

From the Editors

written by newpolitics | January 9, 2015

Contemporary capitalist society faces multiple crises: environmental catastrophe, proliferating wars, multiplying authoritarian governments, inequality, poverty, and failing health and education systems. Everywhere new democratic and progressive social movements continue to arise, from Ferguson, Missouri, to the Climate March in New York City, to the movement for democracy in Hong Kong. And yet, in most countries the democratic socialist left is small, weak, and divided. This is especially true of the United States, where the generation of 1968, now in their sixties, begins to fade from the scene while we have yet to see the emergence of strong new left organizations or a new layer of influential labor and social movement activists.

In this issue we offer a special section on “The Left We Need” that draws together three kinds of essays. From the United States we publish perspectives from three socialist organizations and from one group seeking to assist the building of a new American left. From Europe, we present statements from two mass left parties and one organization attempting to bring together left forces. And from Latin America, we present analyses of two elections where the left has been a key participant.

In the United States, as we wrote in our last issue, working class and socialist politics have reappeared as small blips on the radar screen. We are far from having either mass left political parties or even mass social movements. We face the challenge of reconstructing a left while at the same time building those movements. Three American groups—LeftRoots, the International Socialist Organization (ISO), and Solidarity—publish here their perspectives for addressing that dual challenge. Two of these groups, ISO and Solidarity, are offshoots of the International Socialists, which advanced the “third camp” perspective that has also been part of the orientation of *New Politics*. LeftRoots is a new left organization that has brought together activists, especially young activists of color, to promote socialism and internationalism. From the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, the “think tank” of the German party Die Linke, we provide an explanation of its work and how it views prospects for building the American left. We also thank the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung’s New York office for advice and help in acquiring the article on Syriza, as well as the one on Die Linke.

New Politics has always been independent of any political group and we remain that way. Our hope in publishing these articles is to generate a conversation that can help the left move forward. We note that some groups we contacted were unfortunately unable to provide an article at this time. We look forward to hearing from them in the future and to responses to the statements published here, which we will make available on our web site.

Since the economic crisis of 2008, Greece has been at the center of the struggle between capital and labor, the conflict among European national governments, and the fight between left and right. There Syriza, the Coalition of the Radical Left, has emerged as a mass party of the left which appears to stand on the verge of being elected to government. In Germany, Die Linke (the Left Party) is poised to take power in the state of Thuringia. There is perhaps no greater test of radical left parties than how they meet the challenge of using the political power they achieved through elections to weaken capital, to strengthen working people, and to raise the struggle for democratic socialism to a new level. We read here how these parties see themselves in relationship to these tasks. In the United Kingdom, while there is not a major radical left electoral party, we have seen the recent emergence of the Left Unity Project, which seeks to become a pole for forces to the left of the Labour Party.

Finally, we have three articles on South America. Since the 1980s, South America has often been seen as one of the most hopeful regions of the world in terms of left political developments, with many leftists at different times sympathizing with and expressing solidarity with movements, political parties, and governments in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Uruguay, and Venezuela, in particular. In this issue, we look at the recent elections in Brazil and Chile to see how that process is playing out today.

In this issue of *New Politics* readers will find two other special sections. One deals with the ongoing and escalating crisis in Syria and Iraq. Assad maintains his ruthless grip on power in Syria, while the rise of the Islamic State group and air strikes by the United States pose new challenges. We offer interviews with two leading Syrian activists—Joseph Daher and Yassin Al Haj Saleh—who present differing assessments of the prospects for the uprising, while sharing a critical view of U.S. intervention—along with a statement from the Campaign for Peace and Democracy on ISIS and Kobanê.

The second special section deals with crime and the left. What does the left have to contribute to a discussion of crime? We offer three articles that grew out of a panel at the Left Forum conference this past spring. Lynn Chancer discusses the neglect by the left of crime's causes. Brenden Beck takes a fresh look at incarceration, and how the left ought to respond to it. And Colleen Eren explains why we need radical, not conservative, arguments against capital punishment.

This issue also features a remembrance of our long-time board member and former co-editor Betty Reid Mandell, whose death we mourn and whose life we celebrate. We also present an interview with radical cartoonist Eli Valley, and reviews on Palestine, the environment, and other topics.

We at *New Politics* believe that the left we need will only emerge through discussion and debate, as well as through joint work in common causes. We are pleased to host several socialist parties and other left organizations from various traditions in this issue of our journal, and hope that the left will come to see our journal and our website (newpol.org) as a locus for conversations, debates, and respectful polemics about the labor and social movements, the left, and our common project of the struggle for socialism. We look forward to being part of that process with you.

As we were putting together this issue of *New Politics*, grand juries failed to indict police officers who killed African-American men in Ferguson and Staten Island, leading to mass protests. It was too late for us to organize a symposium on the subject, so we decided to write a brief statement that you will find immediately following, and as well to put the symbol of the movement against such injustices—the “Hands Up, Don't Shot” profile—on our cover. The killing of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and every other young black or Latino man who dies at the hands of police makes clear why we need a strong left in America to respond to the deep systemic problems that lead repeatedly to such outrages. The building of that left is a major theme of this issue.

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Footnotes