the party was not driven by a change in its voting base. Instead, it stems from the interaction of two transformations in American politics and society: the weakening of the parties since the 1970s, and the political disorganization of corporate America since the 1980s.

American parties have been institutionally weak by international standards since at least the early twentieth century. As ideologically undefined catchall parties, they existed more as confederations of local political machines than genuine national institutions. However, beginning in the 1970s, changes in party rules, congressional rules, and campaign finance law all combined to hollow out the parties even further. The result is that American political parties barely exist except as networks of funders, campaign services vendors, and candidates. Decisions such as candidate selection are instead outsourced to the primary system. This same system only magnifies the power of money in deciding party politics, since the parties possess few institutional resources for resisting it.

Weak parties themselves are insufficient to explain Republican radicalization, however. If the weakening of party institutions were the only dynamic, we might expect to see an ever-tightening link between Republican politics and the preferences of American business. Instead, we see growing autonomy and conflict. American business, it seems, is no longer as capable of setting the party's agenda as it once was. This incapacity stems from the increasingly disorganized character of American business politics. While in the 1970s business mounted a spectacular mobilization against

11 James Oliphant et al., "Republican Donations Surge Despite Corporate Boycott After Capitol Riots," *Reuters*, March 9, 2021.

the New Deal order, by the early 1980s, with Ronald Reagan in the White House, business's enemies in the state and the unions had been defeated, and business unity began to unravel. At the same time, the reorganization of corporate America via mergers, acquisitions, and consolidation inclined corporate managers away from long-term, policy-oriented political activism and instead toward narrow defenses of the rents and privileges of their respective economic sectors. This kind of activism has often proven compatible with the Republican Party's long march to the right, as the party has been only too happy to oblige corporate America's preferences for anti-labor, anti-regulatory judicial appointments and tax breaks. The structure of political action by the American ruling class, in other words, has evolved away from the kind of coordinated, long-term action that would be necessary to successfully discipline the Republican Party.

Together, weak parties and elite disorganization have cleared the way for right-wing political entrepreneurs to push the party further and further to the right. A kind of dialectic has ensued since the 1980s, in which party insurgents come to power, fail in their goals, and are replaced by a more establishment power bloc, whose failures then open the door for a new group of insurgents.

These structural transformations, and not a turn to the working-class, are what have remade the Republican Party. This article will begin by examining the evolution of the Republican Party's support base and demonstrating that claims of the party's new working class base are very much exaggerated. It will then develop the alternative explanation, centered in the weakening of the parties and the changing nature of corporate political action. Finally, it will offer a narrative of GOP history since the 1980s, illustrating how these forces have produced a party of a new type on the American scene.

A WORKING-CLASS PARTY IS SOMETHING TO BE

Though the cultural image of working-class Republicanism is ubiquitous, more rigorous investigation of the party's class composition is considerably rarer. Analyzing such a composition is a fraught endeavor. There are many methodological choices to be made, and these choices can have dramatic impacts on the resultant findings. This section will present one such analysis. In the interest of readability, the methodological choices will be described briefly. The reasons for such choices, and the reasons alternative approaches were decided against, are available in an online methodological appendix.

In what follows, I analyze data from the General Social Survey (GSS), which has been asking consistent questions of a representative sample of Americans for almost fifty years. To measure survey respondents' class positions, I employ an occupational definition of class. Essentially, nonprofessional occupations, from laborers to white-collar workers doing semi-routine tasks, are classified as working class. Additionally, I include teachers and nurses in this group, as their incorporation in a category alongside doctors and lawyers has grown increasingly implausible. To measure partisanship, I use the GSS party identification variable, which simply asks respondents which party they identify with.[12]

With the preferred measures of class and partisan political behavior defined, there only remains to be specified conceptualizations of partisan change. Clem Brooks and Jeff Manza, in an earlier study of class and partisanship, provide a useful schema.[13]

12 For similar analytical approaches, see Clem Brooks and Jeff Manza, "Class Politics and Political Change in the United States, 1952–1992," *Social Forces* 76, no. 2 (December 1997); Lane Kenworthy et al., "The Democrats and Working-Class Whites," Unpublished paper, 2007.

13 Brooks and Manza, "Class Politics."

Drawing on a venerable tradition in American political science, they distinguish between critical realignment, secular realignment, and electoral shifts. "Critical realignment," a term first proposed by V. O. Key in the 1950s to understand the coming of the New Deal, describes when a voting bloc, such as workers, decisively shifts partisanship during a single election.[14] For Key and many subsequent scholars, the 1932 election is the paradigmatic example of such a realignment. Key also suggested that groups sometimes undergo "secular realignment," when a clear partisanship shift occurs over the course of several elections. The move of Southern whites away from the Democrats and toward a solidly Republican partisan identity after the civil rights movement is a good example of such a transition. Finally, an "electoral shift" is when existing partisan attachments of a group intensify or weaken, without decisively shifting. For example, women have been more Democratic than Republican for a long time, and this attachment has grown stronger since the 1990s.

With these concepts in hand, some hypotheses can be formulated corresponding to the various claims made about changes in the Republican Party. First, it may be the case that there has been either a critical or a secular realignment among workers from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party. Second, it may be the case that the Republican coalition has become increasingly working class in composition. Both these hypotheses, as it turns out, are false.

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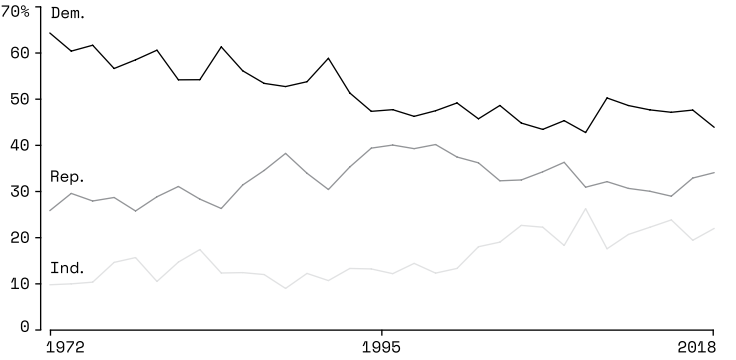
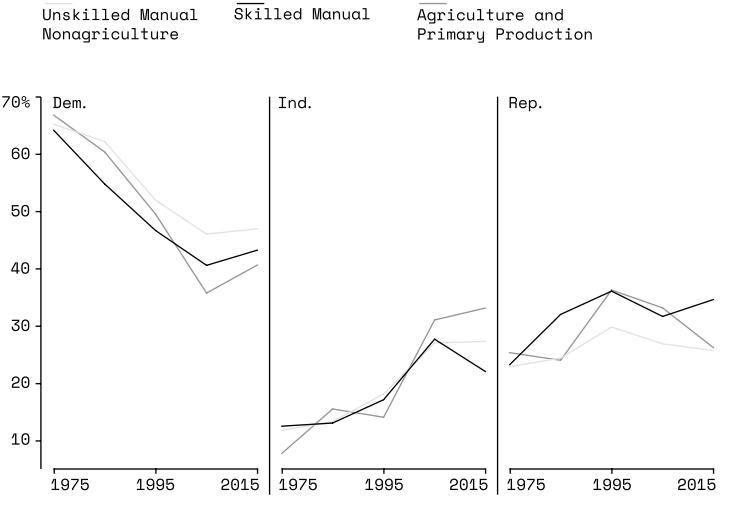
14 V. O. Key Jr, "A Theory of Critical Elections," *The Journal of Politics* 17, no. 1 (February 1955); V. O. Key Jr, "Secular Realignment and the Party System," The Journal of Politics 21, no. 2 (May 1959). While the concept of critical realignment has been the subject of considerable controversy since Key's original formulation, much of that criticism has focused on its importance in explaining political change in the United States, rather than the coherence of the concept itself. For discussion, see John R. Petrocik, Party Coalitions, Realignments and the Decline of the New Deal Party System (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) and Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers, *Right Turn: The Decline of the Democrats and the Future of American Politics* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 40–6.

Figure 1: **Party Identification Among American Workers, 1972–2018**



Data: General Social Survey

Figure 2: **Party Identification Among Lowest Occupational Categories, 1975–2015**



Data: General Social Survey

Figure 1 looks at partisan identification among working-class respondents in the GSS. While there has been an electoral shift away from the Democratic Party, and Republicans have gained, there has been no decisive realignment. Indeed, among workers, the rise in independent identification has been steeper than the rise in Republican identification. These results are not sensitive to the inclusion of teachers and nurses among workers; estimates excluding them from the working class show the same trends.

Even looking at occupational subcategories of the working class, the story does not conform to a working-class GOP. Figure 2 looks at partisan identification among the "lowest" three categories of manual workers: agricultural and primary production workers, semiskilled workers not in agriculture, and skilled manual workers. Workers in these occupations are significantly less likely to possess a college degree (in 2018, about 6 percent of workers in these occupations had a college degree or higher, while about 20 percent of the broader working class did) and, as such, these would be the occupational categories most likely to shift toward the GOP as educational polarization progresses.[15]

Among all three groups, there has been a precipitous decline in identification with the Democratic Party. At the same time, however, the independent category has been the main beneficiary of this decline. The rise in Republican identification has been much more modest and has been greatest among skilled manual workers.

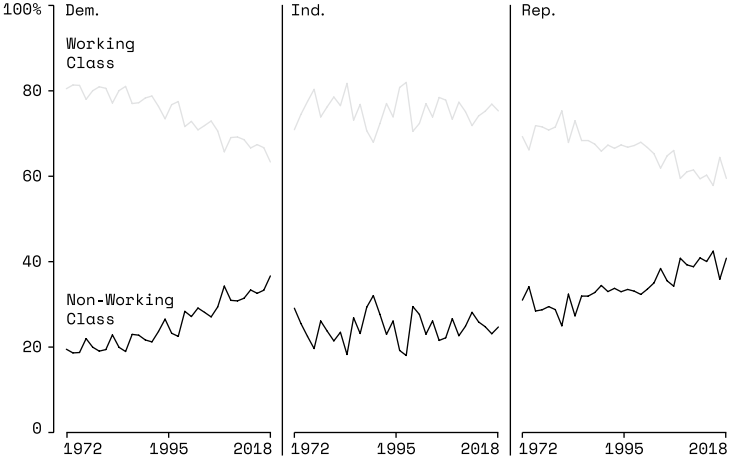
Figure 3 examines the political identification of white and nonwhite workers, broadly defined. As has been found in much previous work, there has been a strong swing away from the Democrats and toward the Republicans among white workers. Interestingly, the bulk of this swing happened between 1970 and

15 Because of limitations of the GSS sample size for subsamples like this, I aggregate GSS waves by decade and report estimates at the middle of each ten-year period.

Figure 3: **Partisan Identification Among American Workers, White and Nonwhite, 1972–2018**

Data: General Social Survey

Figure 4: **Class Composition of Party Identifiers, 1972–2018**



Data: General Social Survey

1990, with little change since then. While white workers were once decisively Democratic, for the last three decades, there has been no clear preference among them. While nonwhite workers have also seen a dealignment from the Democratic Party, the result has been increased independent identification, with little gain for the Republicans.

Among working-class Americans as a whole, there has been no realignment, either critical or secular. While Democrats once claimed an overwhelming majority of American workers, their advantage has eroded considerably. Only a portion of that has led to increased Republican identification, however, and, among workers as a whole, over the last decade, Democratic identifiers have outnumbered Republican identifiers by 15 to 20 percentage points. Among manual workers, the Republican gain has been greater (particularly among skilled workers) but still falls short of a clear majority. Even among white workers, there has been clear class dealignment, but nothing resembling the emergence of a stable Republican majority.[16] Of course, it's possible that these shifts are incomplete and, within a few years, a secular realignment will be visible. But in the aggregate, and even among white workers, the trends suggest that Republican gains have actually been stagnant for some time. The overall story is one of class dealignment rather than realignment.

The other possibility is that, instead of workers becoming decisively Republican, the Republican coalition has become more working class, perhaps caused by the well-documented exodus of professionals and the highly educated from the party.

16 Indeed, one of the most striking facts about the racial trends is the overall similarity among white and nonwhite workers in disaffiliating with the Democratic Party. Among white workers, Democratic identification dropped by an average of 0.46 percentage points per year. Among nonwhite workers, it dropped by about 0.41 percentage points per year.

Figure 4 charts the class composition of Republican identifiers. Far from becoming more working class, the Republican coalition has become less working class over time. Again, the overall trend is class dealignment. Where the Democratic Party was once far more class-polarized than the Republican Party, both parties have become less working class over time, such that the degree of class polarization in both parties is approaching equal. Independents, meanwhile, remain highly class-polarized, with little change over the past half-century.

However the Republican Party has changed since the 1980s, the driving force has plainly not been the rise of working-class Republicanism. The Democrats, it is true, have experienced near-catastrophic levels of working-class exit. But the Republicans have not, in the main, reaped the gains of this. Partisan polarization within the working class has diminished, with the result being that no party commands a clear majority of working-class support. Similarly, within the Republican Party, the share of the party made up of workers has actually diminished over the last few decades. The arguments of Republicans like Hawley and Banks appear to be more advertising than analysis. Explanations of the party's extraordinary move to the right must look beyond class voting patterns for their mechanism.

ENFEEBLED PARTIES

From the perspective of many other capitalist democracies, American political parties don't really exist. They have no membership lists, their platforms are largely built after their candidates are nominated, and, perhaps most important, the parties themselves have very little control over the nomination process. Thus, it is not unheard-of for a Holocaust denier, for example, to win a Republican primary in a deep-blue district in which the party invests no resources, or for a member of the LaRouche cult to win

a Democratic nomination in a deep-red district. Though in such cases the party will often denounce the candidate, it has no power to prevent them from running on its ballot line.[17]

The weakness of American parties, which intensified after the 1970s, has had two results. First, the hollowing out of the parties removed one of the few counterweights to the power of money in American politics. Now, the power of money to decide matters of party direction, and thus ultimately of policy, is even more unmediated. Second, and related, the role of parties themselves changed, from institutions that determined key questions of party life, from platform to nomination, to candidate-service organizations whose main role is fundraising and providing access to vendors of campaign services.

From the country's beginning, American political parties have been weak by design. Inheritors of the political thought of Georgian England, the authors of the Constitution were at best ambivalent about organized political opposition to the current government, seeing in such activity the seeds of civil war. To Federalists and Anti-Federalists alike, parties were, in Richard Hofstadter's words, "sores on the body politic."[18] Alexander Hamilton, who, like all of the Constitutional generation, used the terms "faction" and "party" interchangeably, argued that one of the chief virtues of the Constitution would be its role in suppressing parties. "We are attempting by this Constitution," he told the New York state ratification convention, "to abolish factions."[19]

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17 Liam Stack, "Denounced by His Party as a Nazi, Arthur Jones Wins Illinois G.O.P. Congressional Primary," *New York Times*, March 20, 2018; Elise Hu, "Meet Kesha Rogers," *Texas Tribune*, March 16, 2010.

18 Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780–1840* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 2.

19 Quoted in Hofstadter, *Idea of a Party System*, 17.

The Constitution designed by these men contemplated no role for parties.[20] Indeed, the cumbersome "separation of powers" system they designed was expressly intended to check parties. The presidency was envisaged not as a partisan office but as one whose inhabitant would have to stand above party. As parties did inevitably develop in the political conflicts that followed ratification, they grew as private organizations in constitutional interstices, without clear relation to the state itself.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, American parties became quite powerful entities, though they existed primarily on the local level. On the national level, the parties were unwieldy coalitions of regional power elites. Nonetheless, they were strong enough that, by the late nineteenth century, the parties themselves had become plausible scapegoats for any number of societal ailments.

In the thinking of Progressive reformers, parties were either the organs responsible for activating the baser instincts of the poorer citizens or the vehicles by which such citizens plundered their more industrious counterparts. Reformers accordingly bombarded them with a whole suite of new policies. Civil service reform targeted the parties by trying to deny them the ability to reward their patrons with government employment. One of its supporters went so far as to claim that "The Merit System … will help to abolish partisanship."[21] Numerous municipalities attempted to remove city government from the remit of political competition entirely through the city manager system or, barring that, by making local elections nonpartisan.[22]

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20 The word "party" is only used in the Constitution in the sense of a party to a conflict.

21 Nancy L. Rosenblum, *On the Side of the Angels: An Appreciation of Parties and Partisanship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 197.

22 James Weinstein, "Organized Business and the City Commission and Man-

The reform with the biggest impact on American politics in the long term, however, was the direct primary. Its most important advocate was Progressive standard-bearer Robert LaFollette, who, as governor of Wisconsin in 1903, signed the nation's first law forcing parties to conduct nominations for state-elected positions via primary elections. For LaFollette and his co-thinkers, the entire point of direct primaries was to disempower the parties as institutions and empower voters as individuals. The direct primary's effects on parties were well described by V. O. Key more than half a century ago:

> The adoption of the direct primary opened the road for disruptive forces that gradually fractionalized the party organization. By permitting more effective direct appeals by individual politicians to the party membership, the primary system freed forces driving toward the disintegration of party organizations and facilitated the construction of factions and cliques attached to the ambitions of individual leaders.[23]

Direct primaries spread rapidly. Already by 1917, thirty-two of the forty-eight states required them for nomination to state offices.[24]

Combined with the regionalization and elite orientation of the apparatuses, the primary only further fractured the party system. As a result, American parties exist "more as semi-public agencies for the organization of elections than as private bodies (agencies of civil society) advocating particular programmes."[25]

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ager Movements," *Journal of Southern History* 28, no. 2 (May 1962).

23 V. O. Key Jr, *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1942), 342.

24 Austin Ranney, *Curing the Mischiefs of Faction: Party Reform in America* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1975), 119–34. See also Eric Lawrence, Todd Donovan, and Shaun Bowler, "The Adoption of Direct Primaries in the United States," *Party Politics* 19, no. 1 (January 2013).

25 Richard S. Katz and Robin Kolodny, "Party Organization as an Empty Vessel:

State parties are compelled to hold primaries for elections they hope to contest. Courts in some states even went so far as to forbid state parties from endorsing a candidate within a primary, an unthinkable situation in comparable countries. The national party, meanwhile, can exert no real power over state parties in matters of program, candidate selection, or anything else beyond criteria for sending delegates to the national convention. Even on the national level, American parties' existence is institutionally fractured. The national committees of the party exist mainly to oversee the presidential nomination process. The congressional parties each exist independently, with no institutional link to the national committees. Most staff are employed either by individual members of Congress or by the congressional caucuses, which are funded out of congressional operating expenses. In the United States, there does not exist an actual organizational analogue to the UK Labour Party or the Christian Democratic Union of Germany.

Party Reform: Mammon Unbound

Until the 1960s, then, American parties were pointillist entities, appearing unitary only from a distance. From the late '60s onward, two changes took place. First, the parties sorted along an ideological axis, with the Republicans becoming the party of conservatives and the Democrats the party of liberals. Second, legislative and party reforms weakened the parties even further, combining with escalating campaign costs to define a new and even more unmediated role for money in determining questions of party leadership and direction.

These processes originated with the Democratic Party, and the struggle between its liberal and conservative wings. It had been

Parties in American Politics," in Richard S. Katz and Peter Mair, eds., *How Parties Organize: Change and Adaptation in Party Organizations in Western Democracies* (London: SAGE Publications, 1994), 23–50.

clear since 1937, when Southern Democrats first turned against the New Deal, that the prominence of the undemocratic South in the party was a blockage to the ambitions of many elements (most notably African Americans and union members) within the Democratic coalition.[26] Since the Southern Democrats never lost to Republicans, their average tenure in the House and Senate was longer than their Northern counterparts. And since committee assignments and leadership were distributed on the basis of seniority, Southern Democrats held outsize power in Congress, which they used to block liberal legislation.[27]

Many in the party hoped that the Voting Rights Act of 1965 would be sufficient to displace the power of the old Dixiecrats. It was not. While Strom Thurmond famously left the Democrats for the party of Barry Goldwater in 1964, his was not the modal trajectory for his species of politician. James Eastland remained a Democratic senator until 1978, while Herman Talmadge served until 1981. In the House, John Conyers tried and failed in 1971 to strip the Mississippi Democrats of seniority, given that they remained members of a segregated Mississippi Democratic Party that was not recognized by the national committee.[28] Over the next few years, Democrats instead altered the rules by which committee leadership in Congress was distributed, weakening the role of seniority. Now, committee leadership assignment was in the hands of caucus leadership, creating more centralized congressional parties.

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26 Ira Katznelson, Kim Geiger, and Daniel Kryder, "Limiting Liberalism: The Southern Veto in Congress, 1933–1950," *Political Science Quarterly* 108, no. 2 (Summer 1993).

27 Julian E. Zelizer, *On Capitol Hill: The Struggle to Reform Congress and its Consequences, 1948–2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004);

28 David E. Rosenbaum, "5 Mississippians Retain Seniority," *New York Times*, January 20, 1971.

As John R. Wright has pointed out, liberal disaffection with Dixiecrat seniority was not the only force driving reform.[29] The Democratic Party also confronted a money problem, and the congressional reforms it passed were one part of its solution to this problem. Since the Dixiecrats, even in the early 1970s, were still able to win largely noncompetitive elections, their campaign costs were considerably lower than other Democrats. And since these other Democrats were locked out of powerful positions by Dixiecrat seniority, there was a powerful incentive to either remove or dilute that seniority, in order to give other Democrats the congressional power that would bring donations along with it. As such, in addition to dethroning seniority as the sole criterion for committee leadership, congressional reforms in the early 1970s distributed power more widely among congressmembers, forming additional subcommittees and generally increasing the power of non–committee members over legislation coming out of a given committee.

