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Made in the Community of the Future
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in 2008, I was sitting in front of a bonfire in the Valley of 1000 Hills outside of Durban, South Africa, with an international group of social movement activists. I was there interpreting for 2 leaders of the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement and, as usual in the case when I am surrounded by international leftists, everyone began piling up on the American. Totally understandable.

For the last 100 years, the US has been responsible for countless wars and coups against democratically elected left wing governments, and the CIA openly admits it assassinated key figures like post-colonial Congo leader Patrice Lumumba. Nevertheless, it can be pretty annoying to be treated as if there is something wrong with you, personally, due to the place you were born in.

As the laughter of yet another joke at my expense died, I took a sip of Klipdrift brandy and said, “You know what? I could care less about being from the US. I hate it. But I am proud to be from Chicago. If it wasn’t from Chicago, where the Haymarket affair took place, what would all of you do every May 1st?”

This led to a bit of good-natured rumbling. Someone said, "OK, there may have been some important leftist activists in the US at the time, but the Chicago Haymarket anarchists were all immigrants.”

“What about Lucy Parsons?” I said. “She wasn’t an immigrant. She was an African-American woman born in slavery who ended up making important contributions to the World Communist movement.”

Events that happened in the City of Chicago have had a lot more international influence than most residents of the city realize. Growing up in a working class, pre-gentrified neighborhood on the North Side, I don’t even remember studying the Haymarket in school, let alone social movements like the Black Panthers, Young Patriots, and Young Americans.

When a rock is thrown in a small pond, the waves bounce off the banks and emanate back towards the site of the splash. Haymarket was a rock, and the earth is a closed system. I would like to think of each of one of the articles in this issue of Lumpen as a shock wave bouncing back to Chicago from the Haymarket Affair. I hope that the sharing of experiences and tactics fighting neofascist capitalism around the world from Rockford to Maputo, from Delft to Devon Avenue, will give a few fellow Chicagoans ideas on how to pick up the torch and move forwards towards a world where, at the very least, everyone has “Eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, and eight hours for what you will.”

Brian Miller is a graduate of St. Bonaventure College, Boston Latin High School, Simmons College, University of Vermont, and Loyola who has been living in Brazil for 28 years.

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Florida, countries creak out doctors like a Play-Doh fun factory. The US defines itself as the negation of socialism, which it conflates with terrorism. Globally, it squelches efforts to undo privatization or relieve debt, often by violent means. In rhetoric and strategy, it replicates events relatively decent societies, from moderately socialist affluent countries (Western and Northern Europe) to ones labeled draconically anti-privatization in the global south (Lao, Cuba, Bolivia, Venezuela, Vietnam...). The list is long, and includes many countries in which the US has until recently propped up anti-communist regimes.

The US also holds sway over the IMF and World Bank's policy discourse, imposing debt and austerity on most of the world's economies, preventing even well-intentioned governments from providing for their people. We owe it not only to ourselves but the world to fight a force that starts here at home. We owe it to turn away the wrath of armed agents of the regime we perceive as arrayed against us. Must we eschew fleecing billionaires who want to use us to fight their lesser-evil side of the born-again US Civil War? Or will we continue to trust our institutions that hold us back.

The populist right sees themselves as oppressed by a bunch of media-dominant, NASCAR-hating, vegan, Biden-loving, pussy-hat-wearing, easily triggered weak pacifist snowflakes who are only pro-choice because they can't stomach killing fully-formed human beings. The dystopian capitalist elite of Davos imagines themselves ruling over an easily-bulled-and-extorted serf class with no better options than to farm to fill their wealth hoard, serve in their Starbucks and Amazon warehouses of deeper, or go into debt-slavery for certificates promising higher earnings in some fanciful future that's looking more improbable every day.

Some groups engage in violence to defend those they aid, are unable or unwilling to retreat if a mirror is broken into glittering fragments, rarely in touch with each other—and even then, informally, often accidentally. But the way the left talks about anyone, would think that even in their totality they represent no power at all, rather than making up a vast network of opposition. The populists right sees themselves as oppressed while the left believes, unfairly, that a mirror is broken into glittering fragments, rarely in touch with each other—and even then, informally, often accidentally. But the way the left talks about anyone, would think that even in their totality they represent no power at all, rather than making up a vast network of opposition.

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But the outlook here at home is depressing. We owe it not only to ourselves but the world to fight a force that starts here at home. We owe it to turn away the wrath of armed agents of the regime we perceive as arrayed against us. Must we eschew fleecing billionaires who want to use us to fight their lesser-evil side of the born-again US Civil War? Or will we continue to trust our institutions that hold us back? When I'm able to add up all the good and ignore the shrieks and hoofbeats of the horsemanship of the apocalyptics, I have no doubt those forces are in a rude awakening.
This is the transcript of a speech made at the Kourou rocket launching base in French Guyana on October 22, 2021. Jean-Luc Mélenchon, 70, is the Socialist Republican leader of the France Unbowed Movement and a 2022 presidential candidate.

The October 22, 2021 launch of Ariane 5 reminds us of France’s role in humanity’s new frontier: Space. Thanks to clear and constant political will and the tireless work of engineers and scientists, France has become one of the main space powers. Kourou, in French Guyana, is the third largest space port in the world. France now has the second largest space program in the world. All of the scientific and technical accomplishments of our country were achieved because of the State’s mobilizing in the name of the general good. Since then, we have gained all the know-how needed to launch satellites, manned space travel, and interplanetary scientific exploration. This is a great victory, since so much of the modern world is produced by space technology: telecommunications, transport of people and goods, observation of the environment, and digital technologies.

But we need to put up a warning sign. In the field of space, humanity is arriving at a crossroads. A new path is being proposed: “new space.” This corresponds to a liberal, Anglo-Saxon vision. It’s masters are unscrupulous billionaires who dream of making space their new playground, and above all, a new source of profit. Heavily subsidized by the US government budget, these masters have erected dreams of space tourism and giant, lighted space billboards. This will be done through cluttering earth’s orbit with constellations of mini-satellites. They are planning to reproduce all the ruin they caused on earth in space. They are even preparing to start mining in space. The US legalized the privatization of space in 2015, Luxembourg, never behind in opportunities for financial negotiations, followed suit in 2016. The International Space Treaty of 1967 was unilaterally ripped in half. That treaty stipulated that the celestial bodies were res nullius—they did not belong to anyone. What did France do about this? Nothing. Under the rule of Presidents Hollande and Macron, France gave in to servility.

Did humanity arrive in space merely for the publicity purposes of a few billionaires and their multinational corporations? Or was this done to expand the scope of scientific knowledge and improve the lives of the human race? In the next presidential elections, the French can decide to become a pioneer of space exploration for the general interest of humankind. It is up to our country to give life to a francophone model of science and space exploration.

Let’s create a Space University. Let’s create an employment sector related to space. These technical skills, a moment of ecological uncertainty, are much more essential than the “internet of things” Elon Musk is promoting. We propose an international mission to clean earth’s low orbit, and avoid satellite collisions that would have all kinds of consequences on Earth. We are working to revive the idea of international space exploration, including through robotic missions to Mars under the guidance of the UN and the main international scientific associations.

At all costs, France should avoid having its position on space exploration eroded. This threat exists because of the inconsistency of our leaders. There are leaders who permit our autonomy to deteriorate within Europe and within the field of space exploration—something France helped create. Germany ripped up our satellite treaty in 2017. Emmanuel Macron signed a deal that confirmed the realization of manufacturing the Ariane rocket engine in Germany. Meanwhile, the German government, an unfair partner, wants to develop its own mini-launch sector at a launchpad in Norway, instead of Kourou in French Guyana. What’s more, this comes after it refused to exclusively use Ariane rockets for its satellite launches. Bastia! France can’t do anything good if it isn’t the master of its own projects. The time has come to strengthen the National Center for Space Studies (CNES) and restore it to its leadership position in our space policy. It was absurd to accept the installation of a NATO space center in Toulouse without any debate in Parliament, despite the recent history of United States espionage and betrayal. This center has to be closed. France should be capable of defending itself, but it should also refuse to take part in the militarization of space, as promoted by the USA.

If I win the presidential election, France will propose a new treaty on the demilitarization of Outer Space. It will expand its cooperation with Russia and Italy. It will continue our effective cooperation with China. Indeed, France has already sent a camera to Mars on a Chinese rover. Our horizon of space contains a certain vision of humanity. France has to keep its eye on the stars instead of getting bogged down in conflicts. What other path could possibly exist for our country?
Beer as a Weapon Against Capitalism

By Ezequiel Moraes

In 1998, propertyless Brazilians gained a constitutionally guaranteed right to squat in vacant, tax-cofflaw buildings, with the onus falling on mayors and justices to expropriate these buildings from their owners and convert them into ownership-based, low income housing. Since then, squatter movements have appeared all over Brazil, some with hundreds of thousands of members. Porto Alegre, a metropolitan region in southern Brazil with around 4 million inhabitants, is one of the epicenters of the squatter movements. There, in the 20 do Novembro squat, the Movimento de Luta Pela Moradia (MLNM / National Housing Struggle Movement) began brewing its own beer in 2019. What started through selling cups at street parties has grown into a distribution network and its own brand, DA20—a play on words after the expression, “I can’t give you twenty, but I can give you ten.” In this article, Brewmaster Ezequiel Moraes explains how and why they do it.

Most craft brewers here in Porto Alegre to the south of Brazil—and there is a whole network of them—make beer to provide for their individual wellbeing. We decided to start producing beer here because of the 20 do Novembro squat as a social movement—a way of generating collective income through cooperation. The work is centralised. Everyone participates and receives quotas equally, according to the number of hours they put in. Everyone divides the tasks and responsibilities. There is no pay scale hierarchy.

When we started with our DA20 label two years ago, we spoke with a few people who were interested in starting a production network with us based on the principles of conscious consumption. The way we apply conscious consumption in Brazil is by building resistance networks to counter big companies like AMBEV, which dominate the Brazilian and world beer markets. One of the reasons our poor persons’ social movement decided to produce beer was to fight against the economic concentration of resources into the hands of a half dozen people. So to us, making beer is also a weapon of confrontation.

AMBEV acts like all the big corporations in Brazil—within the logic of capitalism, maintaining a vertical, pyramid-based structure of domination and control. Today it is one of the wealthiest corporations in the world, and Brazil is one of the world’s largest beer consuming countries. Nearly nothing happens in this country without the beer corporations’ involvement. For example, a band plays on a concert, and its artistic production generates waves of followers that can grow to the point of influencing a national election. Who finances this structure of mod-bacon, consumption, and publicity? Beer companies, car companies, and clothing companies. So AMBEV is a key deep in this entire process of maintaining the predatory capitalist model.

Let’s be sincere here. AMBEV is an example of how the exploiter ends up being accepted by the exploited. An average guy will sit out on Friday night, happily drinking a 500 ml can of industrialised beer because he worked all week and needs a cheap way to eat. These days you can’t even think of eating beef anymore, but maybe he’s barbecuing some drumsticks or hot dogs, and he’s going to have a beer. The big beer corporations were among those who made the most profit during the pandemic. A big beer company like AMBEV can even move into a city or region, sit down with all the local politicians, and convince them to change local environmental regulations to facilitate opening a brewery. A craft brewer can’t change a law or a zoning code to open anywhere they want. This is an example of the power of monopolies. We know that companies like AMBEV have all the interest in the world in maintaining Brazil’s neoliberal government, which in turn upholds the monopolistic power of the big beer companies.

It’s hard for poor people to make beer because we have to work with cheap raw materials, and to develop styles and flavors in tune with the tastes of our fellow squatters and working class comrades. But I am proud to say we have developed a few styles of beer that everyone enjoys. Most of the working poor, who are the ones who drink most of our beer, are used to drinking AMBEV or the many other brands of super cheap pale lager. You can’t get people to change their tastes very quickly. Down here, people are used to drinking a cheap, regional pilsner called Polar, which is very popular from the point of view of private sector commodification. Polar is not very good, but it’s what people are used to drinking. We’ve tried to develop a few styles and asked people to try them out. Sometimes we trade beer for goods or services. Last year we started a delivery service for a group of regular customers. We had them buy the math, help, and you need first, and we delivered the beer when it was finished. This helped bring the price down. It’s a different experience from going to the supermarket, paying on the spot, and bringing home your beers. This group paid first, supplied the raw materials, and had their beer delivered a month later. You could say that the squatter movements’ way of producing beer is a more collaborative effort. Producing beer isn’t just an issue of producing the liquid itself. It has a literal production—working together to develop visual art that expresses some of the ideas behind our movement. The label of our DA20 beer was designed in solidarity by Naraaneto Afnor, an artist who is also a public transportation rights activist and member of the National Urban Reform Forum. The label has an African-inspired look while portraying elements related to the themes of urban mobility, urban environmentalism, and the right to the city. It reflects our vision of the ideal type of city that we want to live in.

