Challenging the Right, Augmenting the Left

Recasting Leftist Imagination

Edited by
Robert Latham
A.T. Kingsmith
Julian von Bargen
Niko Block

FERNWOOD PUBLISHING
HALIFAX & WINNIPEG

Editing: Jenn Harris
Cover design: Evan Marnoch
Printed and bound in Canada

Published by Fernwood Publishing
32 Oceanvista Lane, Black Point, Nova Scotia, B0J 1B0
and 748 Broadway Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3G 0X3
www.fernwoodpublishing.ca

Fernwood Publishing Company Limited gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Government of Canada, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Manitoba Department of Culture, Heritage and Tourism under the Manitoba Publishers Marketing Assistance Program and the Province of Manitoba, through the Book Publishing Tax Credit, for our publishing program. We are pleased to work in partnership with the Province of Nova Scotia to develop and promote our creative industries for the benefit of all Nova Scotians.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Challenging the right, augmenting the left :
recasting leftist imagination / edited by
Robert Latham, A.T. Kingsmith, Julian von Bargen and Niko Block.
Names: Latham, Robert, 1956- editor. | Kingsmith, A.
T., 1989- editor. | Bargen, Julian von, 1982-
editor. | Block, Niko, 1988- editor.
Description: Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20200163582 | Canadiana
(ebook) 20200163612 | ISBN 9781773632292
(softcover) | ISBN 9781773632308 (EPUB) | ISBN 9781773632315 (Kindle)
Subjects: LCSH: Right and left (Political science)
Classification: LCC JA83 .C37 2020 | DDC 320.5—dc23

Contents

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the various faculty and staff at the Ontario College of Art and Design University (OCADU) who helped facilitate and organize the workshop in Toronto, Augmenting the Left, that was the starting point for this volume. Special thanks go to b.h. Yael, who advanced the project at OCADU in its early stages and was an insightful participant at the workshop. We also recognize the insightful contributions of presenters at the workshop who do not appear in the volume, including Raju Das, Tim McCaskell, Nick Dyer-Witheford, Svitlana Matviyenko, Steve Maher, Karen Murray, Roni Gechtman, James Beirne, Tyler Chartrand, Scott Forsythe, Niloofar Golkar, and Karl Gardner.

Without the substantial support of the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies at York, this project would not have been possible; we extend our gratitude to the staff and relevant committees that made that possible. We also received general support from the York Department of Politics and extend special thanks to its chair, David Mutimer, and administrative assistant, Margo Barreto. A number of other programs and departments at York also offered funding including: Social Science, Humanities, Social and Political Thought, Geography, and Sociology. The efforts of the staff and program directors from those units to extend such help is greatly appreciated.

At Fernwood Publishing, we thank Errol Sharpe, who early saw the worth of this project. It has been a great pleasure to get to know him and finally work directly with him.

Contributors

Sedef Arat-Koç is associate professor in the Department of Politics and Public Administration at Ryerson University.

Niko Block is a doctoral student in political science at York University. His writings have appeared in *The Guardian*, *Canadian Dimension*, *New Internationalist*, and *Jacobin*.

Javier Cuestas-Caza has a PhD in local development from the Polytechnic University of Valencia. He is an assistant professor in the Department of Organizational Studies and Human Development, Escuela Politécnica Nacional, Ecuador.

Bruce Curtis is professor emeritus in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Carleton University.

Sabrina Fernandes has a PhD in sociology from Carleton University and is currently a full collaborating researcher at the University of Brasília. She studies leftist organizing and revolutionary ecologies in Latin America. Her book on the fragmentation of the left has recently come out in Brazil.

Max Haiven is the Canada Research Chair in Culture, Media and Social Justice at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay where he co-directs the ReImagining Value Action Lab. His latest book, published in 2018, is *Art After Money, Money After Art: Creative Strategies Against Financialization*.