The impetus to increase the party's fundraising prowess was particularly pressing in the 1970s. Beginning in the mid-1960s, campaign costs had risen vertiginously. Driven by the increasing importance of broadcast (radio and television) advertising in political races, costs climbed ever skyward. From 1964 to 1968, total political spending jumped from $200 million to $300 million, a 50 percent climb in four years. In 1972, it reached $425 million, having more than doubled since 1964. Broadcast costs drove this increase. From 1966 to 1970, nonpresidential radio and television spending rose from $27.2 million to $50.3 million.[30]

This explosion in campaign costs was bad news for Democrats. After the losing 1968 campaign, the Democratic Party was

29 John R. Wright, "Interest Groups, Congressional Reform, and Party Government in the United States," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (May 2000).

30 Wright, "Interest Groups."

more than $6 million in debt. Since the mid-'60s, Republicans had tapped into the small political donor market far more effectively than Democrats, using Richard Viguerie's direct mail techniques to solicit money from hundreds of thousands of donors. At the same time, political action committees (PACs), pioneered by the CIO, were growing in importance.[31]

This pressure combined with the long-standing liberal Democratic demand for congressional reform to create a powerful impetus for campaign finance reform. In 1972, the Democratic Congress passed the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA), and in 1974, it passed a series of amendments to the act that created a new legal environment for campaign spending.

FECA and its amendments brought a number of changes. First, they created a new legitimacy for PACs, whose legal status had previously been unclear. Labor unions in particular demanded PAC legalization as a way to protect their political work. Second, they introduced strict new disclosure requirements on campaign financing. Third, they instituted spending limits for presidential and congressional campaigns, as well as contribution limits for individuals. Fourth, they established a matching funds system, by which presidential candidates could receive public funding in return for keeping spending below a certain limit. In 1974, the Supreme Court ruled in *Buckley v. Valeo* that the spending limits were an unconstitutional infringement on freedom of speech, but it affirmed most of the laws' other provisions. Finally, in 1979, a further set of amendments created the category of "soft money," funds spent by state and local parties on voter mobilization instead of a specific candidate.

The consequences of FECA, modified by the Supreme Court, were immense. The most immediate consequence was an

31 Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2001).

explosion in PACs and their donations. In 1968, there were eighty-nine PACs. In 1982, there were 3,371. In 1968, PAC contributions to congressional candidates totaled $3.1 million. In 1982, the total was $83.1 million. Though labor had demanded PAC legalization, business was the real beneficiary.[32]

Candidates soon began fundraising with the goal of redistributing money to their colleagues, thereby winning their support for key committee and caucus leadership positions. As with so much else in this story, Democrats led the way. In 1977, when Tip O'Neill assumed his position as speaker of the House, the race to serve under him as majority leader was conducted, for the first time, on the basis of who could redistribute most to their colleagues. Jim Wright of Texas won, setting himself up to become speaker after O'Neill's retirement a decade later. Two years after, Henry Waxman of California, a two-term representative, ascended to the chair of the Health and Environment Subcommittee of the Commerce Committee (on which he ranked fourth in seniority) by redistributing money to his colleagues. He founded a new PAC, the "Friends of Henry Waxman," and directed $24,000 to his colleagues on the committee, who rewarded him with their votes. Seniority was, at long last, dead.[33]

Others soon followed Waxman's example. In 1988, there were forty-five such "leadership PACs," which existed to redistribute money among congressmembers. One new congressmember who proved a keen student of Waxman's approach was the representative from suburban Atlanta, Newt Gingrich. By 1998, freshmen

32 Wright, "Interest Groups"; Gary C. Jacobson, "Money in the 1980 and 1982 Congressional Elections" in Michael J. Malbin, ed., *Money and Politics in the United States: Financing Elections in the 1980s* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1984), 38–69.

33 Currinder, *Money in the House*, 24–6, 87–9. Ross K. Baker, *The New Fat Cats: Members of Congress as Political Benefactors* (New York: Priority Press Publications, 1989), chapter 3.

congressmembers were launching leadership PACs before they had even been sworn into office.[34]

Parties as Bit Players

In addition to initiating this orgiastic atmosphere of fundraising and redistribution, FECA cemented the weakness of American parties in another sense. By creating a campaign finance infrastructure that is completely candidate-focused, it reinforced the background role for parties as institutions. Candidates create campaign committees, and these organizations are the primary vehicles through which elections are contested. Parties hope to exercise influence on the margins.[35]

In other words, parties didn't simply become weaker. The role they played in American politics changed. At the state level, parties are now decisively subordinate to candidates, whose nomination is not controlled by party organizations and who don't even rely on parties for fundraising or campaigning. Instead, state parties exist mainly to "provide linkage with the increasingly well-funded national organizations."[36] As one scholar summed up the new role of state parties, they are "no longer performing all or even most of the roles of recruitment, nomination, electoral support, and party discipline of elected officials. The activities of the formal state party organizations are more supplemental than controlling."[37]

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34 Currinder, *Money in the House*, 26, 31.

35 Richard H. Pildes, "Romanticizing Democracy, Political Fragmentation, and the Decline of American Government," *Yale Law Journal* 124, no. 3 (December 2014), 834; Paul S. Herrnson, "The Evolution of National Party Organizations," in L. Sandy Maisel, Jeffrey M. Berry, and George C. Edwards III, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of American Political Parties and Interest Groups* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 248.

36 Gerald C. Wright, "State Parties Research: The Quest for Strong, Competitive State Parties," in Maisel et al., *Oxford Handbook*, 410.

37 Wright, "State Parties Research," 413.

At the national level, the story is much the same. Parties now exist primarily as networks of funders, external organizations, and campaign service vendors.[38] Their role is to act as "intermediaries between the candidates and the private market of campaign services."[39]

The American party organizations, always weak, have become background players in American politics. They are, in the words of two prominent scholars, "hollow parties, neither organizationally robust beyond their roles raising money nor meaningfully felt as a real tangible presence in the lives of voters or in the work of engaged activists."[40] Without any real institutional powers of their own, they exist mainly as conduits through which political money can flow from source to destination.

As a consequence, the enfeebled Republican Party can exert little counterpressure against extreme candidates who run for nomination on its ballot line, particularly if they are well financed. Sometimes, as in the case of a Holocaust denier running in a deep-blue district, the only result is half a news cycle of bad press. In other contexts, however, it has cost the party wins. In 2010, Christine O'Donnell, a Tea Party activist only marginally tethered to reality, beat the former Republican governor of Delaware in a Senate primary and proceeded to lose the general election by more than 15 points.[41] In 2012, Tea Party Senate candidates in Indiana

38 Daniel M. Shea, "The Road Less Taken: New Directions in American Party Politics," in Maisel et al., *Oxford Handbook*, 204–21.

39 John J. Coleman, "The Resurgence of Party Organization? A Dissent from the New Orthodoxy," in Daniel M. Shea and John C. Green, eds., *The State of the Parties: The Changing Role of Contemporary American Parties* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994), 318.

40 Daniel Schlozman and Sam Rosenfeld, "The Hollow Parties," in Frances E. Lee and Nolan McCarty, eds., *Can America Govern Itself?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 121.

41 Hacker and Pierson, "Confronting Asymmetric Polarization."

and Missouri handily won primaries against more establishment candidates and went on to lose winnable general elections, making a Republican seizure of the Senate that year all but impossible.[42] Though these candidacies were opposed by many in the party leadership, the leaders now possessed few organizational resources with which to derail them.

THE FRACTURED ELITE

Party enfeeblement is clearly not sufficient to explain the Republican Party's increasing distance from corporate political preferences. If money now rules the parties in a more unmediated fashion than ever before, one would expect the historically preferred party of American capital to be an even more servile supplicant to corporate boardrooms. Instead, the opposite has occurred. The party's steady march to the right has resulted in new levels of estrangement from capital. American capital has failed to discipline the Republican Party.

The roots of this failure lie in the transformation of US corporate political action. Compared to most other advanced capitalist countries, business is strikingly disorganized in the United States. In the 1970s, American business forged a new degree of political unity, as the economic turbulence of that decade provided both the means and the motivation to finally strike a decisive blow against the New Deal order. However, this unity quickly decayed in the absence of a powerful external foe. At the same time, changes in the structure of American corporate organization further disorganized corporate political life.

The result of these transformations has been the political fragmentation of the corporate elite. Corporate political action is

42 Gary C. Jacobson, "How the Economy and Partisanship Shaped the 2012 Presidential and Congressional Elections," *Political Science Quarterly* 128, no. 1 (Spring 2013).

now oriented less toward classwide concerns and more toward sectional and particularistic causes. Corporate managers are interested in protecting the short-term interests of their firm. They want legislation that will hurt them to be defeated, they want judges who will rule against labor and regulations to be appointed, and they want corporate prerogatives like executive pay to be untouched.

In the defense of these sorts of sectional interests, the radicalized GOP is an able partner. It also wants social welfare legislation defeated, plutocratic privileges defended, and a judicial bench stocked with reactionary jurists. However, the party's rightward peregrination has also produced quite a few negative externalities for capital, from needless uncertainty around the national debt to a devotion to minority rule that is threatening the legitimacy of a political system that has worked remarkably well for the corporate rich since the nineteenth century. The reorganization of corporate political action has left them with few resources for reducing these externalities.

American capital is unique among other advanced capitalist countries for its disorganized character. There is no national organization that is the primary representative of American employers. The roots of this go back, ironically, to the weakness of the American labor movement. Scholars of business organization noticed long ago that the organization of capital into business associations follows the organization of labor.[43] Claus Offe and Helmut Wiesenthal summed up the dynamic of organization in capitalist society as follows:

43 Philippe C. Schmitter and Wolfgang Streeck, "The Organization of Business Interests: Studying the Associative Action of Business in Advanced Industrial Societies," Discussion Paper HM/LMP 81-13 (Wissenschaftszentrum, Berlin, 1981), 16; Cathie Jo Martin and Duane Swank, *The Political Construction of Business Interests: Coordination, Growth, and Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

> In all capitalist countries, the historical sequence is this: the first step is the "liquidation" of the means of production of small commodity producers and the merging of these into capitalist industrial firms; the second step is the defensive association of workers; and the third step is associational efforts that are now made on the part of capitalist firms who, in addition to their continued merging of capital, enter into formal organizations in order to promote some of their collective interests.[44]

The United States has never had a dominant national business organization. The American labor movement, weak and sectional in the half-century following the decline of the Knights of Labor, never forced American business to organize. The absence of a strong socialist party similarly removed the threat of a hostile party coming into government. As a result, the first major organizations of American business, the National Association of Manufacturers and the Chamber of Commerce, were organized externally, the first by William McKinley's 1896 presidential campaign, to promote its effort to rally all of American capital behind it, and the second by the Taft administration, as an effort to overcome the fragmentation of American business, which was making it harder for the administration to hear what capital wanted. In the United States, business has felt precious little pressure to organize itself.[45]

The consequences of the resultant disorganization are considerable. As Cathie Jo Martin has argued, it is "much harder for U.S. employers to think about their collective long-term interests than their counterparts elsewhere." As multiple organizations compete to represent business interests, business organizations

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44 Claus Offe and Helmut Wiesenthal, "Two Logics of Collective Action," *Political Power and Social Theory*, Vol. 1 (1980): 74.

45 Martin and Swank, *Political Construction of Business Interests*; Colin Gordon, "Why No Corporatism in the United States? Business Disorganization and Its Consequences" *Business and Economic History* 27, no. 1 (Fall 1998).

have to themselves be concerned with their market share. They find it easier to "voice short-term objections than to endorse positive policy change."[46]

BUSINESS ORGANIZES WHEN LABOR DOES

The economic crisis of the 1970s triggered a medium-term reversal of this tendency. In the late 1960s, as corporate profits began sagging, the efforts of American businesses to recoup them through intensified exploitation sparked a rank-and-file-led upsurge among American workers. At the same time, the American economy, more integrated than ever into the global economy, was falling behind its international competitors.[47] Finally, beginning in the late 1960s, a new wave of regulatory bodies was created, including the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), whose new impositions on business could not have been, from the perspective of corporate managers, more poorly timed.[48]

In response, American business began to organize itself with a new urgency. Two groups reacting to the economic advances of 1960s liberalism — the Labor Law Study Committee and the Construction Users Anti-Inflation Roundtable — had begun talks of a merger in the hopes of presenting a united business front

46 Cathie Jo Martin, "Crossroads Blues: Business Representation, Public Policy, and Economic Growth for the Twenty-First Century," in William J. Crotty, ed., *The State of Democracy in America* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2001), 178.

47 Robert Brenner, The Economics of Global Turbulence: The Advanced Capitalist Economies from Long Boom to Long Downturn, 1945–2005 (London: Verso Books, 1998); Robert Brenner, "The Political Economy of the Rank-and-File Rebellion," in Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner, and Cal Winslow, eds., *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from Below During the Long 1970s* (London: Verso Books, 2010), 37–74.

48 David Vogel, *Fluctuating Fortunes: The Political Power of Business in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1989).

capable of fighting not just on policies of particularistic interest to certain firms but on a classwide basis for business as a whole. In 1972, they merged to form the Business Roundtable, and the next year, the Roundtable absorbed the March Group, an informal association of big-business CEOs who began meeting in 1972 to coordinate political action.[49]

The Roundtable was a new kind of organization for American business. Eligibility was limited to CEOs of the very largest American corporations. The Roundtable would not endorse candidates, nor would it hire lobbyists. Instead, it concentrated on building business unity and deploying it through the personal interventions of its CEOs with elected officials.[50]

At the same time, the Chamber of Commerce was evolving. It created the position of a full-time president to run the group. In 1975, it hired Richard Lesher, who won the job primarily through his strident advocacy of free market economics. Lesher brought new life to the formerly sluggish Chamber, embarking on a dedicated recruitment campaign. In 1976, the organization had fewer than fifty thousand members. By 1980, it was closing in on a quarter of a million.[51]

The result of this surge of business organization was a newly invigorated political voice for American business. As Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson put it, "Corporate leaders became advocates not just for the narrow interests of their firms but also for the shared interests of business as a whole."[52] Though pluralist political the-

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49 Benjamin C. Waterhouse, *Lobbying America: The Politics of Business from Nixon to NAFTA* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

50 Mark S. Mizruchi, The *Fracturing of the American Corporate Elite* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 157–8.

51 Alyssa Katz, *The Influence Machine: The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Corporate Capture of American Life* (New York: Random House, 2015).

52 Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Winner-Take-All-Politics: How Washington*

orists had spent much of the 1960s assuring their readers that American business had far too many cross-cutting divisions to achieve the kind of unity that would allow them to dominate politics, the 1970s unfolded as one long counterargument. Initially focused on defeating liberal legislation, such as labor law reform and consumer protection bills, American business had, by the time of Ronald Reagan's election in 1980, moved to take the offensive, pushing for the rollback of long-existing elements of the New Deal order.[53]

The very success of the business mobilization undermined its durability. By the 1980s, labor institutions were in shambles, and both parties had accepted a neoliberal policy agenda. Profits were on an upward trajectory again, and labor no longer posed a threat. In the absence of a unifying external enemy, capitalist class unity broke down. On the most basic level, organizations like the Chamber of Commerce had trouble selling membership while a friend of business like Reagan was in the White House. By the mid-1980s, Chamber membership was once again falling, dipping below two hundred thousand in 1985. One senior official explained, "For the last six and a half years, you've had a President in the White House who said he'd veto anything antibusiness. So why should business people bother to join?"[54] With the various threats of the 1970s receding in the rearview mirror, the divisions and disorganization that characterized American business associations for most of the twentieth century once again began to assert themselves.

Made the Rich Richer — And Turned Its Back on the Middle Class (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).

53 Patrick J. Akard, "Corporate Mobilization and Political Power: The Transformation of U.S. Economic Policy in the 1970s," *American Sociological Review* 57, no. 5 (October 1992).

54 Quoted in Katz, *The Influence Machine*.

Capital's victory wasn't the only cause of its disorganization. Changes in the political economy during the 1980s also worked to further fragment the American corporate elite. While many could be identified, from the shareholder revolution and the consequent decline in managerial tenure to the consolidation of interests via mergers and acquisitions, the changing place of banks in American corporate life stands out in importance.

One of the most-studied facets of American corporate life is the network formed by managers and board members of one corporation who sit on the boards of another. Since this network took shape in the late nineteenth century, banks have occupied a central place within it. Bank boards, in particular, have generally been larger than other boards and have been places CEOs and board members from other companies are gathered together. In this way, banks acted as an institutional site for the construction of classwide rationality.[55]

Since the 1980s, however, the role of banks in the intercorporate network has changed as their role in the economy more broadly shifted. The rise of the commercial paper market, in which firms issued bonds of their own to raise capital rather than taking a loan, squeezed banks on the lending end. Consumers also increasingly had new options for savings, creating a second squeeze on the depositor end. The solution was for banks to turn to providing financial services for clients, rather than lending, to generate income. Even before the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act tore down the New Deal–era prohibition on commercial banks partaking in investment banking, banks had begun to move into new activities like securities underwriting. One study of a leading bank in the late 1990s found that only about a quarter of their deals involved lending as a primary component. The goal

55 Mizruchi, *Fracturing of the American Corporate Elite*, chapter 5.

of lending, now, was mainly to secure business in other financial services divisions.[56]

As banks became less important as lenders, they also became less central in the intercorporate network. The average bank board size dropped by about a fifth in the 1980s. The number of directors connected to other firms dropped. Where banks were once reliably the most interlocked firms in the network, by the mid-1990s, only a minority of the most interlocked firms were commercial banks.[57] At the same time, the corporate network as a whole became significantly less centralized. In the 1980s, Michael Useem described the "inner circle" of the corporate elite, comprised of those figures who sat on two or more corporate boards.[58] This inner circle disappeared over the next few decades. In 2000, seven directors each sat on six or more boards, and forty-four sat on five. In 2010, not a single director sat on six or more boards, and only eleven sat on five or more. American corporations were becoming more isolated.[59]

These processes were corrosive to the kind of classwide rationality American business had forged in the crucible of the 1970s. Without a common enemy, fractures among business opened back up. At the same time, the nation's political economy was on a track, partially as a result of victories won by business mobilization, that further undermined business's ability to forge a long-term,

56 Mark S. Mizruchi and Linda Brewster Stearns, "Getting Deals Done: The Use of Social Networks in Bank Decision-Making," *American Sociological Review* 66, no. 5 (October 2001).

57 Gerald F. Davis and Mark S. Mizruchi, "The Money Center Cannot Hold: Commercial Banks in the U.S. System of Corporate Governance," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (June 1999).

58 Michael Useem, *The Inner Circle: Large Corporations and the Rise of Business Political Activity in the U.S. and U.K.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

59 Johan S. G. Chu and Gerald F. Davis, "Who Killed the Inner Circle? The Decline of the American Corporate Interlock Network," *American Journal of Sociology* 122, no. 3 (November 2016).

classwide perspective on politics and policy. The histories of the country's two major business organizations, the Business Roundtable and the Chamber of Commerce, both illustrate how business political action changed as a result.

The Business Roundtable had started experiencing severe internal divisions after the 1981 Reagan tax cuts blew a huge hole in the federal budget. Facing the 1982 and 1986 tax bills, the organization was divided and unable to exert significant pressure to preserve the tax provisions most favorable to business. As one Reagan administration official said of the business lobby at the time, "They were brought down by the narrowness of their vision. Precisely because they defined themselves as representatives of single special interests, they failed to notice their collective power."[60] Some issues, however, could still motivate decisive action. One such issue proved to be new Federal Accounting Standards Board (FASB) regulations that would have forced companies to treat stock options for executives as real costs to the business, rather than essentially free perks. The Roundtable moved swiftly into action to block the changes, inviting the FASB's research director to a private meeting with the chair of the group's accounting principles task force. The head of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) later said he had to devote about a third of his time to this issue alone, and was constantly "being threatened and cajoled by legions of businesspeople."[61] The Roundtable had found an issue on which there was unanimity, but it was one that only confirmed how narrow and provincial corporate political action was becoming.

Over the course of the 1990s, the Roundtable went into organizational decline. To be sure, there were some key victories, as

60 Quoted in Mizruchi, *The Fracturing of the American Corporate Elite*, 203.

61 Quoted in Hacker and Pierson, *American Amnesia*, 206.

when it organized vigorously for the World Trade Organization and other free trade agreements.[62] But observers in Washington noted that its influence was not what it once was. In 1997, *Fortune* magazine ran a story on its decline entitled "The Fallen Giant," which noted the group's troubles achieving consensus.[63] Around the same time, the group's president wrote a memo urging a tripling of its dues to finance more aggressive campaigning. But the move backfired, costing the group nearly a third of its membership.[64]

In the decades that followed, the Roundtable continued to press for business-friendly policies like tax cuts and social security privatization. But the issue that spurred large-scale mobilization was, once again, a narrow question of corporate governance. This time, it was a provision in the Dodd-Frank financial reform bill that would have made it easier for shareholders to elect different directors to a corporation's board. In response, the Roundtable flew into action. President and CEO John J. Castellani declared, "This is our highest priority. Literally all of our members have called about this."[65] This mobilization wasn't enough, in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, to kill the provision. It passed as part of Dodd-Frank. However, the Roundtable and the Chamber of Commerce sued and succeeded in getting the rule removed. Researchers later estimated that the Roundtable's success in protecting managerial autonomy against shareholder oversight wiped $70 billion off the value of public corporations. Once again,

62 Michael C. Dreiling and Derek Y. Darves, Agents of Neoliberal Globalization: Corporate Networks, State Structures, and Trade Policy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); James Shoch, *Trading Blows: Party Competition and U.S. Trade Policy in a Globalizing Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

63 *Fortune*, "The Fallen Giant," December 8, 1997.

