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MAPPING THE RESISTANCE

Insurgence and Polarization Between
2016 and 2020

By Ethan Young

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The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation is an internationally operating, progressive non-profit institution for civic education. In cooperation with many organizations around the globe, it works on democratic and social participation, empowerment of disadvantaged groups, alternatives for economic and social development, and peaceful conflict resolution. The New York Office serves two major tasks: to work around issues concerning the United Nations and to engage in dialogue with North American progressives in universities, unions, social movements, and politics.

Up Against Trump: From Fragmentation to Unity

The day after the inauguration of President Donald Trump, “The Resistance” was born in the streets of cities and towns across the United States. The grassroots-organized Women’s Marches, held on January 21, 2017, saw the largest-ever demonstrations in the country’s history. Since then, the anti-Trump protests have been joined by many other groups and constituencies, especially by those most affected by the policies of the Trump administration, including immigrants, LGBT people, victims of gun violence, the poor, environmentalists, and even scientists.

Over the course of the past eighteen months, however, the protests have lost some of their steam. Trump’s repeated distortions and lies, his sheer meanness (as in the case of DACA recipients), and the constant assaults by his administration seem to have worn out the millions of activists fighting against the country’s shift toward an authoritarian government. After all, resistance is not futile, but it can be tiresome.

In this analysis, Ethan Young examines the state of resistance to the Trump administration. In doing so, he refuses to buy into the centrist notion that the current President of the United States will eventually be rejected, or maybe even impeached, for his deeds. In fact, Trump might be gaining ground, given the relatively strong macroeconomic indicators and the tax reform (including small benefits for many). How, then, can Trump be resisted? First and foremost, Trump and his cronies must be defeated at the polls in the upcoming midterm elections. However, voting Trump out of office will not be enough to defend democracy against the Trumpists.

In this paper, Ethan Young demonstrates that the resistance to Trump’s “new authoritarianism”—which is diverse, ranging from the radical left to the establishment center—only stands a chance if it is able to combine opposition to the far right with a rejection of neoliberal policies. In order to do so, we have to overcome the competition and fragmentation that exists among the political groups that are opposed to Trump. Only then is a new united front—outside of or beyond the political mold of twentieth-century socialism—possible. Only once democratic political power has been defended against the onslaught of right-wing populism and neoliberalism can we move toward the task of creating a new politics based on equality, justice, and solidarity.

*Stefanie Ehmsen and Albert Scharenberg
Co-Directors of New York Office, May 2018*

Mapping the Resistance

Insurgence and Polarization Between 2016 and 2020

By Ethan Young

The 2016 election and one year in office for Donald Trump have resulted in an intensifying polarization in mainstream US politics. A many-sided attack is underway on democracy as it has been shaped by movements for protection of rights, living standards, and the environment over the course of the last century.

Meanwhile, responses to this attack suggest a revitalization of resistance to the Right and to neoliberalism, with great political potential. The alliance of right and far-right tendencies that has taken control of the Republican Party, Congress, and the White House, has brought on mass alienation that is sparking a growing, inchoate insurgence. The media have named the broad manifestations of opposition “the resistance,” reflecting the fear that the Republican-led government is moving towards fascism.

The resistance is discovering that the Democratic Party, for better or worse, is an arena for the Left. The Bernie Sanders campaign carried on the attempts, since the 1930s, to utilize the party to bring left politics to the electorate, usually in opposition to party leaders. Today the party is poised to challenge Republican hegemony. It faces the growing determination of its voting base, and possibly of the national majority. But the centrist leadership is torn between its reliance on the corporate sector and the frustration of Democratic voters.

The shift at the top has had dramatic consequences. Lawlessness in the market. Empowerment of blatant white nationalists at the height of government. Open season on immigrants, a crucial sector of the workforce. Militariza-

tion and normalization of deadly force in law enforcement. Normalization of unhinged belligerence in foreign policy and xenophobia in domestic policy. Increased destruction of environment and infrastructure. Increased degradation of women and gender minorities. Critical cutbacks in healthcare provision and public education.

It’s easy to point to manifestations of all these problems in previous administrations, both Republican and Democratic. The difference now is in the balance of political forces, with the Republicans holding the upper hand in all three government branches, and the center (or moderate) forces in that party rendered powerless. (The moderate Republicans of today would have been considered far right before 1980. Nearly all have thrown in with Trump.)

The partisan divide is nothing new, even though both sides claim to be working for “bipartisanship” as some kind of magic balance combining pragmatism and the desire for national unity. But it has taken a particularly extreme form in the sharp right turn to unveiled racial polarization, reviving the white backlash of Civil Rights days. Then, however, the more open racism of third party candidate George Wallace in 1968 only earned him some camera time. After the election of the first black president, white nationalists mobilized. Gross calls for violence helped bring Trump to power.

This points up the underlying tension in US society, what once was called “the nitty gritty.” US democracy not only favors the few; it blatantly disempowers African Americans and other en-

tire demographic groups, based on the historic color line. The question of racial justice is asserting itself in the culture, and in voting patterns. How the resistance responds to this will determine whether or not it can conceive of a democracy worth fighting for.¹

Power and Resistance

The Right, including those who have had misgivings about Trump's delirium and boat rocking, sets out to purge the judicial branch of centrists altogether. This was the significance of the appointment of Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court. Gorsuch is a leading advocate of deregulation of corporations, and increased state repression in the form of the "war on terror" and the death penalty. Once appointed, federal judges can only be removed by resignation or impeachment. Rightists are packing state courts as well, at a frantic pace.²

The winner-take-all horserace of US politics puts the Democratic Party in the position of opposition, and the future of the country and the world depends heavily on how Democrats choose to play this role. There are complicated reasons why this role is not taken on by choice, and their reticence has created a major obstacle for the cohering of forces that can counter the rightist onslaught against democratic norms.³ In the first year of Trump's command, opposition has come less from elected officials than from public protest originating outside electoral campaigns. The diverse themes of different

protests are symptomatic of the fragmentation of the Left.

The day after Trump's inauguration (January 21, 2017), the Women's March on Washington set a new record for a public protest (upwards of 600,000, with estimates as high as 4 million in corresponding protests in more than 100 cities and towns).⁴ It was virtually spontaneous, mobilized through social media in a matter of weeks. While the women's movement had been at a relatively low ebb in recent years, sensitivity to violence and discrimination against women was brewing across the country before the election. The rise of Trump, a well-known misogynist egomaniac, over the female contender Hillary Clinton, was the spark that lit the tinder. Trump's support from the hypocritically puritanical, overtly patriarchal religious right added fuel. There was also a serious effort to break the racial/class barrier that tended to narrow the more political wing of feminism, which had gone all-out for the more "establishment" Clinton, while scapegoating the younger activists who favored Bernie Sanders's left populist appeal.

The Women's March was the first indication in years that a single social movement could win support from many others. These ranged from left-leaning unions, LGBTQ, immigrants, and environmentalists, to the broader array of anti-Trump popular sectors. But women actively raising women's issues take on even greater importance as they emerge as the most insurgent part of the working class, as teachers, nurses, domestic workers, low wage workers, student adjuncts, and defenders of the disenfranchised, children in particular.

On March 24, 2018, 260 locations saw massive turnouts for the March For Our Lives, centered in Washington DC. It was an outpouring of teenagers responding to the wave of gun violence at high schools around the country. This is un-

1 Sean McElwee and Jason McDaniel, "Economic anxiety didn't make people vote Trump, racism did," *The Nation*, 8 May 2017.

2 Paul Rosenberg, "GOP's court-packing spree: It's only the beginning," *Salon.com*, 3 December 2017; Charlie Savage, "Trump is rapidly reshaping the judiciary: Here's how," *The New York Times*, 11 November 2017; Ian Millhiser, "Republicans are using long-forbidden tactics to chip away at judicial independence," *ThinkProgress*, 9 February 2018.

3 Will Stancil, "Democrats' 'resistance' to Trump is eroding, and so are their poll numbers," *The Atlantic*, 9 February 2018.

4 Kaveh Waddell, "The exhausting work of tallying America's largest protest," *The Atlantic*, 23 January 2017.

derstood as part of the resistance because of Trump's and the Republicans' fierce opposition to any serious move in the direction of gun regulation.⁵ (Trump has advocated arming teachers as a defense against shooters with high power automatic assault weapons.) While the organizers did not focus on Trump, they have worked to build active opposition to the National Rifle Association, a mass organization with overtly racist, pro-Trump politics, which threatens opponents with physical violence. The Marchers stand directly opposed to the strongest fascist-led force the US has seen since the heyday of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s. The March organizers have also repeatedly called on young people to vote to defeat pro-gun candidates.

Before the election, confrontations with elected officials outside the urban centers were occasional and usually well-behaved. In the weeks after inauguration there was a steady wave of fierce "town hall" meetings in which residents in Republican-dominated cities and towns raised hell with their House and Senate representatives. The main trigger for these actions was the attempt by the Republicans to overturn Obama's Affordable Care Act. Public sentiment in favor of a public national health plan ("Medicare for All") has pushed key Democrats beyond supporting private insurance-friendly Obamacare.⁶ This was a telling indication of how mass opposition to Trump both encourages and incorporates a general leftward push at the base level. Democratic officials launched anti-Trump town halls in response to the Republican tax bill, a major wealth transfer from the middle and bottom to the wealthiest.

An electoral shift to the Left and Center-Left followed over the course of local races in 2017. In terms of historical timing, the backlash was practically instantaneous. The Republican victo-

ry in 2016 surprised nearly everyone—including the Republicans—but it was not the result of a popular upsurge embracing the party.⁷ The Republicans took every advantage the system and the hapless Democrats had to offer, and achieved Trump's non-popular election (via the indirect apparatus of the Electoral College) by the slimmest of margins.⁸ Trump had no mandate, and the majority of those Americans who concern themselves with politics were shocked into action before the off-year special elections of 2017.