We also had to develop a strategy for our packaging. We are using a system of returnable bottles. Right now, we have a network of 80 collaborators who regularly order our product in advance. They pick up the beer, and when they are through, they return the bottles. This is a way of lowering overhead. A bottle costs R$2 these days in Brazil (around 40 cents US), so if our collaborators return the bottles, we can lower production costs. These savings are transferred to the workers’ quotas.

Cooperativism doesn’t work with the concept of profit—it works for results. Let’s say, for example, you produce, bottle, and sell a batch of 100 liters. To divide the results, first, we have to decide how much will be reinvested in cooperatives for the next batch and establish a cash reserve. Then we set aside something for investing in new equipment, which we are constantly working to improve. When we started out, we used aluminum vats, but we’ve replaced it all with steel. We are also learning how to make our own equipment. These days, we purchase very little that is industrialized. We have metalworking equipment and know how to almost do everything ourselves, from building the equipment to producing the beer and working out how to sell it. Regarding the quotas, the rules of cooperativism stipulate that they have to be distributed equally according to tasks performed and hours worked. So if someone worked 10 hours that week and another person only worked 5, we tabulate the value produced by our results, and it is subdivided according to hours worked. Everyone has their returns according to this system. This system is now paying for all the groceries in the squat, and sometimes there is a little extra. We all also drink beer, obviously. This is an important expense these days, so we all save money on our own beer.

So that is how our production system works. Nobody is paid according to their specialized knowledge or level of expertise. We receive according to the hours worked, just like everyone else in the cooperative. It’s not based on a capitalist hierarchy of wages or value, but on the concept of equality of value.

As a national leader of the MLNM, Ezequiel Moraes coordinated the occupation of the 20 do Novembro squat in Porto Alegre, Brazil, where he currently resides. He is now affiliated with the NMLM (Movimento Luta nos Bairros, Vilas e Favelas / National Movement of Struggles in Neighborhoods).
Building International Solidarity: The Progressive International In a Changing World

By Aline Piva

In recent years, different societies all around the world have witnessed increasing threats to democratic institutions. What at first might be perceived as isolated events in different countries as diverse as Brazil, Hungary, or India, are now increasingly understood as part of a coordinated offensive to bring authoritarian leaders into power. These leaders are willing not only to implement an ultra-reactionary agenda—with well-known consequences for the people—but also to undermine other social advances and rights the people of (and many other) countries have conquered. The consequences of the rising of fascist, authoritarian governments could be considered a global emergency on its own. Add the effects of global inequalities, the profound economic crisis the world has been immersed in, and the Covid-19 pandemic, and we have the receipts for a global calamity.

Nonetheless, as history has repeatedly shown us, moments of crisis also entail great potential for change. But change will never be achieved with handouts, or through individual or non-organized struggles. We have to build spaces with the potential to strengthen people’s resistance, to give support to those who have been forgotten and silenced for far too long, and to rebuild the peoples’ hopes in a better, more equal, and achievable future.

The Progressive International (PI) was established in 2020, right in the middle of the profound systemic crisis the world has been immersed in. It was founded with a mission to unite, organize, and mobilize progressive forces in a common front, with a clear understanding that this mission is at the core of the current struggle in the international arena.

As stated by Noam Chomsky at PI’s launching summit, “The crises we face in this unique moment of human history are of course international. Environmental catastrophe, nuclear war, and the pandemic have no borders. And in a less transparent way, the same is true of the third of the demons that stalk the earth and drive the second hand of the Doomsday clock towards midnight: the deterioration of democracy.” This deterioration, Chomsky adds, is paramount for the survival of the authoritarian right, and is being achieved through concerted efforts of the far right. As such, this trend can only be countered if progressive forces also organize in a coherent, united front. As he highlights, “Two internationals are forming to confront the crises of this historical moment. One is opening now: the Progressive International. The other is a Reactionary International comprising the world’s most reactionary states... One force is working relentlessly to construct a harsher version of the neoliberal global system... The other looks forward to a world of justice and peace... It is a kind of class struggle on a global scale, with many complex facets and interactions.”

Since it was launched, PI’s coalition has grown to include trade unions, political parties, and social movements that represent millions of people around the world, from the National Alliance of People’s Movements in India to the Congress of the People in South Africa, from Argentina’s Democracy in Europe Movement (DEMUS) to the Progressive International (PI). Strengthen democracy and support peoples’ struggles. Fight back systemic inequalities. Respond effectively and timely to ongoing crises. These have been the three pillars that supported PI’s work so far. The first one, called Movement, has mobilized delegations to countries such as Boliva, Colombia, Turkey, and Brazil to oversee election processes, stand in solidarity with its peoples, and denounce growing attacks to democratic institutions in these—and other—countries.

The second pillar, Blueprint, commissioned over 30 essays from sitting presidents, ministers, scholars, and activists on how to reclaim the world after Covid-19. It has also convened a Covid-19 Response Working Group, as well as a networked collective on Debt Justice including scholars like Jayati Ghosh, Katharina Pistor, and Osama Diab, mobilizing to challenge the IMF’s austerity agenda and borders in countries like Argentina and Ecuador. The third and last pillar, Wire, was created to give a platform to these struggles. In addition to building a wire service for the world’s progressive forces, and publishing grassroots voices and critical perspectives from around the world, Wire has organized a team of 200 translators to create a new coalition of 31 publications from around the world, amplifying stories across borders and from publications including Jacobin, The Nation, Brasil Wire, and Diálat.
In 2019, the World looked on in shock as US-backed paramilitary militias executed a right-wing coup in Bolivia, with troops opening fire on protesters with live bullets. One year later a nationwide coalition of indigenous and labor groups retook the government and had illegitimate coup President Janine Áñez arrested. One of the key actors in this process was the 6 Federations of the Trópico of Cochabamba. Here, Ollie Vargas tells their story.

The 6 Federations of the Trópico of Cochabamba is Bolivia’s most important social movement because it created the Movement Towards Socialism, the party which governs today. Evo Morales led the 6 Federations and is still the president, and many of the party’s other leaders hold most positions within the party and government. How did the campesinos unions of a sparsely populated rural region, 600 kilometers from La Paz, manage to achieve such a dominant position within the country? They moved beyond sectionalism and beyond community power to political power.

The region lies between the cities of Cochabamba and Santa Cruz, about 4-6 hours apart by car. The origin of the local struggles here is that it is a coca-growing region. Coca is a sacred leaf in Bolivian culture, and consumed by the majority in the form of chewing or steeping in tea. From the 1980s onwards, coca became a target of the US because we showed them that we’re defending our culture going back 1000 years. We showed how eradication is a humiliation of our culture by the gringos.

The struggles in the Chapare region became historic, and representative of a wider fight against US intervention. A high point was in 1995 when the women’s march from the Trópico to La Paz, almost 600 kilometers. The march was titled “The March for Life, for Coca, for Human Rights, and National Sovereignty.” It started as just 200 women, but during the 33-day-long trek through torrential rain, blasing sun, freezing cold, and repression, women from towns and cities along the route joined until they reached La Paz in thousands, with many more waiting in the city to applaud the final stretch. It was a triumphant moment when the March was taken up by the whole country, who was desperately searching for leadership.

As Evo says in almost every speech I’ve witnessed, including most recently, on his birth day, “Bolivia always had power unions and communities. But to nationalize our natural resources, communal power, or social power was not enough. It was essential to create a political instrument and pass from union power to political power—to govern ourselves.”

Norma Valderrama, leader of the Confederation of Indigenous Women Bartolina Sisa is the women’s union for coca campesino unions branches across the country. The Central Obrera Boliviana (COB) is the federation of all workers’ unions in Bolivia. Particularrly active in government work are the Mine-workers Union (FSTMB) and the Oil and Gas Workers Union (FSTPB).

These organizations form the Unity Pact, an alternative cabinet that meets with the President to nominate or fire ministers and direct public policy. The Unity Pact also plays a vital role in defending the government on the streets. Indicative of their role were the words of COB leader Juan Carlos Huarachi, who said that “the Bolivian people, through their social movements, are ‘enough.’ Enough of these acts of racism and discrimination, enough of these destabilization attempts against our government.” While the Unity Pact defends the MAS government, they are also active and critical participants in the internal life of the state. As President Arce reaches the first anniversary of assuming the presidency, Huarachi suggested that the unions will analyse which ministers should stay and which should go; “We are one year into governing. It’s important to make an evaluation, ministry by ministry, in coordination with the Unity Pact.”

Within this coalition that makes up the MAS—a coalition spanning the Andes Mountains, the Amazon, the southern desert, and everywhere in-between—it’s the 6 Federations, which continue to be the leading voice. The President of the Senate, Andrónico Rodriguez, is also the Vice President of the Unity Pact. The President of the MAS parliamentary party is Gualberto Arispe, former President of the Unity Pact of the 6 Federations. The Vice President of the parliamentary party is Leonardo Lore, leader of the Chimore Federation (one of the 6). The social movement of this one region punches well above its weight, precisely because it has maintained a spirit of searching for unity across all movements in the country, rather than getting bogged down in sectionalism. It is that spirit that makes up the MAS, and it’s that spirit that sustains its existence today.

Ollie Vargas is an editor at Kawsachun News, the English language version of Kawsachun Coca, the official radio station of the 6 Federaciones—or the version of the social movements.
The Non-Aligned Movement and the Fight for Sovereignty

By Lily Lynch

Over two days in early October, the second-largest multilateral forum in the world after the United Nations assembled in Belgrade, Serbia. Since most of those in attendance were from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean, most Western observers felt comfortable dismissing it as “irrelevant.” But the Nonaligned Movement, celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of its first meeting also held in Belgrade, pushed back against that idea. Speakers from the TIT delegations present emphasized the need to “reinvigorate and relaunch” the movement in order to fight vaccine inequity, exceptionalism, paternalism, unilateralism, and hegemony.

The Nonaligned Movement (NAM) is probably the largest and most radical movement you’ve never heard of. Founded during the period of decolonization at the height of the Cold War, the movement gave newly independent states from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean a forum to integrate themselves into the system of global affairs. The conference produced the Ten Principles of Bandung, which remain at the heart of NAM’s philosophical approach to the world. They are:

1. Respect for fundamental human rights and for the purposes and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.
2. Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations.
3. Recognition of the equality of all races and of the peoples, and the sovereignty of nations large and small.
4. Abolition of all forms of economic dominance or interference in the internal affairs of another country.
5. Respect for the right of each nation to define itself as a sovereign entity, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations.
6. Abolition of the use of armaments of collective defense to serve the particular interests of any of the big powers, abstention by any country from entering pacts on other countries.
7. Refraining from acts of aggression or the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any country.
8. Settlement of all international disputes by peaceful means, such as negotiation, conciliation, arbitration, or judicial settlement, as well as other peaceful means, of their own choice, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations.
9. Promotion of mutual interests and cooperation.
10. Respect for justice and international obligation.

As an export-driven capitalist, Belgrade played a somewhat unlikely role in the movement. That first summit in Belgrade was held on the initiative of Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito. Yugoslavia had split from the Soviet Union in 1948, and was seeking to maximize its own position in global affairs while remaining independent of both the Warsaw Pact and NATO. Tito saw in the newly independent states of Africa and Asia potential partners who were similarly wary of predation by the superpowers.

With the end of the Cold War, many Western observers were quick to declare NAM irrelevant or “dead.” However, the movement is still very much alive. From the initial 25 member states present in Belgrade six decades ago, the movement has grown to 120 members. It was clear listening to speakers from the delegations in Belgrade in October that actual member states feel that NAM has a vital role to play today. The Bandung Principles, the speakers emphasized over and over again, are more alive than ever, being transformed, and the pandemic has exposed deep inequities. As Minister of International Affairs and Cooperation of Botswana Lemogang Kaeo said, “The fight against the pandemic endures in many of our developing countries. Our efforts will remain incomplete if we do not compel the international community to accede to our demands for equity in access to lifesaving vaccines. Vaccine equity [and declaring vaccines] a global public good is not only a moral imperative, it is also an important matter that lies at the heart of the demonstration of the true spirit of multilateralism, global solidarity, and international cooperation, which others often preach, but do not practice.”

Felix Plascencia, who assumed the office of foreign minister of Venezuela in August, also spoke about the pandemic: “We reject sanctions that are illegal but that may also be fatal in the current pandemic. [They] are undermining all efforts to resolve a crisis, and in any case we would like to invite you to fight together against this cruel and inhumane policy, including using the pandemic and human suffering for promoting your own political agendas,” he said. “This in [some instances, like the IMF], prevents our country from accessing funds that would be of great importance to us at this time. Bearing in mind this reality, the time has come to double our efforts in order to observe the principles of the UN charter. This is all we have to defend ourselves against the great powers.”

Others suggested that growing bipolarity embodied by the United States and NATO on the one hand, and China and Russia on the other, could mean that a new NAM Movement is precisely what the world needs. This is complicated by the fact that both China and Russia have observer status in the movement, which critics say means the group is no longer truly nonaligned. However, Yugoslav successor states Montenegro, North Macedonia, Croatia, and Slovenia also enjoy observer status in NAM, and all are members of NATO. The future of NAM is uncertain, but observers still say that its potential to help influence world affairs remains.