Jordan House is a PhD candidate in political science at York University and an instructor in the Department of Labour Studies at Brock University. His research interests include the political economy of prison and prison labour, non-union workers' organizations, and labour movement renewal and strategy.

William S. Jaques is a PhD candidate in the Department of Politics at York University and an adjunct professor in the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Humber College.

Paul Kellogg teaches in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Athabasca University and is chair of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies.

A.T. Kingsmith is a PhD candidate in the Department of Politics at York University and a mental health researcher at the University of British Columbia Urban Studies Lab. He teaches at Ryerson University and has written widely on digital networks, anxiety capitalism, and the political economy of mental health.

Gary Kinsman is a long-time queer liberation, anti-poverty, and anti-capitalist activist in solidarity with Indigenous struggles. He is the author of *The Regulation of Desire: Homo and Hetero Sexualities* and co-author of *The Canadian War on Queers*. He is professor emeritus at Laurentian University.

Rickard Lalander is an associate professor in Latin American studies, Department of World Cultures, University of Helsinki. He also teaches in global development studies at Södertörn University, Stockholm.

Robert Latham is a member of faculty in the Department of Politics at York University.

Magnus Lembke has worked for two decades at the Institute of Latin American studies at Stockholm University.

Terry Maley teaches critical and radical democratic theory in the Department of Politics and the Social and Political Thought Graduate Program at York University. He has written on participatory budgeting, radical democratic social movements, and neoliberalism.

Assya Moustaqim-Barrette is a PhD candidate in political science at York University.

Ronaldo Munck is the head of civic engagement at Dublin City University. He has written widely on Latin America and the impact of globalization on labour. He was a lead author for the International Panel on Social Progress Report "Rethinking Society for the Twenty-First Century."

Lina Nasr El Hag Ali is a doctoral candidate in politics at York University.

Bertell Ollman is a professor of politics at New York University. He has written or edited seventeen books of Marxist studies and in 2002 won the first Distinguished Career Award from the New Political

Science Section of the American Political Science Association. He is the creator of the *Class Struggle* board game.

Justin Paulson is a political sociologist and social theorist teaching in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology and the Institute of Political Economy at Carleton University.

David Ravensbergen is a union activist and PhD student in social and political thought at York University. He has published work on Marxism, climate change, and the political economy of the environment.

Herman Rosenfeld is a Toronto-based socialist activist, educator, organizer, and writer. He is a retired national staffer with the Canadian Auto Workers (now Unifor) in their Education Department. Before that, he worked on the line and served as an elected union representative in an auto assembly plant.

Aparna Sundar is a political scientist affiliated with Azim Premji University, India. She works on issues of labour and livelihoods, as well as the politics of democracy, nationalism, and fascism, with a focus on South Asia.

AK Thompson got kicked out of high school for publishing an underground newspaper called *The Agitator* and has been an activist, writer, and social theorist ever since. He is the author and editor of several books, including, most recently, *Premonitions: Selected Essays on the Culture of Revolt* (2018).

Özgün E. Topak is an assistant professor in the Department of Social Science at York University. His research areas include surveillance studies, migration, border studies, and human rights.

Julian von Bargen is a writer, researcher, teacher, and doctoral candidate in the Department of Political Science at York University, Toronto.

Introduction

Augmenting the Left

Challenging the Right, Reimagining Transformation

Niko Block

Beginning in January 2011, democratic uprisings across the Arab world rapidly toppled four governments and destabilized many more. Across Europe and North America, it had by then become obvious that any reforms stemming from the global financial crisis would be purely technocratic, not redistributive. For a left weary of liberal subterfuge and apology, the spectacle of the Egyptian revolution in Cairo's Tahrir Square was especially inspiring. What if people everywhere were to occupy key urban spaces and refuse to leave until their demands were met? In September of that year, the Occupy movement spread across the globe with a force that most would never have imagined possible. For several weeks, rising economic inequality became the top story even in the mainstream media. A stunning number of politicians acknowledged the disturbing concentration of wealth and income within the top 1 percent of their societies, and the proponents of business-friendly politics, it seemed, transformed from voices of reason into sweaty, stammering grifters pleading before an angry jury.