Voters were dismayed at the grotesque caricature of a plutocrat in office, and, just as significantly, traditional Republican voters were confronted with a party now dominated by an alliance far to the right of any that ever swung a whip in national politics. The result, according to the political blog *FiveThirtyEight*, was that in more than 70 special elections for state and federal seats in various states in 2017—whether in "red" (Republican) or "blue" (Democratic) states—"Democrats are doing better in all types of districts with all types of candidates."⁹

A new development suggests a hopeful outcome for this debacle: the trend toward first-time candidates, particularly women, jumping into races for local seats and posing a real threat to established warhorses from both parties. "About four times as many Democratic women are running for House seats as Republican women, according to the Center for American Women and Politics; in the Senate, the ratio is 2 to 1," notes *Time* magazine.¹⁰ The politics of these candidates vary, but the lean is toward favoring both traditional Democratic issues (such as reproductive rights and de-

5 Alli Conti, "The March for Our Lives wasn't just another Trump protest," *Vice*, 26 March 2018.

6 Dylan Matthews, "The stunning Democratic shift on single-payer," *Vox*, 7 September 2018.

7 Nolan D. MacCaskill, "Trump tells Wisconsin: Victory was a surprise," *Politico*, 13 December 2016.

8 Steve Denning, "The five whys of the Trump surprise," *Forbes*, 13 November 2018.

9 Harry Enten, "Special elections so far point to a democratic wave in 2018," *FiveThirtyEight*, 13 December 2017.

10 Charlotte Alter, "A year ago, they marched: Now a record number of women are running for office," *Time*, January 18, 2018.

fending public services) along with the more challenging demands raised by the Sanders campaign (Medicare for all, big money out of politics, higher minimum wage, e.g.).¹¹

The die was cast with the defeat of Roy Moore, a religious lunatic and child molester who beat Trump's choice in the Republican primary for Senator from Alabama. He was taken down by a lackluster moderate Democrat despite (or because of) heavy last minute support from Trump. Even in cold-blooded Alabama, Trump's actual popular support is restricted to a hard core that is being outflanked, as swing voters increasingly reject the Right's crude demagoguery.

The decisive votes in defeating Moore came from African American women. In the deep South, this is a historic development. But it was not a fluke. Voter mobilization groups had been targeting black districts in Alabama for years, and positive results were seen in local elections before the Senate seat race.¹²

There were other surprising signs of shifting voting patterns. Open socialists running as Democrats won several races and did surprisingly well in others, in a variety of political settings. The largest socialist group, Democratic Socialists of America, claimed fifteen victories for candidates they worked for, just months since its membership grew fourfold after their work in the Sanders campaign. One DSA member and "Berniecrat," Lee Carter, took the seat of the Republican Majority Whip in Virginia's State House of Delegates. Carter, 30, running in opposition to an energy monopoly that subsidized both parties, won by nine points.¹³

If this is the beginning of a popular leftward shift with political teeth, it opens the possibility that the resistance can go beyond restoring pre-2016 norms, to ushering in a mass political movement in opposition to neoliberalism, militarism, and xenophobia. Breaking the hegemony of the right/far right alliance may depend on this outcome.

Political Anatomy of the Resistance

The political spectrum of the opposition to the Trump administration runs from moderate right to far left. There are a few open anti-Trump Republicans, and probably more in the closet. The majority of Republicans chose to close ranks around Trump, despite his having built his political profile by smearing the party leadership. This "come to Jesus" moment happened in the peri-

od just before and after his victory. Over time the pull of incumbency neutralized the influence of the remaining "never-Trump" partisans in the GOP, and center-rightists shed their centrist leaning. Today the party is an uncompromising force of retrogression and corruption.

Center-right and Centrist Democrats

Within the Democratic Party, the center-leaning-right wing of elected officials (self-pro-

11 Zaid Jilani, Ryan Grim, and Rachel M. Cohen, "A year after Trump, Democrats, Socialists, and Populists sweep elections," *The Intercept*, 9 November 2017.

12 Van R. Newkirk II, "African American voters made Doug Jones a U.S. Senator in Alabama," *The Atlantic*, November 17, 2017; Will Drabold, "Black women fueled a grassroots movement in Alabama—and may remake state politics," *Mic*, 14 December 2017; Scott Clement and Emily Guskin, "Exit poll results: How different groups voted in Alabama," *Washington Post*, 13 December 2017.

13 Democratic Socialists of America, "15 DSA members elected!, 2017 election," *dsausa.org*, 9 November 2017; Osita Nwanevu, "What a Democratic Socialist's upset win suggests about the future of the democrats," *Slate*, 10 November 2017.

claimed “blue dogs”) and party functionaries favor occasional concessions to the Right on issues like reproductive rights, immigration, and police violence. While opposing Trump’s general direction as extreme, they favor pursuing a course of conciliation with Republicans in Congress, and are careful not to speak ill of evangelical churches and the gun lobby. They are hostile or indifferent to left social movements, although they enjoy support from some unions.

Center-rightists in both parties essentially are playing a waiting game. They expect Trump’s power to wane eventually, and the old familiar politics to come back into fashion. For the most part they are party warhorses whose hope for change veers more in the direction of the *status quo ante* (pre-Trump) than to a push for anti-corporate populism or stronger democratic power. While rhetorically anti-Trump, they take pains to separate themselves from the resistance.

The centrists, which include left- and right-leaners, have control of the Democratic Party national and state leadership. Their voice is heard when word comes down from the Democratic National Committee, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, and most state parties. The party is roiled by staff and fundraising problems which became public knowledge only after the 2016 election.¹⁴

In early 2018 their voting power has increased, but only slightly. They still constituted a minority in government after the debacle of 2016. Their position in preparation for the 2018 elections was based on an analysis that presupposed a backlash against Trump:

1. The majority of voters, while firmly set on the Right, would reject Trump as an extremist;

¹⁴ Clio Chang, “Yes, Democrats have a fundraising problem,” *The New Republic*, 22 August 2017; Ryan Cooper, “This is the real scandal in the Democratic Party,” *The Week*, 8 November 2017.

2. That majority, finding no support from the Republicans, would join the Democrats; and
3. The investigation and indictment of Trump for eliciting Russian interference in the 2016 election would weaken the Republicans and bring waning corporate support back to the Democrats by default.

This scenario was designed for both short-term or long-term developments. It expects or assumes Trump would be easy to beat in 2020. Or Trump could resign or be impeached before then, which would seriously weaken any attempt by the Republicans to elect Trump’s second-in-command, the lackluster theocrat Mike Pence. Even if this plan did not pan out, four more years of Republican rule would give the Democrats an edge in 2024, in theory.

There are some glaring problems with the centrist game plan:

1. There are strong indications that voters are open to the Left, and that the characterization of swing voters among working class whites as Trump’s core base, perpetually anti-civil rights, anti-government, and pro-military, came from social myopia on the part of Democratic analysts. The rise of Sanders’s popularity despite his media characterization as a leftist zealot, while Clinton’s poll numbers only decline, indicate that moderation vs. extremism is not the selling point for Democrats that it was in 1964 (Johnson vs. Goldwater, the last Democratic landslide victory).¹⁵
2. If there is inadequate opposition from elected Democrats, Trump’s support will only grow. Passivity will not attract wayward Republicans or swing voters when

¹⁵ Anthony DiMaggio, “Election con 2016: New evidence demolishes the myth of Trump’s ‘blue-collar’ populism,” *CounterPunch*, 16 June 2017; Nate Silver, “The invisible undecided voter,” *FiveThirtyEight*, 23 January 2017; Michael Sainato, “As Donald Trump’s popularity dwindles, Bernie Sanders’ surges,” *Observer* (New York), 24 October 2017.

the cause of disaffection is distress, not mere disappointment. Trump is gradually gaining ground by default.

3. Most Democratic officials and Democratic-friendly media are preoccupied with the Mueller investigation's outcome, hoping that it will prove conclusively that Trump and Putin colluded against Clinton.¹⁶ How many voters are concerned about collusion is open to question, one way or the other. Whether or not the implication of treason undermines the Republicans' hold on power, the strongest concerns connected to Trump's policies and actions have been given short shrift. Meanwhile, the party's base grows more frantic with each new Trumpian barbarity. They understand that the assault on democratic norms and social programs will not be reversed simply by waiting out the Democrats' misfortune. The Democrats' own favorability as a party is also in decline.¹⁷

Prioritizing opposition, not just to Trump but to austerity and the assault on democracy, arguably would strengthen the party's public standing. Not doing so in 2016 clearly did not help their chances. Why do the centrists in charge keep appealing for bipartisanship and normalcy?

The apparent answer is that they work constantly to keep corporate donors on their side. They are caught in the crossfire of a class war in which their working class base are the proverbial fish in a barrel, while the capitalists go nuts with AR-15s. Corporate America is fixated on increasing profits (and personal incomes, already beyond obscene). To win their support, the Democrats have to play their card as the do-good party very carefully. Every appeal

for justice doubles as a plea for social peace, and the need for a party that can defuse unrest, rather than exacerbate it through ever-increasing violent repression, a Republican trademark. (Democratic administrations also oversee violent repression, such as the crack-down on the Occupy Wall Street movement, but usually not as overtly or as openly aimed at particular constituencies.¹⁸)

This translates into incrementalism in meeting the demands of the social movement constituencies they rely on for votes, and two steps back for every small step towards anything that does not pay some private promoter big dividends. But passivity also comes from the historical design and institutional memory of the Democratic Party itself. Party leaders have inherited an aversion—even a terror—of being marginalized as leftist. When the party responded to the civil rights movement with positive reforms, following their 1964 landslide victory over (what was then) the far rightist Goldwater, they lost to Nixon in 1968. When they ran their most progressive candidate since Roosevelt in the following election, they suffered a disastrous defeat. When the Republicans ran Reagan, who was considered further to the right than Goldwater, they beat the Democratic incumbent Carter in 1980—and subjected the Democrats to their worst failure ever in 1984.¹⁹

These reversals, arguably, have less to do with the role of left social movements than with the Democrats' own presumed need to favor ruling class authority over movements that would undermine it. The tendency in that direction is fixed, and gives rise to endless calls on the Left to break from the Democrats immediately and completely.