As Lisa Díaz-Rendón, a curator and academic based at Birkbeck’s Department of Film, Media and Cultural Studies at the University of London, wrote in an email: “The summit… in Belgrade is precisely what the world needs. This is complicated by the fact that both China and Russia have observer status in the movement, which critics say means the group is no longer truly nonaligned. However, Yugoslav successor states Montenegro, North Macedonia, Croatia, and Slovenia also enjoy observer status in NAM, and all are members of NATO. The future of NAM is uncertain, but observers still say that its potential to help influence world affairs remains.”

As a European capital, Belgrade played a somewhat unlikely role in the movement. That first summit in Belgrade was held on the initiative of Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito. Yugoslavia had split from the Soviet Union in 1948, and was seeking to maximize its own position in global affairs while remaining independent of both the Warsaw Pact and NATO. Tito saw in the newly independent states of Africa and Asia potential partners who were similarly wary of predation by the superpowers.

The Nonaligned Movement (NAM) is probably the largest and most radical movement you’ve never heard of. Founded during the period of decolonization at the height of the Cold War, the movement gave newly independent states from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean a forum to integrate themselves into the system of global affairs. The conference produced the Ten Principles of Bandung, which remain at the heart of NAM’s philosophical approach to the world. They are:

1. Respect for fundamental human rights and for the purposes and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.
2. Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations.
3. Recognition of the equality of all races and of the peoples, and the sovereignty of nations large and small.
4. Abolition of all forms of economic dominance or interference in the internal affairs of another country.
5. Respect for the right of each nation to define itself as a sovereign entity, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations.
6. Abolition of the use of armaments of collective defense to serve the particular interests of any of the big powers, abstention by any country from entering pacts on other countries.
7. Refraining from acts of aggression or the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any country.
8. Settlement of all international disputes by peaceful means, such as negotiation, conciliation, arbitration, or judicial settlement, as well as other peaceful means, of their own choice, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations.
9. Promotion of mutual interests and cooperation.
10. Respect for justice and international obligation.

Lumpen, Issue #139, Vol. 30

Lumpen, Issue #139, Vol. 30

The International Issue

Spring 2022
Like so many people throughout history, I spent much of my youth trying to make sense of what was going on in Brazil, my country. Then history hit me in the face. It changed my existence and the plans of many in my generation.

In 1973 I enrolled in the Universidade de São Paulo, a free, public institution that is a source of pride for us Brazilians. Even today, it’s ranked among the World’s Top 100 Universities. I wanted to be an intellectual and produce academic research, but I ran out of time and was forced to drop out when my generation got caught in a whirlwind of political and social changes that transformed ourselves and Brazil forever.

During the first few weeks of class, the military junta’s DDI CODI political police arrested, tortured, and executed Alexandre Vannuchi Leite, a geology student and member of the ALN armed revolutionary group founded by Carlos Marighella, one of the main leaders of the Brazilian left during the 20th century. In a large-scale police operation in 1974, the government arrested 18 students and teachers in a university preparatory course and submitted them to prolonged sessions of torture. In 1975, an action against the PCB (Brazilian Communist Party) ended with the execution of many of its directors and most important members. In 1978, the entire directorate of the PC do B (Communist Party of Brazil) was machine-gunned down during a central committee meeting. In 1977, the arrest and torture of activists from the ALN Workers League provoked a large protest in downtown São Paulo, the first time in years that the student movement came out to the streets to confront the military police and denounce the cowardliness of the regime.

Despite the open violence and permanent threats from the generals, many people worked together to fight for structural change. Here is a personal example. Among my cohorts in the social sciences department there were activists from the Catholic left associated with the liberation theology movement, members of two orthodox communist parties and two Trotskyist groups, former armed guerrillas, and at least one group of self-proclaimed independents, who the rest of us criticized as excessively moderate reformists.

There were always a lot of good laughs to be had among such a varied group, especially since it seemed so futile, at least in appearances, to think we could change the dictatorship that was born and sustained by the most powerful force on the planet: the North American Empire. I was right not to ignore the fact that among that miscellaneous collection of revolutionary groups with different acronyms there was a certain similarity. In 1978, an influenza epidemic was sweeping the city, the labor union movement would become a decisive force in Brazilian politics for the next few decades.

Starting with a series of wildcat strikes and work stoppages that triggered the end of a regime that was planning to stay in power forever, the union workers exposed a system of superexploitation that was one of the government’s pillars of order. This exposure of class conflict set the tone for all street protests from that moment forward, as the fight against capitalist exploitation became an important and often mandatory rallying cry. A military regime, that was born out of wage stagnation enforced by tanks and bayonets, began to tremble in its boots when the families of striking workers. In an unforgettable symbolic gesture, remember the day one young writer friend showed up with a 5 pound salmon for striking steelworkers.

This coalition of forces, born out of the working class base of Brazilian society, led to the four consecutive presidencies of Lula and Dilma Rousseff, the two most popular leaders in the history of our Republic. This movement led to essential improvements to our development and sovereignty, and for the well being of the poorest segments of society. One example is how enrollment in the free public universities expanded, with 52% of spaces reserved for poor and Afro-Brazilian students.

As we recover from the embarrassing attack against our democracy in 2016, when Dilma Rousseff was deposed through a coup of state, Brazil is beginning to reopen its doors to a better future that will do justice to its economy, natural resources, and culture and make up for the last few years of lost time. Like many lessons that old age can teach the youth, the massive level of support that our population is showing for Lula today not only shows that the consciousness of our country hasn’t been lost.

Paulo Moreira Leite started his career as a reporter in 1969 and has worked at Brazilian news publications such as Gazeta Mercantil, Folha de São Paulo, and Brazil News currently Editor of Brazil 247.
Indian Millennials have never seen a democratically elected government as strong in Parliament as they are witnessing now, during Narendra Modi’s second term, often called “Modi 2.0.” But now it also seems they are experiencing a mass movement as fierce that it can shake the foundation of such a powerful government. Before jumping into conclusions we must first understand historical facts pertaining to the farmer movement.

On September 17th 2020, three farm laws proposed by Bharatiya Janata (BJP) and its allies were passed undemocratically in the Indian Parliament. Behind the smokescreen of COVID-19, the ruling party successfully presented the opposition from presenting any arguments or proposals against the bill, which was designed to turn the government-regulated agricultural market into a corporate-dominated open market. For example, the government publicized this bill with the tagline “One Nation, One Market,” with- out mention of the minimum support price (MSP), which has to be provided to farmers in govern- ment-regulated markets.

This is when it began. Millions of farmers took to the streets of New Delhi under a common banner led by communists and socialists, presenting a solid stand against this act. At that time, learning on a strong establishment, the Modi government was unwilling to have a dialogue with any farmers’ organization, or with any opposition at all. But the farmers blocked the nation’s capital by taking over highways and border leading to Delhi for two months. Only then did the govern- ment feel compelled to invite the farmers for a discussion. It was not fruitful. The position of the farmers was clear, and not up for compromise: in a country where 70,000 of them committed suicide in 7 years, these farm laws were unaccept- able. Still, the arrogant government kept trying to negotiate. During the first discussion session, the farmers not only opposed their proposal but also refused to accept lunch, responding, “We Brought Our Own Food.” Thanks to their unity and commitment, protesting farmers started gaining support and sympathy from all regions of the country. In response, the government started to connect this peaceful movement with separatist and Naxalite movements. Their plan was to discredit the farmers and demolish support through- out India by associating the movement with Communist parties.

After occupying highways in and out of Delhi since September 2020, and after the deaths of 159 protestors, including 4 tragic suicides, plus hundreds injured, the farmers planned to celebrate their Republic Day Parade parallel to the Military Parade. This was the first time India had witnessed a parallel Republic Day in the capital. Millions of farmers participated, along with 200 thousand tractors, which they had modified for protection from tear gas shells. In the end, the government successfully related the farmers’ rally with the Khalistani separatist movement by funding a group of hooligans who hosted a separatist flag at the Red Fort, an important place in New Delhi where the national flag is usually flown. Consequently, the farmers failed to retain the public support they had enjoyed up until that time.

At junctures like this, a movement usually has only one option, and that is to back off. But instead of retreating, the farmers refused to submit. They were in the streets of Delhi no matter what happened. They were there braving the bone-chilling cold in winter, they were there when it was blazing hot in summer, they were there when it was raining torrentially, they were there where the police resorted to extreme brutal- ity, and they were even there when fellow protec- tors died from health hazards or police violence. Perhaps this irresistible determination for the cause is beyond imagination for some.

In September, the farmer’s movement passed its 1 year mark without leaving the streets of the Capital for a single day. On November 19, the Modi administration withdrew the three farm laws that spurred the protest. But the fight is still underway. On December 4, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha farmers union issued a statement saying, “We will not end this agitation without a formal response on each of the issues being raised by us. We want to see all the cases foisted against farmers as well as their supporters, who were part of this movement, to be withdrawn and assurance to be made formally.”

One thing is certain, India has witnessed a movement not only against capitalist oppression but also an inspirational tale of people organizing against a strong fascist government through unity, commitment and irresistible will, and bonding together with a strong political ideology. protesting farmers of India have won the hearts of revolutionary activists around the world. Their movement will go down in working class history and inspire future revolutionaries.

Debojit Banerjee is a member of the West Bengal State Council of All India Students’ Federation (AISF), and Publisher and Executive Editor of the International. Gourab Ghosh is a member of the West Bengal State Council of All India Students’ Federation (AISF) and Associate Editor of the International.
During the 1920s, a group of teachers who used to drink together after school in the working class neighborhood of Estacio de Sa started a Carnaval group. In a joke related to their profession, they called themselves “Samba School.” The name caught on, and every year during Carnaval, the twelve biggest samba schools, some of which have as many as 5000 dancers and musicians, parade through Rio’s Sambadromo stadium for two nights in a row, in what has become Brazil’s largest television spectacle. As Gabriel Deslandes shows in the following article, this event has turned into an important space of working class political resistance.

Rio de Janeiro’s samba schools are the protagonists of Brazil’s most famous Carnaval. They are also a space of cultural and social resistance from poor, predominantly Afro-Brazilian residents of Rio’s favelas and suburbs. Some samba school parades go beyond local politics and culture and are used as a vehicle to transmit political messages to millions of television viewers. Unidos de Vila Isabel, from Rio’s north side neighborhood of the same name, stands out as one of the most politicized groups in Carnaval history. One of their most important influences is the group’s main vocalist and composer, Martinho da Vila, who has also had a successful career as a samba singer, author, and cultural agitator.

**The Black King of Carnaval**

Da Vila first joined Vila Isabel in the mid-1960s as a composer. He helped build the school into a Carnaval powerhouse, incorporating political problems and themes of social and racial inequality into his lyrics. Even during the height of the Brazilian military dictatorship during the 1960s, he affiliated with the clandestine Brazilian Communist Party and built ties with leftist groups in the Portuguese diaspora in Africa. In 1972, Da Vila traveled to Angola at the moment it declared independence from Portugal, and was dazzled by the cultural vitality of the people and their cultural similarities with Brazilians.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Afro-Brazilian civil rights movements strengthened ties and cultural exchanges between Brazilian and Angolan artists in a partnership with the Angolan Popular Liberation Movement (MPLA). Da Vila’s left-wing political activism inevitably influenced Vila Isabel’s Carnaval parades. During the military dictatorship in 1972, they skipped past government censors with a Carnaval parade song called “Where Brad Learned About Freedom,” which celebrated hundreds of years of slave and working class uprisings against Brazilian elites. The chorus dreamed of “a Brazilian brotherhood with no masters or slaves.” Da Vila’s 1974 Carnaval parade composition, “The Carajas Tribe,” was not as lucky: The lyrics honored an indigenous tribe in the Alto Xingu region of the Amazon rainforest that was being exterminated by the army, who was starting strip mining in the region. The song was labeled subversive by the military junta and was banned from Carnaval, and Vila Isabel had to come up with something new at the last minute.

Martinho da Vila’s role at Vila Isabel samba school reached new heights in 1988, the 100th anniversary year of the abolition of slavery in Brazil. This was one of the first Carnavals to take place after the fall of the dictatorship in 1985. During these early years, all of the samba schools experienced an unprecedented period of political effervescence and freedom of expression. Da Vila took advantage of the opening to exalt Black power with a composition called “Kizomba, Festival of Race.” On a low budget, using inexpensive materials for its dancers and musicians like straw and batik, Vila Isabel performed one of the most exciting parades of all time. “Kizomba, Festival of Race” celebrated Afro-Brazilian art and religiosity and paid tribute to Pan-African leaders like Samora Machel, Malcolm X, Agostinho Neto, and Martin Luther King Jr. The song itself called for the end of apartheid in South Africa. After a dismal carnival crowd spent the whole hour of Vila Isabel’s parade on its feet, dancing and singing along with the lyrics, the judges had no choice but to declare Vila Isabel champions of Carnaval for the first time in the school’s history. Later, an internal document leaked from the Brazilian Army showing that it had viewed Vila Isabel’s parade that year as “a revolutionary black protest against whites.”