64 Peter H. Stone, "Business Strikes Back," *National Journal*, October 25, 1997, 2130.

65 Hacker and Pierson, *American Amnesia*.

the Roundtable's political activity focused on the narrowest and most provincial aspects of policy.[66]

The Chamber of Commerce's evolution has been even more bizarre than the Business Roundtable's. The Chamber also faced significant internal dissension over Reagan's deficits, and its consensus-seeking internal procedures prevented it from putting forward any plan for dealing with them. The political scientist Mark Smith provides a description of the Chamber's decision-making during this period:

> the organization probably could not survive without incorporating its members into decision-making. By involving its diverse membership in deliberations that set its positions, the Chamber can help avoid taking stands opposed by part of its constituency. The participation of members helps to ensure that the Chamber takes action only when there is a consensus within business. Even when decisions must be reached without large-scale consultation of the Chamber's constituency, the policy committees, board of directors, and staff use available information and precedents to find the common ground supported throughout the business community.[67]

This kind of procedure put the Chamber at a disadvantage in the increasingly fractious world of American business.

The Chamber had continued its decline from the mid-1980s until new management was brought in during Bill Clinton's second term. Lesher retired and was replaced by Thomas Donohue, who pioneered a new model for the Chamber's work. Rather than

66 Bo Becker, Daniel Bergstresser, and Guhan Subramanian, "Does Shareholder Proxy Access Improve Firm Value? Evidence from the Business Roundtable's Challenge," *Journal of Law & Economics* 56, no. 1 (February 2013).

67 Mark A. Smith, *American Business and Political Power: Public Opinion, Elections, and Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 45.

attempting to forge a consensus among a diverse group of companies, the Chamber would offer its resources to the highest bidder. Since the Chamber is a trade association, donations to it are not required to be disclosed. As such, it could act as a kind of shield for companies wishing to push unpopular causes that might damage their brands. Their donations to the Chamber would be secret, and the Chamber's lobbyists and attorneys would be the ones to get their hands dirty.[68] Donohue was explicit about the purpose of this business model, boasting "I want to give them all the deniability they need."[69]

This new business model was first piloted with the tobacco industry, who, as Thomas Ferguson has noted, lurks behind the scenes of many of the most important political fights of the 1990s. Facing significant pressure from Bill Clinton's Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the industry needed a new strategy for fighting back, and it found the Chamber in the fight over a new cigarette tax being discussed in Congress. The Chamber offered its services to derail the bill, and Philip Morris poured over $200,000 into the Chamber in 1998 alone. As the Chamber pumped out ads opposing the bill and supplied a constant stream of lobbyists to oppose it on Capitol Hill, other tobacco companies took note of its good work and started kicking in funds. The Senate blocked the bill, and a new model of business advocacy (one can no longer call it organization) was born.

Over the next decade and a half, the Chamber would offer its reputation-laundering services to a number of different industries. When Congress considered new auto safety regulations in the wake of the Ford and Firestone recall in 2000, GM, Toyota, Ford, and Chrysler pumped over half a million dollars into lobbying to

68 Katz, *The Influence Machine*.

69 Hacker and Pierson, *American Amnesia*.

remove criminal penalties for auto executives from the legislation. Eleven pharmaceutical companies contributed over a million dollars each for a campaign about prescription drug pricing. The tidal wave of cash the insurance industry sent toward the Chamber in 2009 and 2010, however, dwarfed what had come before. In 2009, America's Health Insurance Plans, a trade group, donated more than $85 million to the Chamber, which came to 42 percent of its funds that year. These funds allowed the insurance industry to play a double game, pledging support for reform efforts in public, all the while funding the Chamber's scorched-earth campaign against a public option or any meaningful regulations on the industry. Throughout all this, Donohue continued to insist to journalists that donations to the Chamber were unrelated to its decisions to get involved in different political causes. The group was selling plausible deniability so rapidly, it seemed, it had forgotten to save any for itself.[70]

In the three decades that followed Reagan's administration, American business's form of political action changed drastically. The united fight to tear down the remnants of New Deal liberalism was over, and business had won. Its victory, however, undermined the very conditions that had made such unity possible. Now exercising an unquestioned dominance over American politics, business found itself rent by the kinds of divisions that had seemed insignificant in the 1970s. They became, once more, as Karl Marx described, "a band of warring brothers."

In this new environment, the leading organizations of American capital could no longer operate in the same way. They stopped trying to forge a classwide perspective and ceased seeking consensus. Instead, they attached themselves to the most narrow and sectional concerns of business, whether that meant shielding

70 Katz, *The Influence Machine*; Hacker and Pierson, *American Amnesia.*

the tobacco industry from liability or doing everything possible to preserve managerial autonomy.

For these sorts of endeavors, a Republican Party moving ever further to the right was a profitable partner. The Republican right could be counted on to fight against any real penalties for business malfeasance, to back the most brutal slashing of the tax code, and to support judges who would maintain a ceaseless hostility toward labor unions and regulations. What Richard Lachmann describes as the "autarkic" orientation of American capital fit perfectly with the party becoming more and more conservative.[71]

THE GOP SINCE REAGAN: THE DANCE OF INSURGENTS AND ESTABLISHMENTS

With the party institutionally enfeebled and corporate America more focused than ever on the narrowest, most sectional forms of political action, the way was cleared for Republican political entrepreneurs seeking to pull the party right. Even in the heyday of moderate Republicanism, during the Eisenhower administration, there was a strong constituency in the party trying to pull it further to the right. Through a combination of canny organizing, luck, and convention-rigging, these forces managed to win the party nomination for Barry Goldwater in 1964. Goldwater, of course, proceeded to a crushing defeat at Lyndon B. Johnson's hands, an outcome many thought had sealed the fate of the party. Reagan's eventual victory in 1980 proved that rumors of their demise were greatly exaggerated.

Yet, once ensconced in the White House, Reagan was an inconsistent force for party conservatism. His victory in the primaries had depended on winning support from some of the party's biggest

71 Richard Lachmann, *First-Class Passengers on a Sinking Ship: Elite Politics and the Decline of Great Powers* (New York: Verso, 2020).

corporate funders, who had little interest in movement conservatism's various social issue obsessions. George H. W. Bush's presence on the ticket was testimony to the continuing power of this wing of the party. As noted above, after his tax cuts sent the federal deficit skyrocketing, Reagan enacted the largest peacetime tax increase in American history, greatly dispiriting his free market fundamentalist backers. But most important of all, Reagan was not much of a party builder. While he campaigned hard for GOP congressional candidates in 1982, 1984, and 1986, his 1984 campaign in particular undercut the party's efforts. His campaign was, after all, almost entirely image-based and carefully avoided ideological or partisan appeals. In 1986, the White House even ordered the Republican National Convention to avoid a partisan campaign. Moves like these did little to pull the party to the right in the way Reagan's original backers had hoped he would.[72]

That task would fall to a former history professor from suburban Atlanta: Newt Gingrich. A former Rockefeller Republican, Gingrich came to Congress in 1978 and quickly realized two things: that the old party establishments were weaker than they looked, and that his route to power meant following the money. Most accounts of Gingrich's rise in the House focus on his battles with Democratic speaker Jim Wright, whom Gingrich successfully brought down over ethics violations in 1989. Catching Wright was certainly important, but what happened behind the scenes, when the cameras weren't rolling, is what allowed Gingrich to do it.[73]

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72 Geoffrey Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin: The Downfall of Moderation and the Destruction of the Republican Party, from Eisenhower to the Tea Party* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Sidney M. Milkis and Jesse H. Rhodes, "George W. Bush, the Republican Party, and the 'New' American Party System," *Perspectives on Politics* 5, no. 3 (September 2007).

73 On Gingrich's early career, see Julian E. Zelizer, *Burning Down the House: Newt Gingrich and the Rise of the New Republican Party* (New York: Penguin, 2020).

From early in his career, Gingrich was a conservative institution builder. In 1983, he founded the Conservative Opportunity Society, a strategy group for conservative congressmembers. In 1986, he took over GOPAC, a fundraising body set up by Delaware governor Pete du Pont to help maintain a healthy stable of state and local Republican candidates who could move up to higher office. Gingrich had first encountered GOPAC in 1985. He later described its impression on him, saying, "There was a high dollar fun fundraiser in 1985 and I walked in and saw the amount of wealthy friends that Du Pont had. I saw so much potential that this organization and this wealth could provide."[74]

Gingrich turned GOPAC into a force in Republican politics. He continued Du Pont's work of training candidates, sending out ideologically rigorous audio tapes candidates could listen to in their long car rides crisscrossing their districts. Over the next nine years, GOPAC would raise over $15 million, much of it from conservative business owners, to train and fund future GOP congressmembers. By the time Gingrich ascended to the office of speaker in 1995, he estimated that 75 percent of GOP freshmen had received his largesse. As Henry Waxman had discovered a few years earlier in the Democratic Party, in the post-reform Republican Party, power followed money.[75]

Gingrich's greatest triumph, of course, came in 1994, when, under his leadership, Republicans took back the House for the first time since the Eisenhower administration. Though many observers (and, of course, Gingrich himself) attributed the victory to Gingrich's leadership and agenda, which he called the "Contract

74 William Corkery, "Newt Gingrich and GOPAC: Training the Farm Team That Helped Win the Republican Revolution of 1994," Undergraduate Honors Thesis, College of William and Mary, 2011.

75 Thomas Schaller, *The Stronghold: How Republicans Captured Congress But Surrendered the White House* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

with America," the evidence for his popularity is thin. In fact, 71 percent of voters reported they had never heard of the Contract, and 68 percent said they were not familiar with Gingrich (of those who were, more had an unfavorable opinion than a favorable one). Instead, as Thomas Ferguson has argued, Gingrich rode a wave of business money to victory.[76] The Clinton administration, despite Goldman Sachs alum Robert Rubin's leadership on economic policy, had managed to alienate large sections of capital. The Brady Bill stirred up the gun industry, proposed energy taxes agitated oil, and the administration's intimations about regulating hedge firms even pushed Wall Street away. Most consequentially of all, the attempt to regulate the tobacco industry through the FDA prompted a Jesse Helms protégé to appoint Ken Starr (himself a lawyer for a tobacco company) to the position of special prosecutor investigating, at first, the Whitewater scandal. These companies directed a massive amount of money into the Republican Party and its candidates, which Gingrich expertly doled out to the races where it would be most impactful.[77]

Gingrich received a unanimous Republican vote to become speaker. His time on top, however, was not to last. Mistaking the campaign funds that brought him to power for a popular mandate for conservatism, he immediately launched a budget battle with the Clinton administration, demanding cuts to Medicaid, Medicare, and education spending. Gingrich refused to give Clinton a bill he would sign, prompting two government shutdowns that sent Gingrich's poll numbers through the floor.[78]

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76 Thomas Ferguson, "The 1994 Explosion," in Benjamin Ginsberg and Alan Stone, eds., *Do Elections Matter?*, 3rd edition (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1996).

77 Thomas Ferguson, "Blowing Smoke: Impeachment, the Clinton Presidency, and the Political Economy," in Crotty, *The State of Democracy in America*, 195–254.

78 Julian E. Zelizer, "Seizing Power: Conservatives and Congress Since the 1970s," in Paul Pierson and Theda Skocpol, eds., *The Transformation of American*

Gingrich's defeat on the budget dealt a blow to the party's radicals. Their momentum, seemingly unstoppable a few months earlier, had been broken. The more moderate wing of the party, grouped around figures linked to the Bush administration, was ready to seize the advantage. They coalesced quickly around Bob Dole as their choice to challenge Clinton in 1996. Dole had long-standing links to the party establishment, including running as Gerald Ford's vice presidential candidate in 1976. Among the party's right wing, however, Dole was viewed as "Senator Straddle." To placate them, Dole selected supply-side guru Jack Kemp as his running mate and tacked right throughout the campaign.[79]

Dole's backers in the party by this point viewed Gingrich and his horde as a problem to be managed. Allies of Bush, in particular, still smarted at the memory of Pat Buchanan's 1992 RNC speech calling for a *kulturkampf* against homosexuality and feminism, which many viewed as mortally wounding Bush's reelection chances. They intended to take no chances in 1996, and GOP figures from Reagan administration veterans to current governors spread the word that theatrics from the party's insurgent conservatives would not be tolerated at the convention.

Dole's subsequent defeat did little to improve the party establishment's position vis-à-vis the insurgents. Moreover, Dole's decision to resign from the Senate during the campaign meant that Trent Lott, who had been a key Gingrich ally in the House, would become Senate majority leader.[80] In the House, a chastened Gingrich moved to a more collaborative position with the Clinton administration, working quietly behind the scenes on a plan to

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Politics: Activist Government and the Rise of Conservatism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 105–34.

79 Matt Grossmann and David A. Hopkins, *Asymmetric Politics: Ideological Republicans and Group Interest Democrats* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

80 Schaller, *Stronghold*.

implement cuts to Social Security and Medicare.[81] However, the Republican Revolution was beginning to devour its own. The freshmen representatives Gingrich had brought in had already begun to turn on him for insufficient conservatism. One Clinton administration official remarked that "the freshmen had become Newt's Frankenstein monster."[82]

Gingrich's freshmen were joined by Tom DeLay, a former exterminator from Texas. DeLay had won the position of majority whip after the 1994 election, and he had won it by running against Gingrich's preferred candidate. DeLay managed this upset by redistributing money throughout the House on a scale grander than even Gingrich had imagined. A lobbyist for the brewing industry made the game plan explicit: "We'd rustle up checks for the guy and make sure Tom got the credit." After winning the whip position, DeLay only intensified his fundraising efforts. He hired an experienced tobacco lobbyist to run his leadership PAC, and the tobacco industry responded by contributing generously.[83]

It was DeLay, not Gingrich, who led the Republican charge to impeach Bill Clinton. Ironically, Gingrich himself paid the price for that gambit's failure, resigning shortly after the GOP lost seats in the 1998 elections. The new speaker of the House would be Dennis Hastert, whom DeLay had elevated as deputy whip in 1995.[84]

As the party headed into the 2000 election, then, a sort of stalemate existed between its establishment and the insurgents. The establishment had lost two presidential elections in a row, but the

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81 Steven M. Gillon, *The Pact: Bill Clinton, Newt Gingrich, and the Rivalry That Defined a Generation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

82 Schaller, *Stronghold*; Zelizer, "Seizing Power."

83 Lou Dubose and Jan Reid, *The Hammer: Tom DeLay — God, Money, and the Rise of the Republican Congress* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), 87.

84 In fact, DeLay, Dick Armey, and John Boehner had actively been plotting to remove Gingrich and replace him with one of their own. See Schaller, *Stronghold*, 149–54.

insurgents had led the party into two debacles — the government shutdowns and the impeachment. Moreover, the insurgents had few candidates who could credibly run in 2000.

George W. Bush emerged as an early front-runner in the campaign, with deep support from party establishment figures like George Shultz and James Baker. Bush, who had been one of his father's top campaign advisers in 1992, blamed Buchanan and the party right for the campaign's failure. Determined to avoid his father's fate, Bush's campaign walked a narrow path. On the one side, Bush distanced himself from the image of the congressional Republicans with his stance of "compassionate conservatism." On the other, he emphasized his evangelical bona fides, which were crucial to the electoral base of the Republican right. In this way, George W. Bush, though not known for his political genius, accomplished the impressive task of bringing together the two wings of the Republican Party that had been in conflict for most of the last decade.[85]

In office, Bush continued to be a uniter, not a divider, of the GOP. The first Republican president since Dwight Eisenhower to govern with a Republican congress, Bush needed Hastert, DeLay, and Lott, even if he personally didn't like them. It helped that the moderate image Bush had projected during the campaign was, for the most part, a facade. After the election, Dick Cheney had met with Senate GOP moderates and told them in no uncertain terms that the Bush administration would be tearing up environmental treaties, showering tax breaks on the wealthiest Americans, and, even before 9/11, pursuing an increasingly aggressive foreign policy.[86] In all of this, the administration had the firm backing of the Chamber of Commerce and the Business Roundtable.

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85 Schaller, *Stronghold*; Milkis and Rhodes, "George W. Bush."

86 Gary C. Jacobson, *A Divider, Not a Uniter: George W. Bush and the American People* (Boston: Longman, 2011).

With this kind of unity in the GOP, it is little surprise that the party began talking of a "permanent Republican majority." Karl Rove compared his ambitions for Bush to McKinley's win in 1896, which established the Republicans as the default party of government for the next three decades. But pride cometh before the fall. Though Bush won reelection in 2004 against John Kerry, the next four years would see the party unravel like never before, weakening the establishment and setting the stage for a new insurgency to pull the party even further to the right.

The most important story here was, of course, the debacle in Iraq. As the early euphoria of the US victory over Saddam Hussein's dilapidated military faded and American casualties rose, foreign policy transformed from Bush's signature strength to an albatross around his party's neck. Though the entirety of the foreign policy establishment had supported the invasion, the Republicans took the blame. Hurricane Katrina only underscored the administration's incompetence. In 2006, voters reacted by delivering both the House and Senate to the Democrats in one of the largest partisan flips in American history.[87]

Neither the insurgents nor the establishment had a plan in the aftermath of 2006. The previous year, Tom DeLay had left Congress after being indicted for campaign finance irregularities in connection with his extraordinary efforts to gerrymander Texas in the mid-2000s. His ally Dennis Hastert departed the House after the 2006 election, leaving John Boehner, another Gingrich loyalist from the '90s, to sort through the wreckage. On the presidential level, former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney made an unlikely play for the 2008 nomination, attempting to win the party right by employing his Mormonism to court Christian

87 Vivek Chibber, "American Militarism and the US Political Establishment: The Real Lessons of the Invasion of Iraq," *Socialist Register* 2009; Mike Davis, "The Democrats After November," *New Left Review* II/43 (2007).

conservatives. But the religious right was split between Romney and Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee, allowing John McCain, who was not strongly connected to either the establishment or the insurgents, to take the nomination. McCain originally wanted to appoint Democrat Joe Lieberman as his vice-presidential candidate, but he picked Sarah Palin in a bid to both appease the party right and project a more modern image for the party.[88]

The financial crisis doomed whatever slim chance McCain had of picking up the pieces of the Bush administration. It also exposed fault lines in the Republican Party more explosive than anything yet revealed. After Lehman Brothers collapsed in September 2008, Treasury secretary Hank Paulson embarked on a quest for legislation to contain the fallout. The bailout he sought for the nation's financial infrastructure sparked heavy opposition from congressional Republicans, despite Bush's stalwart support for it. McCain himself oscillated between sheepishly admitting the necessity for action and repeating the free market nostrums emanating from his party's right wing. When Paulson convinced Speaker Nancy Pelosi to bring legislation to the floor of the House (literally getting on his knees and begging her), House Republicans showed little loyalty to either Minority Leader Boehner's lachrymose pleas or President Bush's personal lobbying. Indeed, even after Bush himself called all nineteen Texan Republican congressmembers, only four supported the bill. In total, just under a third of House Republicans voted for the bill, and it failed. The children of DeLay and Gingrich were now standing against American capital's policy preferences in the midst of its most profound crisis since 1929.[89]

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88 Henry C. Kenski, "The 2008 Republican Nomination: John McCain As the Comeback Kid," *American Behavioral Scientist* 55, no. 4 (2011).

89 Thomas Ferguson and Robert Johnson, "Too Big to Bail: The 'Paulson Put,' Presidential Politics, and the Global Financial Meltdown — Part I: From Shadow Financial System to Shadow Bailout," *International Journal of Political Economy* 38,

After the stock market recorded its biggest drop ever in the aftermath of the bill's failure, enough legislators reconsidered that the bill passed, establishing the Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP). While the program saved many an investor's portfolio, those who had banked on John McCain winning the presidency found their stakes liquidated on November 4, 2008. As the Republican Party found itself more deeply divided than at any moment since the 1960s, Barack Obama became president.

Being in opposition once more removed some of the responsibilities for governing that had divided the party the previous year. On the night of Obama's inauguration, Republican congressional leaders met privately with Gingrich to discuss how to approach their new adversary. Obama was too popular to attack personally, they agreed. Kevin McCarthy, taking a page from Gingrich's playbook, argued, "We've got to challenge them on every single bill." As Obama took charge of economic policy, the Republicans' opportunity for opposition presented itself. The stimulus bill, which the administration packed with tax cuts in hopes of winning GOP support, wasn't supported by a single House Republican.[90]

Opposition to the stimulus bill also proved the occasion for the launching of the Tea Party, whose impact on the GOP is comparable to that of the Republican Revolution in 1994. The Tea Party took shape in response to CNBC broadcaster Rick Santelli's on-air rant about an Obama administration initiative to bail out indebted homeowners. Immediately afterward, new groups

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no. 1 (2009); Thomas Ferguson and Robert Johnson, "Too Big to Bail: The 'Paulson Put,' Presidential Politics, and the Global Financial Meltdown — Part II: Fatal Reversal — Single Payer and Back," *International Journal of Political Economy* 38, no. 2 (2009); John Lawrence, "When America Stared Into the Abyss," *Atlantic,* January 7, 2019.