¹⁶ Masha Gessen, "Russia: The conspiracy trap," *New York Review of Books*, 6 March 2017.

¹⁷ AP-NORC Center for Public Research, "New year, same priorities: The public's agenda for 2018," *apnorc.org*; Jennifer Agiesta, "CNN poll: Democratic advantage narrows in 2018," *CNN.com*, 21 January 2018.

¹⁸ Naomi Wolf, "Revealed: How the FBI coordinated the crackdown on Occupy," *The Guardian*, 29 December 2012.

¹⁹ Joshua Mound, "What democrats still don't get about George McGovern," *The New Republic*, 29 February 2016; David Plotke, "Democratic Dilemmas," *Verso blog*, 28 November 2016.

The centrists, out-maneuvered by the Right repeatedly, are, like the Left, stuck in a defensive posture. Within the Democratic Party, the success of the Sanders campaign shows that resistance, rather than incrementalism, has the best chance of mobilizing Democratic voters. The Right has mobilized its base by baiting liberal centrists as radical leftists in disguise, and centrists are unable to convince the Right's base otherwise. The Center, politically bankrupt in its embrace of neoliberalism, needs the Left more than ever, to sufficiently square off against the Right. Some centrists understand this, and intermittently act on it. In most cases protest is necessary to budge the leadership.²⁰

The Democrats and the Left: Social Movements

The left and center-left political sectors use public pressure inside the party and through public protest to demand an alternative to centrist caution within the anti-Trump camp. This broad, diverse camp takes the form of insurgent electoral campaigns and left social movements, along with political groups dedicated to mobilizing a progressive voting bloc.

When Sanders was running against Hillary Clinton in the 2016 Democratic primary, he distinguished his camp from "the political establishment": "I have friends and supporters in the Human Rights Fund [sic; Human Rights Campaign is the largest nonprofit LGBTQ rights organization] and Planned Parenthood. But, you know what? Hillary Clinton has been around there for a very, very long time. Some of these groups are, in fact, part of the establishment."²¹

²⁰ David Weigel, "Why did Keith Ellison lose the DNC race?," *Washington Post*, 26 February 2017; Alan Nichols, "The fight for power in Wisconsin: Neoliberalism, the crisis in the Democratic Party and the way forward," *Organizing Upgrade*, 1 February 2018.

²¹ Interview with Rachel Maddow, January 19, 2016, see Steve Benen, "Bernie Sanders takes a risky shot at the 'establishment'," *MSNBC.com*, 20 January 2016.

Some groups that might fall into that category, such as MoveOn.org and Democracy for America, endorsed him, as Sanders pointed out. These groups have big followings and comparatively large funds available for political education and publicity. Their ties to Democratic campaigns have been strong through the years. But while they lean center-left, they are directly and constantly targeted by the Right. They now speak much more firmly in opposition to the right/far right power bloc than the Democratic Party as a whole.

The world of left and center-left nonprofits and NGOs shy away from party brands, partly for legal/financial reasons. Add to this increasingly left-leaning churches, synagogues and mosques. But the Republicans as a whole are arrayed against these groups' goals, and are actively working against them every day. While many center-leftists resent Sanders's opposition to Clinton in the primaries, their priority is self-defense and survival. This requires focusing on unseating the Trumpites for as long as it takes.

These organizations are far-reaching in influence, after many years of service. The strongest examples are the ACLU, NAACP, NOW, the Sierra Club, and the groups mentioned above; and labor unions, three of which (SEIU, NEA and AFT) are among the top Democratic funders. Other groups in this camp have social media audiences numbering in the millions.

Social movement groups tend to take an insurgent direction, the closer they are to working class constituencies in their actual settings, particularly people of color, immigrants, women as a social sector, and youth. Street protests and confrontations with officials have been breaking out across the country. *The Washington Post* reported of the first summer of the Trump era:

For August 2017, we tallied 834 protests, demonstrations, strikes, marches, sit-ins and rallies in the United States, with at least one in every state

and the District. Our conservative guess is that between 175,625 and 205,178 people showed up at these political gatherings, although it is likely there were far more participants. Because mainstream media often neglect to report nonviolent actions—especially small ones—it is probable that we did not record every event that took place. [...] We estimate that 82.7 percent of the events we recorded were opposing Trump’s policies, a higher percentage of events than in July. About 62 percent overall were explicitly anti-Trump while another 21 percent overall took stances on issues that contradict those of the president.²²

The Crowd Counting Consortium estimated that overall, between 5.9 million and 9 million people protested in the US in 2017, about 1.8-2.8 percent of the population, of which 89 percent were anti-Trump.²³

This wave of protest does not come from any single organized political headquarters. It is mostly haphazard and small scale in execution, reflecting the fragmentation of the opposition in all its forms. Mass organizations tend to be top-down, with policy rarely set by membership in consultation with staff or boards. They respond to, rather than initiate, most anti-Trump protests. The actual mobilizing has been online, and can be initiated by any group, large or small.

This testifies to the actual level of ferment in the country. The protests respond directly to the government’s sharp turn against various popular sectors, and against laws put in place in response to pressure from social movements as they organize in neighborhood settings. The issues are concrete and urgent. These include:

Income inequality: The ever-present split between the very rich and the bulk of the population has been exacerbated by the plutocratic administration. *The Washington Post* noted:

²² Erica Chenoweth and Jeremy Pressman, “Last month, 83% of U.S. protests were against Trump,” *Washington Post*, 25 September 2017.

²³ Crowd Counting Consortium, <https://sites.google.com/view/crowdcountingconsortium/home>.

From 2013, the share of wealth owned by the 1 percent shot up by nearly three percentage points. Wealth owned by the bottom 90 percent, meanwhile, fell over the same period. Today, the top 1 percent of households own more wealth than the bottom 90 percent combined. That gap, between the ultrawealthy and everyone else, has only become wider in the past several decades.²⁴

The Republicans’ 2017 tax bill, which promised cuts across the board, actually places new long term burdens on the majority. Impoverished workers, mostly youth, laid-off tradespeople, and immigrants, are virtually unprotected as health and housing costs soar. The labor movement is hard-pressed to respond, for reasons described in another section below. Fierce protests broke out locally and in Washington.²⁵ The strongest labor response so far was a nine-day statewide strike of public school teachers in West Virginia, begun on February 22, 2018. It was noteworthy in at least four ways: the workforce held the line after their union tried to push a compromise on their wage demand; the strike was technically illegal; they won; and in a Trump-friendly state, they had broad public support.²⁶

Unrestricted police violence and militarization: Widespread actions against police violence have been ongoing since the confrontation between civilians and heavily armed and fortified police in Ferguson, MO following an unpunished murder by a police officer in 2014. These events, and continued killings around the country, involving black civilians in huge numbers, triggered the Black Lives Matter movement. Trump advocated violence against

²⁴ Christopher Ingraham, “The richest 1 percent now owns more of the country’s wealth than at any time in the past 50 years,” *Washington Post*, 6 December 2017.

²⁵ David Leonhardt, “A tax plan to turbocharge inequality, in 3 charts,” *The New York Times*, 17 December 2017; Adam Gabbatt, “Sit-ins, protests, rallies: Activists’ mammoth push to thwart Republican tax bill,” *The Guardian*, 24 November 2017.

²⁶ Rachel Garringer, “Learning from the leadership of West Virginia’s striking teachers,” *Scalawag*, 7 March 2018.

protesters, and hard core white supremacists (“white nationalists”) rallied to him. “Taking a knee,” silent protest by professional and college football stars at televised games, provoked further outrage from Trump and his supporters. The separation of Trump from black constituencies, already evident well before the election, is now virtually unbridgeable. Even black business executives have spoken out.²⁷

Deportation of immigrants: Attacks and deportations were already on the rise during the Obama administration. Trump’s crusade against immigrants, especially from what he declared “shithole countries” (specifically Africa, Haiti, and El Salvador), may be the one campaign promise he fulfilled. The federal immigration police force, ICE, have become Gestapo-like in their approach. In response, action by immigrants and their supporters has become widespread. Church and community groups have harbored endangered neighbors and pushed for “sanctuary city” status in their localities. Protests and constituents marked for deportation have been supported by leading elected officials in cities with high numbers of immigrants, where Democratic office holders tend to predominate. A new peak of public outrage followed attempts by Trump to intensify expulsion of “Dreamers,” non-citizens brought to the US as children, who know no other home.²⁸

Gender discrimination: Trump’s pandering to fake puritans of the religious right, along with his own

outrageous history as a “ladykiller,” mark him as the most misogynist president in memory. His election undoubtedly contributed to the #MeToo explosion that brought to society’s center stage what actor Eva Green called “the ubiquitous exploitation of power.” Trump, having transcended his old career as a Manhattan social climber, has made himself over as a warrior against LGBTQ rights. One trans rights group proclaimed it “the discrimination administration.”²⁹

Islamophobia: The number of Muslims living in the US rose from 2.35 million in 2007 to 3.45 million in 2017. Islamophobia has also been rising steadily among all other groups.³⁰ Unlike Europe, Islamophobia in the US stems less from cultural and religious differences than from demagogic claims by mainstream politicians and media figures that Muslims as a group (1 percent of the population) pose the greatest threat of terrorist violence. (Researchers found that the majority of terrorist attacks have come from native white supremacists.³¹) Trump made Muslims, along with Latin Americans, a special target for his immigrant-bashing rhetoric and policies. Violent attacks on individual (assumed) Muslims and on mosques have spiked since Trump’s election. More recently, Christian fundamentalists have accused Muslims of trying to impose Sharia law on America, where Islam is a distinctly minority faith.