It looked for a moment as though change was inevitable — yet the movement declined almost as fast as it rose. Ironically, the original poster for Occupy Wall Street read, "What is our one demand?" Whereas the demand for democracy resonated across the Arab Spring, Occupy never answered this simple question and its lack of clear objectives led to growing impatience from the mainstream press. The movement was from the start also debilitated by internal disagreements and a lack of organization stemming from competing partisan and anarchist tendencies, and throughout

the last two months of the year the encampments were gradually stamped out by direct state repression.

Not only did these transnational revolutionary waves fail to achieve their initial promise; eight years on, the forces of reactionary bigotry are now more powerful than any of us had predicted. Even for leftists who, over the past three decades, have ridiculed the assumption that the age of global liberalism was nigh, the recent surge of nationalist authoritarianism across the Philippines, India, Europe, Brazil, and the US has been dizzying. The Arab uprisings, meanwhile, have been either repressed by reconstituted dictatorships or, in the cases of Syria, Libya, and Yemen, collapsed into civil wars that persist to this day.

In a nutshell, the events of the past decade have made it clear that the hand of history will not intervene to neutralize the crises of capitalism. On the contrary, capitalism's self-reinforcing tendencies are strong enough to ensure that its own innate crises, specifically financial and environmental crises, will never spontaneously ignite systemic change. Rather, the transformative crisis must be a political one, charged with active discussion, organizing, and solidarity. This in turn raises the issue of what kinds of opportunities for *ideological* transformation exist in the twenty-first century. Will elite interests succeed in perpetuating capitalist ideology or will their increasingly obvious hypocrisy foment resistance?

Many on the left now talk about Occupy with disdain, try to forget about it, or even pretend that they were never involved. But in light of the work that needs to be done, I believe its history is instructive for a number of reasons. First, it was the single most important moment of consciousness raising in recent memory. In its wake, the concept of class conflict re-emerged, the socialist left in North America became increasingly self-confident, and a few key public intellectuals amplified their criticism of growing wealth and income inequality (Chomsky 2013; Stiglitz 2013; Piketty 2014). Second, we learned that the tactic of occupying public spaces carries major risks but does in fact work to garner attention, and it could probably succeed in pressing specific demands if it were more coherently organized. Third, we learned that there are thousands of people who are still drawn to the *idea* of revolutionary politics, but they are only likely to hit the streets when their imaginations have been sparked — a moment when the battle suddenly seems *winnable*. And fourth, we learned

that it is also unwise to launch a movement before concrete demands have been articulated.

These last two themes — of narratives and vision — deserve some elaboration. This introduction will draw from the book's contributions to argue that the current left's shortcomings in these fields have rendered it difficult to develop a narrative and vision that garner popular support. Amidst the tumult and opportunity that marked the beginning of the twenty-tens, this crisis of vision has since become especially pressing.

Indeed, the central argument of this book is that the crises of the twenty-first century call for a radical recasting of the leftist imagination. This process involves building bridges between the real and the imaginary, so that the path to achieving political goals is plain to see. Accordingly, the articulation of leftist goals must resonate with people in concrete ways, so that it becomes obvious how the achievement of those goals would improve their day-to-day lives. The left, in this sense, must appeal to people's existing identities and not condescend the general public as victims of "false consciousness." All this means building movements of continual improvement and refusing to ask already vulnerable people for short-term losses on the abstract promise of long-term gains. As we will see below, this project also demands that we understand precisely why right-wing ideology retains a popular appeal in so many spaces. These were among the central themes addressed at the Augmenting the Left symposium held in downtown Toronto in May 2017, four months after the inauguration of Donald Trump.

