

The Fight for Socialism Amid Narrowing Horizons and Increasing Dangers

January 23, 2022



As we send this issue to the printer, we think capitalism’s dangers have never been more apparent. Just as clear to us is that the only sane alternative is socialism. The capitalist system and its failure to deal with the crises of the pandemic, the economy, and climate change are generating growing discontent and opposition.

The COP26 U.N. climate change conference in Glasgow, what some had called the “last chance for the planet,” was a flop. In almost every area, there was a failure to make specific plans. The heads of state and corporate executives meeting there failed to establish enforceable rules to keep the rise in global temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels. Though the need to reduce carbon fuels was mentioned, no commitment to end their use was adopted. As the young Swedish activist Greta Thunberg predicted, the meeting was a lot of “blah, blah, blah.” At the same time, COP26 made clear there is a global movement against climate change. We need to build that movement if we are to prevent a planetary apocalypse.

Adding to the global challenges, tensions are increasing among the United States, Russia, and China, all of which are nuclear powers. The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists has declared that we are 100 seconds from midnight on the Doomsday Clock. So now, as we listen to the ticking, we wonder which will come first: climate catastrophe or nuclear holocaust. We must race to build an international peace movement to save the planet and humanity.

Many thought Trump’s eviction from the White House would initiate a return to “normalcy,” meaning the pre-Trump status quo. As bad as that was—with its grotesque inequality, rampant

police brutality, cruel immigration policy, and a host of other social ills, not to mention brutal drone wars—things are getting much worse fast. We see the growth of ultra-rightwing, including neofascist, ideology, threatening rhetoric, and violent behavior at political rallies, school board and city council meetings, and even in state legislatures and Congress. Biden’s “Build Back Better” program—a \$3.5 trillion proposal to rebuild and remake U.S. society—was eviscerated by “moderates” in his party, with all but a tiny handful of self-styled progressive Democrats abandoning their putative goal of combining a Green New Deal, Medicare for All, and substantial taxes on the rich with infrastructure. As we go to press, it looks questionable whether it will pass at all. Meanwhile, democracy is being undercut and white supremacy bolstered by GOP gerrymandering and attacks on voter registration.

Unfortunately, the mass social movements that were able to rally hundreds of thousands to the streets before Biden’s victory have ebbed. Still, there are some hopeful signs. The contradictions of capitalism have never been clearer to millions of people in this country, especially the young. As Republicans are poised to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, a new abortion rights movement is emerging, one that is far more diverse in race and class than what preceded it. While the now-ultra-Right Republican party is endorsing the violent overthrow of elections, progressives have mobilized to defend voting rights. And though the mass protests of Black Lives Matter have dwindled, police racism and violence could at any moment ignite a new movement. Nevertheless, the new generation radicalized in the past five years, including a larger number of people who self-identify as socialists than we have seen in our lifetime, has yet to produce the stable organizations needed to win political victories.

The working class is awakening, slowly and fitfully. We can see this in strike votes, job resignations, and small but important organizing campaigns. North Carolina’s teachers’ union now has a social justice leadership and is speedily growing, and Chicago’s teachers remain a fighting force. Cultural and knowledge workers, as well as college student workers and adjunct faculty are unionizing rapidly. John Deere workers provided an inspiring example of solidarity by going on strike in large part to prevent a two-tier system; Kaiser workers were willing to strike for the same reason. A slim majority of IATSE members — film and television workers — voted against their new contract, which only passed because the union has an electoral college-style voting system. And there were strikes of school bus drivers in eight states this fall. Resistance has not yet crystallized into open class struggle on a large scale, and unions still represent a small fraction of the working class. But the confluence of the Right’s stunning growth and the diminished strength of movements for social justice has highlighted more sharply than ever the responsibility of the Left to support workers’ struggles, while recognizing the growth of support for Trump among white workers.

That takes us to *New Politics* and our current issue. We begin with a symposium on the climate crisis. Martin Hart-Landsberg urges us to look at the U.S. government’s mobilization for World War II in order to understand the scale of action that would be needed to implement a current-day Green New Deal. Laura Schleifer and Daniel Fischer argue that animal liberation is an essential part of climate justice. And Steve Ongerth makes the case that workplace organizing is critical for addressing the economic harms of climate change.

Four essays make up our roundtable on the fight for abortion rights. Elizabeth Rapaport reviews the ever-narrowing legal status of abortion since *Roe v. Wade*. Dana Cloud maintains that the crucial battles for abortion rights are in the streets, not in the courtrooms. Marian Jones focuses on the failings of the white-led reproductive rights movement. And Irene Hays argues that “*Roe Is Already Gone*,” as abortion has been out of reach for many Americans for a long time.

In an article that is the first chapter of her new book, Lois Weiner examines the implications of recent developments in work and in neoliberalism for how education activists need to respond. Brian Bean and Shireen Akram-Boshar interview Palestinian activist Layan Kayed on how students and

women are organizing against the Israeli occupation. Dan La Botz explores the origins of “campism” on the left, the view that any opponent of the United States is automatically worthy of our support. Michael Pröbsting looks at one such adversary, Russia, and shows that it too is an imperialist power. An article by Frieda Afary and a talk by Kobra Sultani examine the situation of women in Afghanistan. And Phil Gasper interviews one of the leading authorities on the politics of sports, Dave Zirin.

In our review essays, Sue Ferguson examines *Patriarchy of the Wage: Notes on Marx, Gender, and Feminism*, a new book by Sylvia Federici, one of the founders of the Wages for Housework campaign, and David Finkel provides a critique of Sue Linfield’s book on Zionism and the Left. Javier Sethness and Scott Remer offer analyses of Erich Fromm, an important theorist from the Frankfurt School. And we have shorter reviews by Brian Kwoba on the Black American radical Hubert Harrison, Lillian Cicerchia on social reproduction, Suddhabrata Deb Roy on dialectics, and Kevin B. Anderson on Marx’s last years.

We hope that these analyses and reports make some small contribution toward the fight for a socialist future.