90 Robert Draper, *Do Not Ask What Good We Do: Inside the U.S. House of Representatives* (New York: Free Press, 2012).

began springing up across the country, calling their movement the Tea Party. Two views have tended to structure the discussion of the Tea Party. One view, emanating from many liberals, has been that the Tea Party was entirely an astroturfed organization, propped up by its funders with no real grassroots support. Another view, given voice by some of the more credulous figures in the media, is that the Tea Party was a nonpartisan uprising of citizens concerned about government spending. As Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson have shown, the truth is somewhere in between. The Tea Party was supported by a dense network of extremely conservative, well-funded political groups. At the same time, it really did have a grassroots presence among very conservative Republicans.[91]

The Tea Party provided a golden opportunity for a Republican Party struggling after historic defeats in 2006 and 2008. As Skocpol and Williamson note, its effect "was to free conservatism from the tainted 'Republican Party' label in order to maximize the election of conservatives in 2010."[92] In much of 2009 and 2010, the Tea Party actually polled more favorably than the Republican Party itself. Just as Philip Morris, a few years earlier, rebranded itself as the Altria Group to get some distance from its negative brand image, the Tea Party offered the GOP a similar opportunity. It was extraordinarily effective at this task. In the midterms, the GOP took sixty-three seats in the House. Tea Party–endorsed candidates had a win rate higher than other Republicans. The incoming freshmen in the new Congress were overwhelmingly to the right of the median House GOP member before their election, and many were to the right of all current House members. The overall effect was a shift to the right among the House GOP

91 Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

92 Skocpol and Willliamson, *The Tea Party*, 120.

conference that was bigger than even that produced by Gingrich's wild bunch in 1994.[93]

Though the Tea Party was certainly energizing for the conservative grassroots, it was no populist explosion. Sections of capital were enthusiastically invested in its success. Its money flowed in from two major currents. First, intensely ideological billionaires like the Koch brothers, working through their group Americans for Prosperity, poured money into Tea Party groups and candidates across the country. Second, business groups whose fortunes would be helped by various Tea Party causes opened their wallets. The leading figure here was former House majority leader Dick Armey, who had retired to become a lobbyist in 2002. In addition to lobbying, Armey also headed FreedomWorks, a group that had split from the Koch brothers' network in the early 2000s over issues with Armey's leadership. Armey had been happy to offer his organization's support to his lobbying clients. When the oil industry hired him as a lobbyist, FreedomWorks fought for more offshore drilling. When a life insurance company bought his services, FreedomWorks activists found a new passion for deregulating life insurance. The same pay-to-play rules applied to FreedomWorks's Tea Party groups. A $100,000 donation from the oil industry trade group saw Armey's Tea Partiers throw themselves into action against the Obama administration's climate change bills. Looking at the picture of corporate support for the Tea Party in the aggregate, Thomas Ferguson, Paul Jorgensen, and Jie Chen found that energy industries like oil, gas, and utilities were the sectors whose support for Tea Party candidates was most fervent.[94]

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93 Lee Fang, *The Machine: A Field Guide to the Resurgent Right* (New York: The New Press, 2012); Gary C. Jacobson, "The President, the Tea Party, and Voting Behavior in 2010: Insights from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study," Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Seattle, September 2011.

94 Thomas Ferguson, Paul Jorgensen, and Jie Chen, "Party Competition and In-

Yet even as some industries found their interests well represented by Tea Party zealotry, the new congressmembers also began creating problems for capital. Early in 2011, the Republican right prompted a rare rebuke from capital when it tried to slash infrastructure spending. Later that year, the Tea Party went even further, threatening to force the United States to begin default on debt payments (one of the pillars of the world financial system) if their budgetary demands weren't met. In response, the Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers issued a joint statement condemning such fiscal hostage-taking. Then, in 2013, Tea Partiers forced a government shutdown in a doomed attempt to defund the Affordable Care Act (ACA). While the Chamber of Commerce had been paid handsomely by the insurance industry to lobby against the ACA, by 2013, the prospect of its repeal excited few in corporate boardrooms. The Chamber condemned the Republican intransigence, but its statement had none of the fire that its opposition to progressive legislation would frequently contain, asserting simply that "it is not in the best interest of the employers, employees or the American people to risk a government shutdown that will be economically disruptive and create even more uncertainties for the U.S. economy."[95] Conflict has also arisen over immigration policy, infrastructure, and even the normally uncontroversial Export-Import Bank.[96]

Groups like the Chamber of Commerce, the Business Roundtable, and the National Federation of Independent Business joined with the Republican establishment to push back against the Tea

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dustrial Structure in the 2012 Elections: Who's Really Driving the Taxi to the Dark Side?" *International Journal of Political Economy* 42, no. 2 (2013).

95 Katz, *The Influence Machine*, 236.

96 Alexander Hertel-Fernandez and Theda Skocpol, "Billionaires Against Big Business: Growing Tensions in the Republican Party Coalition," Prepared for delivery at the 2016 Midwest Political Science Association Conference, April 8, 2016.

Party. The party establishment, while ecstatic about the Tea Party's successful rebranding of American conservatism, hated the movement for both costing the party winnable seats by nominating extremists and bucking party leadership in Congress. The Chamber and other business groups mobilized on a number of fronts, most notably on immigration and the federal budget. Mitt Romney's nomination in 2012 as the party's presidential candidate was one indication of establishment strength. Across the House and Senate, Tea Party candidates lost a huge number of primaries to candidates with establishment support. By 2016, the Tea Party caucus in Congress was no longer operative.[97]

Yet while some interpreted these results as a decisive triumph for big-business groups and the party establishment, such a view misses how epiphenomenal the Tea Party itself always was.[98] In fact, the organizations that provided the most crucial support for the Tea Party, most centrally the Koch brothers' Americans for Prosperity, only grew stronger. Americans for Prosperity had been founded in 2003 with a budget of $2 million. By 2015, it was raising more money than the Republican National Committee, the National Republican Congressional Committee, and the National Republican Senatorial Committee *combined*. Even as the Tea Party was fading away, Americans for Prosperity was staking out aggressive new ground in the GOP, successfully targeting incumbent Representatives for primary challenges.[99]

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97 Jon Terbush, "How the Tea Party Lost the 2014 Midterms," *The Week*, January 8, 2015; Tom Hamburger, "The Biggest Winner in Primaries: U.S. Chamber of Commerce," *Washington Post*, May 21, 2014.

98 See, for example, Charlie Post, "The Future of the Republican Party," *Jacobin*, December 23, 2014.

99 Theda Skocpol and Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, "The Koch Network and Republican Party Extremism," *Perspectives on Politics* 14, no. 3 (September 2016); Elena Schneider, "Koch-Backed Group Targets First GOP Incumbent in Primary," *Politico,* May 12, 2016.

Americans for Prosperity (AFP) is funded through seminars, where donors make pledges to the organization. The lowest pledge is $100,000, and most donors give far more than the minimum. In this sense, the organization is indicative of the continued dominance of big money in American politics. While in the 1980s the top 0.01 percent of donors gave 10–15 percent of all donations, by 2012, the number was 40 percent. If so-called "dark money" donations to super PACs were included, the number would doubtless be even higher. At the same time, the amount of money the group now raises strongly suggests that it is no longer the project of a handful of idiosyncratic billionaires, but rather a project drawing support from sections of the corporate rich more broadly. Since donations to the Kochs are not itemized in the way campaign contributions are, they cannot be analyzed in any detail, but their sheer quantity is certainly a strong signal regarding the character of the donor base. As such, the conflict between AFP and the Chamber cannot be reduced to a few ideologically driven billionaires versus capitalist class organizations. It is rather a conflict *within* the sections of the capitalist class that back the Republican Party. This group is then split between capitalists who are pursuing extremely conservative policy ends and a transactional relationship between business and the party, and a group that rejects transactional politics in favor of all-out war on regulation and the welfare state.[100]

These divisions among Republican Party investors are part of what allowed Donald Trump to seize the nomination in 2016. Indeed, with two extraordinarily well-funded groups claiming to be the real voice of conservatism in the party, it should come as no surprise that elite signals to the party base seemed to cancel one another out in 2016. Jeb Bush, the candidate of the party

100 Adam Bonica et al., "Why Hasn't Democracy Slowed Rising Inequality?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 27, no. 3 (Summer 2013).

establishment, ended his campaign early after the most extraordinary defeat for a presumptive front-runner since Edmund Muskie's campaign imploded in 1972. While Bush was the clear choice of the party establishment, the insurgents found themselves divided, as Scott Walker, Marco Rubio, and Ted Cruz all jostled for support. In the end, the Koch network never made a decisive choice in the primaries, concerned that any of their favorites would be unable to stop Donald Trump anyway.[101]

Trump himself won the primaries with an ideological appeal that completely scrambled existing alignments in the GOP. On immigration, he ran far to the right of even most Tea Partiers. Meanwhile, on economic issues, he ran to the left of even the party establishment, promising to protect entitlements like Social Security and Medicare. This moderation was, in fact, an underappreciated facet of his success. As Justin Grimmer and William Marble have shown, Trump's most significant gains in the general election came from low-income white voters with moderate political views.[102] At the same time, even as traditional Republican political investors abandoned his candidacy in droves, their late push to help Republicans keep the Senate provided coattails that Trump was able to ride to victory in key states. Trump's win was thus the ultimate illustration of the decoherence of the Republican Party, both in the electorate and among its elite backers.[103]

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101 Jane Mayer, "Is This the End of Big-Money Politics?" *New Yorker,* March 3, 2016.

102 Justin Grimmer and William Marble, "Who Put Trump in the White House? Explaining the Contribution of Voting Blocs to Trump's Victory," unpublished paper, 2019.

103 Thomas Ferguson, Paul Jorgensen, and Jie Chen, "Industrial Structure and Party Competition in an Age of Hunger Games: Donald Trump and the 2016 Presidential Election," Institute for New Economic Thinking, Working Paper Series No. 66, February 2018.

Because Trump himself had no organization, when he unexpectedly won the presidency, his administration had to be largely staffed out of traditional Republican power blocs. Appointees like Steve Bannon and Jason Miller were the exception. Vice President Mike Pence, long a favorite of the Koch network, was far more representative of Trump's choices. Figures like Treasury secretary Steve Mnuchin and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson were the American establishment incarnate. With these people in the administration, and a Republican Congress with less than zero interest in any of Trump's populist gestures, it is little surprise that Trump's primary policy initiatives were classic Republican goals like tax cuts, regulatory reform, and attacks on the welfare state. At the same time, the extraordinary personalism of his regime, which manifested mainly through ceaseless attacks on the Democratic Party, proved to be the one force capable of forging significant Republican unity. Among the party's base, there was little agreement on what they supported, but they knew they hated Democrats and loved Trump. Ultimately representing neither insurgents nor the establishment, Trump's ascension demonstrated how the conflict between the two groups had degraded their collective ability to deliver their signals to the party's voters.[104]

CONCLUSION

The events of the last year have led many to hope that the Republican Party will return to normal in the aftermath of Trump's presidency. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed his unique combination of incompetence and indifference with an urgency that simply could not be ignored. Similarly, the pathetic stunts through which Trump and backers like Rudy Giuliani and Sidney Powell

104 Paul Pierson, "American Hybrid: Donald Trump and the Strange Merger of Populism and Plutocracy," *British Journal of Sociology* 68, no. S1 (November 2017); Dylan Riley, "What Is Trump?" *New Left Review* II/114 (2018).

tried to overturn the 2020 election results only underscored his weakness. Finally, the riots at the Capitol on January 6 seemed to be a nail in the coffin of Trumpism, as even Trump stalwarts like Lindsey Graham lined up to denounce the president.

The Capitol riots also marked a new level of discord between the Republican Party and the business community. Everyone from the Business Roundtable to the Chamber of Commerce to Americans for Prosperity denounced the riots. Trump's strongest backers, like Ted Cruz and Josh Hawley, found themselves completely isolated. Some businesses signaled they would stop donations to Republicans entirely, while many more said they would stop donations to any politicians who voted against certifying the election results.[105]

Yet these actions proved less substantial than many had hoped. When the Republican Conference stood strong beside Trump during the post-riot impeachment hearings, the business boycott began to fall apart. By March, the Chamber of Commerce announced it would not proceed with the boycott. As the Biden administration moves to expand the welfare state, raise corporate taxes, and enact new environmental reforms, there is little doubt that many sections of business will migrate back to what is still Trump's GOP. Indeed, even during Trump's disastrous last year, both the Chamber of Commerce and the Koch brothers' network worked to push Trump's plans for reopening as soon as possible.[106]

These dynamics reveal the failures of potted Marxist paradigms like treating Trump or the Tea Party as a radicalized middle-class

105 David Gelles, "'We Need to Stabilize': Big Business Breaks With Republicans," *New York Times*, January 15, 2021; Maggie Severns, "Koch Network Pledges to 'Weigh Heavy' Lawmakers' Actions in Riots," *Politico*, January 13, 2021.

106 Alex Gangitano, "Chamber Pushes Plan for Reopening Economy," *The Hill*, April 15, 2020; Lee Fang, "Charles Koch Network Pushed $1 Billion Cut to CDC, Now Attacks Shelter-in-Place Policies for Harming Business," *The Intercept*, March 26, 2020.

insurgency. Since the 1980s, the Republican drive to the right has been powered by the shifting political interventions of capital. If the GOP now pursues policies that are frequently opposed by large sections of capital, that fact only testifies to the profound divisions that exist among the uniquely disorganized American capitalist class.

This article has given little attention to alternative "demand-side" theories of Republican radicalization that focus on the GOP's voters. Examples of these include research that directs attention to racial and sexual resentments among the Republican electorate or emphasizes the role of right-wing media in pushing the party to the right. While these kinds of studies have made real contributions to understanding the party, they cannot function as explanations of the party's move to the right unless the inability to block that move by forces interested in opposing it is also explained.[107]

If Republican radicalization is rooted in the weakness of the parties and the disorganization of capital, it is unlikely to reverse so long as those dynamics persist. Moreover, there are strong reasons to expect continued conflict between Republicans and large sections of business. In particular, the party's discarding of even a rhetorical commitment to the basic democratic principles of fair elections and majority rule are likely to create conundrums for business in the future. The GOP has, in essence, admitted that it has no hope of winning national majorities in its current form and will thus pursue politics through the negation of democracy. Where possible, this will be through constitutional means, such as the filibuster. Where necessary, fraud and even violence, like that

107 Angie Maxwell and Todd Shields, *The Long Southern Strategy: How Chasing White Voters in the South Changed American Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Nicole Hemmer, *Messengers of the Right: Conservative Media and the Transformation of American Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

of the Capitol riots, will be employed. All this poses a problem for business. Even now, firms are coming under tremendous pressure to denounce Republican attempts at vote suppression. Over the long term, Republican efforts, should they succeed, will have a profoundly delegitimizing effect on American capitalist democracy, a system that has worked remarkably well for American capital. American capital wants the policy fruits of Republican rule, but it is understandably nervous about the instability that accompanies dominance without hegemony.

The Republican Party's frank abandonment of democratic commitments is obviously a tremendous problem for the American left. Any prospect of winning reforms like welfare state expansion is dependent on the ability to conduct class struggle via the ballot box. Already in many states, Republican gerrymandering has made it functionally impossible to unseat a Republican legislative majority.

On another level, the Left's relationship to the forces driving Republican Party radicalization is paradoxical. The weakness of American parties has, after all, been an obvious asset to the American left. Without this weakness, Bernie Sanders's 2016 and 2020 candidacies would have been far less impactful. Similarly, the victories of socialist candidates in primaries across the country would have been impossible in a party whose leadership controlled candidate selection.[108]

At the same time, weak parties and disorganized capitalists are both powerful barriers to socialist advance in the United States. A left party simply cannot exist in a political context where money drives partisan dynamics in such an unmediated fashion. For

108 Jonah Birch, "The Rise of Socialism in the United States: American 'Exceptionalism' and the Left After 2016," in Claes Brundenius, ed., *Reflections on Socialism in the Twenty-First Century: Facing Market Liberalism, Rising Inequalities and the Environmental Imperative* (Cham: Springer, 2020): 103-130.

parties to play the kind of role the Left needs them to play, from building class consciousness to solving collective action problems to forging classwide preferences, they must be organizations with genuinely autonomous institutional power. Similarly, as plenty of research in comparative political economy has revealed, a disorganized capitalist class, focused on the narrowest and most short-term interests, is often a more dedicated foe of the welfare state than an organized one. Capitalists organize in response to external threats. If socialism is to progress beyond its present, barely marginal presence in American political life, it will depend on growing strong enough both to forge a new kind of political party in the American context, and to threaten employers enough to completely change their mode of association.[109]

In the short term, Republican radicalization is likely to remain the defining feature of American politics. At this point, the party looks likely to retake both the House and the Senate in 2022, putting an end to whatever tepidly expansionary and ameliorative policies the Biden administration decides to enact before then. The outcome of the 2024 election will depend on what kinds of voting access and electoral certification measures the GOP passes in various states in advance. Republican radicalization is, in other words, well-positioned for continuing political success, even as it promises to bring political and economic instability with it. The forces deranging the Republican Party are deeply rooted in American politics and society. They show few signs of abating.

109 Ralph Miliband, *Marxism and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); Martin and Swank, *The Political Construction of Business Interests.*

ABSTRACT

Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* was once the New Left's bible. The book's rich analysis offers today's socialists a chance to learn from its spirit of protest, its materialist social theory, and its warnings regarding commodified liberation, while leaving firmly in the past its political Manichaeism and culturalist despair.

The Two Souls of Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*

Jeremy Cohan and Benjamin Serby

Few intellectuals have been so closely identified with a social movement as Herbert Marcuse was with the transatlantic New Left in the late 1960s. In 1966, the year *One-Dimensional Man* was issued in paperback, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) included the book in their political education curriculum, alongside the works of C. Wright Mills, Gabriel Kolko, Paul A. Baran, and Paul Sweezy. Following its translation into German and Italian the next year, it quickly became recognized as "a primary ideological source" for young radicals in Europe.[1] In the upheavals

1 Hubert J. Erb, "Anti-US Spirit Up in Berlin," *Austin Statesman*, December 25, 1967, A16.

that rocked universities during the first half of 1968, Marcuse, the "prophet of the New Left," was suddenly everywhere.[2] Students in Berlin held a banner proclaiming "Marx, Mao, Marcuse!" — an alliterative slogan more elaborately formulated by demonstrators in Rome: "Marx is the prophet, Marcuse his interpreter, and Mao his sword!"[3] Although dismissed by most liberal critics and increasingly denounced by a motley chorus of conservatives, left sectarians, and Soviet apparatchiks, *One-Dimensional Man* maintained its position as the "bible" of the New Left through the end of the decade, providing, as one American commentator noted in 1968, a "special philosophical vocabulary" that graced New Left journals "as if it were part of ordinary language."[4]

This article aims to introduce and critically reevaluate *One-Dimensional Man* for today's socialists. We begin with the book's enthusiastic reception within the New Left, capturing why and how it resonated with a generation of young activists in the 1960s. Marcuse's resolute moral and political opposition to the destructive direction of late capitalist society helped resuscitate the sense that the status quo was unsustainable and change was urgent. Unfortunately, however, some of the book's weakest aspects — such as its offering as alternatives to the status quo various paths (cultural radicalism, new subjects of history, ultraleftism) that proved to be dead ends — were often its greatest draws for its New Left readers, something Marcuse himself understood and resisted.

In important ways, the New Left missed core aspects of Marcuse's critical project that are worth retrieving for today. We turn

2 Yury Zhukov, "A Dissenting Voice on Prophet of New Left," *Los Angeles Times*, September 1, 1968, F2.

3 Ian Adie, "Marx and His Interpreter," *Guardian*, May 23, 1968, 9.

4 Allen Graubard, "One-Dimensional Pessimism: A Critique of Herbert Marcuse's Theories," *Dissent* 15 (May-June 1968), p. 216.

to reconstructing and evaluating Marcuse's moral and materialist analysis of late capitalism. We lay out the philosophical basis for his critique and his insistence on the breadth and depth of the moral commitments — to freedom, equality, happiness, reason, and peace — undergirding socialist politics. We then examine Marcuse's materialist social theory, which raised critical questions about the gap between socialist theory and social conditions in "the affluent society" that resonate in our own moment. Our interpretation emphasizes the overlooked degree to which the "classical" Marxism of the Second International provides the underpinnings of *One-Dimensional Man*. Marcuse's materialist analyses of working-class integration through consumerism, a rising standard of living, and the culture industry aimed to explain capitalism's unexpected resilience and absorptive capacities.

It would ultimately be left both to Marcuse's contemporaries Ralph Miliband and André Gorz and to today's socialists to draw out the political implications of Marcuse's questions and method and to formulate a socialist strategy adequate to the advanced capitalist world. Though he insisted that the basic premises of Marxist social theory remained correct — a distinct and underappreciated quality of the book — a sense of futility with the theory's practical implications in the present, as well as fidelity to a vision of social change as total historical rupture, drew Marcuse to paint an imaginative but inadequate picture of his moment as Hegel's proverbial "night in which all cows are black," void of possibilities for radical social transformation.