This has been met by opposition from other religious groups and civil libertarians. The

27 John Sullivan, Zane Anthony, Julie Tate, and Jennifer Jenkins, “Nationwide, police shot and killed nearly 1,000 people in 2017,” *Washington Post*, 6 January 2018; Sonali Kolhatkar, “In America, justice for victims of police brutality remains elusive,” *Truthdig*, 22 September 2017; David Gelles, “The C.E.O. who stood up to President Trump: Ken Frazier speaks out,” *The New York Times*, 19 February 2018.

28 Ramon Taylor, “Amid deportation protests, ICE detains immigrant-rights leader in NYC,” *VOA*, 11 January 2018; Priscilla Alvarez, “Trump cracks down on sanctuary cities,” *The Atlantic*, 25 January 2018; Jose Olivares, “More jurisdictions to provide legal defense for immigrants at risk of deportation,” *NPR*, 12 November 2017; Joanna Walters, “What is Daca and who are the Dreamers?,” *The Guardian*, 14 September 2018.

29 Whitney Kassel, “Donald Trump’s presidency is an assault on women,” *Foreign Policy*, 4 April 2017; Michael D. Shear and Charlie Savage, “In one day, Trump administration lands 3 punches against gay rights,” *The New York Times*, 27 July 2017; Rebecca Buckwalter-Poza, “The end of gay rights,” *Pacific Standard*, 5 June 2017; National Association for Transgender Equality, “The discrimination administration,” *transequality.org*; Lydia Wheeler, “Gay rights groups feel they are under siege,” *The Hill*, 11 October 2017.

30 Besheer Mohamed, “New estimates show U.S. Muslim population continues to grow,” *Pew Research Center*, 3 January 2018.

31 Mythili Sampathkumar, “Majority of terrorists who have attacked America are not Muslim, new study finds,” *The Independent*, 23 June 2017.

Muslim population includes Arabs, South and Central Asians, and African immigrants. Tightly knit communities from various predominantly Muslim nationalities have responded to Islamophobia with protests and public pressure on officials, mostly in urban centers.³²

Enfranchised neofascists: Far rightists of various stripes had a direct role in Trump's campaign. His access to these groups, including armed nativists, extreme religious social conservatives, the National Rifle Association, and overt "white nationalists," was facilitated by his partnership with Steve Bannon, former chief of the rightist news site Breitbart.com. Mass revulsion followed the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, VA in August 2017. This was a major attempt to bring overt neofascist groups out of the shadows, which mass (and elite) antifascist sympathies have successfully suppressed since World War II. (It also brought the return of overt anti-Semitic rhetoric chanted by torch-bearing marchers.) A counter demonstrator was killed by a supporter of the rally. Trump's defense of the rally underscored how his presidency opened doors to a fringe which was previously taboo in US society.³³ Response has taken the forms of widespread denunciation, particularly in major media, and showdowns by antifascists, sometimes violent. Students and faculty are organizing to oppose neofascist infiltration of campuses.³⁴

Disability rights: Trump and Congress have tried to reverse protections won by disability

rights activists. These moves have been made as part of the push against national healthcare provision and anti-discrimination guidelines for public schools. Cutbacks in aid are expected to lead to a steep rise in institutionalizing disabled people after years of pressure to ensure their right to live independently. A wave of protests have called attention to the hardships these moves will bring. In June 2017, protesters in wheelchairs were ejected from the office of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, and arrested. Most of the protests were coordinated by the activist group ADAPT.³⁵

Health care: The Right has made a centerpiece issue of overturning Obamacare, the last administration's attempt to deal with skyrocketing health costs without defying the power of private insurance and the drug industry. This led to a merry chase after the election as Obamacare increased in popularity while the Republicans stampeded to put in place a more privatized, slapdash alternative plan. The grassroots pressure group Indivisible and others protested and lobbied Congress into delaying the Republican bill, which can only grossly raise the cost of health care. As noted above, the popularity of Medicare for All spread widely when Sanders campaigned on it. The single payer movement gained ground steadily for decades, and is now well-organized in unions, and healthcare and medical professions. DSA voted to make Medicare for All its central campaign.³⁶

32 Perry Stein, "Muslim Americans rally against Trump travel ban one day after a judge blocked it," *Washington Post*, 18 October 2017; Peter Moscovitz, "We can fight back against Trump's Islamophobia," *The Nation*, 8 November 2017; Christopher Mathias, "The 'March Against Sharia' protests are really marches against Muslims," *Huffington Post*, 10 June 2017.

33 Michelle Chen, "Donald Trump's rise has coincided with an explosion of hate groups," *The Nation*, 24 March 2017; J.M. Berger, "How white nationalists learned to love Donald Trump," *Politico*, 25 October 2016; Joe Helm, "Recounting a day of rage, hate, violence and death," *Washington Post*, 14 August 2017.

34 Colleen Flaherty, "Campus Antifascist Network," *Inside Higher Ed*, 17 August 2017.

35 Rebecca Cokley, "The rights of disabled Americans are under attack," *CNN.com*, 14 February 2018; Mike Ludwig, "Disability activists crash congress to stop a bill that would undermine their civil rights," *Truthout*, 16 February 2018; David M. Perry, "'That's just the life of a warrior': How disability activists are playing the long game under Trump," *Pacific Standard*, 22 January 2018.

36 Amanda Zhou and Kris B. Mamula, "Single-payer health care gains traction, local physician advocates," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 23 November 2017; Julia Conley, "Kill the bill, don't kill us: Protesters arrested as GOP pushes Senate tax bill forward," *Common Dreams*, 28 November 2017; Robert Pear, Maggie Haberman, and Reed Abelson, "Trump to scrap critical health care subsidies, hitting Obamacare again," *The New York Times*, 12 October 2017.

Gun control: Gun violence and the open market for weapons of war have been at issue for decades, but an upsurge of protest, particularly among high school students, broke out in 2018, over the mass shooting at an affluent suburban Florida high school. This is a direct, open turn against the Republicans by millions, led by furious teenagers. The constant repetition of mass murders in broad daylight by “troubled loners” armed with easily accessed automatic assault weapons led to a crisis for the National Association (NRA), which is a major actor in the American Right. The NRA doubles as a lobby for the firearms industry, and a mass organization with tons of money. Its leadership is highly political, utilizing white supremacist xenophobia and fear of the central government to stoke their members. It is also the ideological stronghold of gun culture, which is rooted in an ongoing violent climate, enforcing and reinforcing white domination, from pioneer settlers to lynch mob terror to police sadism.

The NRA has mastered social media and marketing, and by promoting and ensnaring the politicians of its choice, has become a controlling influence in the Republican Party. Now the demands for stronger gun regulation and banning automatic weapons have made the NRA and its loyalists into political pariahs to an exhausted public. Mass protests by high schoolers put officials on the take from the NRA in a deeply compromised spot. A new online group, #NeverAgain, formed instantly after the February 14, 2018 massacre. The NRA has taken the offensive, targeting the Left (including DSA by name) and championing capitalism. Threats of violence have pervaded their stance, echoing Trump’s belligerence. This polarization may be irreconcilable, bringing substantial new numbers to the resistance, as evidenced by the enormous national turnout for the March For Our Lives on March 24, 2018, organized and addressed by high school students.³⁷

³⁷ Dean Obeidallah, “The NRA’s worst nightmare is here,” *CNN.com*, 25 February 2018; Maureen Sheeran, “NRA

Voter suppression: Changing demographics have been an under-the-radar concern of the Right. Specifically, whites are becoming the numerical minority in state after state. Republicans are pushing hard for local laws making it harder for people fitting certain racial and economic categories to vote. They are also changing Congressional district maps to undercut the votes of districts where people of color predominate. This has led to serious pushback efforts from mass interest groups like the ACLU and NAACP, which are gaining public support.³⁸

Foreign policy: The peace movement has been at an ebb for years, despite the continuation of Washington’s longest war ever. This is the weakest point in the resistance, particularly in light of the administration’s belligerent rhetoric and promotion of militarism. Democrats in general have not strayed far from Clinton’s pro-Pentagon position. There has been some negative response to Trump’s moving the US embassy in Israel to Tel Aviv, his sabre-rattling at North Korea and Iran, and his plan to hold an unheard-of public military parade in his own honor.³⁹

Environment and science: The influence of the fossil fuel-driven energy industry, combined with the anti-science stance of the religious Right, carry the denial of climate catastrophe that guides current policy. Trump has also

losing corporate ties amid calls for boycott in wake of Parkland shooting,” *ABC News*, 27 February 2018; Ashley Reese, “The NRA’s vice president is scared of socialists,” *Jezebel*, 22 February 2018; Emanuella Grinberg and Nadeem Muaddi, “How the Parkland students pulled off a massive national protest in only 5 weeks,” *CNN.com*, 26 March 2018.

³⁸ David Jackson and Deborah Barfield Berry, “Trump, after killing his ‘voter fraud’ commission, calls for new ID laws,” *USA Today*, 4 January 2018; T. Keung Hui, “Anti-Trump sentiment brings crowd to HKonj march in Raleigh,” *News and Observer* (Raleigh NC), 12 February 2018; Arielle Dreher, “The racist roots of disenfranchising voters,” *Jackson Free Press*, 28 February 2018; Matt McDermott and Sean McElwee, “The cause the resistance cares most about is ending voter suppression,” *Vice*, 22 February 2018.