During the 1990s, Rio de Janeiro Carnaval began to receive sponsorship money from the private sector. This had a negative influence on the themes chosen for the parades because its increased role as a television spectacle limited space for political criticism. However, this new commercial dynamic enabled the Venezuelan Sandino, and Simon Bolivar. Despite attacks in the corporate media, the parade excited the Brazilian audience of tens of millions. Vila Isabel had won its second ever Carnaval championship title.

Ten years later, with another song written by Martinho da Vila, Vila Isabel honored the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Miguel Arraes, the socialist governor of Pernambuco who was arrested and exiled during the military dictatorship. In its parade, Vila Isabel celebrated Arraes’ struggle for agrarian reform, investment in public education and improvements in the lives of the working class.

In 2021, Carnaval was canceled due to the pandemic. This year, however, Vila Isabel will return to the Sambadrome, with a parade honoring the life and work of Martinho da Vila himself—now 83. It will be the first time in the Carnaval parade’s ninety-year history that a samba school has ever paid tribute to its own lead composer. This tribute will represent the consecration of a nearly sixty-year relationship between a legendary singer and activist and the samba school that he belongs to.

**Stage of Resistance**

BY GABRIEL DESLANDES

Hugo Chavez to publicize Bolivarian ideals to a Brazilian audience of tens of millions. Vila Isabel paraded through the Sambadrome Carnaval stadium celebrating a collective Latin American cultural identity and celebrating the continent’s pre-Colombian roots from the Yucatan Peninsula to Tierra del Fuego. While promoting the Bolivarian dream of the “Giant Homeland,” the school celebrated historic freedom fighters who fought for the emancipation of Latin America like Che Guevara, San Martin, Jose Marti, Augusto Sandino, and Simon Bolivar. Despite attacks in the corporate media, the parade excited the Brazilian audience of tens of millions. Vila Isabel had won its second ever Carnaval championship title.

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In September 2021, 56% of Berliners voted yes on a referendum calling for the expropriation of 240,000 apartments owned by the city’s biggest real estate companies.

Berlin, the capital of Germany, has 3,664,088 inhabitants and 85% of them are renters. In the recent city elections, one million people voted for the expropriation of all real estate companies that own more than 3,000 apartments and to convert those spaces into low-income housing.

The violence that Berliners are facing because of real estate speculation is increasing alarmingly. Most of the city’s property is controlled by big real estate companies, and there is an average of 10 evictions per day. It is impossible for the majority of Berliners to move or to find a decent and affordable home. This has enormous consequences for our quality of life and our survival. It is impossible to separate from bad relationships, protect oneself from domestic violence, leave one’s parents, move to a different neighborhood or a different type of housing and live decently on an average salary. These are the problems of people who are already lucky enough to have a home. What about those who are looking for one? Only privileged people have a chance in this speculative real estate market. For all the people affected by any kind of discrimination, it is almost impossible to find housing.

The housing crisis increases violence, reduces our quality of life and our possibilities to choose our way of life. It increases poverty, discrimination and the gap between social classes. This situation increases the fear that tenants have of losing their homes. The fear of homelessness leads Berliners to accept inexcusable housing conditions and disrespectful behavior from landlords. Landlords even use this fear and our need for healthy housing to increase their profits.

Every human being is born to live somewhere. We must succeed in banning speculation in real estate and real estate ownership.

**LANDLORD STRATEGIES**

To increase profit, real estate companies divide buildings into condos that they rent out at the time of sale. Since contracts for apartments in Berlin and Germany are open-ended, landlords have developed tactics to terminate these rental agreements. For example, they can claim that they want to use the apartments themselves. The strategy of the affected tenants is very hard. They are isolated and fight alone in the building against their landlord. Their fight often ends with an eviction. These eviction battles often leave the former tenants with health and psychological problems.

A new phenomenon in Berlin is the use of security guards, not to protect anyone but to “keep the peace” in the buildings. These security guards prevent tenants from organizing themselves to collectively solve problems. Tenants, who are too rebellious, are threatened by these security guards. This tactic of intimidation makes the tenants prisoners of the bad intentions of their landlords. Moreover, this tactic prevents what has been one of the strengths of Berlin’s tenants up to now: organizing in groups to defend our housing rights and our buildings.

Another new phenomenon is social white washing. Real estate corporations become charitable and use the lack of apartments in Berlin and the misery of the tenants to position themselves in the media as responsible landlords. Meanwhile, they buy massive amounts of apartments whose rents benefit their shareholders.

These are a few examples of the violence of real estate speculation. Although the right to housing in Berlin is anchored in the city constitution (Article 28: “Every person has the right to adequate housing”), every year, people freeze to death in this city. This use of housing as a consumer good is an aberration of our system.

**TENANTS FIGHT BACK**

The expropriation campaign is one of the strongest reactions to this predatory real estate speculation. On September 26th, Berliners with German citizenship were asked to vote for or against the expropriation of all residential properties owned by companies that have more than 3,000 apartments. The Yes vote won, but for now it is just a draft law and is not legally binding. Many Berlin activists believe that property owners will not let their property be expropriated in this way. Let’s not forget that private property is often at the center of our constitutions in this capitalist system. If we want expropriation, we have to do it ourselves.

Gemeinsam gegen Verdrängung und Mietwahnsinn (Together against eviction and rent madness), of which the expropriation campaign is a part, is an alliance of many Berlin groups that fight for the right to housing. This alliance is co-organizer of the Housing Action Day, a transnational day of action which has been held at the end of March for two years now. It regularly organizes large tenant demonstrations and fights for the abolition of housing as a consumer good.

A final example of our struggle is the Mieter:innen Gewerkschaft Berlin (Berlin Tenants’ Union Berlin), which is the first tenants’ union in Berlin. The aim of our group is to establish a collective right and a right of co-determination of tenants, similar to the trade union structures for workers’ rights. This group helps tenants to organize and fight for their housing. It promotes the idea of unconditional solidarity, but also the connection that the price of a building goes down if inhabitants are organized and fight. In this group there is also an intersectional working group, FLINTA Stadt, which we could translate as LGBTQ City. Their goal is to build a city of solidarity for ALL.

As long as the existence of the planet is questioned, habitat will continue to be a central theme. It is perhaps one of the best arenas where the fight against social injustice and our unequal system can take place. We must think of radical transformations if we want our children to survive. The vision of a city of solidarity in which everyone has a place is a real alternative. Let’s build this world together. Feel free to contact these groups to exchange ideas.

Wir bleiben alle! We all stay!

The International
President Nayib Bukele’s improvised political experiment has given rise to a new dictatorship in El Salvador. Although in the beginning he was profiled as a youthful, social media savvy and alternative face, Bukele’s Nuevo Ideas administration rapidly turned down a path of authoritarianism, centralizing power, promoting militarism as a main state policy, and banning any type of criticism against his government.

Despite this, Bukele’s fans in the mainstream media and foreign press insist that he remains popular among Salvadoran youth. Until recently it was hard to find challenges to this claim. Now, at the halfway mark in his term in office, it is clearer than ever that young people are faring poorly.

Thousands of young Salvadorans continue to flee the country each month, while those who stay are becoming increasingly involved in mobilizations and activism to oppose the government’s neoliberal, authoritarian measures.

A major uptick in street protest against the Salvadoran administration began as the Bitcoin law was taking effect. Three major protests were held in the capital of San Salvador in September and October, 2021, in which a wide array of organizations demonstrated their discontent with the political and socioeconomic path being imposed. Youth have not only participated in marches but are also leading the grassroots organizing behind these collective actions. Two of the largest networks of leftist organizations, the Coordination of Popular Movements and the Popular Resistance Block, have engaged young people nationally, including within their leadership.

What’s more, the increased visibility of vocal opposition to Bukele’s autocratic management from progressives, feminists, LGBTI+ youth and anti-imperialists is inspiring greater involvement in organizing around discontent.

There are many factors behind this shift away from support for Bukele. First, the militarization.

Youth have not only participated in marches but are also leading the grassroots organizing behind these collective actions. Two of the largest networks of leftist organizations, the Coordination of Popular Movements and the Popular Resistance Block, have engaged young people nationally, including within their leadership. What’s more, the increased visibility of vocal opposition to Bukele’s autocratic management from progressives, feminists, LGBTI+ youth and anti-imperialists is inspiring greater involvement in organizing around discontent.

There are many factors behind this shift away from support for Bukele. First, the militarization. One of the main promises and expectations for Bukele’s government was that new opportunities were going to be generated for youth. However, military service was not what they had in mind. In just two years, Bukele increased military spending by more than 75% with the goal of doubling the size of the military by recruiting 20,000 young people by 2024, taking the country to levels of militarization not seen since the armed conflict (1979-1992). These “new opportunities” are aimed at working class youth with lower access to higher education and employment. This dramatic increase in militarization can only exacerbate abuses by security forces against women, the LGBTI+ community and other vulnerable groups.

A second cause of growing discontent is the government’s reinforcement of traditional family values and gender roles. It is a well-known fact that younger generations tend to be more progressive on issues like LGBTI+ rights and abortion. Because of Bukele’s millennial-president profile, some thought he would be at least open for discussion on these topics, but so far his stances have only become more and more conservative. Recently, he declared on Facebook that he had ordered the removal of any text that could open the door for same-sex marriage or abortion from his regime’s proposed constitutional reforms. In May, 2021, members of congress from his political party archived a gender identity bill. These moves have drawn strong criticism from feminists, LGBTI+ organizations and progressive youth.

Third, his political party Nuevo Ideas’ talking points might still look and sound good to some but conditions for working class families are simply not changing. An unprecedented public relations strategy has been central to keeping the masses distracted from the most pressing issues but after two and a half years in power, and with all branches of the government at his mercy, more people are starting to realize the contradiction between what’s depicted on social media and what their actual socioeconomic conditions are.

Increasing cost of living, disappearances, gang control of the territories, vulnerability to climate change, and femicide have all worsened, and with so many frustrated people fleeing the country, 2021 may have played out as the year with the most Salvadoran detentions in the US border history. Former officials from the previous FMLN party government have been subject to political persecution and journalists have faced sweeping censorship. Meanwhile, criminalization of social movements, six of which have been raided by the Office of the Attorney General in recent days, including Las Miskitas and PROVIDA, are provoking outrage.

Conditions for a more solid shift in youth consciousness in 2022 seem certain. Social movements are seizing the opportunity for renewal and incorporating new generations into the struggle. While Nayib has invested a great deal of time in attacking the traditional parties, the FMLN and ARENA, the majority of the vast array of organizations, movements and figures of the growing opposition cannot be classified as part of either party.

Some of the most visible opposition has come from progressive NGO sectors, while less visible, are activists, young and old, who are building on decades of campesino struggles fighting for sustainable solutions to provide food and end hunger for communities and defend El Salvador against the occupation of the United States and transnational corporations. Rural organizations of the Latin American Coordination of Rural Organizations (CLOC) and La Via Campesina have decades of confronting neoliberal policies in Latin American agriculture and pushing for profound changes in social and productive structures and relations. These, and other organizations and communities, exist as steadfast units of decades of imperialist struggle, and are preparing to challenge Bukele while reinvigorating the fight against neoliberalism and militarism in Central America, guided by lessons derived from the historic struggles of El Salvador’s indigenous communities and popular organizations in past decades.

Roberto Zapata is an environmental and LGBTI rights defender of ASUCO, member organization at the El Salvador Coordination of Popular Movements. Camila Escalante is a Latin America-based journalist and editor of Kawsachun News.
In 2019 Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos made a critical about capitalism, akin to Varden’s “the public be damned”. That said, “no such thing as society”—quotations of the elite that serve to define their speech. The quote in question didn’t get quite as much media attention at the time as Bezos’ post-space-travel tweet to Amazon employees and customers that “you paid for this.” Though that statement was similarly telling and deservedly ridiculed. Rather, it went relatively overlooked within a speech Bezos gave at a special press conference held for the announcement of Amazon’s Climate Pledge, a set of energy and purchasing goals ostensibly intended to address climate change. In attempting to explain the connectedness of capitalist firms and recruitment uses the notion of “scope” to delineate what is and isn’t under a company’s control. Corporate environmental commitments usually take the form of some future date at which the company expects to reach net-zero carbon emissions for some percentage, or some part, of its operations. Since the practice is still relatively new in the business world, and publicity releases have a way of disappearing from public view, progress toward past goals can be difficult to measure. And measurements of current promises are subject to the same creative accounting involved in their drafting, with so much room for interpretation in variables like the cost of carbon, the type of offset and how it is measured, how the scope of responsibilities is defined, which emissions count, how “renewable” is defined, what baseline the percentage is judged against, and so on.