By augmenting the left, then, we mean adapting it to the crises of our time and even getting ahead of them. We mean abandoning some of the wishful thinking that has persisted in left-wing thought, reconciling certain counterproductive divisions within the left, and strategizing for the work that lies ahead in this century. Five specific subjects call for attention, which are addressed in each of this book's sections. First, the left needs new ways to engage working-class people who are already disillusioned with the system they inhabit but who are nonetheless estranged from anti-capitalist organizing. Second, the left must find ways to undermine reactionary currents of ethnonationalism while at the same time supporting anti-colonial movements *in conjunction* with movements against class stratification. Third, the left needs to think about how to strategically build power both inside and outside the state apparatus. Fourth,

the environmental crises of the twenty-first century, especially climate change, demand new forms of resistance that will have to challenge our existing systems of production in unprecedented ways. And finally, the left must understand the cultural dimensions of popular ideology in order to effectively promote notions of solidarity and ecological responsibility.

~

The left has a general appeal that many of us take to be self-evident: we want to fix the crises of inequality and ecological destruction that have been wrought by capitalism. But as several of the book's contributions observe (albeit in different terms), the left's political marginality can in many ways be explained by weaknesses in its narrative and objectives. On the other side of the spectrum, the narratives offered by the right typically have a more intuitive, nationalist character and follow the familiar U-shaped trajectory so common in biblical and other myths (Frye 2004). The protagonists begin from an immaculate and sacred status, then experience a tragic fall often at the hand of outsiders but eventually regain their past glory. It is a trajectory that remains strikingly persistent in Hollywood blockbusters, in which villains disrupt an excessively rosy version of our own world, but the heroes then vanquish the bad guys and return us to the *status quo ante*. The nostalgic character of the right offers us the same: a return to a time of mythologized national greatness, a sense of *destiny*. (Although primarily associated in the Anglophone world with slogans about "making America great again," this kind of irredentist rhetoric — promising a return to past national greatness — is hardly unique to the US, as Sedef Arat-Koç and Aparna Sundar's analysis of Turkish and Indian authoritarianism demonstrates.) Despite their deviations from the historical record, these visions of the past nonetheless resonate in the aggrieved and often paranoid minds of twenty-first century capitalism.

There is a perverse rationality at work in this style of aggrieved nationalism. The structures of power today operate in such obscure and confusing ways that even the most unflinchingly curious political scientists struggle to explain state behaviour. In much the same way that commodities are ascribed magical qualities because the labour that produced them remains hidden from the buyer (Marx 1976), the obscurity of political power today virtually demands that the gaps in our knowledge be filled by conjecture and even conspiracy theory. Yet all too often the outcome is

ethnic scapegoating. The implications follow inexorably: once we escape the control of the "globalists," or exorcise the infiltration of immigrants, then we can be great again. (As Paul Kellogg argues in Chapter 4, tendencies of racial resentment are at the heart of nationalist authoritarianism in the United States today.)

Indeed, while these myths render national greatness an abstract but nonetheless *imaginable* outcome, the more concrete objectives offered by conservative demagogues are strikingly attainable. In other words, despite the grandiosity of their narratives, conservatives tend to offer policies that are almost comically modest: punish the villains and lower the taxes. Yet this modesty is their strength. After half a century in which progressive ambitions for the public sphere are almost always stymied, we should hardly be surprised if most voters have lowered their expectations. On top of the perverse rationality of paranoia, then, we might say there is also a cynical rationality within the reactionary mindset of today.

What follows is a cycle of chaos and anxiety that becomes difficult to break. In Trump's United States, for instance, we have witnessed an escalation of the state's sadistic and criminally negligent treatment of undocumented migrants, whose numbers continue to swell in concentration camps along the southern border. In Chapter 20, Max Haiven elaborates the revanchist character of these conservative tendencies, suggesting that the language of revenge has, amidst the crisis and confusion of the twenty-first century, become a dominant logic in politics. As Terry Maley similarly suggests, a certain "mix of fear, alienation, and desperation" has set in amidst the sense of despondency generated by the entrenchment of capitalist interests. As political hopes become frustrated, people become inured to the suffering of others and at times even desire it.