³⁹ John Feffer, “The new, new Cold War,” *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 7 March 2018; Ethan Young, “Where did the peace movement go?,” *The Independent*, 1 May 2017.

overseen an unprecedented dismantling of the Environmental Protection Agency. The environmental movement, from the straight-laced Sierra Club and NRDC to more the militant 350.org and Food and Water Watch, has never been more opposed to a sitting president. Leaving the Paris Climate Accords, amidst increasingly menacing climate events worldwide, brought on strong condemnation. Scientists and other related professionals have spoken out against the strain of anti-intellectualism that debunks teaching evolution. Earth Day was revived in the form of the March for Science soon after Trump's inauguration. The revolt of Standing Rock Sioux Indians against the Dakota Access Pipeline brought national attention and made the Obama administration stop construction, only to see the decision reversed by Trump.⁴⁰

Public and higher education: The furious 2018 strike of public school teachers in West Virginia was a direct response to the attack on public education. Parents and teachers have called out the appointment of Betsy DeVos, a religious right privateer, as education secretary. Hundreds of thousands have joined Network for Public Education, a group that opposes cuts and the general direction of education policy. DeVos has hardened the burden of students living on college loans, and attacked the rights of disabled students.⁴¹

40 Elizabeth Woodworth and Dr. Peter Carter, "Science betrayed: the crime of denial," *Common Ground*, 10 February 2018; Environmental Defense Fund, "Deep EPA cuts put public health at risk," <https://www.edf.org/deep-epa-cuts-put-public-health-risk>; Chris Mooney, Joe Heim, and Brady Dennis, "Climate March draws massive crowd to D.C. in sweltering heat," *Washington Post*, 29 April 2017; Kyle Powys Whyte, "Why the Native American pipeline resistance in North Dakota is about climate justice," *The Conversation.com*, 16 September 2016.

41 Rebecca Klein, "One year in, Betsy DeVos has supercharged teacher activism," *Huffington Post*, 13 February 2018; Celeste Katz, "Betsy DeVos just made it harder for ripped-off students to get full loan forgiveness," *Newsweek*, 20 December 2017; David M. Perry, "Assessing Betsy DeVos' rollback on disability rights," 24 October 2017, psmag.com/education/betsy-devos-rolls-back-disability-rights; Julia Conley, "Trying to deliver 'failing' grade to Betsy DeVos, teachers locked out of education dept," *Common Dreams*, 9 February

Media: Trump's hostility to the press is now legendary, and major media outlets have responded in kind. Of the four major daily papers nationally, three (Murdoch's Wall Street Journal excepted) regularly attack the entire Trump camp. The leading centrist cable news network, CNN, is Trump's favorite target. The Federal Communications Commission has pushed forward privatization of the Internet by abolishing net neutrality, despite overwhelming opposition. This move is sparking a mass movement that has polarized Silicon Valley against the administration.⁴²

Finding a Focal Point

Bringing together this fierce but fragmented array of social movements is now a major concern. A well-positioned group, People's Action, made a potentially significant effort in this direction in February 2018. The group is itself a merger of several multi-region organizing efforts. Their think tank, Institute for America's Future, assembled a broad list of public intellectuals, donors, and activists in support of a left populist agenda for the Democratic Party.⁴³ The breadth of social movements reflected in the endorsers—and the convergence of political positions since before the election—are a starting point. Of particular note is the inclusion of the head of United Steelworkers, a major industrial union that had made sympathetic gestures to Trump for his rhetoric against free trade agreements.⁴⁴

Ultimately, the strength of social movements short of participating in political processes and exercising power, lies in their capacity to en-

2017; Taylor Hosking, "The changing landscape of student protest in higher education," *The Atlantic*, 20 December 2017.

42 Chris Taylor, "They struck net neutrality down: Now it's becoming more powerful than they could possibly imagine," *Mashable.com*, 18 January 2018.

43 Richard Eskrow, "A pledge to transform the resistance, and America," *OurFuture.org*, 21 February 2018.

44 Campaign for America's Future, <http://campaignforamericasfuture.org/signers>.

gage and mobilize millions. This is the stated goal of the Poor People's Campaign, launched by the North Carolina-based church leader Reverend Dr. William Barber II. The campaign was inspired by the last, uncompleted protest action of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. before his assassination in 1968.

Rev. Dr. Barber and co-chair Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis have undertaken an ambitious plan designed to bring poor people together from across the country with a moral appeal. "This campaign is not about a single party or policy agenda," they wrote in *Time*. "It's about saving the soul of America by challenging the enmeshed evils of systemic racism, poverty, the war economy, ecological devastation and our distorted national morality." They envision a "third Reconstruction" carrying on the mission of the Civil Rights movement, centered by the existing black movement but bringing in broad sectors of economic victims of neoliberalism. Explicitly targeting Trump, they called for a campaign that would "unite the poor, disenfranchised and marginalized to take action together, combining direct action with grassroots organizing, voter registration, power building and nonviolent civil disobedience."⁴⁵

Barber's standing is such that he will not have to work hard to bring out social movement organizations. Gatherings of this kind—minus the participation of really effective numbers of working people—have been seen and heard from repeatedly. To actually change the country's direction, this campaign would need to inspire a tidal wave of the power-starved, on the order of the Women's March, but with greater numbers and militancy. If successful, a real midterm mandate would be undeniable—for the resistance, with a revitalized broad Left heard from for the first time in decades.

⁴⁵ William Barber II and Liz Theoharis, "Rev. Dr. Barber & Rev. Dr. Theoharis: It's time to fight for America's soul," *Time*, 5 December 2017; Eleanor J. Bader, "Huge organizing effort, '40 Days of Action' launching to fight poverty," *Alternet*, 4 March 2018.

The Union Dilemma

The labor movement would be the heart of resistance in previous decades. Since the late 1930s, they have been a bulwark against the Republican Party. As noted above, three of the largest unions—which mostly represent public school teachers and public sector workers in government offices—are financial mainstays of the Democratic Party. Their constituencies are directly dispossessed by the punishing spending cuts that are the hallmark of Republican policy.

Yet unions have been stripped of power as their membership has declined since the 1980s. Overall, Republicans have been combatting unions through legal restrictions, undercutting dues-checking, and whittling away at long-standing, hard-won pay, health care provision, and pension agreements. Deindustrialization has drastically reduced private sector industrial unions. As a result their finances and ability to mobilize members is of less use to the Democrats.

Public sectors unions have grown comparatively, but they face a bitter confrontation in the Supreme Court. The appointment of Justice Neil Gorsuch by Trump (a selection that was Obama's to make, but was blocked by the Republican majority in Congress pending the election) guaranteed that the Court would be majority rightist. *Janus v. AFSCME* contests Illinois's requirement that public employees in a unionized position pay a fee to the union if they choose not to join. The appellants accepted lower court rulings against them to get in position for a Supreme Court review.

A decision against AFSCME, one of the largest public sector unions, threatens to cripple all such unions financially. This would not only drastically reduce unions' bargaining power. It would also push labor to the fringes of politics, and undercut the Democratic Party deeply. The

only established bulwark of and for workers would be so weakened, the entire opposition to neoliberalism would be left to the mercy of one trend in capital or another. Only working class supporters could make up the difference, and the ability to draw on those supporters would be drastically reduced.⁴⁶

Within the public sector branch of labor groups, competition and fragmentation rule. They are also alienated from private sector unions, further damaging the movement's future. Some unions representing industrial and building trades workers, as well as law enforcement, have leaned towards Trump. In a disastrous situation facing their members, these unions cling to hope that Trump's rhetorical calls for increasing domestic manufacture and opposing free trade agreements will benefit them.⁴⁷

Another, sorrier reason for unions' acceptance of Trump is widespread acceptance of his anti-immigrant policies and his white nationalist rhetoric among some workers. Unions that worked for Clinton in 2016 found that this sentiment, spread by far rightists in the rust belt areas of key states, stymied the Democrats' efforts. Now they are at a disadvantage when they seek to mobilize their bases to join the resistance.

Unions, even pitted against one another, serve their function in taking on income inequality and workers' rights. Workers still turn to them for support, notably in the low wage service and agricultural sectors. Under Obama some headway was made in raising the minimum wage. Under Trump, the influence of Wall Street became direct power in the White House, despite his fraudulent claims of opposing bankers.

Chances for a unified labor movement in response to Trump's attacks on workers' rights and living standards seem remote. Some unions will increase their identification with non-labor social movements, despite the influence of the political far right among workers who identify with nativism, militarism, gun ownership, and police repression in poorer communities of color.

The AFL-CIO, which includes most major unions, has moved away from its initial gestures of acceptance.⁴⁸ Leaders in Sanders's camp, Labor for Our Revolution, have been the most outspoken in support of the resistance. National Nurses United took the lead in organizing People's Summit meetings in Chicago, attracting thousands of activists from across the country to discuss electoral strategy and the complicated politics coming out of far-flung localized electoral efforts.⁴⁹ The extent to which a growing resistance can speak directly to working people on issues of social and economic security and democratic rights, unions will be better equipped to take on the anti-labor confederacy now in power. It remains to be seen whether unions will actively join that effort, but the survival of the labor movement may depend on it.

The Democrats and the Left: Political Action

The need for focus on political action often comes to the fore, more so than in previous years. There is a growing recognition that to be effective, the movements' issues need to be expressed as part of the mobilization of the majority of voters. New groups set up for that purpose, and to elect local candidates, appeared in the aftermath of the Sanders cam-

46 Michael Paarlberg, "The future of American unions hangs in the balance," *The Guardian*, 26 February 2018.

47 Steven Greenhouse, "The unions that like Trump," *The New York Times*, 8 April 2018; Richard Pérez-Peña and Sheryl Gay Stolberg, "Police unions hail Trump's easing of security: Local officials worry," *The New York Times*, 4 April 2017.

48 Michael Tackett, "Union chief says Trump, having 'actively hurt' workers, is losing support," *The New York Times*, 23 January 2018.

49 Rand Wilson and Peter Olney, "From 'Labor for Bernie' to 'Labor for Our Revolution'," *Organizing Upgrade*, 13 September 2017; David Weigel, "Other lessons from the People's Summit," *Washington Post*, 12 June 2017.

paign. Sanders launched Our Revolution, which has local groups in fifty states.