Governments who have been in the promise-making business longer tend to leave behind paper trails of announcements, agreements, and agendas that reveal promise-making as an ongoing game of missing targets and setting new ones. A game whose rules require constant moving of goalposts. President Jimmy Carter's 1979 target for 20% of the nation's energy to come from renewable sources by the year 2020 was moved forward by President Barack Obama in 2013, thirteen years after the initial deadline had passed, to a new goal of 2020. The nation’s promises, at least, are renewable. Perhaps in recognition of this embarrassing fact, President Joe Biden offered a target whatever it was they were doing until the deadline passed and we all agreed to sit down together again, pretending to make progress. Signature lines—which somehow make these promises feel official—lack the bravado of the original Kyoto Protocol. Resulting from existing public and private pressure, but also a kind of legislative bargaining through board consortia, the main function of these signature lines is to allow business to continue as usual, providing corporate commitments— which help employees feel better about their jobs and the companies they work for. These promises usually just end up making people feel good strategies like offsets that don’t address existing public and private pressures on companies, and consortiums of both of these to make public promises, pledges, and agreements that set future deadlines, or even replacement deadlines. Anticipated by the military and corporate tradition of scenario building and forecasting, and also enabled by the increasing power and ubiquity of networked computers and accompanying datafication, this promissory politics is ever-present and is not on the decline or near extinction. Anticipated by the military and corporate tradition of scenario building and forecasting, and also enabled by the increasing power and ubiquity of networked computers and accompanying datafication, this promissory politics is ever-present and is not on the decline or near extinction. Anticipated by the military and corporate tradition of scenario building and forecasting, and also enabled by the increasing power and ubiquity of networked computers and accompanying datafication, this promissory politics is ever-present and is not on the decline or near extinction. Anticipated by the military and corporate tradition of scenario building and forecasting, and also enabled by the increasing power and ubiquity of networked computers and accompanying datafication, this promissory politics is ever-present and is not on the decline or near extinction. Anticipated by the military and corporate tradition of scenario building and forecasting, and also enabled by the increasing power and ubiquity of networked computers and accompanying datafication, this promissory politics is ever-present and is not on the decline or near extinction. Anticipated by the military and corporate tradition of scenario building and forecasting, and also enabled by the increasing power and ubiquity of networked computers and accompanying datafication, this promissory politics is ever-present and is not on the decline or near extinction. Anticipated by the military and corporate tradition of scenario building and forecasting, and also enabled by the increasing power and ubiquity of networked computers and accompanying datafication, this promissory politics is ever-present and is not on the decline or near extinction.
goal of conserving 30% of land for biodiversity by the year 2030, sound more like a business magazine’s annual roundup of young entrepreneurs than a concrete, science-informed plan. To be fair, the further off a target, the more justifiable its imprecise positioning. And round numbers certainly are more memorable. But given the margins between 1.5 and 4 degrees of warming, such arbitrary selection or non-existent decade rounding could mean the difference between life or death, survival or extinction.

Following Carl von Clausewitz’s dictum that war is politics by other means, such public prom- ises, goals, statements, resolutions, protocols, and agreements can be understood as a continu- ation or transubstantiation not of politics but the absence of politics. Or the absence of politics. Promises are not merely policies that can’t be policed; they are fundamentally non-policies to begin with. Their main effect, if not their actual intent, is neither to initiate, nor even to guide recognition of these relations is a first step toward making promises part of the means of production. Furthermore, if workers can also “own,” in the sense of taking responsibility for something, or claiming it as their work, and climate change produces new means of perform- ing, monitoring, and defining labor, then Marx himself—a habitual practitioner of the classical chiasmus and other literary inversions—might have endorsed a contemporary call for ownership of the production of means. Bezoz’s motto—“We are all a part of each other’s supply chain”—is more than just a tech- nical description of the networked organization of firms like Amazon. It neatly encapsulates the dis-organized state of labor among its own suppliers and the broader global precariat, as well as the culture of personal branding and internalized, mediated person-as-corporation, the ideology of individual consumer responsibil- ity for climate change, and a sense of obligatory participation in the given economic system in order to merely survive.

This global networked “supply chain” may have largely replaced the traditional single-plant assembly or pipeline line as a locus of labor struggle, but it too contains choke points and places, along the chain that can be blocked. A chain, after all, is still a kind of line, one that is only as strong as its weakest link. Only its networked aspect makes it more resilient, as exemplified in Amazon’s own third-party platform model. The supply chain metaphor contains within it the seeds of its own undoing, if only we recognize it as not a statement of corporate social responsi- bility, but of worker solidarity. The workers of this world have nothing to lose but their supply chains.

Seeing a network means connecting dots. And what we do when we connect dots is draw lines. Capitalism is global, and so are its effects. This much can be plainly seen. These dots have been connected, these lines have been drawn. But the lines themselves are not yet fully seen for what they are: battle lines.

This piece was originally published in Workplace—November 2021 Workplace is a collaboration between e-flux Architecture and the Canadian Centre for Architecture within the context of its year-long research project Catching Up With Life.

FICTILIS is a curatorial collective whose research-based projects explore engaging interests in language and literature, materialities and waste flows, monuments and public memory, and political ecology. In 2015, FICTILIS founded the Museum of Debris, an exhibition dedicated to examining the intersection of generation and future generations about the ideology, history, and legacy of capitalism.
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How a low budget Chicago radio talk show became a conduit of international dissent

This is Hell started as a one-hour summer replacement, an irregularly-scheduled fill-in in case someone was unable to make their shift. The irregular schedule fit an irregular show featuring an accordionist and a piano player accompanying me, a bitter, blind, broke, gap-toothed radio host reading the news, and discussing it with friends in a large production room where bands would usually record.

I had also just started an internship in the Chicago Fox affiliate’s newsroom. I saw how news was made, and what This is Hell could be started coming into focus.

On all the news it was nothing but smiling faces, excitement over low taxes, balanced budgets, and skyrocketing stock markets. The deep denialism of a burning planet and any complicity capitalism played in its destruction was blatant and, somehow, not obvious to those on TV and those watching. Nor was there any recognition of democracy and the market’s competing interests—eventually, we will have to choose between profits and people.

A permanent public affairs programming slot opened at WNUR on Saturday mornings, and we were chosen to fill it. The requirement was that during each hour of the show, we had to do a longform interview. Our worry was booking in-studio guests. That’s when we found out the on-air control room and interview booth adjacent to where we were producing our show now had been the location of an accordionist and a piano slot opened at WNUR on Saturday mornings, and we were chosen to fill it. The requirement was that during each hour of the show, we had to do a longform interview. Our worry was booking in-studio guests. That’s when we found out the on-air control room and interview booth adjacent to where we were producing our show now had been the location of an accordionist and a piano.

We were the first media outlet in the United States to feature an interview with the reporter who broke the story that Florida had voted fifty-six thousand votes from the state’s 2000 presidential vote rolls, helping George W. Bush steal the presidency.

Our opposition to sanctions on Iraq caught the attention of Voices in the Wilderness and its co-coordinator, Kathy Kelly. Kathy and her group were purposely and publicly violating US trade sanctions against Iraq, inviting the US to stop them and charge them with a crime. They were against the war on Iraq before the war on Iraq was officially declared.

Voices’ support opened up the possibility to interview anyone we wanted. Everyone the media was busy ignoring looked up to the work of Voices—and Voices knew everyone.

For instance, ten days prior to 9/11, Noam Chomsky first appeared on our show. We interviewed Howard Zinn several times because of Voices.

Four days after 9/11, Noam returned to This is Hell for his first live interview following the tragedy. Noam had gotten it right: the wars that were coming, the logic that would be used, the media coverage that would promote war, and the public being convinced that it was necessary—not only for US national security, but for the good people of Afghanistan and Iraq, despite the fact that millions would be displaced and hundreds of thousands, mostly civilians, would be killed.

Having had Noam and Howard on, we could now interview anyone we wanted. Everyone the media was busy ignoring looked up to the work of Voices—and Voices knew everyone.

With the Iraq war raging and Guantanamo open, we talked to human rights advocates who appeared very much like the outgrowing Bush administration. The “War on Terror” continued throughout Obama’s presidency.

When Occupy happened, we interviewed the people who originally came up with the idea, and the activists who were in it in Zuccotti Park, as well as here in Chicago and out in Oakland, California. We’ve heard from Randi Weingarten and the ZADs and covered the Yellow Vest movement. We were fortunate to reconnect with Brian Miezal right around the beginning of the Operation Lava Jato scam that weaponized Brazilian law to overthrow democracy in Brazil and install current President Jair Bolsonaro.

For the pandemic, in March 2020 when President Trump was blaming the virus was a Chinese bioweapon and predicting seventy thousand would die from the virus, epidemiologist Rob Wallace came on our show—repeatedly—to tell us the virus was likely zoonotic, and that at a half million would die in the US, possibly a million—and half before the virus was no longer a threat.

And from the beginning, there was always climate change.

I don’t know about you, but to me…This is Hell!

Chuck Mertz is a bitter, blind, broke, and gap-toothed radio show host. Originally from Michigan, he has lived in Chicago since the 1990s. His program This is Hell! has been broadcast from the University of Chicago’s Kraish Experiment, WNUR 89.3FM. It streams live every Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, at 1100 Chicago time on www.thisishell.com. The world broadcast premiere of these shows can be heard on WRHU 88.7FM in New York before the launch of WRHU 89.5FM Chicago, listed. It also airs alternate one-hour versions on Lumpen Radio Radio Free Moscow 88.9.

Lumpen, Issue #139, Vol. 20

Spring 2022

Is This Hell? By Chuck Mertz

Chuck Mertz is a bitter, blind, broke, and gap-toothed radio show host. Originally from Michigan, he has lived in Chicago since the 1990s. His program This is Hell! has been broadcast from the University of Chicago’s Kraish Experiment, WNUR 89.3FM. It streams live every Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, at 1100 Chicago time on www.thisishell.com. The world broadcast premiere of these shows can be heard on WRHU 88.7FM in New York before the launch of WRHU 89.5FM Chicago, listed. It also airs alternate one-hour versions on Lumpen Radio Radio Free Moscow 88.9.
Lumpen, Issue #139, Vol. 30

The Socialist Case for Puerto Rican Independence

BY AUSTIN GONZÁLEZ

In late 2017, a report from the Federal Bureau of Investigation detailing “nine persistent extremist movements” in the United States was made public. At the time, most people in the United States were still dealing with the very raw emotions following the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, just a few months prior. However, what seemed to captivate public attention the most regarding the revelation of these “nine persistent extremist movements” was the category known as “black identity extremists.” An egregious classification indeed. Much discourse was made online and in the media over whether or not it was right to lump this group, “BIE,” into the same category that included other groups such as white supremacists and sovereign citizens.

What did not seem to garner as many headlines or online discourse was another group listed in the FBI’s classification, “Puerto Rican nationalists.” As a matter of fact, if one were to engage with the modern United States socialist or progressive movements and ask them if they viewed the United States as an empire with colonies, one should not be surprised at how many people may reject this assertion outright. Further, if one were to ask any socialists in the United States if they knew of any Puerto Rican nationalists, or of the history or current status of the nationalist movement, one should also not be surprised to receive a glazed-over look in the eyes of the person they are speaking to. The fact of the matter, whether citizens of the United States went to acknowledge it or not, the Puerto Rican independence movement is one of the greatest “domestic” threats to the US empire, and the United States government has been aware of this from the very beginning. By 1950 the islands were annexed in 1898. From the day of Puerto Rican nationalists like Ramón Emeterio Betances, Lolita Lebrón, and Filiberto Ojeda Ríos, to everything and everywhere in between, Puerto Ricans have been fighting for their freedom quite literally since Christopher Columbus himself landed on the island of Boriken in 1493. It is a well past time for socialists in the United States to recognize that, yes, the United States is an empire, and, yes, the United States does have colonies, which they are actively exploiting in modern times. As the rest of the world has declared colonialism dead, it is common for the average Puerto Rican to wonder just what the islands will look like at the end of this century; that if we even make it to the end of this century in one piece.

The Puerto Rican independence struggle is one that predates even the United States’. Long before the ink on the United States Declaration of Independence was dry, independent Taíno and Afro-Puerto Ricans had been in struggle against the Spanish conquistadors subjugating the islands of the Caribbean. Puerto Rico remains the last remaining colony in the world, on an island chain condemned to eternal servitude toward imperial powers many miles away from its own shores. It was Puerto Rican nationalists, such as the aforementioned Betances, who helped continue this history of struggle against the Spanish colonial empire and would help play a critical role in the Cuban Wars for Independence of the late 19th century.