There are, we suggest, two souls of Herbert Marcuse — on the one hand, the critical and materialist; on the other, the moralistic and defeatist — each with its own significance for today's activists. We close by suggesting that *One-Dimensional Man*'s decline from its previous stardom may offer today's Left a chance to learn from its spirit of protest, its materialist social theory, and its warnings

regarding commodified liberation, while leaving firmly in the past its political Manichaeism and culturalist despair.

GURU OF THE NEW LEFT

Hebert Marcuse, a German-Jewish philosopher, lived a turbulent but scholarly life that hardly seemed to set him up to become a household name and "father" to a mass movement. He grew up in Berlin, and though he was politicized by the abortive German Revolution of 1918–19, he soon went to Freiburg to study philosophy under Martin Heidegger.[5] Blocked in mainstream German academic circles with the rise of Nazism, Marcuse joined the Institute for Social Research (also known as the "Frankfurt School") and, in the late 1930s, emigrated to the United States to teach at Columbia University. [6] During World War II, Marcuse worked with the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), helping to guide the war effort against the Nazis.[7] He eventually returned to teaching, first at Brandeis University and then at the University of California,

5 Marcuse participated briefly in a soldiers' council during the revolution, and he sympathized with the Spartacist uprising and its assassinated leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. See Herbert Marcuse and Karl Popper, *Revolution or Reform: A Confrontation*, ed. A.T. Ferguson (Chicago: New University Press, 1976), 57; Caroline Ashcroft, "From the German Revolution to the New Left: Revolution and Dissent in Arendt and Marcuse," *Modern Intellectual History* (2021), 1–24.

6 It was in part his own adviser who blocked Marcuse's academic career. Marcuse's brief postwar correspondence with Heidegger should serve as a bracing tonic to those who would attempt to rehabilitate Heidegger's approach: marcuse.org/herbert/pubs/40spubs/47MarcuseHeidegger.htm. See also "Heidegger's Politics" in *The Essential Marcuse*, ed. Andrew Feenberg and William Leiss (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), 115–27; and Peter E. Gordon, "Heidegger in Black," *New York Review of Books*, October 9, 2014. On the Frankfurt School, see Stuart Jeffries, *Grand Hotel Abyss: The Lives of the Frankfurt School* (London: Verso, 2016) and *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader*, eds. Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas MacKay Kellner (London: Routledge, 1989).

7 Franz Neumann, Herbert Marcuse, and Otto Kirchheimer, *Secret Reports on Nazi Germany: The Frankfurt School Contribution to the War Effort*, ed. Raffaele Laudani (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

San Diego, where he became a bête noire of the Right, facing the condemnation of then-governor Ronald Reagan.

Among Marcuse's major writings, his first book published in English, *Reason and Revolution* (1941), remains one of the best interpretations of the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and an expression of the engaged philosophy that he would continue to champion throughout his career. His other most important works were: *Eros and Civilization* (1955), a synthesis of Marx and Freud that aimed to historicize modern psychology, investigate the psychic sources of domination, and articulate a utopia of fulfillment and sexual liberation; T*he Aesthetic Dimension* (1978), which argued for the centrality of art, imagination, and sensuality to human emancipation; and, of course, *One-Dimensional Man* (published in 1964, but substantially finished in the late '50s), which is the subject of this article. [8]

Indeed, it may seem especially surprising that *One-Dimensional Man*, widely regarded as abstruse and pessimistic in the extreme, should have become so deeply insinuated in the discourse of a mass movement. While Marcuse promised, in his preface, that his argument would vacillate between two contradictory hypotheses — "that advanced industrial society is capable of containing qualitative change for the foreseeable future," and "that forces and tendencies exist which may break this containment and explode the society" — *One-Dimensional Man* was virtually silent on the second point, ultimately presenting a critical theory of society with no "liberating tendencies" capable of translating it into reality.[9] Reviewers charged Marcuse with overlooking the obvious social

8 Douglas Kellner's *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) remains, to this day, the best synthetic overview of Marcuse's life and work.

9 Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), xv.

ferment in American society at a time of escalating civil rights and antiwar militancy.[10] Others excoriated Marcuse for characterizing the welfare state as a container of radical energies rather than an achievement by and for the working class.[11] Although remarking that "qualitative change appears possible only as a change from without," Marcuse even expressed skepticism toward the anti-colonial movements of the Third World.[12] This great refusal to name possibilities in the present, this maddening tendency to see all apparent opposition as always already absorbed into and reinforcing the system, followed from the traditional materialist framework of Marcuse's analysis, on the one hand, and the Luxemburgian quest for a total negation of the existing order — a social force capable of "breaking out of this whole" — on the other.[13]

Ultimately, it is the depth of Marcuse's quest for revolutionary rupture, and his insistence on its necessity, that accounts for the impact of *One-Dimensional Man* on the youth of affluent nations. Even if the book suggested that such a rupture was nowhere on the horizon, its account of the domination and repression subtly pervading advanced capitalist society confirmed the unarticulated observations of many newly politicized activists who were, moreover, enchanted by Marcuse's expansive conception of liberation and his willingness to speculate about a utopian future. While the book's departures from orthodox Marxism caused less shrewd critics to conclude that he had retreated "into the realm of Hegelian idealism," the Marxologist George Lichtheim correctly recognized *One-Dimensional Man*, upon its release, as the introduction of

10 See, for example: Marshall Berman, "Theory and Practice," *Partisan Review* 31, no. 4 (Fall 1964), 617–24.

11 See, for example: Alasdair MacIntyre, "Modern Society: An End to Revolt?" *Dissent* 12, no. 2 (Spring 1965), 239–44.

12 Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 49.

13 Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 253.

Western Marxism to an American audience.[14] To Lichtheim, the book was "a portent" of things to come, and, indeed, the few hopeful passages in the book seemed to anticipate the social unrest coming from exactly the groups Marcuse identified as "those who form the human base of the social pyramid — the outsiders and the poor, the unemployed and unemployable, the persecuted colored races, the inmates of prisons and mental institutions."[15] Thus did Marcuse's elegy for the revolutionary working class intensify an ongoing search for new subjects of world-historical transformation, despite his explicit warnings that no such subject existed.

"It is sometimes said of Marcuse that the students who follow him haven't the slightest idea what he means," the *Washington Post* observed in 1968.[16] Initial reviewers cautioned, "This is not an easy book," noting its difficult syntax and disquieting aporetic conclusions.[17] The ambiguities of *One-Dimensional Man* are legion. Does Marcuse's argument depend, as Alasdair MacIntyre charged, on "a crude and unargued technological determinism"?[18] Is his "technological order" in fact a political-economic system — or not? Does he describe class exploitation, or universal enslavement to the apparatus of domination? While oblique references to "the particular interests that organize the apparatus" evince a class analysis, much of the language in the book — including its very title — aligns with conventional mid-century humanistic discourse.[19] Indeed,

14 Helmut R. Wagner, "Review: *One-Dimensional Man*," *Social Research* 32, no. 1 (Spring 1965), 121; George Lichtheim, "The Threat of History: *One-Dimensional Man*," *New York Review of Books*, February 20, 1964, 15–16.

15 Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 53.

16 Drew Pearson and Jack Anderson, "Marcuse: Godfather of Student Revolt," *Washington Post and Times Herald*, July 6, 1968, D7.

17 Berman, "Theory and Practice," 619.

18 MacIntyre, "Modern Society," 239.

19 Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 168.

while it was possible for one reviewer to describe the book as decidedly *not* "just one more journalistic work on the alienation of modern man," R. D. Laing, writing in the *New Left Review*, drew the opposite conclusion. Anticipating much of the book's reception, Laing channeled what he took to be the lament at its core: "Will man be able to re-invent himself in the face of this new form of dehumanization?"[20]

To Marcuse's New Left interpreters, at least one point was unequivocal: the working classes were bought off, a conservative force, leaving, three SDS theorists wrote in 1965, "virtually no legitimate places from which to launch a total opposition movement."[21] Invoking Marcuse against calls like Bayard Rustin's for a coalition politics anchored in the trade union movement, these activists looked beyond purportedly oppositional groups that had succumbed to the lures of parliamentarism and the welfare state, calling instead for "a thoroughly democratic revolution" led by "the most oppressed" — those least captured by existing institutions. But while they looked to the urban poor (as opposed to the working class), by 1968, the search for a revolutionary subject that was carried out under the sign of *One-Dimensional Man* just as often led to college students, disaffected intellectuals, and the "new working class" of salaried technicians and professionals.[22] Within SDS, opponents of the workerist proposals put forward by the Progressive Labor faction "drew heavily on the ideas of Herbert Marcuse" to support an approach to organizing groups

20 R. D. Laing, "Review: *One-Dimensional Man*," *New Left Review* I/26 (July-August 1964), 80.

21 Tom Hayden, Norm Fruchter, and Alan Cheuse, "Up From Irrelevance," in Paul Jacobs and Saul Landau, eds., *The New Radicals: A Report with Documents* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 271.

22 Hayden, Fruchter, and Cheuse, "Up From Irrelevance."

outside "the traditional, narrow industrial working class."[23] In Europe, students cited Marcuse on behalf of their view of the university as a nexus of revolutionary power. For his part, Marcuse at times seemed to encourage this reading. When asked about the radical forces in the world in July 1968, he placed "the intelligentsia, particularly the students" at the top of the list, followed only by "minorities in the ghetto."[24] They alone — not the working class — resisted incorporation.

This turn away from the labor movement accompanied other shifts in perspective: from "exploitation" to "alienation," and from class to consciousness, as the source of radical opposition. As one popular underground newspaper summarized the argument of *One-Dimensional Man* in May 1968, "Only those groups on the *outside* of automation and 'progress' — the unemployed, the blacks and minorities, the students — think."[25] Late-1960s enthusiasts of cultural revolution, such as Theodore Roszak and Charles Reich, enlisted Marcuse in their Romantic attacks on consumerism and technology, dispensing with the materialist underpinnings of his analysis and, as Russell Jacoby noted, conflating his critique of instrumental reason with a subjectivist abandonment of reason itself.[26] By a sleight of hand, Roszak cited Marcuse in order to unmask Marxism as "the mirror image of bourgeois industrialism," guilty of the same soulless hyperrationality as the society it ostensibly opposes.[27] For Reich, meanwhile, the totalizing ideol-

23 "Factions Clash as New Left Meets," *Los Angeles Free Press*, July 5, 1968, 14.

24 Dorothy Townsend, "Marcus [sic] Says Students No. 1 Radical Force," *Austin Statesman*, July 31, 1968, A15.

25 "Pepper's Pickle: Saigon, Paris, A Fine Pair, Both May Fall," *Berkeley Barb*, May 24–30, 1968, 2.

26 Russell Jacoby, "Marcuse and the New Academics: A Note on Style," *Telos* 5 (Spring 1970), 188–90.

27 Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Berkeley: University of California

ogy-critique in *One-Dimensional Man* had demonstrated that the source of domination is not in the social relations of production but in consciousness, attitude, and lifestyle. "Nobody wants inadequate housing and medical care — only the machine," he explained.

> Nobody wants war except the machine. And even businessmen, once liberated, would like to roll in the grass and lie in the sun. There is no need, then, to fight any group of people in America. They are all fellow sufferers.[28]

While it is true that Marcuse could hardly be held responsible for these depoliticized corruptions of his ideas, it is telling that he felt compelled to respond to them — more than once.

In fact, Marcuse's drift away from *One-Dimensional Man* began almost from the moment it landed on bookshelves, as he attempted, in one historian's words, "to break out of the theoretical box he had placed himself in with that book."[29] Writing in the *International Socialist Journal* in 1965, he declared, "the contradictions of capitalism are not transcended; they persist in their classic form; indeed, perhaps they have never been stronger," thereby guarding against the impression that advanced capitalism had achieved permanent stability.[30] Speaking to leftist students in Berlin the following year, he waxed enthusiastic about "the militant Liberation movements in the developing countries" and — picking up a theme that would become dominant for the rest of

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Press, 1969), 100.

28 Charles A. Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York: Random House, 1970), 348.

29 Richard King, *The Party of Eros: Radical Social Thought and the Realm of Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 147.

30 Herbert Marcuse, "Socialism in the Developed Countries," in Douglas Kellner, ed., *The New Left and the 1960s: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse, Volume III* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 454 n. 68.

the decade — the alienated youth of the affluent nations.[31] By 1967, he had come to view the counterculture as representing "a total rupture" with the ideology of advanced capitalism, a force heralding "a total trans-valuation of values, a new anthropology" and the development of needs that the existing political and economic system could not satisfy.[32] The student uprisings of 1968 reinforced Marcuse's growing conviction that "the only viable social revolution which stands today is the Youth," and that "the New Left today is the only hope we have."[33] So profoundly did this belief in these groups' emancipatory potential shift Marcuse's social theory that his 1969 book *An Essay on Liberation* was initially to be titled "Beyond *One-Dimensional Man*."[34] In the 1970s, even as he worried over the turn to the right ("counterrevolution") in US politics, he would embrace ecology and especially the women's movement — "perhaps the most important and potentially the most radical political movement that we have" — as pointing the way to a qualitative break with capitalist society.[35]

In the final analysis, however, Marcuse consistently maintained that no force other than the working class was capable of achieving the full break with one-dimensional society demanded by critical theory. The student movement, the hippie counterculture, the radical intelligentsia — these were *catalyst* groups with a "preparatory function."[36] Their task was not revolution, but

31 Quoted in Douglas Kellner, introduction to *The New Left and the 1960s*, 17.

32 Herbert Marcuse, "Liberation from the Affluent Society," in David Cooper, ed., *The Dialectics of Liberation* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2015), 177, 184.

33 "Marcuse on the Hippie Revolution," *Berkeley Barb*, August 4–10, 1968, 9; "Marcuse," *The Rag* (Austin, TX), December 15, 1968, 14.

34 Kellner, introduction to *The New Left and the 1960s*, 21 n. 27.

35 Herbert Marcuse, "Marxism and Feminism," in *The New Left and the 1960s*, 165–72.

36 Marcuse, "Liberation from the Affluent Society," 188.

"radical enlightenment"; lacking a mass character, they could at best move the broader population from false to oppositional consciousness.[37] Their signal achievement was having called into question "the prevailing structure of needs" and freed "imagination from the restraints of instrumental reason."[38] Marcuse applauded the New Left but cautiously warned his readers not to overrate its significance. The rebellions in Paris in May 1968, while encouraging as "a mass action," were not a revolution, and the American campus revolts of that season in no way changed the fact that the situation in the United States was "not even pre-revolutionary."[39] Even at his most utopian, Marcuse inserted escape clauses like the following:

> By itself, this opposition cannot be regarded as agent of radical change; it can become such an agent only if it is sustained by a working class which is no longer the prisoner of its own integration and of a bureaucratic trade-union and party apparatus supporting this integration.[40]

Although he insisted that "the traditional idea of the revolution and the traditional strategy of the revolution" had been "surpassed by the development of [...] society," Marcuse confessed in 1968: "In spite of everything that has been said, I still cannot imagine a revolution without the working class."[41]

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37 Herbert Marcuse, "Re-Examination of the Concept of Revolution," *New Left Review* 56 (July-August 1969), 281.

38 Herbert Marcuse, "The Failure of the New Left?" in *The New Left and the 1960s*, 183, 184.

39 "Herbert Marcuse: On the Paris Rebellion," *Liberation News Service* 81 (June 11, 1968), 12; Townsend, "Marcus [sic] Says Students No. 1 Radical Force," A15.

40 Marcuse, "Re-Examination of the Concept of Revolution," 277.

41 "Herbert Marcuse: On the Paris Rebellion"; "Marcuse Defines His New Left Line," in *The New Left and the 1960s,* 100.

By the end of the 1960s, it was clear to Marcuse that while the "Great Refusal" he had predicted in the conclusion to *One-Dimensional Man* had materialized, it was bound to remain a mere gesture — even a reactionary "confusion of personal with social liberation" — if it could not reawaken the working class from its slumber.[42] And yet he was extremely pessimistic about the development of revolutionary class consciousness in the advanced capitalist countries (especially in the United States). For this reason, he strongly condemned New Left intellectuals who sneered at the student movement and retreated into "vulgar Marxism," declaring in 1970:

> To a great extent it was the student movement in the United States which mobilized the opposition against the war in Vietnam. ... That goes far beyond personal interest — in fact, it is basically in contradiction to it and strikes at the heart of American imperialism. God knows it is not the fault of the students that the working class didn't participate. ... Nothing is more un-bourgeois than the American student movement, while nothing is more bourgeois than the American worker.[43]

Statements like this one hastened the death of late-1960s Marcuse-mania. Already in 1968, he was booed by students at the Free University of Berlin for inadequately affirming their excitement about the supposed fusion of Third World and proletarian revolutionary forces. "A Revolution is waiting to be made," one disappointed former admirer complained, "and he offers us California metaphysics."[44] A study of campus bookstores con-

42 Herbert Marcuse, "USA: Questions of Organization and the Revolutionary Subject — A Conversation with Hans Magnus Enzensberger," in *The New Left and the 1960s*, 140.

43 Marcuse, "USA: Questions of Organization and the Revolutionary Subject."

44 Melvin J. Lasky, "Revolution Diary," *Encounter* 31 (August 1968), 83.

ducted in late 1969 found that *One-Dimensional Man* had been surpassed in sales by the works of Black Power militants, such as Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, and a string of paeans to cultural radicalism (Roszak's *Making of a Counter Culture*, Abbie Hoffman's *Revolution for the Hell of It*, and Laing's *Politics of Experience*).[45] Marcuse's defense of the university, his willingness to condemn violence, his concerns about the "anti-intellectualism" that had "infected" the New Left, and his calls for organizational discipline in the years that followed further diminished his standing.[46] Although more than 1,600 people turned out to see him speak at UC Berkeley in February 1971, many in the audience were dismayed by his failure to discuss "the joyful possibilities of youth culture."[47] "I have always rejected the role of a father or grandfather of the movement," he told *Psychology Today*. "I am not its spiritual adviser."[48]

So, what exactly was Marcuse's theory, as laid out in *One-Dimensional Man*? How much was it a product of — and subject to the limits of — its time? What remains from the work? We will focus specifically on the social theory of the work, on which Marcuse's ideology-critique of culture and philosophy rested, which was the book's greatest influence and is most relevant for left-wing readers today.

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45 Jack Schwartz, "Turning on at the Campus Bookstore," *Newsday*, November 1, 1969, 11W.

46 "Cops Clear Kant," *San Francisco Good Times*, February 12, 1971, 18.

47 "Cops Clear Kant."

48 Quoted in "Marcuse's Message to Young Radicals: Violence is 'Criminal,' 'Stupid,'" *Washington Post Times Herald*, February 14, 1971, F3.

CRITIQUE

One-Dimensional Man, most of all, is a resolute, unsparing, and honest depiction of a monstrous society, set for destruction, whose possibilities for change seemed far dwarfed by the forces of the status quo. The society Marcuse analyzed had more than enough technological ability to be decent and humane; instead, it teetered on the edge of destruction, preserved deep injustices, and relied on mass quiescence engineered by systematic manipulation. It was a sick, insane society that passed itself off as reasonable and orderly.

Marcuse's call to radicalism rested on three main diagnoses of mid-century capitalism that have only shown signs of intensifying as the ruling class has tightened control:

1. **Irrationality and Destructiveness.** The imminent possibility of nuclear war is the shadow that hangs over all of Marcuse's critique, from the first sentence on.[49] The prosperity and relative peace of the *Trentes Glorieuses* were purchased at the cost of an unending buildup toward a nuclear war that could annihilate the entire human race. Imperial ventures and the use of defense production to wastefully subsidize the private sector, keeping up profits and employment, trumped the survival of the species as a whole. This imminent destructiveness was also contained in the devastation the consumer society visited on the natural world.[50]

2. **Manipulation and Unfreedom.** Marcuse believed that some level of general material security and prosperity had been exchanged, in a devil's bargain, for the broader demands

49 "Does not the threat of an atomic catastrophe which could wipe out the human race also serve to protect the very forces which perpetuate this danger?" Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, ix.

50 Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 235–43.

of the socialist movement for autonomy. Workers had little decision-making power in the face of gigantic corporations, elections were organized spectacle rather than an opportunity to realize the will of the public, and the culture industry utilized techniques of mass manipulation to keep people pacified. "This is the pure form of servitude: to exist as an instrument, as a thing. And this mode of existence is not abrogated if the thing is animated and chooses its material and intellectual food, if it does not feel its being-a-thing, if it is a pretty, clean, mobile thing."[51] One-dimensionality was compliance in the guise of freedom.

3. **Continuing poverty and exploitation.** Despite the advances achieved by the working class of the period, Marcuse would emphasize the continuing poverty amid plenty that characterized the United States, especially, and the vast differences between rich and poor countries.[52] Moreover, he would insist that society was holding back the general decrease in working hours that could accompany the mechanization and automation of production.[53]

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51 Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 33.