This type of group is not new for the US. Progressive Democrats of America helped launch the Sanders campaign in 2015. Emily's List has been pushing a center-left feminist agenda for decades. The campaigns of past Democratic figures like one-time presidential contender Howard Dean and the late Minnesota Senator Paul Wellstone are survived by similar policy advocacy groups and political funders (PACs). Some of the established groups have edged to the left in response to the enormities of the GOP under Trump, while new ones are free of any historic attachment to inner party politics.

While the electoral activism in the resistance takes the form of numerous groups growing in every state, 2018 and 2019 will test their ability to pull together. The largest groups function independently of one another. Our Revolution and others noted above have been joined by a deluge of networks and local groups with names like Brand New Congress, Knock Every Door, Flippable, Run For Something, and Sister District. Working Families Party uses ballot status in a few localities to boost left and center-left candidates.⁵⁰

These groups are just starting out for the most part. Some have roots in Occupy, others come from the Sanders campaign. Still others were pulled together by angry Democrats. Their commonality is in their recognition that the priority task leading up to the 2020 election is breaking the hegemony of the Republican Party (and in many cases, right-leaning Democrats) free of the control of Democratic leaders and corpo-

rate funding. That recognition sets them apart, not only from the "establishment" Democrats, but from the social movements and political left groups still grappling with their traditional missions as they face the bitter new terms of the Trump era.

There is a tension between Sanders and Clinton supporters that continues to flare up at different points, and this tension puts distance between some anti-Trump electoral groups. In 2017, the party old guard exploited this tension in a party vote for chairman, a position that commands little power but a lot of public attention. When Chuck Schumer, as Senate Minority Leader the most powerful post-Obama Democrat and a solid centrist, sought to mend fences by backing a Sanders supporter, he was pushed aside by Obama. The party stalwarts went for Obama's choice, who proved ineffectual, exacerbating the tension and leaving the public puzzled as to just what direction the party planned to take.⁵¹

In a major upset, leaders of the California Democratic Party, a stronghold of the Center-left in the party, voted not to endorse long-standing Senator Dianne Feinstein, a moderate, for re-election.⁵²

The old guard Democrats have made some moves that betray a fear of encroachment from the Left. In Texas, where the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee has set its sights on gaining a majority of Congress members in a Republican bastion (and where that party has long been dominated by far rightists), an attack on a center-left contender attracted national attention.⁵³ This fight will not be re-

50 Charlotte Alter, "The resistance helped Democrats win on Tuesday: Now they're turning to 2018," *Time*, 9 November 2017; LA Kaffman, "The resistance to Trump is blossoming—and building a movement to last," *The Guardian*, 9 November 2017; Peter Dreier, "The anti-Trump movement: Recover, resist, reform," *American Prospect*, 4 April 2017; Mark Pazniokas, "The Working Families, pushing Democrats to the left," *The Connecticut Mirror*, 11 February 2018.

51 Edward-Isaac Dovere, "DNC overhaul struggles as Sanders-Clinton rivalries persist," *Politico*, 16 January 2018; Bill Barrow, "How to counter Trump? Democrats still searching," *Boston Globe*, 21 October 2017.

52 Seema Mehta and Phil Willon, "California Democrats' snub of party icon Dianne Feinstein could be a speed bump—or a signal," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 February 2018.

53 David Weigel, "Democratic group faces backlash after intervening in crowded House primaries," *Washington Post*, 2 March 2018.

solved easily. If the insurgent Left in the party is suppressed, any appeal the party might have for disillusioned Democrats will be offset by demoralization and disunity. “Resistants” will not give up lightly in the face of the greater imminent danger of a second Trump term.

While social movements are just beginning to lobby the party seriously, left populist political left groups are making it a priority. A fast-growing new group, Indivisible, takes its lead from an analysis of Tea Party tactics and their possible application for developing a left populist politics. Indivisible played a leading role in organizing mass opposition to the Republican tax bill. The group also arranged showdowns with elected officials over the Republicans’ alternative to Obamacare, delaying the vote which was to have been Trump’s biggest first term coup.⁵⁴

In an enlightening essay, Stuart McIntyre describes the scope of the emergence of a “resistance network” in one state alone—Ohio, an industrial graveyard where Trump took out Clinton by 8.6 points:

The “Resistance” in Ohio is made up of hundreds of grassroots groups that emerged after Trump was elected. The launch of the Indivisible Guide, which led to the formation of 7000+ groups spanning every single congressional district in America, and the Women’s March in January can be seen as the starting point. There are nationally-based groups, such as Indivisible and Women’s March, state-based groups like Action Together Ohio, and also independent local groups. I would estimate that there are still upwards of 100 active grassroots groups, and thousands of activists across the state that are part of the “Resistance.”

I was first awed by the scale of the “Resistance” at a Indivisible District 12 subgroup leaders meeting in March. There were about 35 people at the meeting, each of whom led a “subgroup” within the district. In March, Indivisible D12 had 40+ subgroups, 500

people who had attended a meeting, had already hosted multiple events with 200+ participants, and had more than 3000 people as members in its FB group. Sitting in that meeting was my ‘holy shit’ moment. I was sitting there thinking to myself — “Holy shit, D12 has hundreds of people in their base, and there are 15 other districts in Ohio. And Indivisible isn’t even the only ‘Resistance’ group. This thing is fucking massive!” [...]

I realized in that meeting that I was only scratching the surface of the “Resistance.” In terms of capacity, it’s not an exaggeration to say that the Ohio “Resistance” network has, by far, the widest base of any left-of center group in the state. [emphasis in original] There are important questions about ideology, program, demographics, and the depth and durability of these organizations, but they are truly a grassroots force to be reckoned with. The defeat of Trumpcare alone is an astonishing achievement. For me, being a part of the “Resistance” network in Ohio has been humbling, because of how massive their base is, and how its sheer size dwarfs much of the organizing work I’ve been involved with in Ohio.⁵⁵

The scattered efforts to mobilize voters in a left direction can be found across the country, at state, regional, and municipal levels. Some operate independently of the Democrats, some are Berniecrats or other dissident Democrats, and some focus on local legislation rather than on electoral contests.⁵⁶ In July 2017, twenty state-based organizations from thirteen states formed a working coalition, the State-Based Power Caucus, highlighting racial justice and class issues. Representatives from national networks and movement leaders are active in the caucus.⁵⁷

Social movements have formed around single demands or identification with a particular constituency. The traditional political Left has grown out of various traditions, many of which

54 Doug Kriss, “What is Indivisible? Political group hopes to be flip side of tea party,” *CNN.com*, 11 February 2018; Mark Brown, “Fed by anti-Trump fervor, progressive activists gear up for 2018, 2020 elections,” *The Chicago Sun-Times*, 2 February 2018.

55 Stuart McIntyre, “Six months in the ‘Resistance,’” *Organizing Upgrade*, 29 November 2017.

56 Ethan Young, *Growing from the Concrete: Left electoral politics in the United States*, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung New York Office, November 2015.

57 State-Based Power Caucus, “Twenty state organizations unite into state-based power caucus,” *Organizing Upgrade*, 28 September 2017.

were thrown up for grabs with the collapse of the Soviet model and the adaptation of foreign social democratic parties to neoliberalism.

The Socialist Dilemma

Centrists on the defensive have always been particularly afraid of being rebaited. When Bernie Sanders suffered no consequences after declaring himself a democratic socialist, it took the entire political spectrum by surprise. Even under Franklin D. Roosevelt, when the executive branch took on “economic royalists,” the “s-word” carried the taint of the foreign, the alien, mob rule. Recent polling shows the national mood about capitalism and socialism has shifted dramatically—and without a prominent, or even recognized national organization espousing socialism.⁵⁸

There are many left social movement leaders and activists who consider themselves independent socialists. As they move into political action, they do so less as socialists than as part of the anti-Trump camp. The resistance does not promote socialism, despite broad identification with socialism as a political stance and opposition to capitalism as a system. In other words, it is a popular front.

The old political Left, mostly socialist, remains isolated and fragmented into tiny groups. Activists who join to make an impact on the current political balance, find that lack of structure and funds prevent this. Existing in the margins has been their lot for so long that they accept it as the natural order of things. Socialist groups become revolving doors where young activists get basic skills and political grounding, then move on to nonprofits and more established, non-socialist projects. Only a handful of socialist groups favor working for Democratic candi-

dates, and they have little influence in political campaigns outside of a few minor efforts. This is a far cry from the 1930s and 40s, when Communists and Socialists could swing elections in a few localities.⁵⁹

Yet the impact of Sanders’s successes in various state primaries and party caucuses still has not dawned on many in the Left, in parties, social movements, or intellectual circles. Sanders’s social media-generated base produced the highest vote numbers for an avowed socialist in US history, far and away. The claim by some that “he’s not a real socialist” can’t dispel the fact that the avowed socialist finished the primary season with 13,206,428 votes. The previous high water mark for a socialist presidential candidate was set by the legendary Eugene V. Debs on the Socialist Party ticket in 1920: 913,664 votes out of 26.75 million overall votes cast.

One group benefited heavily in the wake of the Sanders campaign: Democratic Socialists of America, which grew explosively just before and after the 2016 election. DSA had some success attracting young activists in the early 2010s, but they made their biggest impression since their founding in 1982 by throwing their forces into the Sanders campaign.

The influx of young people into DSA has made it the most important socialist group in the country.⁶⁰ They benefited directly from Sanders’s advocacy of democratic socialism. But indecision regarding non-socialist progressive candidates has kept the traditional political Left, including DSA, largely incidental to the direction of the resistance, with some important exceptions in 2017 elections.

Other socialist groups gave the Sanders campaign quiet support, or opposed it altogether.

⁵⁸ Max Ehrenfreund, “Bernie Sanders is profoundly changing how millennials think about politics, poll shows,” *Washington Post*, 25 April 2016.

⁵⁹ Ethan Young, *Mapping the Left: Progressive politics in the United States*, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung New York Office, November 2012.

⁶⁰ Mike Konczal, “What Democrats can learn from the Democratic Socialists about rebuilding the left,” *Vox*, 20 December 2017.