To this day, there are a saying among Cubans and Puerto Ricans: Cuba y Puerto Rico son un pájaro las dos alas. Cuba and Puerto Rico are two wings of the same bird. One only needs to look at the national flags of both Cuba and Puerto Rico to see the intentional twin design that early nationalists of both nations helped develop in solidarity with one another. However, while Cuba was able to find political freedom at the dawn of the 20th century (albeit a neocolonial one, at the time), Puerto Rico, along with the Philippines, Guam, and other Pacific islands, was annexed by the United States. After decades of heroic struggle, the Filipinos were finally able to assert control of their political sovereignty from the United States empire. As for Puerto Ricans, Chamarros, whose Pacific islander heritage, as well, that wait continues on this very day.

Contrary to popular belief among some sectors of the United States, Puerto Rico’s continued colonial status has not been the result of a lack of fighting back or of a lack of any level of popular support. The simple fact is that any time the Puerto Rican independence movement has received an upsurge in activity, it has been summarily crushed by the United States and its colonial lackeys on the islands. One needs to look no further than the independence movements of the 1930s and 50s, led by Álvaro Campos and the Partido Nacionalista. The culture of intimidation and fear that has dominated the islands through tactics such as carpetas, the infamous secret documents compiled on independentistas, has consistently forced nationalists and independentistas into clandestine activity. Whether it be the Young Lords or the Puerto Rican Social Party of the late 1960s, the United States has been on the lookout for its top “domestic” threats. This is the risk that every Puerto Rican nationalist takes when they are fully open regarding their views on the status of their nation. In modern day Puerto Rico, there are few things more revolutionary that one can do than wave that light blue flag, and dare to be unabashedly, unapologetically Boricua.

In last year’s general election on the islands, hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans opted to do just that. Dare to be Boricua. Under the charismatic leadership of Juan Dalmau and his bold Partido Nuevo Progresista platform, the Puerto Rican Independence Party received its highest share of the vote in over fifty years. It should be no surprise that support for independence is on the rise and continuing to accelerate. The islands, since cited as an example of overpopulation (and, therefore, the justification for sterilizing black and brown Puerto Rican women), now continue to depopulate at alarming rates. Cryptocurrency colonizers from the United States have already declared Puerto Rico a potential utopia for gringo settlers to enjoy a relaxing time on the beach while they continue to enjoy the fruits of the exploitation of Puerto Rico’s Latin American brothers and sisters abroad.

In Puerto Rico, the two party system itself, long dominated by the supporters of either Estado Libre (New Progressive Party) or one of the Commonwealth status quo (Popular Democratic Party), has continued to be digitized in a constant struggle of one upping another over which side can take the people of Puerto Rico closer to statehood itself. A violation of the very laws of nature that God himself developed for the islands of the Caribbean and South America. These lands have an ancient history together, dating back to the very first peoples who popu - lated the islands of the Antilles, and the South American coast adjacent to them.

The empire of the United States is a very real thing. An active threat across the world, rampaging across Africa and Asia, and continuing to subjugate the entire Americas. To be a socialist in the United States is to recognize that we all have the state of the United States, and that duty is to be fighting the military industrial complex from within—from fighting the United States empire within the metropole itself. The fact is the vacuums of Puerto Ricans—of Chamarros, of Samoans, of indigenous peoples across the United States—lead us to do a great disservice to the storied history of socialistic movements providing support and assistance to decolonial movements fighting for freedom.

Lastly, I humbly say to my fellow socialists and leftists: if the FBI has deemed “Puerto Rican nationalists” worthy of attention, maybe you should too.
A review of the exhibition If only this mountain between us could be ground to dust, by Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme (both born in 1983), the Art Institute of Chicago.

First was the sound: an electronic symphony, foliaceous and mournful, yet terribly beautiful and alluring. The music, “ariottous solemnity,” slipped past the gallery walls. I listened to the beat-striped techno tones, layered with dusty vocals and field recordings, while approaching a wall, or rather, I sensed the tactile music that brushed against me as it filled its architectural enclosure.

If only this mountain between us could be ground to dust, by the Palestinian-American duo Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme (both born in 1983), curated by Maite Borjabad López-Pastor, was on display at the Art Institute of Chicago, in July 31, 2021-January 3, 2022. Peripherally in its title a popular Palestinian song, the exhibition presented us with which the state of Israel—and with the support of its American allies—works hard at obfuscating, namely the ongoing destruction of Palestinian history and lives. This task that the artists took upon themselves began with a paradox: how to represent that which is not there. How to represent the undying of Palestinian life and culture? And, how to represent the Palestinian bodies that exist in spite of their ceaseless obliteration, that manage to escape with fugitive means, by evading their own capture and representation?

A free-standing wall opened the exhibition, shimmering with scattered words in reflective vinyl. I composed and recomposited them into phrases as I walked along. “Bodies not supposed to be seen like this / A violent act / Museums are graveyards on the piles of dead bodies / Once an artist now just a tool.” Beyond this wall a path intersecting the gliding color fields that escaped the separation fence into what used to be the family’s land, the surveillance video was released for a short period and circulated online. The artists layer the monochromatic CCTV footage with scenes of lush green and yellow fields and text in English and Arabic.

The video grapples with a question raised by Saidi Hartman in her influential 2008 essay “Venus in Two Acts”: “How does one revisit the scene of subjection without replicating the grammar of violence?” As it circulated on various multimedia channels, the CCTV evidence—which the artists managed to download before it was removed from the web—contributed to the destruction of Palestinians, who are not only killed but also represented as killed, and as soon to be killed. “Oh shining star testify” responds to this saturation by doubly fragmenting the logic of the apartheid that produced this representation. The first fragmentation happens with the layering and visual splitting of the video into multiple channels. The second occurs in the gallery, by projecting onto uneven, overlapping surfaces that further fracture the visual field. In doing so, the artists poetically shatter the linear, catastrophic history imposed on Palestine.

One notable scene features a person passing through a field to pick the same plant Shawamreh was foraging when he was killed. Here, the saturated violence inflicted on the Palestinian body seem to be absorbed by the land that is depicted with bright hues of greens and vivid yellows. In doing so, the work presents not only the brutalities of a space that is structured by apartheid but also the beauty of loved and intimately known indigenous land.

A second multi-channel video, “At those terrifying frontiers where the existence and disappearance of people fade into each other,” consists of human avatars and textual excerpts from Edward Said’s most personal and poetic work, After the Last Sky (1984). The avatars are based on online images of participants in the Great March of Return, a massive civil movement held weekly on Fridays in 2018–2019, during which thousands of Gazan Palestinians—who are kept in the world’s biggest “open” prison—protested their inhumane living conditions and demanded the right to return to a homeland occupied by Israel. The artists rendered these images through software while reenacting the protestors’ body movements and panels that broke up the projections. The arrangement implicated the audience, since there was no darkened space to withdraw to.

The installation featured two multi-channel videos, shown consecutively. “Oh shining star testify” (2019–20) presents CCTV footage taken by the Israeli military near Hebron on March 19, 2014, showing Yassar Shawamreh, a 14-year-old Palestinian boy, who was on his way to pick akkub flowers, a delicacy in Palestinian cuisine, growing wild at high altitudes and blooming for only a short time. After the military shot the teenager dead for crossing the separation fence into what used to be his family’s land, the surveillance video was released for a short period and circulated online. The artists layer the monochromatic CCTV footage with scenes of lush green and yellow fields and text in English and Arabic.
feeding the embodied performances back into the software; the results register any missing visual information in the avatars’ faces as incomplete features, as glitches, and as scars.

The attention the artists give to these gaps in visual data is especially evocative. By working with that which is not there, they highlight the fact that the low-res recordings are of people generally blocked from sight—for the last fifteen years Gaza has been under siege by Israel, with all media and humanitarian access barred. Working against the state which both obliterates Palestinian lives and repudiates their obliteration, the artists rendered the avatars with their own bodies, resulting in a singularly uncanny depiction. “Uncanny” is used here in its Freudian sense of unheimlich; the original German indicates the local, the home (das Heim) which has become un-home-like, or uncanny. I evoke the Unheimlich because though the artists were in Palestine when the Great March of Return was unfolding, they couldn’t reach and join the protestors due to the architecture of the apartheid. Split and seized across an intimate distance—the protests were happening only 60 miles from the artists—produced an uncanniness that permeates the work.

Further, rendering the missing data as scars on skin visually reinscribes the mostly unseen, and yet fully intentional, debilitation of Palestinians by the Israeli state. During the Great March of Return, the Israeli military perfected its so-called humanitarian approach—shooting to cripple and not to kill—and maimed thousands of people who were then denied medical attention, which meant the loss of any possibility of full rehabilitation. This military strategy is imposed on Palestinian bodies already being maimed daily by the Israeli state, which limits the amount of water, calories, and megawatts allocated to Gaza, keeping it, as Benjamin Netanyahu said, at “the bare minimum [needed] for survival.” Hence, the scars imposed on the avatars should not read as trauma-porn but as documentary.

With these glitches the artists propose, as well, a radical new tactic. The unregistered avatar holds the potential to virtually escape the definition of Palestinians as being outside the law—illegal and condemned—becoming instead that which evades the law and visual capture. Escaping the violence of the apartheid algorithm, which is programmed to identify that which it condemns to the barest of lives, the glitched- and-missing-data avatars are fugitives.

The fugitive and the fugue come together in a series of small, sparse white on black text prints. In “Don’t read poetics in these lines” (2010–21), tweets responding to the Arab Spring ironically morph into concrete poetry. The compositions were constructed via erasure, with the artists heavily cutting-up tweets they have been collecting since 2010. The internet, and the constant chaotic calls it evokes and serves, what the artists call an “amnesiac archive,” is darkened here and represented as a space of absences. The resulting poetry is stunning.

If only this mountain between us could be ground to dust is symphonious. Its poetic tactics resonate as I am writing these words. It reverberates a demand I sensed while being in the show, which by design insists on my inclusion. Shedding light on my body, it literally shed light on my presumed stance as an outside viewer and illuminated my position as being already implicated in the ceaseless obliteration of Palestinian presence and history. And yet, the saturated and nuanced sonic and visual tones seduced me into an impossible state that was near to trance. I was spellbound, because the exhibition is terribly beautiful. In writing “terribly beautiful,” I echo Moten, who wrote of it as an ontological state of black art (a category to which, in my opinion, Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme belong). In Black and Blur Moten explains, “the music is a riotous solemnity, a terrible beauty. It hurts so much that we have to celebrate.” And so do, as this exhibition’s anarchic force, its rituals of mourning and of grace, its wit and elegance keep reverberating.
BY XIOMARA RODRIGUEZ

In May of 2021 it was announced that Chicago Alderman Maier and the CEO of Hispanic Housing, Paul Roldan, were moving forward with the building of a new 9-Story Affordable Housing Complex. This complex is part of Hispanic Housing Development Corporation’s “Preserving Paseo Boricua” development strategy, which is working to bring affordable housing to our neighborhood so that long-time residents can afford to continue living in the community they have called home for generations.

Immediately after it was announced that the plan for the affordable housing complex was moving forward, a Block Club Chicago article came out containing the voices and discontent of a group who calls themselves the “East Humboldt Park Neighborhood Association.” According to the article this group “opposes the project because of the lack of community involvement in the decision making process and because they think the building is too tall for the area”. However, this article fails to mention the fact that this affordable housing complex plan came out of a mandate given to community leaders. This mandate was articulated in a summit sponsored by the Puerto Rican Agenda at Chi Arts High School with the participation of nearly 300 community members and community organizations including: LUCHA, Hispanic Housing, Casa Norte, Buckboard, The Puerto Rican Cultural Center, Logan Square Neighborhood Association, and Association House. The fact that this “East Humboldt Park Neighborhood Association” went to the press about how upset they were about a lack of community involvement in the decision making process, while completely disregarding the fact that community members came together to mandate this affordable housing complex, makes it pretty clear that the way the “East Humboldt Park Neighborhood Association” defines their community is exclusive of their neighbors who support affordable housing. The “East Humboldt Park Neighborhood Association” describes itself on its facebook page as based in “a diverse neighborhood on Chicago’s west side that is bordered by North Avenue, Western, Division Street, and California.” As someone whose family, according to their partitioning, has lived in so-called “East Humboldt Park” for over five decades, I was shocked and disturbed by this neighborhood association’s blatant disregard for the lives and well being of their neighbors who are being priced out of the community.