Liberal centrists (such as the Democratic Party or the Canadian Liberal Party) may forcefully rebuke the politics of scapegoating and *schadenfreude*, but they have virtually nothing to offer the typical pro-business voter who simply wants lower taxes and higher demand for labour in their locales. In particular, liberal parties around the world seem to be incapable of speaking to lower-middle-class rural voters who gain little from government services, whose local economies are propelled by the private sector, and who do in fact carry an unfair tax burden. Urban workers have only slightly more incentive to endorse liberal parties, who generally favour the professional middle class. As Robert Latham, Jordan

House, and Bertell Ollman all suggest, there is a really existing conflict between the lower and upper classes. Yet centrist liberals hardly bat an eye as they blame the poor for their poverty or claim that progressive income redistribution is simply impossible.

And what, we might ask, are the narratives and the objectives on offer from centrist liberals? Perhaps some empty words about the greatness of the Enlightenment, or a few familiar bromides about the wonders of our globalized economy. It hardly inspires, at this point. At the very least, there is a growing awareness that the liberals offer little of value on questions of inequality and the environment. (As Assya Moustaqim-Barrette argues, liberal prescriptions centred on lifestyle activism are hardly up to the task.) Indeed, if there is an opportunity for the socialist left today, it is because fewer and fewer people are drinking the Kool-Aid of liberal capitalism.

But what, then, does the socialist left offer by way of narrative and vision? If there is any truth in the above, then political power is largely built upon narratives that are romantic yet ring true, and objectives that seem both desirable and attainable. Some strands of left-wing ideology do have these characteristics, but today's left is so diverse that it is difficult to say anything sweeping about it. Certainly our historical narratives are contested. The most mollifying might relate to stories of emancipation for Blacks, women, or queer people. But historical victories in this vein are so often claimed — perhaps fairly — by liberals, while those on the socialist left tend to stress that these struggles are far from over. (The contribution from Elise Thorburn and Gary Kinsman is a case in point.) At the same time, the traditional Marxian narrative of class conflict and revolutionary uprising still resonates with many, as Occupy demonstrated. But when have such uprisings succeeded? The question has no straightforward answer. Perhaps we owe almost everything to the class struggles of the past, or perhaps we owe more to liberal reformism than we would like to admit.

In short, the values of the left may be shared — and they are the reason the left will never go extinct — but the stories are not. The result is that it is difficult for the left to capture the popular imagination, even in moments of crisis. Whereas the nationalist right is virtually constituted by mythologization, the socialist left, on the other hand, is organized around tedious historians attempting to explain the rise of capitalism, the process of neoliberalization, or why the promise of the workers' republic has so

often resulted in the tragedy of totalitarianism. Whereas the right's utopian visions of the past and future can be depicted as glibly as the Flintstones and the Jetsons, the left is populated with inveterate pessimists insisting that no modern society has ever been truly free of exploitation or oppression. Whereas the right stands to gain from the absence of information, the left, so long as it has the courage of its convictions, pursues historical truths in all their amoral complexity. As such, the left's approach to history is fundamentally different from the right's. We study it not for the sake of irredentist propaganda, but for a theory of history that might guide our future struggles. "In contrast to the far right's stubborn recollections of mythic past greatness," writes AK Thompson in this volume, "the left opted for citations that could illuminate those internal relations that give discrete events their overarching coherence. Significantly, these citations recalled the enduring and unfulfilled dimensions of the broader struggle."

These divergent approaches to the truth have in this century become especially evident on questions of climate science. As Naomi Klein (2013) has observed, environmental science itself is telling us with ever-growing urgency that revolution is the only rational course of action, while fossil-friendly capitalist states "have had to find ever more thuggish ways to silence and intimidate their nations' scientists."