52 "Even the most highly organized capitalism retains the social need for private appropriation and distribution of the benefits as the regulator of the economy. That is, it continues to link the realization of the general interest to that of particular vested interests. In doing so, it continues to face the conflict between the growing potential of pacifying the struggle for existence, and the need for intensifying this struggle; between the progressive 'abolition of labor' and need for preserving labor as the source of profit. The conflict perpetuates the inhuman existence of those who form the human base of the social pyramid — the outsiders and the poor, the unemployed and unemployable, the persecuted colored races, the inmates of prisons and mental institutions." Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 53.

53 Marcuse translated into English for the first time a key passage of Karl Marx's 1857 notebooks, the *Grundrisse*. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 35–6.

MARCUSE AND CLASSICAL MARXISM

One-Dimensional Man, then, offers the case for the continuing relevance of the Marxist critique of capitalism. But what about the theory's understanding of collective action and social change? If social change is so urgent, why is society characterized by such a muted opposition? *One-Dimensional Man* answered by attempting to provide a materialist social theory adequate to the conditions of the time, not by abandoning Marxism but by developing the theory.

Marcuse is insistent that an adequate explanation for working-class quiescence will have to be a materialist one. Something deep must have changed in the economy and society for mass consciousness to shift as it has.[54] It is difficult to understand what that thing is, since the mid-century United States was surely still capitalist, characterized by the same injustices and systemic dynamics. Moreover, Marcuse treats as his point of departure what we might call the basic strategic formula of "Classical Marxism," as the only rational theory for comprehensive social change.[55] That formula, more or less, runs as follows:

working-class majority + party + crisis = socialist revolution

The emerging working-class majority has particular structural advantages for exercising power, with their numbers, their concentration and accompanying capacity to organize, and the power of their strikes to shut down production and touch the powerful where it most hurts. These workers saw their basic survival, let alone their thriving, as fundamentally threatened by capitalism, and

54 Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 21; Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 6–8.

55 Broadly, from Marx and Friedrich Engels through the Second International and ending with the last attempts of international revolution of the early Third International.

they had the power to tear it down.[56] They needed to be organized into a political party, in order to intervene on the level of the state, to develop a consciousness that things could be different, and to formulate a strategy for how to get there.[57] Finally, the persistence (and possibly radicalization) of generalized capitalist crisis would afford opportunities for dramatic revolutionary change, in which a class-conscious party would lead the majority toward a new, truly democratic order.[58]

Marcuse argued that the conclusion of the Marxist theory of social transformation still uniquely followed from the premises, but that those premises no longer applied to the world in any obvious way.[59] Some sinister combination of defeat and partial victory had paralyzed politics.

The interesting task of *One-Dimensional Man* is that, though it accepts both the necessity of fundamental social change — especially given the severity of the threat of nuclear war and the irrational destructiveness of the social order — and the classical Marxist formula of how to get there, it argues that social change has undermined the latter without providing any alternative.[60] It's a work that admits to being *stuck* in a way that was both

56 Marcuse, *Counterrevolution*, 38.

57 Of course, precisely these kinds of mass working-class parties had developed all over the advanced capitalist world in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See Gary P. Steenson, *After Marx, Before Lenin: Marxism and Socialist Working-Class Parties in Europe, 1884–1914*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991).

58 This theory sometimes goes by the name of "Kautskyism," after its authoritative expositor, Karl Kautsky, in *The Class Struggle* (1892)*, The Road to Power* (1909), and other works. Its significance was argued forcefully in Lars Lih's seminal *Lenin Rediscovered* and the developing historiography and political theory coming from that work.

59 "And yet: does this absence refute the theory?" Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, xiii.

60 This was a common problem for many heterodox (ex-)Marxists at the time.

intellectually forthright and so unsatisfying that Marcuse himself — and especially his epigones — would search for easy ways out to escape the dilemma.

THE THEORY OF INTEGRATION — SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AS IMPASSE

Beyond describing these matters and giving force to the kind of impossible frustration they must cause in anyone who reflected on the matter, Marcuse also laid out a hypothesis as to *how* this had happened. Marcuse argues that it was precisely the accomplishments of the working class and their institutions in the face of the last crisis that were standing in the way of the further, necessary change. There is perhaps no more powerful analysis of the capacity of capitalist society to absorb opposition and commodify liberation than *One-Dimensional Man*. Late capitalist society, Marcuse said, was based simultaneously on "an increasing standard of living and an increasing concentration of power."[61] Another way he had of expressing this was the intertwining of the perfection of the means of production and the means of destruction, pithily summarized in the juxtaposition of the "welfare and warfare state."[62] Social democracy was, in this view, the enemy of democratic socialism.

One of the main achievements of the working-class movement was its cutting off the logic of immiseration characteristic of the rise of capitalism and creating the power to extract profound concessions from capital in the form of high wages and the welfare state.[63] This increased standard of living, Marcuse insisted, was

61 Herbert Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance," in *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*, Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore Jr, and Herbert Marcuse (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965).

62 Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 48.

63 It should be noted that he seems at times to severely overestimate capital's ability and willingness to accede to these demands in the text.

a real achievement, and was not to be denied as the basis for any real conception of human freedom.

However, this achievement had, for Marcuse, a fundamentally depoliticizing effect in several ways. First, the rising standard of living itself produced a cooling effect. Revolution occurs when, among other things, a subordinate class sees the existing order as absolutely opposed to its life. People revolt for want of bread — give them bread, and they don't revolt. By giving the working class something to lose besides its chains, and by eliminating total immiseration for the vast majority in the advanced capitalist world, capitalism had made systemic change less likely.[64]

Consumerism, the form in which this rising standard of living is realized, also, Marcuse argues, blunts working-class politics.[65] This is, first of all, for material reasons. Consumption is atomized, so that the modes of life that once brought working-class people together now help to drive them apart. Working-class popular culture is replaced by a commoditized mass culture. There is,

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64 This is pointedly stated in *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, 6.

65 In his works of the '60s, Marcuse critically uses both the phrases "the affluent society" and "consumer society." He recognizes the basic picture they paint of advanced capitalist societies of the time, while denying the affirmative conclusions often drawn from them, insisting that they remain part of the "repressive continuum." His basic summary of those characteristics is as follows:

> "1) an abundant industrial and technical capacity which is to a great extent spent in the production and distribution of luxury goods, gadgets, waste, planned obsolescence, military or semimilitary equipment — in short, in what economists and sociologists used to call "unproductive" goods and services; (2) a rising standard of living, which also extends to previously underprivileged parts of the population; (3) a high degree of concentration of economic and political power, combined with a high degree of organization and government intervention in the economy; (4) scientific and pseudoscientific investigation, control, and manipulation of private and group behavior, both at work and at leisure (including the behavior of the psyche, the soul, the unconscious, and the subconscious) for commercial and political purposes. All these tendencies are interrelated: they make up the syndrome which expresses the normal functioning of the 'affluent society.'" (Herbert Marcuse, *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1968], 187.)

too, an ideological analogue. The system's demonstrated ability to increase consumption is used to sideline any questions around life's quality and meaning, the destructive externalities and militaristic uses of the production process, and the increasing concentration of control.

This changing standard of living was also based in changes in the labor process itself that, Marcuse argued, blunted opposition. Marcuse speaks of the mechanization of the production process increasingly relieving work of backbreaking destructiveness, as well as an increase in white-collar work and administration. These diminish the strength of the opposition of the worker to the capitalist and also diminish the leverage of workers. Again, these changes have an ideological analogue: the machine seems to play a role in production independent of any particular capitalist — it appears merely as the product of reason itself, and thus relatively uncontestable.

Finally, there was an overt trade-off between the satisfaction of needs and autonomy.[66] The labor movement more or less gave up contestation over the prerogatives of management, ceding control of the production process; in exchange, it got greater wages and benefits. Marcuse saw this trade-off on the factory floor as the microcosm of a larger social transformation. Privacy and the freedom to criticize were being hemmed in on all sides. But the offer of greater prosperity and security quashed opposition. This is the basis for Marcuse's use of the word "totalitarian" to refer to liberal-democratic capitalist societies just as much as Nazi or Soviet ones.

Advanced capitalist society "delivers the goods" to the majority, making questioning and attempting to change the irrational system

66 This is the best way to understand his characterization of "false needs" versus "true needs." Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 4–5.

itself seem totally unreasonable.[67] In some ways, Marcuse simply updated for the advanced industrial world the criticism of Juvenal against the bread and circuses of Rome. Even as capitalism increased the power of the ruling class, exposed individuals to systematic and many-sided manipulation, and condemned the vast majority to alienated work and a still-significant minority to poverty, it also offered a two-car garage and spectacular entertainment. The most powerful and hard-to-counter ideology of the period was built on that basis — things are the way they are because technology and prosperity say so.

Thus, Marcuse provides a materialist theory of working-class integration through the rise in the standard of living (capitalism "delivers the goods"), the changing structure of occupations, and the atomization of the class through consumption.[68] On top of these mechanisms are built a cultural totality that increasingly invades individual experience. Capitalist mass culture, due to its corporate structure, fundamentally sifts out information necessary for working-class people to get a bearing on how society works and overwhelms the individual with distractions and entertainment. Socialization through mass institutions such as the media reinforces the obstacles toward social change that shifts in capitalist production and the partial victories of social democracy erected.

INSIGHTS AND IMPASSES

Some of Marcuse's insights have become common sense on the Left. For instance, that corporate media systematically narrows the scope of political contestation is the raison d'*ê*tre for today's

67 Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 84.

68 Indeed, in classic Marxian fashion, it is the workers themselves who produce their own integration and subjugation. That is, it is ultimately their labor, their social action, and even now their consumption that reproduces the conditions of their own comfortable and bland unfreedom.

growing left media ecosystem, both independent and through established channels. We know that it is part of our fundamental task to expose how "opposition" parties are anything but when it comes to the sanctity of profits, the blind faith in technology's ability to solve social problems, and militarism.

There are other insights that seem fresh and alive and worth recovering in light of some of the theoretical problems today's socialists face. The reorientation of the Left around a program of class-struggle social democracy has allowed it to finally grow and engage with political reality. Marcuse at his best made normative, analytic, and strategic contributions that are worth revisiting in this context.

Let us begin with the normative. One of the freshest aspects of *One-Dimensional Man* today is its attempt to wed the critique of inequality with critiques of unfreedom, systemic irrationality, and destructiveness. Today's Left has rightly restored obscene inequality and redistribution to the center of its politics, thereby broadening its base and concentrating its efforts. Still, Marcuse pushes us to remain expansive in our indictment of capitalism by discussing forthrightly aspects of the "good life" that it denies most individuals. Our society's degradation of the natural world, everyday cruelty and meanness, trivial intellectual culture, boredom, depression, and puritanical preening are not incidental to our criticism but form a core plank of it. Politics and philosophy ought to clarify, not deny, the ordinary ways in which people express their happiness and dissatisfaction. This is a deeply sick society that denies important and ordinary goods to most human beings — liberty, love, satisfaction, security, peace — and it is rational to rebel against it.[69]

69 Marcuse's engagement with Friedrich Schiller's philosophy is behind some of his inspiring ethical vision that could use a plausible restatement in the present. In Schiller (along with Sigmund Freud), Marcuse saw a reconciliation of classical German philosophy's rigorous concerns with autonomy and reason with a vision

Moreover, in cases where the normative and the practical political are in some tension, we should admit the difficulty rather than elide it. It can be too easy to neglect the most fundamental issues of our, as Noam Chomsky puts it, "race to the precipice" — nuclear weapons and climate change — because they are related in only mediated, complex ways to economic interests. There is a temptation to either engage in empty moral gestures or push the problem aside to a later day. But the difficulty in formulating a concrete strategy around these issues is no excuse. Serious moral thinking and serious political economy must be joined.

Second, Marcuse offers analytic resources for considering what should be the central problem of the day: the separation of the working class from radical consciousness. Much like in the period of the New Left, the Left in the advanced capitalist world is still relatively isolated among the highly educated, despite wide popular appeals of a left-wing economic program. Marcuse both foregrounds the centrality of this question for any radical political strategy and offers a materialist method for analyzing the problem. He began with an analysis of changing class composition to understand the limits of oppositional politics with a narrow base since, however much he welcomed the New Left, he insisted that no fundamental transformation would occur without overcoming obstacles to working-class radicalism. He then offered an intriguing and still-relevant hypothesis: that capitalist consumerism integrates through atomizing the neighborhoods, leisure, and general experience of working-class people. The intellectual task for today's Left is to size up the sources of working-class atomization at work and at home, and to approach these obstacles as organizers.

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of sensuality, playfulness, beauty, and love. See Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1977).

And, while hardly an immediate problem, Marcuse's analysis of how partial victory can paralyze oppositional forces, and how a high level of capitalist development turned out to mean a low level of revolutionary potential, are absolutely essential for the Left's long-term strategic perspective. It bears repeating that today's Left should begin with the analysis of a relatively stable capitalism due to the near elimination of starvation in the advanced capitalist world and the spread of democratic and activist states. Furthermore, the Left should be ready for both severe defeat and partial incorporation. Are there ways that the Left can anticipate these plausible paths and prepare for them? Already, the increasing will to organize on the Left — remarkably well-developed since the Occupy Wall Street days — is a good sign, as organization is essential for maintaining continuity between high and low points of struggle. The rise of member-based organizations with vibrant internal cultures is again a promising development. Most of all, the Left needs to fight for structural reforms that increase the capacity to mobilize in the future and to find ways to plausibly resist the urge to demobilize with victories.

Yet Marcuse also articulated a form of defeatism that has plagued the Left of the advanced capitalist world. Marcuse's liberatory and socialist message was largely abandoned and repressed with the defeats of the New Left, but his doubts as to the *possibility* of majoritarian left politics became the common sense of the New Left and the elite liberalism that would follow.

Critics of the strain of gloomy mid-century social theory Marcuse exemplifies often point to how wildly inaccurate the portrait of a fundamentally static world turned out to be. High growth rates, proportional wage growth, high unionization, and more were hardly permanent.[70] But Marcuse was certainly not alone in

70 See the recent debate between Ingar Solty ("Max Horkheimer, a Teacher

failing to accurately predict how far we could fall backward. Some variation on the theory of state capitalism was widely held at the time. Everyone missed the possibility of a strong revanchist turn to a seemingly permanently discredited laissez-faire liberalism.

More problematic is Marcuse's obfuscation of class theory. On the one hand, Marcuse depicts a society ruled by the few, which the vast majority has an interest in changing. As we mentioned, he continually returned to the necessity for working-class action in order to change society. On the other hand, when describing the various mediations that interpose themselves between this basic sociological analysis and late capitalism, he frequently presumes what he ought to prove — that working-class people have been not only effectively adjusted to but have even happily embraced their position in late capitalism. He presumes that the modal consciousness in advanced capitalist society is working-class consent rather than resignation.[71] This has significant consequences for the theory and for organizing. Resignation is a different habit of mind to break through for organizers, which requires different tools than how one might approach the converted.

Some of Marcuse's contemporaries noted the illicit presumption of working-class enthusiasm for the social order of the day and its quietist implications. In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse cites a pamphlet by the Trotskyist Marxist-humanists on automation and speed-up in Detroit, among other studies on the mechanization of the production process and the bonding of workers to the machine.[72] Yet Raya Dunayevskaya, in her review of *One-Dimensional Man* in the *Activist*, would write that Marcuse "leaves out

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Without a Class," *Jacobin*, February 15, 2020) and James McDougall ("No, Actually Max Horkheimer Is a Super Cool Guy," *Damage*, May 25, 2020).

71 Vivek Chibber, "Rescuing Class From the Cultural Turn," *Catalyst* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2017).

72 Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 25.

entirely the central point of the pamphlet, the *division* between the rank and file and the labor leadership in their attitudes toward Automation."[73] Marcuse supplemented references to this pamphlet with "many references to bourgeois studies which maintain the exact opposite"; Marcuse has "[failed] to hear this powerful oppositional voice at the point of production itself," and instead chosen to listen to authors who claim that workers have been incorporated; he is wrong to adhere "to the view that the new forms of control have indeed succeeded in containing workers' revolt."[74]Even as Marcuse plausibly pointed to the change in workers' situations as being enough to present fundamental problems for a theory of social change — golden chains are less likely to produce revolutionaries — he less plausibly claimed that the overall reaction to this situation mostly eliminated tension, dissatisfaction, and opposition rooted in the production process, between workers and their bosses. Though he would insist that the underlying conflict of interests remained, the gap between imputed and actual interests threatened to become an abyss.

This provided a basis for New Left activists inspired by his works to reach the conclusion he refused to countenance, that there could be a socialist politics that somehow occurred independent of working-class radicalization. The "cultural turn," with its overvaluation of interventions into culture and the discourse — and the increasing orientation to middle-class concerns that this implied — was both a plausible implication of Marcuse's pessimism about integration and at the same time a conclusion he had to refuse given the critical theory of capitalist society.[75] The theory

73 Raya Dunayevskaya, "Reason and Revolution vs Conformism and Technology," *The Activist* 11 (Fall 1964), 33.

74 Dunayevskaya, "Reason and Revolution."

75 This at times reaches absurd proportions in the work, e.g., "While the people can support the continuous creation of nuclear weapons, radioactive fallout, and

also seemed to countenance a never-ending search for actors who were too marginalized to be incorporated into the system, less because of the moral importance of the flourishing of every human being than the conceit that, there, one might find the "real" revolutionaries. Both these trends are in no way immune to the commodification of opposition characteristic of late capitalist politics that Marcuse himself analyzed.[76]

Moreover, Marcuse's presumption about the form of political change necessary does not seem to have been subjected to the same critical consideration he insisted on applying to the working class. This vision of revolution is nobly related to the barricades of Marcuse's youth in the betrayed German revolution.[77] Yet it is also rather all-or-nothing. The intransigent anti-capitalist consciousness that demanded the narrow debate of the period be burst open also threatened to lead to a kind of apolitical idealism.

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questionable foodstuffs, they cannot (for this very reason!) tolerate being deprived of the entertainment and education which make them capable of reproducing the arrangements for their defense and/or destruction. The non-functioning of television and the allied media might thus begin to achieve what the inherent contradictions of capitalism did not achieve — the disintegration of the system." Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 246.

76 See an important essay influenced by Marcuse: Adolph L. Reed Jr, "Black Particularity Reconsidered," *Telos* 39 (1979).

77 Alfred Sohn-Rethel would say, "[My investigation] began towards the end of the First World War and in its aftermath, at a time when the German proletarian revolution should have occurred and tragically failed. This period led me into personal contact with Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer, Siegfried Kracauer and Theodor W. Adorno and the writings of Georg Lukács and Herbert Marcuse. Strange though it may sound I do not hesitate to say that the new development of Marxist thought which these people represent evolved as the theoretical and ideological superstructure of the revolution that never happened. In it re-echo the thunder of the gun battle for the Marstall in Berlin at Christmas 1918, and the shooting of the Spartacus rising in the following winter." Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1977), xii. See also Sebastian Haffner, *Failure of a Revolution: Germany 1918–19* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1973).

This is, again, not unique to Marcuse — the severity of the chasm between the Second and Third International was real enough to facilitate the rise of Nazism. And Marcuse was severely critical of the parties or sects of the Second, Third, and Fourth Internationals.[78] But the weakness of the vision of social change in the idea of the "Great Refusal" is related to Marcuse's dismissive criticism of the parliamentary participation of the Italian and French communist parties (PCI and PCF) and silence on the civil rights movement.[79] Marcuse had little hope that participation in liberal democratic politics or the achievement of significant reforms could meaningfully shift the dynamics of the system overall (and the totality of the system is what mattered, in the final analysis). He only saw how they served to further integrate the working class into an increasingly powerful system, handicapping opposition before it could really get off the ground.

This led generally to an *overvaluation* of subjective radicalism and an *undervaluation* of objective transformation. The hope Marcuse placed in the New Left was that their cultural subversion, aesthetic sense, demand for a less narrow and repressed life, and expanded sense of need could flow over into demand for a transformation of the basic structures of social life, especially the economy.[80] Yet he seemed to have very little hope that mass politics focused on redistribution could overflow *its* boundaries in the other direction.

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78 See Marcuse's most direct political statement, in the unpublished "33 Theses" in *Herbert Marcuse: Technology, War and Fascism*, ed. Douglas Kellner (London: Routledge, 1998), 217–27.

79 Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 257, 20; Marcuse, *Counterrevolution*, 4.

80 See Marcuse's 1967 speech "Liberation from the Affluent Society." Though he did suggest that spiritualism, mysticism, bohemianism, and the like "are rather the ceremonial part of practical behaviorism, its harmless negation, and are quickly digested by the status quo as part of its healthy diet." Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 14.

Yet this was hardly the only conclusion one might reach from his premises. Starting from the premises that the working class of the advanced capitalist world was not likely to lead an insurrection, especially given its higher standard of living, while all the same it continued to suffer from alienation, exploitation, inadequate public investment, and diminished democracy, other theorists looked to develop a political strategy on these grounds that did not presume the same subjective integration that Marcuse did. André Gorz in France, influenced by the Left of the trade union movement in Italy, introduced in his *Strategy for Labor* the idea of "non-reformist reforms" — aggressive measures that took on capital's prerogatives, built the capacity of labor, and addressed the wide range of needs that were unmet by advanced capitalist societies — as a path forward for the Left.[81] Ralph Miliband in Britain would underscore the importance of this idea for a socialist strategy adequate to the fact that no advanced capitalist state had ever collapsed and that revolutionary dictatorships had hardly proved fertile ground for socialist democracies.[82] Bayard Rustin and Michael Harrington in the United States insisted that mass politics oriented toward (removing conservative obstacles to) expanding a hobbled American social democracy could spill over into fundamental system change.[83] These theorists suggested that the causal arrow could, and indeed must, move the other way, from political action to a deepening of revolutionary consciousness.