However, the East Humboldt Park Neighborhood Association’s response to this affordable housing complex is more than an isolated act of ignorance and selfishness. Their response speaks to the systemic violence our community has faced in the battle to survive against colonialism, capitalism, and white-supremacy. When a representative of the “East Humboldt Park Neighborhood Association” by the name of Max Colopy is quoted saying “The adjacent buildings are either one story or four stories. There’s no building within the vicinity that’s nine stories, let alone facing the park”, he is not just saying that the view he is able to see from the park is more important to him than families having access to housing, he is acting from an awareness that we live in a world that values the voices of people who can afford housing over people who cannot. Moreover, we cannot take this response by “East Humboldt Park Neighborhood Association” to an affordable housing complex out of the context in which it was made. Firstly, the area that the “East Humboldt Park Neighborhood Association” has partitioned as ‘their’ neighborhood is one of the areas in Greater Humboldt Park that has experienced some of the worst gentrification and price hikes. Additionally, the Hispanic Housing Development Corp’s “Preserv -ing Paseo Boricua” development strategy comes out of an acknowledgment of the decades of gentrification Puerto Ricans, specifically, have struggled against in Lincoln Park, Lakeview, River North, and now Humboldt Park. The struggle to find affordable housing has become central to the story of Puerto Ricans in Chicago, but the ways in which people have attempted to dispossess us from our housing hasn’t only been through Block Club Chicago articles. If you walk in the corner of Rockwell and LaSalle in so-called “East Humboldt Park” you will see a mural depicting a Brown woman calling for help from a burning building, there are hands breaking chains, and on one of the chains it says “Housing is Still the Issue.” This mural is referencing the many Puerto Rican families we lost in Humboldt Park, because their landlords were conducting arson for profit. Arson for profit was an attack on the lives of our community members who were viewed as worthless by more wealthy landlords. This article in Block Club Chicago is an attack on our community members whose lives are seen as worthless by more wealthy neighbors who do not have a need for affordable housing. It is incredibly dangerous to view this article and attack on the Hispanic Housing affordable housing complex as an isolated incident. My family and all Puerto Rican families in this city are here as a direct consequence of settler colonialism. Humboldt Park’s existence is a direct result of the process of settler colonialism during which French and British settlers violently disappeared, murdered, and dispossessed Indigenous Bodéwadmiakiwen, Kiikaapoi, Myaamia, Očhéthi Sakowin, and Poria people. Similarly the Puerto Rican community is in Humboldt Park because of the same disgusting process of settler colonialism, because the United States, as a settler colonial nation-state, also operates as an empire utilizing external forms of colonization. The invasion and economic devastation of Puerto Rico by the U.S. forced the spatial deconcentration of dispos -sessed Puerto Ricans, like my grandparents, lured by the hope of low-wage employment to abandon their homes and family to occupy and settle on seized Indigenous land. The gentrifiers of Humboldt Park’s actions are informed by this gruesome legacy of settler colonialism with their latest attempt at dispossessing their low income neighbors of the only housing many of us can afford, and disappearing the culture/community we have cultivated out of necessity for genera -tions replacing it with “co-living” apartment complexes geared towards millennials.”

Krouser Rodriguez in the dedication of In Memoriam at the Thay Puerto Rican Cultural Center and a lifelong resident of Chicago Humboldt Park neighborhood.
The new cold war against China is becoming the key focal point in international politics today. Following a humiliating defeat in Afghanistan, the US is moving on from its disastrous “War on Terror”, to concentrate on what US Secretary of State Blinken has described as the US’s “greatest geopolitical test” of the 21st century – stopping the rise of China and maintaining US global dominance.

China’s economic rise, which has brought more than 850 million people out of poverty in 40 years, and taken China to the brink of becoming an advanced economy, that will soon be larger than the US, is regarded by the US political establishment as a challenge to their dominance and therefore intolerable. Unfortunately both the leaderships of the Democratic and Republican parties are united in their commitment to carry out a new cold war which aims to hold back the social, economic and technological development of China.

This new cold war is not only an attack on China’s people, however, but an attack on all of humanity. US aggression against China constitutes a threat to world peace and prosperity and is a major obstacle to tackling the shared threats facing every human being such as avoiding climate catastrophe, ending the Covid 19 pandemic and building global economic recovery.

In response to this threatening US agenda, a new international movement against the cold war is growing that is demanding an end to US aggression and supporting global cooperation to deal with the real problems facing humanity.

BIDEN ESCALATES THE COLD WAR

The new cold war against China was launched by former US President Trump and has unfortunately been continued by Biden. The economic, propaganda and diplomatic attacks on China have been maintained, the focus on blocking China’s technological advance remains, and the US’s military build-up against China in the Pacific region is increasing.

The key difference between Trump and Biden’s approach to attacking China is that the new US administration is attempting to build a wider international front of US allies, particularly amongst advanced economies in the Global North, to participate in these attacks.

At the most recent NATO summit in June 2021, a number of European governments unfortunately acceded to the new cold war agenda advanced by Biden. The summit’s communiqué identified China’s rise as a “systemic challenge” and a threat to the Western military alliance.

It is ridiculous to suggest that China poses any threat to the US or any other countries in NATO. China has no military forces close to the US or Europe. China does not send warships to roam around the coasts of the US or Europe.

The US, however, is stepping up its military encirclement of China. The US currently has 400 military bases surrounding China and the US military budget for 2022 of $750 billion will see hundreds of billions of dollars spent on upgrading US military capabilities to threaten China. Britain, France and Germany have sent warships to the South China Sea this year in politically provocative gestures of support for this US-led military build-up in the Pacific.

A further escalation of the new cold war against China took place in September, when Australia, the US and Britain announced the formation of a new military alliance known as AUKUS. This will see the US furnish Australia with the technology to deploy nuclear-powered submarines which is in violation of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The creation of AUKUS is an act of aggression against China which threatens peace and stability in the Pacific.

US militarism, the new cold war presents crucial for humanity

In addition to the dangers posed by increasing US militarism, the new cold war portends many other threats. A particular danger is that demoralization of China by leading politicians and the mainstream media in the West – includ ing the attempt to blame China for the Covid 19 pandemic – has fuelled a rapid rise in racism and hate crimes directed against people of Chinese, East and Southeast Asian heritage in the US and Europe.

The horrific massacre of eight people including six women of Asian heritage in Atlanta. A similar trend has occurred in Britain, where reported hate crimes against Asian people have risen by 55% in two years, from 1,492 incidents in 2018 to 2,122 in 2020.

Economically, it is clear that any country that pursues a cold war against China will suffer damage, including losing jobs, trade and investment. A study by the leading consultancy Oxford Economics concluded that tariffs on Chinese goods exports to the US raises the cost of living for US families by hundreds of dollars, while others have concluded they have costs hundreds of thousands of jobs.

The fact that the top priority of US administration to stop the rise of China means that colossal resources are being wasted on a cold war instead of dealing with the real threats facing humanity – in particular climate change.

The latest analysis from the Carbon Action Tracker estimates that following the recent COP26 conference the world is on course for 2.4C of warming, far above the critical threshold of 1.5C necessary to avoid climate catastrophe. The US is not only the world’s largest contributor of carbon emissions historically – emitting twice as much as any other country – but today the US remains the biggest polluter of any major economy in per capita terms, emitting twice as much as China per capita. The US currently emits 4 tonnes per capita, whilst China emits 7.4 tonnes per capita. The US’s existing climate target, to cut its per capita carbon emissions to approximately 10 tonnes per capita by 2030, is dangerously inadequate.

No Cold War: why building opposition to the US attacks on China is crucial for humanity

NEW COLD WAR IS AGAINST THE INTERESTS OF HUMANITY

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Research from the forum Stop AAPI Hate revealed that there were nearly 3,900 anti-Asian racist incidents in the US in 2020. This year the horrific massacre of eight people including six women of Asian heritage in Atlanta. A similar trend has occurred in Britain, where reported hate crimes against Asian people have risen by 55% in two years, from 1,492 incidents in 2018 to 2,122 in 2020.

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ENFF (Escola Nacional Florestan Fernandes/Florestan Fernandes School), was born out of a decision made by the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra/MST) to create a political education system for activists from the cities and the countryside. It enables workers from all over the world who are denied their basic rights to meet, talk and share knowledge and experiences within a Latin American perspective.

The school was inaugurated on January 23, 2005, in the countryside outside of Guararema, São Paulo, after the physical structures were collectively and voluntarily built by comrades from the MST. It was our social movement’s base and headquarters. It was our social movement’s base and headquarters.

The school is named in honor of the late Brazilian sociologist and politician Florestan Fernandes because of his class origin, his tireless fight against social exclusion, the knowledge he generated on the struggles of his time, and his commitment to socialism. The ENFF was built with mysticism and in memory of other warriors like Frida Khalo, Patativa do Assaré, Antônio Cândido, Marseille Franco, Patricia Galvão, Vito Gianotti, Rosa Luxemburgu, Paulo Freire and [Brazilian socialist football legend] Dr. Sócrates, who all have names at the school named after them.

The school’s political education strategy uses socialization and knowledge production to break from the logic of the mercantilization of education and society. It has created new areas of knowledge through a mixture of political formation and technical training. Due to the consolidation of this educational project. The ENFF is linked to the fight for and construction of human emancipation. Themes that are taught include agrarian reform, agroecology, Marxism, feminism, Latin America, diversity, racism and gender diversity without losing sight of the total reality of the processes, enabling a reading of the problems, challenges and potentials of the international, regional and local class struggle.

We consider this relationship fundamental in the learning process, which always maintains its revolutionary vigor, strengthening and giving continuity to the struggle, as well as preparing for the future by creating a generalized feeling of transgression against the order of capital.

The ENFF was born out of a desire to criticize the way society produces knowledge, and those whose interests this process serves. It was created to form organic intellectuals who are anchored in their reality and understand the contradictions of the class struggle, with the skills to continually extract elements from this to make qualitative jumps in their class consciousness.

Florestan Fernandes School works for subjects to become protagonists in their own stories and begin demanding social changes. This is a task that requires a lot of courage and dedication to our ideals and dreams for a just, solidarity society. This transformation can take the form of new ways of engaging in politics, restoring the historic struggle of the exploited and oppressed and building solutions for our times. Our school goes beyond walls, geography and symbolic borders. It is a school that aims to decolonize knowledge and consciousness.

Our participatory methodology uses collective and individual study, collective labor, organicity, mysticism, culture and art in ways that recognize the humanist and socialist values that are part of our communal living philosophy of day to day life in the school. Our pedagogical project is linked to the fight for and construction of human emancipation. Themes that are taught include agrarian reform, agroecology, Marxism, feminism, Latin America, diversity, racism and gender diversity without losing sight of the total reality of the processes, enabling a reading of the problems, challenges and potentials of the international, regional and local class struggle.

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No War but Class War: A conversation with Hüseyin Dogru

BY BRIAN MIER

This war shows the hypocrisy of the West more and more. The West is going really insane. They could end it all just by saying, “we agree, we will not expand NATO to Ukraine.” It would be done if they did that. Instead, they have started shutting down media outlets. They have the whole technology in their hands and they can just do it.

If you look at the media coverage, the voice has changed. Western journalists are saying things like, ‘this war is bad but you can’t compare it with Iraq or Afghanistan because they are used to things like that.’ They are basically saying, as Europeans, they are more civilized and this is why war shouldn’t happen in Europe. It’s mad.

Another journalist was interviewed on BBC and complained that blond people with blue eyes are dying. It’s crazy.

This conflict is definitely going to be a long term thing. At some point it’s going to ease down, but you never know when. Nobody predicted that Putin was going to go in like that.

Our editorial position at Redfish is that we do not support any kind of war except class war. As you can see on our timeline on our social media, we did heavy coverage of the anti-war protests in Russia. Our stand is that we oppose all imperialist wars. The Azov issue is important, as is the fact that everyone is now sending weapons to Ukraine. Everyone makes money. War means money and profit for a lot of companies. This is very dangerous. The Ukrainian government is handing over weapons to Ukraine. Everyone makes money. War means money and profit for a lot of companies. This is very dangerous. The Ukrainian government is handing over weapons to everyone now. And we saw what happened in Libya and Iraq, where these weapons ended up. The Azov Battalion, the right wing, are going to be brutally armed. And I think this is the tactic of the West, especially the CIA, to create a controlled chaos. This is what they did during the Crimes and Medien protests - the West sided with Azov and right wing fascist groups there.

The other thing which is worrying me is that while the Ukraine war is really horrible and ugly, this is just the start of something bigger because the US is using the situation to its advantage. First, they just took away Europe from Russia - they killed the relationships. They are going to use that now to make Europe dependent on them in terms of cheap energy, gas, petroleum and anything else they can. At the same time, this is a process of preparing for the future conflict with China. The US will use Europe’s dependency to push the EU into a position to support them in an escalation with China over Taiwan, which will definitely come. I think this is the first step towards China again, strategically, because now they have the justification. They are going to say, “Xi Jinping is even worse than Putin, and look what Russia did, so we have to unite.” And they will use that fear of the population to justify a big escalation in the future against China in Asia, because the US has made this clear.

One year ago in Biden’s first international speech at the Munich Security Conference in Germany in 2021, he said, the biggest threat to US security was China.

What happened back then is that France emphasized that it had its own relationships and that it needed to follow its own interests. That was very dangerous for the US. But the US will change that narrative right now. France and Germany had the same reaction when the US attacked Russia verbally on a diplomatic level. One year ago France also emphasized that, although the US was an ally, it needed to have its own aims, goals and relationship with Russia. Now this is all broken. The US is really going to take advantage of it.

Hüseyin Dogru is co-founder and head of production at Redfish Media. He lives in Berlin.
History Doesn’t Forgive You

BY ENE OBI

During the 1980s, the IMF introduced structural adjustment programs to Nigeria and so many other countries in Africa. There were big economic issues involved and we were alarmed when we saw what they were.