But the left's opposition to nationalist mythologization and censorial thuggery has done little for its ability to present appealing narratives nor helped it to present objectives that are both graspable and exciting. Certain goals are attainable within the realm of liberal democracy that we inhabit — improved social service provision or more bike lanes, for instance — but the revolutionary promise of the left at times seems difficult to justify. Strategically, the party often looks like a promising vehicle for change, but competent socialist parties have also foundered for simply failing to build an adequate constituency, as the essay by Bruce Curtis and Justin Paulson observes. Social movements outside the state, meanwhile, have sometimes won important gains of their own — especially on a local level, as Lina Nasr El Hag Ali demonstrates. But the question of how to build local, ground-level movements into forces capable of producing system change remains a difficult one, particularly when the nature of that change remains unclear. At what point might we be able to upend the system of exploitation that pervades our workplaces and our pathetically unfair housing market? At what point might we become truly empowered to

the point that banks or oil developers no longer possess privileged seats in government? What, in short, *is* the socialism that we are fighting for? And how would it solve the truly momentous problems we face?

Our most wish-fulfilling proposal has in recent years become encapsulated in the idea of "fully automated luxury communism" (Srnicek and Williams 2015; Bastiani 2019). Arguably, the notion that new technologies will liberate people from work is dismissible as little more than a left-wing version of the Jetsonian pipe dream; indeed, the intellectual basis for the "post-work" or "post-scarcity" economy remains spurious, as David Ravensbergen suggests. But although loosely articulated, the idea has galvanized the much-needed conversation about what kind of future we on the left want to *build*. Most importantly, it has helped the left to break away from the long, self-imposed inertia of viewing revolutionary demands as naive and reformist demands as futile (Srnicek and Williams 2015). In that regard, the joint ambitions of curbing carbon emissions, shortening the workweek, and developing a universal basic income is not a bad place for socialists to start.

This means doing the hard and often dreary work of studying the concrete dynamics of political economy. It means conceptualizing the principles of modern history without naturalizing the exploitation, ecological devastation, and geopolitical competition that have defined it. Finally, it means making demands that are ambitious but attainable, and building mass movements on the basis of improving people's everyday lives. If narrative is constitutive of ideology, then it is incumbent upon us to act as both brutally honest historians and deliriously optimistic economists. Only then, I think, will we start to build a mass movement that avoids the pitfalls of its predecessors.

~

This volume responds to the complex, troubling forces that have brought us to the present moment and surveys strategies for finding a way out. Its contributions are united by a shared understanding of the gravity of the problems we face and the urgency with which we need to solve them. As noted, the following sections focus on strategies for working-class mobilization; the relation between contemporary class and identity politics; the question of the left's political infrastructure; the pressing need for ecological transformation; and, finally, the need for leftist cultural interventions.

Readers will find that each section contains a lively discussion, as the writers actively engage each other on the issues at hand.

In Section 1, authors survey both recent and historic strategies of class mobilization to understand how it can be effectively undertaken amidst the changing terrain of the twenty-first century. Robert Latham describes the subtle ferment of the present moment as a sort of in-betweenness, verging on neither political rupture nor political stability. Getting widespread dissatisfaction to transform into active resistance means obviating the ways in which so many people are *contending* with capitalism — a strategy that has in the past facilitated solidaristic struggles encompassing Black and white workers in the US. Bertell Ollman suggests that activating class consciousness is sometimes simply a matter of talking to workers directly, and putting questions *to them* rather than lecturing them about abstract theory. Jordan House, in a similar vein, stresses that the left, if it is worth its salt, must demonstrate its value to lower-class people on an ongoing basis by speaking in terms of the everyday obstacles they face and winning campaigns that concretely improve their lives.