Suspicion of Sanders stemmed mainly from his choice to contend in the Democratic primaries against Clinton, after a long political career as a left independent. The notion that Sanders sold out to the Democrats, and was being used as a “sheepdog” to lure innocent radicalized youth into a bourgeois party, was spread by a few socialist groups.

This dismissal turned to hostility when Sanders came out for Clinton after she won the primaries, identifying Trump as too big a danger to ignore. At that point, a number of prominent DSAers issued an open letter declaring they would not support Clinton over Trump.⁶¹ While this was not the majority view, it soon metastasized to the point where the national organization downgrades campaigning for non-socialist candidates inside or outside the Democrats: “DSA will concentrate its scarce national electoral resources on supporting chapters that are campaigning for open socialists who are running as Greens, independents, or in partisan Democratic primaries.”⁶²

This position ran counter to the trend towards a cross-ideological push against Trump and the Republicans. It puts the dream of a mass socialist movement, brought about by DSA, above the urgent need to win political space for the broad Left before any mass affirmation of socialism is realizable. Effective electoral action against the Right is the primary means to winning that space.

Very few left candidates who run to win, run as socialists, because of the continued stigma against socialism in the US. On the surface, Sanders’s results and the good showing among 25 socialists endorsed by DSA in November 2017 races encouraged the view that those days

were over, or fast coming to an end. This reading may prove dangerously myopic.

Sectarianism has always been a mark of Cain among American socialists. While the political movement has common roots with trade unionism, it has been less attuned to concurrent social movements over the course of two centuries. “Tradition’s chains,” sectarianism and dogmatism, distorted socialists’ grasp of American phenomena like post-Civil War Reconstruction, the omnipresence of white supremacy, and the historic waves of feminism. Ignorance, and stereotyped ideas of who “belonged” to the working class and who opposed it, all alienated the political Left from activists in social movements, to the detriment of both.

A persistent pattern had every party and group focusing on ensuring that the socialists of one’s own group got to lead the broader movement. The current resistance offers a new chance to give socialism meaning in a mass setting that already exists, instead of relying on agitation to create one from scratch, dominated by one group.

In another branch of left politics, signs of a different direction emerged out of the long fight for municipal power by black radicals in Jackson, Mississippi. In 2017 Chokwe Antar Lumumba of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, a black nationalist, revolutionary organization, won the race for mayor of this important Deep South city by a big margin. His father Chokwe Lumumba had previously won the seat but died shortly after taking office. Antar, who ran as a Democrat in the tradition of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party led by Fannie Lou Hamer and Aaron Henry in Civil Rights days, is the most openly radical official in a position of this magnitude. He represents an ongoing movement promoting participatory democracy and cooperatively run businesses and public services. As Lumumba told journalist Amy Goodman,

61 74 Members of Democratic Socialists of America, “The Left is under no obligation to support Hillary Clinton,” *In These Times*, 4 November 2016.

62 Joseph M. Schwartz, “DSA Convention adopts national political priorities,” *Democratic Socialists of America*, 16 December 2017.

[O]ur plan is to incorporate more people, giving people voice who have not had it. That is a shift from what we've seen in traditional politics. It's usually the lay of the land is given to those who are most privileged. And so, we're trying to incorporate more people in the process, give voice to the voiceless. And it starts with identifying, you know, the areas of greatest need. [...] [We] need to show people dignity and respect in their jobs and also see the economic benefit of it. You know, Jackson is like many cities: It does not have a problem producing wealth; it has a problem maintaining wealth. And so, if you put more money in the people's hands that live and work here, you stand a greater chance of receiving it back.⁶³

The 2017 Lumumba election connected a left campaign in the South to the Sanders campaign. This event hints at possibilities for change in the relationship between the left populists and the black electorate, and the white-dominated Democratic Party in the Republican-dominated South. Jackson, taken together with other electoral upsets in the region in 2017, suggests that a new multiracial voting bloc could shake the Republican stranglehold on power in the South.

All of these efforts are moving ahead under the shadow of a default mode of capitalism—

suppression of the Left, counterrevolution. The most serious threats are aimed at people of color, part of an entrenched pattern in American society. The FBI has begun directly prosecuting those they call “black identity extremists” as a criminal threat. This attack move is familiar to activists of the 1960s and 1970s who were aware of the FBI’s COINTELPRO (“counterintelligence program”) campaign of surveillance, infiltration, and assassination. The campaign was a more direct, and deadly, manifestation of state repression than the post-WWII red hunt. COINTELPRO effectively wiped out the militants that emerged out of the work of the civil rights movement, including the Black Panther Party, prisoners, and students. “Black identity extremists” is a vague catch-all for the current Movement for Black Lives and similar groups challenging police violence and militarization.⁶⁴

The connection between the Department of Justice under Attorney General Jefferson Sessions, which oversees the FBI, and white supremacist power in the South, shows how hegemony for the Right and Far Right normalizes practices which were pushed into the shadows by the social movement Left over the last fifty years.⁶⁵

Political Problems of the Resistance

Taking the focus from the micro to the macro, mapping the resistance brings up strategic questions that place fast-changing phenomena in the context of the larger history of the

US Left. The success of Trump and company re-raises a fundamental point: a direct route

⁶³ Amy Goodman, “Jackson, Miss. Mayor-elect Chokwe Lumumba: I plan to build the ‘most radical city on the planet,’” *Democracy Now!* (television interview transcript), 26 June 2017; Kali Akuno, *Casting shadows: Chokwe Lumumba and the struggle for racial justice and economic democracy in Jackson, Mississippi*, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung New York Office, February 2015.

⁶⁴ Martin de Bourmont, “Is a court case in Texas the first prosecution of a ‘black identity extremist?’,” *Foreign Policy*, 30 January 2018; Mana Azarmi, “The FBI’s ‘black identity extremists’ report and the surveillance reform debate,” *Center for Democracy and Technology*, 18 December 2017.

⁶⁵ Carimah Townes, “Despite his racist past, Jeff Sessions confirmed as attorney general,” *ThinkProgress*, Feb 9, 2017; Sean McElwee “This is what a white supremacist Department of Justice looks like,” *Vice*, 15 January 2018.

away from capitalism neither exists, nor can be created through persistent agitation. The Left must understand and meet mass unrest in the actual form it takes, independent of wishful thinking, and without fixating on a program or inherited doctrine.

The resistance fits the description of a popular front: a broad alliance of liberal and radical forces from different classes against a common threat. "Popular front" is not a common term in political discussion, though the historic Popular Front before and during World War II left a strong mark on society. To some sectors of the political Left, it's the mark of the beast—Stalinism—or at least conciliation of the class enemy. For activists who accept cross-class alliances as a necessity, welcome or not, the phrase rarely enters the conversation, but it's relevant.

Opposition to popular front tactics generally come from left fear of co-optation, or the position that the danger of the tactic becoming a strategy is greater than any gain the tactic might achieve. This view attaches popular front to every defeat in the face of fascism and imperialism, and every victory is downgraded because they were seen as too compromised to be acceptable. The failure of workers to unite against capitalism is chalked up to "false consciousness" and "misleaders."

Now we face a situation where the dangers of eroding democracy and climate destruction define the terms of struggle in urgency and immediacy. The position that the Left's problem is its unwillingness to go on the offensive, can't be justified. The US Left, to use a Nazi-era allusion, is naked among wolves. All it has is potential numbers. The concepts of popular front and united front - in their differences and their connections - are in need of revival and rethinking.

The distinction of united front in the 20th century was its nature as an alliance of the two socialist camps that dominated the workers'

movement—meaning, in the setting of the aftermath of WWI, the Social Democratic and Communist parties around the world. This formula was presented in the early Communist International as an alliance between the parties' leadership and ranks around shared goals, while they continued their internal fight over reform vs. revolution.

The postwar trend toward revolution waned by 1920, and the workers' movement was weakened by the great pro- and anti-war split in the Second (Social Democratic) International during the war, which led to the formation of the Comintern. In 1928 the Comintern officially shifted to the position that the Social Democratic party leaderships were enemies on a par with fascists. After the Nazi Party prevailed over the divided Left in 1933, the Comintern revived united front as a strategic weapon against fascism, and appealed for unity with Social Democratic leaders. By moving toward healing the breach between the two major wings of the movement, it was proposed that a strengthened movement could contest for power after the war.

The Comintern's revived united front position also advocated the popular front, which was conceived as the united front extended to liberals and non-socialist radicals who opposed fascism. It was not projected as a revolutionary strategy, but a defensive move against the fascist attack on bourgeois democracy and gains won by workers in the course of the modern class struggle.

Today the movement is not just divided; it is fragmented and isolated. Terms like "socialism" and "workers' movement" require reframing, if not reinvention. In the US, neither the Socialist nor the Communist parties ever found the basis for a powerful united front, and today they are no longer an important factor in the direction of either the fight for socialism or against fascism.

What Workers' Movement?

Unrest is sweeping the US, and confrontations with powerful agencies are breaking out in unexpected places. This is not usually described as class struggle, but that's what it is.

Traditionally, both capitalists and socialists identified class struggle with trade unionism, especially the enormous organizing and strike campaigns that broke out at various times since the end of the Civil War, and into the 1950s. But this was not the only form of class struggle.

What were once called "new social movements" actually appeared at the same time as trade and industrial organizing, and developed concurrently. Leaders going back to Marx himself had a hard time with movements not explicitly fighting for the working class. Over and over, concern about "alien ideas" and compromise with class enemies led to downgrading the demands and accomplishments of women and oppressed racial groups and nationalities, not to mention other ostracized social sectors. Socialists tended to be more aware of injustice and inequality than most political trends inside and outside the working class, but forms of resistance to these problems often got short shrift when they didn't focus on the rights and wellbeing of workers as a collective, singular grouping.