First of all, Nigeria did not need any international aid. We did not need money from any international organization at the time. Nigeria decided it wasn’t going to borrow money from the IMF but it wanted to implement IMF structural adjustment policies anyway.

So we students were looking at this, we were looking at the IMF conditionality and it was clearly not good for Africa. Many people, including members of professors unions and other organizations, got together and looked at the policies and said they were not going to be good for Nigeria. A lot of it had to do with what they would do to our social structures. The Nigerian system did not have the kind of social welfare structure that other countries in the West had at the time. There was this idea that they would withdraw subsidies and that they needed the health and education sectors to move on their own. A lot of social structures were going to be withdrawn from the poor and the vulnerable. This was unacceptable. Because the government is supposed to work at the service of the people. It is for the people and it is by the people. It has to do with the well being of the people and the security of the people. It has to do with the economy of the people. And so when you are bringing in policies that are going to oppress the people, what does this do?

I was a student union leader at the time. I was the Student Union President at the University of Jos, which is in the center of Nigeria. I was the Student Union President at my university because our protests were nation wide. These students were just nothing. They arrested leaders because they felt that the voices of the students were just nothing. They arrested leaders from different schools all over the federation because our protests were nation wide. These protests took place under the auspices of the National Association of Nigerian Students, within which I was the Student Union President at the University of Ibadan, which is in the center of Nigeria. All schools in the country drew under that umbrella. Whenever a demonstration was coming up, we had ways of spreading the word and involving the entire country out. We made a very well coordinated attempt, but we can’t say that the leaders really listened to what we were saying. They enacted the IMF conditionality anyway, despite the trouble. Instead of listening, they said the police and the police was not enough so they brought out the army so that everybody was scattered or arrested and taken to prison.

We spent years demonstrating against the structural adjustments. We took our voices to the road. We took our voices to protest, we were arrested and after some weeks of detention we were released and many times we were arrested again. I myself went into detention many times and spent time in prison. But at the end of the day, all of the things we predicted happened because they ignored the voices of the young people, as usual.

We were trying to tell the Nigerian government that we were struggling because of the economy. And today, we are worse off because of this because the structural adjustments destroyed every structure - the education sector for Nigeria was destroyed, the health sector was destroyed, the police were destroyed, the money from every social amenity. How can you withdraw something like that from the people in a country like Nigeria, where the social structure wasn’t fully supporting the people in the first place? The social structure already wasn’t supporting the population because the development plan didn’t meet with the population growth rate. This is why we saw the IMF conditionality as something that was not going to be good for Africa at all.

Today, I think the student movement from that time has been vindicated. Many years down the line - I remember this very well and I still remember the small corner of the newspaper where it was written in 1996... The IMF Deputy Director apologized to Africa, admitting that its policies were a failure. Of course, they cannot work in Africa, because they are not African. You don’t know anything about the economy but you go in and you destroy a country and you design a new structure and you feel that it is the best for Africa. How can that be?

And so, the rest is history. They destroyed our systems and then Nigeria ended up having to borrow, anyway. And so we are now left coping with all the damage. We former student activists are no longer young people, but what we predicted has come to pass. It has destroyed Nigeria and individual differences in Africa. It has destroyed every facet of our structures. It has riddled Africa, removing a lot of dignity from people and shrinking people out, leading to so much poverty, disdain, sickness and want, unfortunately.

I think what we all know is that history will not forgive you when you need to stand up for something and you don’t stand up for it - history doesn’t forgive you. We didn’t have smartphones and all the connectivity we have now. We didn’t have Instagram or WhatsApp and all that. Today the young people are so easily connected. I would like to think that our struggle is connected to last year’s #EndSars protests against the Nigerian police Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and police violence. The young people of Nigeria called out through the social media, they called themselves to the streets. At that time, the Nigerian Labor Congress was supposed to go on strike. When the strike was called off at the last minute, I knew that something was going to be up because the young people were tired. And they came out in mass across the country, they were well organized. At the end of the day, Lagos turned very volatile. The government seems to have mobilized other young people to counter and attack them, but it was very massive and unprepared.

So I am encouraged by the young people. I am encouraged by that demonstration because it made me understand that the young people have not left us alone. They are not going to leave the future of the world to be determined by older people. And I think they are much more organized. The emergence of the feminist movement, the young feminist movement, was also an encouragement for me. It showed me that even if we leave the stage, others will continue. So my encouragement to young people is that you should always stand up for your rights and you need to unit your voices together. As young people, the future belongs to you. And the kind of political class we are having today, especially in the developing world, they are very selfish individuals - many of them. Let me say many of them because it’s not all of them that are selfish. There are some dedicated ones but they are too few. And so we have a class of very selfish individuals who are leading Africa, Nigeria and the world.

You need to be aware of this and you must always stand up for your rights and you must never give up. As Nelson Mandela said, “do something, don’t stand still. Crawl if you will and fall if you will but you have to stand up.”

So I want to say that I have no regrets about going to jail. I have no regrets and I am happy that I did what I did. I will do it again if I have the opportunity. We are mobilizing across the country with the social movements on a lot of different things and we are building coalitions with the labor unions and all the civil society organizations so the sky is the limit. We are still in the struggle. We are not giving up.

Ene Obi is a former leader of the Nigerian National Student Movement and the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS). She is the Convener of the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room and Co-Chairman of ActionAid Nigeria.
Save the Nearest Prairie with Your Burning Desire

BY PEREGRINE KODIAK

Stop filling your holes for one second and step into this time machine. We’re going back way, way before white people came to the Americas. Let’s take a look at the landscapes and the rugged human and indigenous genius by which tribes remain strong, even in this weak moment. Look out the time machine window at women giving birth in the cold dark, lying down, way down. No electricity. No money. No emojis. Yet, they are exercising the same existential rights as we and other Earthly life forms are. The right to pollinate and to be pollinated. The right to parasitize. The right to express sex appeal. The right to play with herbs. The right to ignite anthropogenic fires for a higher purpose.

People have peaceably set fire to shit since time began, but it’s hard to find record of fire activism because all the records burned up. Of course, other instruments of peace were left lying around. Significant bow and arrow operations are attested by 59 exhumed 10,000-year-old skeletons at Jebel Sahaba, Egypt. Those Mesopotamian remains tell of a violent skewering window at women giving birth in the cold dark, way back, way back. Way before white people came here.

Survivors have learned to steal fire, eat forbidden fruit, and just keep bestowing blessings on us party people. God gets it. God’s a pyro too. And in God’s image, we humans like to burn shit. Indeed, the original human on these North American lands were having a great time playing with fire.

Let us consider some nearby locale—Rockford’s Bell Bowl, the gravelly basin left behind by the Wisconsin glacier 13,000 years ago. It takes a lot of balls to claim that the first humans living in Illinois walked here, essentially from Russia, on the frozen Bering Straight. But we do know that by 8000 BCE, the glaciers were eaten up, and out of that Rock River Basin gravel sprang happy little tree sprouts, magically, as if painted by Bob Ross. It took a long time, like another 1500 years before the Eastern Woodland cultures felt welcomed here with these happy trees now that they began to hang out and hunt among them. Thousands upon thousands of years passed, and we have no idea what we missed. But somewhere around 1700 BCE, Native Americans started building enormous mounds. These man-made mountains were the coolest thing man had ever made. But it was soon discovered that there was one way to make them cooler. The mounds looked amazing on fire.

Trees became offensive. And in-the-way. But bushes were cool. Red Oak Dogwood, for example, was great in the peace pipe and offered spiritual protection. And willow bark was used for pain relief and chewy baskets symbolizing longevity. Of course, blackberry and raspberry bushes were the jam! And after getting one’s skin torn to shreds from hunting and gathering those delectables, it was customary to mummify oneself in witch hazel poultices. Witch hazel was also cool for “witching” or walking around with a witch hazel stick in each hand like a human Ouija Board, waiting to see if the sticks would cross, and... joy of joy! Stop right there and start digging for water. Diggings! Obviously a favorite past-time of mound builders! Why do we so exclusively celebrate the building aspect? You can’t have a mound without a dig! Maybe it wasn’t about the mounds at all! Maybe it was about the dig?

Well, we know it was about the mounds, because a flaming pit doesn’t look anywhere as cool as a flaming mound. The name of the flame quickly eclipsed the fun of digging. People started committing all manner of fire art. Fire was great for moving shit out of the way of prophecies, meanwhile moving prairie chickens, sturgeon, and monarch migration. A perfect frequency for the peaceful protest is in full swing and you might argue that such damnation can’t be achieved, and that to suggest as such would be fraud. Praries are as obsolete as tractor pulls. But no! The great news is that you CAN find your burning peace and exercise your right to ignite right now here in Illinois, “The Prairie State”. Not too long ago, 22 million acres of prairie grew on Illinois soil. There are still 2000 acres remaining! One prairie, in particular, the previously mentioned Bell Bowl Prairie, situated in Rockford, Illinois, is unique in that the last glacier dumped a bunch of gravel there, and today’s flowers are rooted in rocks and sand. Only very special kinds of flowers (endangered ones) can grow in rocks and sand. And special kinds of birds and bees (endangered ones) live with the special flowers there.

The landscape began to change to support a more open, festival-friendly scene. Sun-loving squalls of wildflowers crushed the bush by the zillion. Now you know, native wildflowers like to get toasted. Especially their little seeds. And all up in their pollen tubes were butterflies and bees, who are cool with flowers getting toasted because they can just fly away when it gets to be too much.

Native wildflowers are the best party guests. They always bring food and drugs—the good shit, like purple coneflower, aka Echinacea, which is like Robitussin. And peweweed, which both soothes bug bites and tastes like walnuts. (Eat the sweet pods.) And yarrow, a delicious tea, great in salads and to scare away folk devils. And milkweed, which is both poisonous and edible at the same time! And was used by Chippewa moms to soothe their little ones (live with the special flowers there. And milkweed is the coolest thing man had ever made. But it was soon discovered that there was one way to make them cooler. The mounds looked amazing on fire.

Trees became offensive. And in-the-way. But bushes were cool. Red Oak Dogwood, for example, was great in the peace pipe and offered spiritual protection. And willow bark was used for pain relief and chewy baskets symbolizing longevity. Of course, blackberry and raspberry bushes were the jam! And after getting one’s skin torn to shreds from hunting and gathering those delectables, it was customary to mummify oneself in witch hazel poultices. Witch hazel was also cool for “witching” or walking around with a witch hazel stick in each hand like a human Ouija Board, waiting to see if the sticks would cross, and... joy of joy! Stop right there and start digging for water. Diggings! Obviously a favorite past-time of mound builders! Why do we so exclusively celebrate the building aspect? You can’t have a mound without a dig! Maybe it wasn’t about the mounds at all! Maybe it was about the dig?

Well, we know it was about the mounds, because a flaming pit doesn’t look anywhere as cool as a flaming mound. The name of the flame quickly eclipsed the fun of digging. People started committing all manner of fire art. Fire was great for moving shit out of the way of prophecies, meanwhile moving prairie chickens, sturgeon, and monarch migration. A perfect frequency for the peaceful protest is in full swing and you might argue that such damnation can’t be achieved, and that to suggest as such would be fraud. Praries are as obsolete as tractor pulls. But no! The great news is that you CAN find your burning peace and exercise your right to ignite right now here in Illinois, “The Prairie State”. Not too long ago, 22 million acres of prairie grew on Illinois soil. There are still 2000 acres remaining! One prairie, in particular, the previously mentioned Bell Bowl Prairie, situated in Rockford, Illinois, is unique in that the last glacier dumped a bunch of gravel there, and today’s flowers are rooted in rocks and sand. Only very special kinds of flowers (endangered ones) can grow in rocks and sand. And special kinds of birds and bees (endangered ones) live with the special flowers there. And wouldn’t you know that this prairie is owned by Chicago Rockford International Airport, which has plans to run a bulldozer through it to make a road? Why? Because Amazon and UPS would better be able to serve your online shopping habits. Do you really need another MP3 player? Maybe! Be sure to order a megaphone too, because the peaceful protest is in full swing and your voice is important.

Praries are an amazing stage for peaceful demonstrations. They look a lot more awesome on fire than buildings do. Bell Bowl Prairie should be preserved at least for that purpose—a training ground for protestors. Demand for justice. Or course, it’s not practical for urban activists to carpool hours to enact resistance in a prairie. But if you look around, tiny prairies can be found at libraries, schools, and in pots in front of police stations. High-profile stages of great impact. Strategically spaced way stations for the monarch migration. A perfect frequency for the peaceful protest. All you have to do is ask around. “Where is the nearest pollinator garden?” You could probably walk there from wherever you are. Or perhaps see the outermost limit of your quest for peace as a place reachable on foot. Look for the solitary songbird atop the tall, lonely bunch grass—and spiky saw heads. Ruminating with invertebrates, waiting for a match.
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