The theme of nationalism re-emerges in Section 2, where contributors examine the complex ways in which identity shapes class politics, and vice versa. For Paul Kellogg, the unexpected rise of Donald Trump needs to be understood not merely as a "populist" insurgency, but as a campaign that deliberately capitalized on the still-powerful currents of racism and misogyny in the United States — forms of bigotry that appear to be fuelled by anxieties about the collapse of white privilege. Within this context, a critical mass of dispossessed whites, in supporting Trump, attempted to defend what W.E.B. Du Bois called the "psychological wage" of whiteness. Sedef Arat-Koç and Aparna Sundar observe that similar motives — the desire for ethnic privilege as well as geopolitical strength — are motivating support for India's Hindu-nationalist government under Narendra Modi, as well as Turkey's Sunni-nationalist government led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Assya Moustaqim-Barrette argues that ultimately it is class struggle that should be prioritized because class is fundamentally at the root of racial and gender discrimination. Consequently, the lifestyle- and identity-based politics that prevail in liberal culture are completely inadequate for dealing with the crises of our time. Elise Thorburn and Gary Kinsman flip the question somewhat on its head by arguing that identity-based movements

like Black Lives Matter and Idle No More are in fact "at the *cutting edge* of class struggle, in that they mediate relations between race, colonialism, gender, and class." The question of the relation between identity and class is also addressed by Özgün Topak, who argues that the dominant discourse in the Global North reductively characterizes migrants and refugees either as villains or victims. Contrary to both, a reclamation of their identity as *workers* presents an opportunity to foster solidaristic links with domestic political movements.

The contributions in Section 3 focus on how the left needs to strategically engage with the state and the public from here on out. Herman Rosenfeld's chapter offers a series of honest reflections on decades of organizing in the Toronto area, looking at both the merits and the pitfalls of past struggles. Among these, the left needs to build coherent political infrastructures that are capable of exerting real pressure on parties and policymakers. Further, he stresses, the left needs to find a way to coherently engage both anti-oppression *and* class struggles without succumbing to infighting or false accusations.

Bruce Curtis and Justin Paulson, meanwhile, turn our attention to the difficult question of political parties in their analysis of the rise and decline of the Communist Party of Great Britain. They capture the extent to which this history was shaped by forces that surrounded the party, and therefore caution against unsubstantiated allegations that the party compromised to centrists by too much or too little. If we recognize that anti-capitalist parties cannot merely presume a constituency in the working class but should actively build one, then we must also ask: how are leftist constituencies built *in general*? Lina Nasr El Hag Ali responds to this pressing question — the one we started with — by stressing that successful left movements do not occur entirely within the boundaries of the party apparatus but, rather, are led by ground-level movements that succeed in *pushing* parties and public discourse in a leftward direction.

Julian von Bargen, approaching the state from a different angle, looks at how the left should approach the law itself. He argues that while the left has largely abandoned the notion of civil liberties, the concept has now been taken up to alarming effect by the right — especially in the right's churlish defences of hate speech. The result is that North American politics are characterized by an army for individual rights attacking only a few defenders of *collective* rights.

As we turn to the essays addressing the need to revolutionize our systems of ecological management, we are confronted with analyses that are perhaps even more sobering. David Ravensbergen observes that the dominant position on the climate embraced by liberal-left parties has an ecomodernist character, one that relies on clever technological solutions and geoengineering. But these ideas reflect a Holocene mentality that fails to grasp the scale of crisis at work in the Anthropocene. Rather, he suggests, we need to take seriously the argument that the ecological crises unfolding today can only be coherently addressed by a politics of degrowth that inherently challenges the foundations of capitalist production.

Sabrina Fernandes, focusing on Brazilian politics, confronts the fact that the left has not merely been relatively weak in its defence of the environment, but that industrial unions have in certain cases been straightforwardly regressive actors by campaigning for the protection of carbon-intensive jobs. Finally, the contribution from Javier Cuestas-Caza, Rickard Lalander, and Magnus Lembke examines the use and abuse of the idea of *Buen-Vivir* in the Ecuadorian and Bolivian governments that rose in the aughts. *Buen-Vivir* in its most reductive form signified living better and not with more, and it became laden with promises of an eco-socialist agenda that prioritized the particular interests of Indigenous Peoples. But as these governments attempted to square the impossible circle of progressive capitalist development, the concept that formerly encapsulated the manifold demands of the left ultimately became co-opted and lost its political resonance.