The view from here and now exposes the blind-spots of the last two centuries: failure to recognize enslaved Africans (and women keeping house, for that matter) as part of what the traditional socialist movement understood as "the working class." Taking on why that was, and too often still shapes the views of many in the Left, is essential. Unfortunately the ideology of a segregated and racially stratified society reduces such questions to individualized blame, punishment, and redemption. In real life, personal transformation follows the life ruptures brought on by political engagement, not the other way around.

There were complicated historical reasons for the Left's failure to see the post-Civil War Reconstruction period as the strongest manifestation of resistance to US capitalist social relations in two centuries. But the failure had a profoundly harmful effect on the Left's ability to draw on the continuity of domestic class struggle. Nor was the Left equipped to recognize that realizing the working class's potential for challenging capital required consistent organizing against discrimination, segregation, and violence against racially branded people, as forms of class oppression.

The limitations of bourgeois democracy were every bit as rooted in capitalist social relations as was labor exploitation, and generally played important roles in maintaining those relations. The rejuvenation of the US Left after the 1950s repression involved bringing this understanding to the center of intergenerational discussions of the Left's decline. The resurgence of social movements—most notably the "second Reconstruction" of the Civil Rights movement, the mass peace movement which challenged militarism and super-patriotism, and the "second wave" of feminism—gave the New Left the living historical grounding to cut through generations of fixed notions.

Today the potential for convergence of these movements is demonstrated by recognition of their shared significance as opponents of Trumpery. This is not simply a turn to "intersectionality." It does not manifest as diverse movements dropping identity politics in favor of class solidarity, or embracing socialism. The outbreak of the resistance is the motion of American working people—skilled and unskilled, inspired by an array of demands stemming from their specific conditions as subjects of capital.

Workers' positions in relation to the means of production, once the be-all and end-all for many a would-be Marxist revolutionary, is no longer

cut and dried. The basis for unity is often unclear and old animosities continue to break out.

What binds them together and moves them is recognition that the country is turning to shit. Quality of life is plummeting, and the “American dream” of upward mobility and increased security from generation to generation is turning to dust before our eyes. The dream was the alternative to the demand for healthcare, education, safety, relative freedom from punishment by law enforcement for everyday occurrences, and social security, as human rights. Neoliberalism and militaristic authoritarianism are now removing the “middle class” access to those basics, and the recognition is spreading fast that these are human rights simply because we can’t live without them.

The Left’s role is explaining that these rights are achievable because of our own labor.

United Front Today

The resistance is a 21st century popular front. It takes many forms, since it is growing out of a fragmented populace. Its goal is not socialism but stabilizing and enhancing democracy as people have known it under capitalism. Which is just as well, since we are nowhere near the revolutionary situation where a society in which workers run society collectively, is immediately foreseeable.

As in the original model, this popular front needs a collective heart and brain that uses a united front of the Left to move in the direction of consolidating and winning democratic political power. Today’s Left is not recognized as large, visible political parties that might find a level of agreement amidst real differences on long term vision.

What actually exists are three sectors engaged in three forms of activism: social movements;

political projects organizing around program, candidates, or legislation; and left intelligentsia.

Social movements have been the main arena for popular opposition to the damage done. They often find one another at odds over turf, funding, resources and choice of allies. Political Left groups vacillate between trying to aid and move the movements towards fighting for power beyond individual reforms, and becoming sects. The intelligentsia produce theory and analysis that give direction to the movements indirectly, sometimes through exposure to their ideas in school, sometimes through independent study. Each group vacillates between identifying with, and rejecting, the other two.

A twenty-first century united front requires a conscious effort by activists in all three areas to bring them together in common, coordinated political action and dialogue. The form such a front would take can’t be predetermined, but its purpose can be: developing a national opposition with a mass base and working class-interested politics.

Currently, both Republicans and Democrats are faced with disinterest and suspicion by voters. The parties are driven to jockey for power in a marketplace of spectacle and celebrity worship, by ideologies framed in the long fight over runaway profiteering vs. government regulation. There is little room for direct public intervention in this arrangement, and the parties usually respond with fear and evasion when confronted. In the era of social media and distrust of government by lobby and corporate donations, the questions of democratic access to power, and accountability of representatives, come to the fore.

The old united front model was party-centric. As a result its conception of democratic participation began and ended in the role of parties setting terms and providing direction. This is impossible today, whether or not it is a prefera-

ble setup. Movement organizations and unions that only mobilize members have bred a deep alienation from politics, and cynicism regarding what the ranks can actually accomplish. Engaging masses of working people today demands a deeper conception of democracy, where policy-making from the base is encouraged and political education and culture is fostered. In an effective national opposition, it's not enough that working people belong to it. It must belong to them.

Hopefully this understanding will shape a new political Left as the fight for power sharpens before the next presidential election. Here is where the distinction between front-building and sect-building is made plain. The resistance is more important than any existing group, and the value of any political Left group will be measured by the extent to which they help or hurt it, not "lead" or capitalize on it.

Either/Or, Then and Now

Reform or revolution, socialism or democracy—these were the Left's hot "either/or" questions in the last century. In fact, revolutionary situations were few and far between, and in the between-times, abstaining from reform struggles meant complete irrelevance. That remains the same, but the question of how to take on reforms without surrendering to the political premises of capitalism is still open.

The anti-democratic practices of "existing" socialist societies placed democracy at odds with revolution and radical reform. This was constantly maximized by all the opponents of socialism, and it handed the "franchise" of democracy over to imperialism and neocolonialism in international discourse—"freedom to choose" under force of arms.

When Bernie Sanders proclaimed himself a democratic socialist, he was distancing himself

from "formerly existing" socialist societies—essentially saving democracy for socialism, the same approach as DSA. His call for a "political revolution" is distinct from old social democracy's acceptance of democracy as defined by current property relations—unquestioning acceptance of elite government's rules and neo-liberal ideology.

Communists never rejected the concept of workers' democracy, however much their efforts ran counter to that principle. Now, however, the Communists' prior claim to being supporters of democracy is moot, while the far right is revealing its anti-popular, fascistic soul. The radical role of working people in realizing democracy is coming front and center.

Every form of representative or delegative democracy is class-interested—reflecting the power and goals of a particular class or classes. Socialist democracy implies democracy that is conducted in the interest of working people, who are, after all, the great majority worldwide. In that sense, only socialist democracy (distinct from the old political movement, social democracy) really qualifies for the title.

The twenty-first century has not provided us with a revolutionary situation, but it demands revolutionary solutions. The capitalist class has taken the species to the brink. The ultimate response is not military or ideological, but political: democratic assertion of democratic power, by any means available. In this process, just what is meant by socialism will be determined by the partisan workers themselves.

Seeing this political project through is the task of the 21st century united front. Martyred organizer María Elena Moyano of Peru (1958-1992) summed it up:

[...] the revolution opens up to life, to individual and collective dignity; it is a new ethic. The revolution is not death, or imposition, or submission, nor fanaticism. The revolution is new life,

*convincing people to struggle for a fair, decent society, side by side with the organizations created by our people, respecting their internal democracy and grafting new buds of power for the new Peru. I shall continue to stand alongside my people, women, youngsters and children; I shall continue to struggle for peace in the name of social justice.*⁶⁶

Moyano's testimony is this century's response to Rosa Luxemburg's final either/or, "socialism or barbarism."

Politicizing Social Movements

If social movements have any hope of unseating and defeating the Republicans and center-right Democrats, they have to prepare to engage in politics. Some have already taken up training to organize their base to register and vote, teaching some basic political principles about whose interests reflect theirs, and getting acquainted with the land mines that try to hold back democratic action in the electoral arena.

These obstacles are legal and financial. All social movements need to be aware that voter suppression is ongoing, and it will take great numbers of people lobbying and protesting to push it back.

Funding must be taken as seriously as a heart attack. While Sanders proved that the enormous piles of corporate money shoveled into major party campaigns can be challenged by a lot of small donations, advertising and other publicity are still expensive and indispensable. The electoral Left has stiff and wealthy competition. Besides the Murdoch media empire, the media corporation Sinclair Broadcast Group is expanding into a top monopoly owner of local television stations. Their stations are already

overladen with "news" propaganda—free commercials for the Right.⁶⁷

Ideology also comes into play. Presumptions about different population sectors have to be faced and squared with the goal of a multiracial, mass political movement based on existing social movements. The extent of racial and cultural segregation in US society is overwhelming. The resistance is made up of people starting at a disadvantage in cutting through their own isolation. Finding an identity can be personally liberating, but it really becomes socially useful in contesting for democratic space and power.

Social movements are already poised against the Right, and their effectiveness poses some of their adversaries' biggest problems. But working specifically to isolate the Right in its various forms has to be a priority. The goals of disempowering the Right, defending democratic rights, and building the organized political strength of working class constituencies are already implicit in the work of social movements, but they should be made increasingly explicit as the electoral showdown approaches. This is primarily up to movement leaders.

The political Left, whether operating in socialist formations or within social movement groups, has a particular responsibility to take on the fragmentation of the broader Left. This means reaching across old boundaries, initiating discussions to put old rivalries and disputes into perspective, in light of the overarching threat from the consolidation of right/far right hegemony. The basis for each particular group's political education and training will always come from their ideological heritage and experience, but that should not stand in the way of agreeing on a framework for joint work in campaigns, and for solidarity against the Right's onslaught.

⁶⁶ Gardens of the Righteous Worldwide, "Maria Elena Moyano: A 'pasionaria' in the fight against poverty," *en.Gariwo.net*.

⁶⁷ Andy Kroll, "Ready for Trump TV? Inside Sinclair Broadcasting's plot to take over your local news," *Mother Jones*, November/December 2017.

In short, the situation demands a transformation of social movements to become consciously political, taking on electoral politics to win the political space needed for all parts of the Left to reach more and more working people. The

decline of the Center and Center-right leaves a vacuum which the Right and Far Right are filling. Their America is one of suffering, militarization, and subjugation. Most people would prefer love, democracy, and food on the table. Just ask them.

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