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81 Also sometimes called "structural," "revolutionary" reforms. See André Gorz, *Strategy for Labor: A Radical Proposal* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967) and André Gorz, "Reform and Revolution," *Socialist Register* 5 (1968).

82 Ralph Miliband, *Marxism and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), ch. 6, "Reform and Revolution."

83 Paul Heideman, "It's Their Party," *Jacobin*, February 4, 2016.

CONCLUSION

We have said that there are two souls of critical theory in Herbert Marcuse. On the one hand, there are roots of what has become a sort of common sense among some of today's liberals (however little they would be able to trace this to the Frankfurt School): the replacement of interest-based politics by ethics, self-expression, and identity; of class organization by cultural contestation; of majoritarian aspiration by elite pose. This is the long-standing tendency on the Left to flee the dilemmas of organizing a working-class majority in the advanced capitalist world, which is understandable but not tenable. On the other, there is the attempt to preserve and develop a socialist strategy adequate to the transformations of contemporary society — mass politics, the welfare state, the further application of technology to production, and mass media. Indefatigably critical, morally expansive, and analytically materialist, it forthrightly analyzes, and then seeks to overcome, new obstacles to organizing a working-class majority to press for a transition to a new society.

In May 2021, Israel unleashed another of its periodic and brutal bombings of the Occupied Territories, focusing its attack this time on the Gaza Strip. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), relying on United Nations reports, estimated that around 77,000 Palestinians were displaced due to the bombings and 256 killed, to an order of more than twenty to one compared to Israeli causalities from Hamas rockets. In many ways, this was business as usual as far as the occupation is concerned. Israel has carried out similar, even more brutal campaigns in the recent past, with only the most tepid criticisms, if any, by the US media. But this time, the reaction was different. Not only did the Palestinians' physical and human cost get ample coverage, the main organs of the corporate media — even the *New York Times*, for decades the most reliable apologist for Israel — condemned Israel for its actions.

This scale of criticism in mainstream American media and political elites has not been seen in decades. To make sense of it, *Catalyst* invited three of the most respected analysts of US-Israel relations to analyze the change. We proposed that they answer a simple question: What explains the sudden opening for criticism of Israel's actions toward the Occupied Territories? Understanding this shift is of great importance if the Left is to advance its support for Palestinian rights.

ABSTRACT

The increasing brutality and brazenness of Israeli attacks, coupled with Israel's growing dependence on the far right in the United States, have triggered a significant loss of support from liberal sections. The era of impunity for Israel's elites may be coming to an end.

An Era of Impunity Is Over

Noam Chomsky

Gaza should be a Mediterranean paradise. Instead, it is a horror story, in which 2 million prisoners, half of them children, survive in conditions that will soon be unlivable according to international monitors, with almost no potable water, destroyed sewage and power systems, general misery, and little hope. The wreckage is not the result of nature's cruelty. It is the work of a malevolent occupier backed by a brutal superpower.

Gaza's torture begins with Israel's ethnic cleansing programs in 1948, expulsions that continued well into the 1950s. Egypt-occupied Gaza was subject to regular Israeli terrorist attacks, some truly horrifying, like the Khan Yunis massacre in 1956.

In 1967, Israel conquered Gaza and soon initiated illegal settlement programs, as in the West Bank and Golan Heights, taking over Gaza's main resources — and despoiling them, notably through water-intensive crops drawing down the limited aquifer. In 2005, the Ariel Sharon government withdrew the settlers, recognizing that it was pointless to devote substantial military resources to protecting a few settlers who could be moved from their subsidized illegal homes in Gaza to subsidized illegal homes in occupied areas that Israel intended to incorporate into its Greater Israel project. Israel remains the occupying power in the eyes of the world, excluding Israel.

The nature of the "withdrawal" is depicted accurately in the leading Israeli scholarly work on Israel's settlement policies, by Idith Zertal and Akiva Eldar: the ruined territory was not released "for even a single day from Israel's military grip or from the price of the occupation that the inhabitants pay every day." After the disengagement,

> Israel left behind scorched earth, devastated services, and people with neither a present nor a future. The settlements were destroyed in an ungenerous move by an unenlightened occupier, which in fact continues to control the territory and kill and harass its inhabitants by means of its formidable military might.[1]

The main Israeli administrator of the "withdrawal," Dov Weisglass, provided his own take on the matter:

> What I effectively agreed to with the Americans was that [the major settlement blocs in the West Bank] would not be dealt with at all, and the rest will not be dealt with until the Palestinians turn into Finns [the kind of Finns who bow obediently

1 Idith Zertal and Akiva Eldar, *Lords of the Land: The War for Israel's Settlements in the Occupied Territories, 1967–2007* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2007).

> to a foreign master]. … The significance of the disengagement plan is the freezing of the peace process. And when you freeze that process, you prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state, and you prevent a discussion about the refugees, the borders and Jerusalem. Effectively, this whole package called the Palestinian state, with all that it entails, has been removed indefinitely from our agenda. And all this with [President Bush's] authority and permission … and the ratification of both houses of Congress.[2]

"The disengagement," Weisglass continued, "is actually formaldehyde. It supplies the amount of formaldehyde that is necessary so there will not be a political process with the Palestinians."

In public, the withdrawal was portrayed as a noble gesture, relinquishing Israeli historic rights as a gift to unworthy Palestinians. The picture has largely been adopted by Westerners in thrall to the carefully cultivated propaganda campaign.

As for the prisoners, they would remain "on a diet," Weisglass explained, "but not to make them die of hunger" — which wouldn't look good.[3] To close the prison walls even more tightly, Israel barred Gazans from a large region along the border, including a third or more of Gaza's scarce arable land. Intruders are regularly shot by Israeli snipers. The pretext is security, which — whatever the merits of the claim — could have been just as well achieved by establishing the security zone on the Israeli side of the border, or by ending the savage siege and other punishments.

As Israeli soldiers withdrew to the border in November 2005, a new phase in the torture of Gaza began. Israel and the Palestinian National Authority reached an Agreement on Movement

2 Yair Ettinger, Aluf Benn, and Ari Shavit, "U.S. Asks Israel to Clarify Comments Made by Top PM Aide," *Haaretz*, October 6, 2004.

3 Conal Urquhart, "Gaza on Brink of Implosion as Aid Cut-Off Starts to Bite," *Guardian*, April 15, 2006.

and Access (AMA). It called for the opening of a crossing between Gaza and Egypt at Rafah for the export of goods and the transit of people, the continuous operation of crossings between Israel and Gaza for the import/export of goods and the transit of people, the reduction of obstacles to movement within the West Bank, bus and truck convoys between the West Bank and Gaza, the building of a seaport in Gaza, and the reopening of the airport in Gaza that Israeli bombing had demolished.

The agreement lasted only a few weeks. In January, Palestine had the first free election in the Arab world, closely monitored and declared free and fair. But Palestinians committed a terrible crime: they didn't follow US-Israeli orders and voted the wrong way, handing control to Hamas — clear proof that Arabs are too backward for democracy.

The guardians of order acted expeditiously. The United States began organizing a military coup to overthrow the elected government. Israel rescinded the AMA, imposed harsh sanctions, and soon sharply stepped up violence.

The Hamas government then committed an even worse crime: it preempted the planned military coup. It's evil enough to vote the wrong way, but it's an unspeakable crime to prevent a US-Israeli military coup from overthrowing the elected government.

At that point, the lid was off. The self-declared "most moral army on earth" launched a fierce attack against the civilian population of the prison.

I won't run through the record that followed, which is amply documented elsewhere. There is a regular pattern. Israel carries out an exercise of what it calls "mowing the lawn" — more accurately described by an appalled senior US military officer as "removing the topsoil." An agreement is then reached. Israel ignores it, and Hamas observes it, until some escalation of Israeli violence evokes a Hamas response, which is of course slight by Israeli standards.

Then Israel carries out another military attack more brutal than the last — in self-defense. Who can object to that?

The basic pattern was described in 2014 by Nathan Thrall, senior Middle East analyst for the International Crisis Group. There was then a cease-fire. Israeli intelligence recognized that Hamas was observing its terms. "Israel," Thrall wrote,

> therefore saw little incentive in upholding its end of the deal. In the three months following the ceasefire, its forces made regular incursions into Gaza, strafed Palestinian farmers and those collecting scrap and rubble across the border, and fired at boats, preventing fishermen from accessing the majority of Gaza's waters.[4]

The siege never ended. "Crossings were repeatedly shut. So-called buffer zones inside Gaza … were reinstated. Imports declined, exports were blocked, and fewer Gazans were given exit permits to Israel and the West Bank," Thrall said.

So matters continued until April 2014, when another Palestinian crime took place. Gaza-based Hamas and the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank signed a unity agreement. Hamas made major concessions. The unity government contained none of its members or allies. In substantial measure, Thrall wrote, Hamas even turned over governance of Gaza to the PA. Several thousand PA security forces were sent to Gaza, and the PA placed its guards at borders and crossings, with no reciprocal positions for Hamas in the West Bank security apparatus. Finally, the unity government accepted the three conditions that Washington and the European Union had long demanded: nonviolence, adherence to past agreements, and the recognition of Israel.

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4 Nathan Thrall, "Hamas's Chances," *London Review of Books* 36, no. 16 (August 2014).

Israel was infuriated. Its government declared at once that it would refuse to deal with the unity government and canceled negotiations. Its fury mounted when the United States, along with most of the world, signaled support for the unity government. For Israel, that is extremely dangerous. Failure of Palestinians to unite has been a primary Israeli argument for rejection of diplomacy: there is no negotiating partner, so Israel can continue with its systematic takeover of whatever it finds of value in its vastly expanded "Jerusalem" and the rest of the West Bank (and the forgotten Syrian Golan Heights) — the Greater Israel project, accompanied by plenty of violence and cruel repression, but not as dramatically visible as the assaults on the prison.

A pretext was concocted for a new and more savage assault on the Gaza prison, Operation Protective Edge. The pretext was quickly exposed as totally fraudulent, but no matter. The assault was successful. The prison was again shattered, and the feared unity agreement was aborted.

The process of escalating assaults has been quite successful within Israel and the occupied territories. Israel has moved far to the right, a natural consequence of having your jackboot on someone's neck. The criminal Greater Israel project has continued with virtually unanimous support in the political system. The United States continues to provide whatever is needed, even replenishing Israeli military supplies when they are depleted because of the ferocity of the assault on Gaza — easy, because one element of the extraordinary US-Israel relationship since 1967 is that the United States stockpiles arms in Israel for potential use if needed by US forces.

Right now, in the wake of the latest assault, Israeli chief of staff Aviv Kochavi has been welcomed in Washington, where he is briefing the Pentagon on the new strategies and technology that Israel deployed in the latest massacre, specifically "the

breakthrough that the Military Intelligence branch and the Israel Air Force achieved in using advanced technology to locate targets and launching sites," according to *Haaretz* military correspondent Amos Harel, including efforts "during the operation in Gaza to integrate a very broad assimilation of cutting-edge artificial intelligence with the work of intelligence officers and commanders in the field."[5] Kochavi is also expected to request $1 billion to replenish high-tech arms supplies depleted in the assault.

All very successful, but not completely. With each brutal hammer blow, Israel loses support among those sectors of world opinion that have some concern for human rights and law. More ominous still, that includes the United States. In the 1970s, Israel made the fateful decision to choose expansion over diplomacy and political settlement, options that were readily available. It was predictable, and predicted, that the result would be moral degeneration within Israel and crucial reliance on the United States in the face of mounting global opprobrium.

The opprobrium is clear, but it is not universal. Israel is now firming up its relations with the Gulf and North African dictatorships through the Abraham Accords, a core part of the one coherent Donald Trump geostrategic initiative: to construct an alliance of reactionary states, run from Washington, including Jair Bolsonaro's Brazil, Narendra Modi's India, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's Egypt, and now the Abraham Accords, with the Saudi dictatorship in the wings.

At the governmental level, Israel's decision to choose expansion over diplomacy has so far paid off. But the popular base for government support is eroding, crucially in the United States. Not long ago, Israel had been able to retain its status as the darling of American liberalism, no matter what crimes it committed.

5 Amos Harel, "In Washington, Israeli Army Chief Shares Lessons From Gaza Conflict," *Haaretz*, June 25, 2021.

That privilege held even after the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, with scarcely an attempt to conjure up a credible pretext, killing perhaps twenty thousand people, destroying much of southern Lebanon, and culminating in the Israel-supervised Sabra and Shatila massacre. Even that could not tarnish Israel's image as "a society in which moral sensitivity is a principle of political life" with an army that "has from the start been animated by the same righteous anger and high moral purpose that has guided Israel through its tumultuous history."[6]

That worship has long since disappeared among more liberal sectors of American society, even in the Jewish community, and particularly among younger Jews. Along with the collapse of Israel's image has come a greater appreciation of Palestinian suffering and rights. In colleges, the change has been dramatic, particularly since the Operation Cast Lead atrocities of 2008–9. No longer are talks on campus that dare to mention Palestine held under police protection, sometimes airport security, with frequent disruptions even when the speaker is an Israeli civil rights advocate. Domestic US developments have also played a part, including increased awareness of the hideous legacy of four hundred years of bitter racism and the shocking crimes of settler-colonialism.

By now, the base of support for Israeli actions has shifted far to the right, to evangelical Christians and hard-line nationalists and Islamophobes — and, of course, military security sectors, which highly value intimate relations with their Israeli counterparts, as Israel has moved to the forefront in the domains of violence and repression, now its comparative advantage. Polls show that even among evangelicals, the core of popular support for Israel, the younger generation is drifting away.

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6 "Opinion: What's Polluted in Lebanon," *New York Times*, November 6, 1982; "Sharon vs. the Army," *Time*, October 11, 1982.

For the first time, there are public calls for ending military aid to Israel, reaching to Congress, where Minnesota representative Betty McCollum introduced legislation barring Israel from using any US aid for violence and repression in the occupied territories — unimaginable until recently. Popular organization and activism could alter bipartisan support for Israeli crimes and pressure Washington to support a diplomatic settlement that would take due account of Palestinian rights. Even moves in that direction would have a significant impact, opening the door to more far-reaching steps.

There are opportunities. They should be grasped.

ABSTRACT

There has been a shift in American discourse around Israel and Palestine triggered by recent events, against a background of questioning of Israel's oppression of the Palestinians. Since the strategic arguments for the alliance with Israel have diminished in importance, the supposed "shared values" that sustain it are called into question by Israel's discriminatory treatment of the Palestinians.

Will US Empire Ever Break With Israel?

Rashid Khalidi

The limits of permissible debate on Israel are changing. In terms of the media, what has occurred over the last couple of months must be seen in two contexts. The first is a swing away from an idyllic depiction of Israel and toward a more realistic depiction of the Palestinians. Such swings have occurred repeatedly in the past, at moments when it was impossible to completely ignore the brutal nature of Israel's actions. The old media saying is that "when it bleeds, it leads," and at times the blood shed by Israel was so copious that it could not be ignored. This happened during the invasion of Lebanon and the siege of Beirut in 1982. It happened again during Israel's fierce repression of the first intifada, starting in 1987. And it happened after Israel's

assaults on Gaza in 2008–9, 2012, and 2014. What happened in Beirut in 1982 couldn't be hidden because of seventeen thousand Palestinian and Lebanese people being murdered and entire buildings being brought down by Israeli bombs. Some things in the public consciousness changed as a result, but eventually the media coverage went on as before. A leading NBC News broadcaster, John Chancellor, said during the siege of Beirut, "This is not the Israel we knew." Each time, there was a swing away from an almost entirely false depiction of Israel, and the media was obliged to describe accurately the atrocities taking place before its reporters' eyes and the lenses of their cameras. But soon afterward, news reporting returned to the status quo, in part because of the Israel lobby's extremely effective backlash against the media that had told the truth. The late historian Amy Kaplan was the first to fully explain this dynamic in her brilliant book *Our American Israel.*

The events of May 2021 are different, however. The reason this coverage has had such impact is linked to the second context, which is that this media shift takes place against a background of questioning fundamental issues about Zionism, Israel, and the Palestinians: the settler-colonial nature of the state, inequality, racial discrimination, and injustice. Because this escalation, and media coverage of it, started in Sheikh Jarrah — because it started with Jerusalem, and then went on to escalate over Gaza — those aspects of the situation came out in unprecedented ways. In other words, there was finally attention to the fundamentally discriminatory nature of Israeli law and of the Israeli system of control over the Palestinians, inside Israel and in the occupied territories, and to the profound injustices that result. The fact that Palestinians cannot legally recover property on one side of a line, and Jewish organizations can claim property on the other, as was shown in Sheikh Jarrah, is a fundamental injustice that can't be unlearned

once you've learned it. The fact that a synagogue is sacrosanct but tear gas can be fired into the holiest Muslim site in Palestine, the al-Aqsa Mosque, during Ramadan, during prayers — things are now understood that cannot be forgotten.

May does appear different, and it has to do with those aspects. Israel's kill rate in Gaza in 2014 was far higher than in 2021: they murdered over 2,200 people, of whom the overwhelming majority were civilians: women, children, old people, the disabled. This time, at least 250 people were killed, with the same high proportion of women, children, and the elderly. So the difference was not based on the barbarity of what Israel did in Gaza, or the attack on the al-Aqsa Mosque, or the ongoing theft of Palestinian property in and of themselves, but on the fact that these things are beginning to be understood in terms of basic inequality and the fundamental settler-colonial nature of Zionism, and of the Israeli state, and of its flaws. That makes this distinct.

The scathing reports by B'Tselem and Human Rights Watch, which made it more acceptable to consider Israel to be practicing a form of apartheid, provide the background. The average consumers of the news were not fully aware of these reports, if they knew of them at all, but during coverage of the carnage of May, the reports clearly showed fundamental discrimination: Jews in one place, Arabs in another place.

There are two other important background aspects to this conjunction. One is the rise of Bernie Sanders, and the second is Benjamin Netanyahu's alienation of the Democratic Party. Within the Bernie Sanders coalition, people half or a third of the age of Sanders are playing a key role. But it's not just their youth — the United States has been shaken by upheavals over racial discrimination, and over indigenous rights, to a lesser extent, from Standing Rock on, that, in juxtaposition with Palestine, cause people to make connections between these similar forms of injustice.

The Netanyahu factor has had an impact on at least two important constituencies. The first is the Democratic Party. Netanyahu made a strategic decision to link Israel's future to the Republican Party and its base — the evangelicals, the white supremacists, the uber-hawks. He decided that those were Israel's core supporters in the United States and acted on that belief. That offended Democrats, and they'll never forgive him, because he's done enormous harm: for example, he almost torpedoed Barack Obama's Iran deal.

The second constituency is the American Jewish community, which is liberal overall. The leadership of the institutions that claim to represent it is quite conservative, but the community as a whole, including its intellectual elite, is liberal, or sees itself as liberal. The overwhelming majority are Reform, Conservative, or unaffiliated, and about 10 percent are Orthodox. Most of the community, even some of the Modern Orthodox, are offended by Netanyahu's alliance with the fundamentalist religious establishment in Israel and the political parties that represent it. Why? Because they are systematically treated as second-class citizens in Israel; their marriages, their conversions, their very Judaism, are not recognized in Israel by the Orthodox rabbinate. And Netanyahu is politically wedded to the Orthodox parties that take their marching orders from the rabbis. He's at odds with an overwhelming majority of the American Jewish community in terms of his actions, his policies, and his attitudes. On the surface, it hasn't affected the community's bigger institutions, but the fact that groups like J Street, Jewish Voice for Peace, and IfNotNow are growing is evidence that students, as well as much of the upper-middle class, intellectual elite, and professionals, are affected.

There are more strategic issues to consider. In order to determine whether the media occasionally using words like "apartheid," "segregation," and "inequality" to describe Israel indicates deeper

forces at work or an elite split over the strategic significance of Israel as part of a gradual adjustment to a new reality where Israel is not as important to the United States, the media itself is not the place to look. The media has already shifted back to its customary position. There are already fewer critical media analyses of Israel being published than there were for a few weeks in May.

This has to do with more fundamental things than the media. First, Israel's strategic value was the basis of the American-Israeli relationship only at certain points. The Cold War and George W. Bush's "War on Terror" in the wake of 9/11 were the two high points of Israel's diplomatic relevance. In other words, Israel was a useful and successful proxy against Soviet-aligned forces from the 1962 Yemen "civil war" (which was actually that plus a regional proxy war, like Lebanon 1975–90, and like the wars in Libya, Yemen, and Syria today) onward. The 1967 and 1973 wars were the best example of its strategic value. That continued until the end of the Cold War, even though by then the Soviet Union was no longer the regional factor it had been from the 1950s through the 1970s.

After 9/11, Ariel Sharon resurrected a strategic importance for Israel during the "War on Terror" through a shrewd but utterly specious argument, one that Netanyahu mastered. He was, in effect, saying: "The United States was attacked by terrorists; we are being attacked by terrorists. Terrorism is terrorism; it's all the same. Hamas is the same as al-Qaeda. We are allies, and this is strategic — indeed, it is existential for both of us, and you will learn from us. We will give you technology and methods; our experts are your experts, and our expertise is your expertise." This was a ludicrous strategic basis for an alliance — more fragile, in fact, than the Cold War alliance — but in the fevered atmosphere of Washington after 9/11, it worked brilliantly.