In the final section, authors examine the relations between popular culture, affect, and ideology in the rise of the contemporary right and analyze opportunities for leftist intervention. AK Thompson draws on the work of Walter Benjamin to suggest that it is precisely *because* the left approaches history with a truth-seeking mentality (rather than a propagandizing one) that it is more difficult to elaborate a leftist "selection of citable images and artifacts" that appeal to unconscious wish-images. Rather, the basis of ideological appeal for Thompson must be moved into the field of conscious, dialectical images, where the active *production* of new social relations can occur.

Terry Maley suggests that neoliberalism is distinguished in part by a self-legitimating cultural structure that shields the system from leftist movements and results in a profusion of social vulnerability. While that

vulnerability becomes normalized, it also produces feelings of anxiety and anger that are often misdirected. Max Haiven, in a similar vein, suggests that capitalism has long relied upon forms of discipline that are framed as just revenge. The misdirected anger that drives the contemporary right, in this sense, has evolved out of these long-standing systems of discipline.

Will Jaques, in turn, suggests that because so much of the battle occurs in the field of affect and representation, the left should take seriously the tactics of art terrorism and insurgent art in order to "produce subversive and robust aesthetic experiences that involve a felt confrontation with the anxiety-producing contradictions of late-stage capitalism." A.T. Kingsmith, on the other hand, is circumspect, observing that the tradition of *détournement*, or culture jamming, has been taken up by the right, which now deploys memes, pranks, and misinformation in ways that do more to provoke anxiety than improve political consciousness. Across these contributions, we find consistently innovative approaches to the question of why the right has remobilized so rapidly in the present moment — approaches that weave together theories of political economy, state power, affect, and the unconscious with the complexity that the question demands.

~

The decade we now inhabit is by no means the first time that the left has, in a moment of retreat, had to rethink many of its long-standing assumptions. The value of these moments, however, is that everything becomes subject to interrogation, and the essays in this volume share that spirit of reflection. Throughout, there is a refreshingly sober examination of the general bases of solidarity the left must build, and yet also a sensitivity to the nuances of particular struggles.

And this is precisely the attitude we require to avoid further catastrophes: unbending solidarity in a time of divisive propaganda. Observe, for instance, the way that progressive voters were divided in the runup to the 2016 election in the US, when liberal centrists in the Democratic Party cynically accused their socialist rivals of holding reactionary views on race and gender. In the wake of the disaster that ensued, the left is just as heterogenous as it ever was, but there is a growing understanding that both social and economic justice must be pursued in unison. Accordingly, the left is in a unique position today to take advantage of the great diversity

of approaches and issues that have been the hallmark of its otherwise bemoaned fragmentation. More precisely, the worldwide trend of popular disaffection presents a major opportunity for the left, if it is willing to take fragmentation, intra-left conflict, and a history of refusals and defeats as a starting point for next steps in the struggle against capitalism and the far right, rather than as the basis for more conflict or defeatism.

References

Bastiani, Aaron. 2019. *Fully Automated Luxury Communism: A Manifesto*. New York: Verso.

Chomsky, Noam. 2013. *Occupy.* New York: Zuccotti Park Press.

Frye, Northrop. 2004. *Biblical and Classical Myths: The Mythological Framework of Western Culture,* ed. Jay Macpherson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Klein, Naomi. 2013. "How Science Is Telling Us All to Revolt." *New Statesman*, October 29. <newstatesman.com/2013/10/science-says-revolt>.

Marx, Karl. 1976. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I.* New York: Penguin Books.

Piketty, Thomas. 2014. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Boston: Harvard University Press.

Srnicek, Nick, and Alex Williams. 2015. *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work*. New York: Verso.

Stiglitz, Joseph. 2013. *The Price of Inequality.* New York: Penguin.