Besides those considerations during the Cold War and the "War on Terror," Israel has little strategic value to the United States.

Israel did not help the United States in the Gulf, as was perfectly apparent during the 1990–91 Gulf War, when the Iraqi regime fired missiles at Israel and the United States had to send Patriot missiles to defend it. Israel was a liability for the United States then. That was also demonstrated during the Obama administration, when Israel undermined American policy in the Gulf, and it's true today. Indeed, Israel has embarrassed the United States globally with its aggressiveness and its treatment of the Palestinians.

The Trump administration tried to reinvigorate Israel's utility as a strategic asset through the so-called Abraham Accords — by making Israel and the Gulf autocracies proxies against Iran in the way that Israel and other countries in the Middle East were previously proxies against countries aligned with the Soviet Union. However much one inflates it as a bogeyman, Iran is not what the Soviet Union was. The relationship between the United States and Israel is more than an alliance. No ally is treated like Israel: not Japan, not Britain, not Canada. While you can say that Israel is an economic or technological asset, that wasn't the original basis for the relationship. It was other things: "values" and domestic political considerations. Since the strategic importance of Israel has faded today, we're back to the old basis for the relationship. That's a problem for Israel. In crucial respects, their values are not our values. They purport to be a democracy, "the only one in the Middle East." That line worked well in the past, but its viability has faded as light is shed on the actual nature of Israel's rule over the Palestinians.

It can be asked whether values and domestic politics fully explain the degree of loyalty the United States extends to Israel. One can see the difference between the almost messianic support for Israel in Congress and the less enthusiastic backing of every presidential administration (except those of Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump).

The executive is not as fervently committed to catering to Israel's whims as is Congress. Most members of Congress regard foreign policy as an aspect of domestic politics, and particularly electoral politics, but the executive branch is not as directly driven by domestic political considerations as Congress. It's not that they aren't committed to a special American-Israeli relationship — they are. It's that they see other considerations, and thus they're not as enthusiastic about Israel as the representatives in Congress, whose primary consideration is that they have to go before voters regularly and spend an inordinate amount of time collecting money to fuel their campaigns.

An example of considerations that go beyond domestic ones relates to Iran. Netanyahu worked tirelessly against Obama over the nuclear deal (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA), and now the Biden administration wants to revive it. This deal involves a certain acceptance that Iran is a power that must be accommodated after the strategic defeat of America in the Iraq War. Since the second year of George W. Bush's 2003 invasion of Iraq, many shrewd politicians have realized a majority of Americans are against that war. From 2004, the year of Bush's reelection, polls showed that public opinion was consistently opposed to American involvement in Middle Eastern wars, and the Iraq War in particular. As far as foreign policy is concerned, both Trump and Obama were elected on a plank of getting us out of foreign wars. Politicians know that appeal is popular with elements of both the Right and the Left. This is evidenced in the recent congressional votes on several still-outstanding authorizations for use of military force (AUMF). Three of them have been voted down for the first time since they were adopted, from the 1950s through the 1990s. That represents a majority of US public opinion.

However, the demonization of Iran is still operative. Iran is very unpopular, and so is making a deal with the country. Nevertheless,

because war is the only alternative, the executive, the foreign policy establishment, and the defense establishment were determined to do a nuclear deal, and they are intent on restoring it after Trump abrogated it. Obama originally sold the nuclear deal by saying that the other option was war with Iran, which he knew the American public did not want.

The mandarins in the executive branch resent being led around by the nose by Israel and a bunch of absolute Gulf potentates working in tandem. Perforce, the policy of these regional actors becomes US policy. Given its deep-seated differences with Iran since 1979, the United States has basically been engaged in a cold war with Tehran, which has refused to bend at all to the will of the United States, unlike most other Middle Eastern countries. People in the executive branch are fed up with being pressured by Netanyahu, Abu Dhabi ruler Mohamed bin Zayed, and Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman, who want more than a cold war — they want the United States to go to war with Iran and eliminate their main rival, something they cannot or will not do themselves. As Bill Clinton is reported to have said after he'd been lectured by Netanyahu, "Who's the [expletive] superpower here?" He was infuriated that Bibi was trying to dictate to the United States in the Middle East, arguing that "Our wars are your wars; our enemies are your enemies." Immediately after 9/11, people in Washington may have believed that — but twenty years later, all except the truly unhinged understand that's not true. Hamas is not a major enemy of the United States, nor is Hezbollah — even Iran is not the primary enemy.

Iran is a minor local power that's of concern to US Middle Eastern policy, on a level with another half dozen local powers with which American interests are in conflict globally. But it's not the United States' main enemy: in the view of the foreign policy establishment, China and, to a lesser degree, Russia are by far the

most important rivals of the United States. The idea of going to war with Iran is anathema in Washington, and this is how Obama basically carried the Iran deal: "You really want another war? The JCPOA is the only alternative to war." It is widely believed in Israel and in Washington that Netanyahu and his then–minister of war, Ehud Barak, wanted the United States to go to war to destroy Iran's nuclear capacities. They didn't want to fight themselves; they wanted the United States to do it for them. The entire American foreign policy establishment recoiled at that, as did the politicians who said, "My constituents hate war in Afghanistan, they hate war in Iraq, and they're really going to hate war with Iran." And military officers have said privately that they have repeatedly war-gamed a campaign against Iran, and there's no way the United States comes out on top.

The United States couldn't win a future war with Iran, although it could do immeasurable damage to the country, as it did to Iraq and Afghanistan. Iran is an even more insoluble problem than Afghanistan and Iraq were. The military establishment does not want to go to war with Iran, and it has a powerful voice in this decision. To go to war, a president has to overcome the opposition of the military, if he wants to do something the military doesn't want to do. And no president could overcome the opposition of the American military on Iran, because they do not have a successful plan they can present to the commander in chief.

There is little likelihood that these differences over Iran will seriously affect American support for Israel, at least not publicly, especially with Netanyahu out of office. We will not hear about these differences in the media or in open political debate. If discussed at all, this would be in elite discourse, not mainstream media or even public political discourse. This critique applies to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf autocracies as well as Israel. In other words, the turn away from these absolute monarchies, which we've

seen in the media, is parallel to the turn away from Israel, and is motivated, in some respects, by the same sentiments: Who are these people to drag us into their internecine local quarrels, and not only over Iran? Why is the United States allied with a country that's at war in Libya, where the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been fighting a low-grade war for years? Why is the United States supporting the war of Saudi Arabia and the UAE on Yemen? Are their priorities US priorities? US bombs, US targeting, and the United States' prestige are being used for a war on the poorest country in the Arab world — a losing war. The only question for the Saudis now is how they salvage some prestige, which is what they are currently quietly negotiating with Iran about.

The question arises whether the new discourse over Palestinian rights will affect American policy toward Israel's occupation, for which the United States provides arms, finance (via tax-deductible 501(c)(3) "charities"), and diplomatic protection. The answer to this question goes back to strategic considerations. On the one hand, the American relationship with Israel, at least since the fading of the "War on Terror," has not primarily been based on strategy. But on the other hand, Israel's oppression of the Palestinians is not currently an important strategic problem for the United States. It will come down to whether Israel's oppressive practices toward the Palestinians are no longer seen as consonant with the professed values and domestic political calculations of US politicians. While something seems to be stirring on that front, it may take a while for those calculations to change, if they ever do.

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ABSTRACT

The shift in the attitude of the US liberal opinion, media, and political class on the Israel-Palestine conflict results from the combination of three main trends: the long-term degradation of Israel's image, the polarization of US politics, and the Black Lives Matter movement as a key component of the new youth radicalization.

Israel Is Losing American Liberals

Gilbert Achcar

The shift in attitude of the mainstream liberal opinion, media, and political class in the United States toward Israel and the Palestinians was much emphasized and discussed during the recent round of protests and violence in the regional conflict that occurred in May. This shift is but the reflection of a trend that has been developing among young and nonwhite Americans in the past fifteen years, fueled by Israel's successive rounds of violence against Gaza in particular.

The previous peak in conflict reached during Israel's "Operation Protective Edge" against Gaza in July and August 2014 had seen, for the first time, more young Americans under thirty (aged eighteen to twenty-nine) blame Israel as the main culprit than those

blaming Hamas (29 percent vs. 21 percent), according to a poll conducted by the Pew Research Center; the same was observed among black Americans (27 percent vs. 25 percent) and, most strikingly, among Hispanics (35 percent vs. 20 percent), while liberal Democrats were evenly divided on the issue (30 percent vs. 30 percent).[1] During Israel's war on Lebanon in 2006, there were still three times more young Americans blaming Hezbollah than those blaming Israel (30 percent vs. 10 percent). However, during "Operation Cast Lead" against Gaza in 2009, the margin in Israel's favor among young Americans had considerably shrunk already (23 percent vs. 14 percent).[2]

The most recent poll that AP-NORC conducted in June, after the May 2021 events, surprisingly showed that there are more Americans, all categories combined, who believe the United States is not supportive enough of the Palestinians (32 percent) than of the Israelis (30 percent). Among Democrats, a majority of 51 percent now say that the United States is not supportive enough of the Palestinians, this majority reaching 62 percent among those who describe themselves as liberal.[3]

The reasons for this trend are manifold, starting with the steady degradation of Israel's image at the global level over the last four decades. The first phase of degradation went through three key moments: the arrival of the Israeli far right, the Likud, to power for the first time in 1977 after winning the Knesset election; Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the most blatantly unprovoked and non-"defensive" of all Israel's wars; and the Palestinian intifada of

1 Pew Research Center, "Hamas Seen as More to Blame Than Israel for Current Violence," July 2014.

2 Aaron Blake, "Young Americans Take a Dim View of Israel's Actions," *Washington Post*, July 29, 2014.

3 Ellen Knickmeyer and Emily Swanson, "Poll: Many Democrats Want More US Support for Palestinians," Associated Press, June 23, 2021; see also AP-NORC Center, "Public Wary of U.S. Taking a Major Role in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," June 23, 2021.

1987–88, when the Israeli armed forces got involved in the brutal repression of a nonviolent uprising in the territories of Gaza and the West Bank that had been occupied in 1967 (Occupied Palestinian Territories, or OPT).

This first phase ended with the 1993 Oslo Accords, whereby leaders of previously dominant "Laborite" Zionism, Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, strove to restore Israel's image and end the conditions that got Israel's army bogged down in the role of colonial police force before the eyes of the world. Soon after, the cycle of Palestinian suicide attacks, in reaction to the accelerated deployment of Israel's settler-colonialism in the OPT, mitigated the sympathy Palestinians had won through the intifada. So did the serious error made by the Palestinian National Authority when it fell into the trap of using the light weaponry Israel allowed it to hold in the territories assigned to its rule, in fighting back against Israeli repression in the wake of the provocation staged in Jerusalem in September 2000 by then–Likud leader Ariel Sharon. This provocation created the conditions that allowed Sharon to win the Knesset elections in early 2001 and launch a full-scale onslaught on the OPT that coincided with George W. Bush's "War on Terror."

The second phase of the deterioration of Israel's image started in 2006, with the parallel brutal onslaughts on Lebanon and on the Hamas-dominated Gaza Strip that Israel evacuated in 2005, only to guard it tightly from the outside like a vast open-air colonial concentration camp. The trend was aggravated by the 2008–9 renewed onslaught on the Strip, then peaked a second time in 2014 with the most brutal and murderous of all Israel's assaults on Gaza to this day. The heavy pounding of the enclave by Israel's armed forces in May, combined as it was with an upsurge in colonial brutality toward the Palestinians in Jerusalem, as well as in naked racist violence against Palestinian citizens of the Israeli state, could only bring Israel's image to a new low.

However, the inexorable degradation of Israel's image over the last four decades could not have produced a shift in the United States had it not converged with another domestic trend that has been unfolding over the last dozen years or so. This latter trend is the left-wing radicalization among the generation that awoke to politics against the backdrop of the first major crisis of neoliberal capitalism since its full implementation in the United States under Ronald Reagan — the crisis triggered by the 2007 subprime mortgage crisis and known as the Great Recession. This radicalization deepened the polarization of US politics between left and right.

On the one hand, there has been a drift to the far right, continuing the rightward trend that was first propelled by Reagan's "conservative revolution" and then pushed further by George W. Bush's presidency, and more so again by the white supremacist "Tea Party" reaction to Barack Obama's presidency in the aftermath of the economic crisis. This trend culminated in Donald Trump's presidency, the furthest to the right in US history and the most prominent manifestation of what has taken the shape of a global neofascist trend. On the other hand, there has been a left-wing radicalization among the youth, including young members of racial and ethnic minorities, of which Bernie Sanders and his presidential campaigns in 2016 and 2020 constituted the principal embodiment.

Although a few other countries did witness a similar post-crisis polarization — Britain was one of them, where a left-wing youth radicalization manifested itself through the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership — for most countries, the only visible trend has been the rise of the far right. The surge of neofascism overwhelmingly remains the most important global political phenomenon of recent years. Israel has been no exception to this tendency. On the contrary, the twelve continuous years of Benjamin Netanyahu's prime ministership (2009–2021) and his very active intervention in the global arena made him a pioneering figure of the global far right.

Netanyahu fully epitomized the congenital Jewish-supremacist trend that has been at work in the Israeli state since its inception in 1948. Racism is indeed a built-in feature of the statist-Zionist endeavor, as French scholar Maxime Rodinson explained in his 1967 essay *Israel: A Colonial-Settler State?*:

> Wanting to create a purely Jewish, or predominantly Jewish, state in an Arab Palestine in the twentieth century could not help but lead to a colonial-type situation and to the development (completely normal, sociologically speaking) of a racist state of mind …

It is thus no surprise that it took the far right less than thirty years after the foundation of the Israeli state to come to power in 1977.

The Likud was formed in 1948 as a far-right coalition whose main component was the Herut, the party of Revisionist Zionism, i.e., the fascistic wing of the Zionist movement inspired by Vladimir Jabotinsky, an admirer of Italian Fascism. It was led by Menachem Begin, a man whom David Ben-Gurion — the longtime leader of the so-called Workers' Party of the Land of Israel (better known as the Labor Party) and the most prominent founder of the Israeli state, as well as its longest-serving prime minister before Netanyahu broke his record — was still comparing to Adolf Hitler in the early 1960s. That was before Ben-Gurion's friends accommodated Begin in the 1967 war cabinet. Ten years later, the Likud won the election and has been, since then, the party that has most impacted Israel's polity and society, leading the Israeli government for thirty-two out of the forty-four years that have elapsed since 1977.

The Likud has been ousted again from government, for now. But the new prime minister, Naftali Bennett — a former commando in an elite Israeli military unit turned high-tech millionaire and then prominent far-right politician, who served for a time as Netanyahu's

lieutenant before splitting from the Likud to outbid his former master from the extreme right — is unlikely to improve Israel's overall image, no more than the highly heterogeneous cabinet he chairs. Israel, a country where the once-dominant Laborite wing of Zionism has been reduced to a group of 7 MPs out of 120, is not anywhere close to changing its image as a prominent participant in the global far-right drift.

In the United States, Netanyahu has firmly established his credentials as a crony of the US Republican right. He did so first by overtly colluding with the latter in opposition to Barack Obama, displaying the highest degree of interference in US domestic politics of any Israeli prime minister. He carried on by cozying up to Donald Trump and his team, at both political and personal levels, behaving almost as if he were a member of the Trump administration. By doing so, Netanyahu entrenched Israel's perception in the United States as a staunch ally of the domestic right-wing bloc. This significantly eroded the reserve of sympathy from which Israel had benefited until recent times among liberal Democrats and even part of the Left. An increasing number of liberal Zionists have been warning against this in recent years, expressing their worries that Netanyahu was causing Israel lasting damage by jeopardizing the long-standing US tradition of unconditional bipartisan support for Israel.

The shift has even affected the constituency that was supposed to be the most loyal to Israel, namely American Jews, whose vast majority has traditionally stood on the Democratic side of the US political divide. The change was aptly described in *Haaretz* in December 2019:

> Once their pride and joy, Israel is slowly evolving in American Jewish minds into a prominent member of the kind of Trump-supporting country — e.g. Brazil, Hungary and Poland — that they normally disdain. Under such circumstances,

> continued Jewish liberal support for the Jewish state is unsustainable. The liberal majority will slip away, the right-wing minority will be entrenched but the center is unlikely to hold. Thus, the last decade will be remembered as a turning point — and possibly a point of no return — in relations between Israel and the bulk of U.S. Jews.[4]

Indeed, the latest survey of Jewish Americans conducted in 2020 and recently released indicates that a majority (51 percent) of those surveyed under thirty (aged eighteen to twenty-nine) say that they are "not too" or "not at all" attached to Israel, with 37 percent of the same age range believing that the United States is "too supportive of Israel," while a majority (53 percent) of all Jewish Americans say that caring about Israel is not "essential," even though it is deemed "important" by most of them (37 percent).[5]

Last, but not least, is the fact that a major component of the ongoing youth radicalization in the United States has been the movement against anti-black police violence that culminated in last year's Black Lives Matter mobilization in reaction to George Floyd's murder. This was described by the *New York Times* as probably "the largest movement in U.S. history," with an estimated number of participants ranging between 15 and 26 million.[6] The shape of the latest round of Israeli anti-Palestinian violence last May — especially the combination of Israeli Jewish-supremacist and police attacks on the Palestinian minority of Israel's citizens after they mobilized in solidarity with their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem and then in Gaza — could not fail to strongly reinforce the sympathy of the US anti-racist

4 Chemi Shalev, "The Decade That Devoured the Ties Between Israel and U.S. Jews," *Haaretz*, December 30, 2019.

5 Pew Research Center, "Jewish Americans in 2020," May 2021, 137–58.

6 Larry Buchanan, Quoctrung Bui, and Jugal K. Patel, "Black Lives Matter May Be the Largest Movement in U.S. History," *New York Times*, July 3, 2020.

movement for the Palestinians and the identification of their fate with that of black Americans.

The *Washington Post* reported that "Black Lives Matter activists say an alliance with Palestinians is natural, since, as they see it, Israeli police are brutalizing Palestinians much like American officers mistreat unarmed Black people and protesters."[7] The article quoted Jamaal Bowman, the new Democratic representative from New York who unseated the staunchly pro-Israel Democratic representative Eliot Engel, declaring:

> As a Black man in America, I understand on a personal level what it means to live in a society designed to perpetuate violence against people who look like me. … My experience of systemic injustice … informs my view of what's happening right now in Israel and Palestine.

As usual, Israeli rulers tried to counter this identification by instrumentalizing the memory of the Holocaust and weaponizing the accusation of antisemitism, resorting to an outrageous analogy between Palestinian protests and anti-Jewish pogroms.[8]

Those are the key reasons for the shift in part of the American public opinion and political class. It is a very important political development indeed, but it should not be overestimated: the most prominent figures of that shift, the liberal-left fraction of congressional Democrats, have come such a long way from their party's traditional stance that they are still far from fully endorsing the Palestinian cause or daring to do so openly. What we are witnessing among congressional Democrats are rather more "equitable" condemnations of violence than the previous unconditional defense of Israel's

7 Sean Sullivan and Cleve Wootson Jr., "'From Ferguson to Palestine': How Black Lives Matter Changed the U.S. Debate on the Mideast," *Washington Post*, May 22, 2021.

8 Gilbert Achcar, "Israel's Racism and the Misuse of Antisemitism," *New Politics*, May 18, 2021.

unilateral right to "self-defense," but they remain nevertheless flawed in equating the right of the oppressed and that of the oppressor.[9]

Representative Ilhan Omar was blamed by fellow Democrats for drawing "moral equivalency" between Hamas and Israel.[10] She was censured from the perspective that Hamas is qualitatively more reprehensible than the Zionist state, whereas it is the reverse that should be upheld from the standpoint of elementary justice. Israel is the culprit as occupier, as well as racial and national oppressor, and the oppressed have the right to fight back "by any means necessary" — means that are available to them, that is (one can safely presume that members of Hamas wish they had precision weapons!) — regardless of whether their choice of weapons is an appropriate strategy or not. But choosing the appropriate means for struggle is certainly crucial for the Palestinian cause.

The fact that a tangible improvement in public opinion and mainstream political attitudes proved possible in the country that has long been Israel's staunchest supporter is a powerful confirmation of what constitutes the most effective strategy for the Palestinian people in the face of overwhelming Israeli superiority in firepower. The struggle for Palestinian rights will not progress by fighting Israel with unsophisticated and indiscriminate weapons, and especially not by initiating the resort to arms, thus choosing the very means in which Israel possesses a huge and insuperable superiority. The Palestinian cause can only be effectively promoted by way of nonviolent popular mobilization with a view to winning increasing support globally — particularly in the United States, the only country capable of forcing Israel to change course — and eventually among Israelis themselves.

9 See Bashir Abu-Manneh, "As an Occupier, Israel Has No Right to 'Self-Defense,'" *Jacobin*, May 16, 2021.

10 Jon Schwarz, "Ilhan Omar and 'Moral Equivalence,' a Term of Propaganda Invented in the 1980s," *Intercept*, June 24, 2021.

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