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#### Racial capitalism systematically orders Black life into a constant state of violence through racial hierarchies and accumulation. This is the basis for intercommunal violence through anti-relationality through material accumulation: global genocide, war, slavery, and colonialism.

**Alexander 22** (Qui Dorian Alexander, University of Toronto, Assistant Professor of Gender, Sexuality and Trans Studies in Curriculum and Pedagogy is a Puerto Rican/Black/Afro-Latinx trans-masculine non-binary FTM person) Pedagogies of abolition: A phenomenological exploration of radical study in Black trans communities. Diss. University of Minnesota, 2022, DM

Ruth Wilson **Gilmore** (2020; 2002b, 2017) **defines racial capitalism as not a thing but as a relation.** **Meaning it is a dynamic relationship between capitalism as a social organizational structure and racialization as a practice of subjugation. Capitalism is a market economy, based on private ownership of a society’s most valuable resources and labor that is exploited for profit. Capitalism requires inequality, and racism is the system that preserves that inequality.** Many scholars argue that **all capitalism is racial capitalism** (Brewer, 2012; Gilmore, 2017; Ransby, 2018; Robinson, 1983), meaning that capitalism **as we know it cannot exist without white supremacist ideology or a system of racial hierarchy. These two systems are inextricably linked and both must be addressed in order to dismantle either one of them.** Within a US context, **the institution of slavery is often viewed as the sole link between white supremacy and capitalism.** Cedric Robinson’s (1983) work on **racial capitalism, however, shows us that the origins of those relationships existed before the Atlantic Slave Trade even began.** While **chattel slavery in the United States and other regions of the “new world” (i.e. the Caribbean, Brazil) certainly exacerbated these relationships, white supremacist ideology became entangled with capitalist development long before it was even exported out of Europe** (Robinson, 1983). To understand anti- Blackness (Hartman, 1997; Sexton, 2016a; Wilderson, 2020) as **a system of socio- political and economic disenfranchisement of Black bodies, we must first understand the connection between the rise of capitalism, slave labor, nationalism, and the development of race.** Racial capitalism is a framework we can use to understand anti-Blackness both materially and ideologically. **It allows us to see the ways in which anti-Blackness operates systemically, interpersonally and individually in people’s everyday lives.** Anti- Blackness is **an entanglement of various systems of domination working alongside and intertwined with each other** (Hartman, 1997). **Racial capitalism offers a way to see how racial and socio-economic hierarchies contribute to anti-Black ideologies and theorizes a framework that looks beyond racism and classism to understand the ways white supremacy is embodied in our communities** (Robinson, 1983). **Robinson begins to articulate the relationship between racialization, capitalism, slave labor and nationalism in his seminal text Black Marxism** (1983). He began by naming the ways that **racialization existed as a practice of differentiation prior to the development of capitalism. Prior to and within systems of capitalism, the use of [enslaved] ~~slave~~ labor was also common practice. Racialization was a practice enacted by those who owned the means of production to rationalize the enslavement of those whose labor they exploited** (Gilmore 2020). Because capitalism requires inequality to operate, racialization became the ideological mechanism through which to justify that inequality. **Racialized bodies were deemed intellectually and culturally inferior, or barbaric** (Robinson 1983), and with the perception that their participation in a capitalist system was for their own benefit. **This dynamic wasn’t viewed as exploitation because racialized bodies were not worthy of value, therefore,** **their bodies could only be in service of capitalist accumulation** (Melamed, 2015). **Capitalism always needs to be accumulating capital to survive, and racialization enshrines that system of accumulation; one cannot survive without the other, so they cannot be dismantled without the other in place.** This is how race and capitalism are inextricably connected. **Capitalist accumulation continues to exist by producing and enacting relations of inequality. This accumulation is enacted through both material and epistemic violence. Material accumulation happens through the more transparent violence of war, genocide, slavery, dispossession and colonialism.** The insidious nature of nationalist, liberal and multiculturalist ideologies create logics of value that preserve the structure of the state (Melamed, 2015). While Gilmore (2002a) explains **racial capitalism as a relation, she also frames it as functioning as a technology of anti-relationality, a method and practice that reduces collective life to relations only needed to sustain capitalist accumulation.** Racial capitalism creates a mechanism for social separation embedded within structural foundations of the state that continue to manifest today. This **hierarchy of difference dictates how individuals relate to each other interpersonally and collectively, offering a framework for controlling who can relate and how they can relate. Racial capitalism requires individuals to be connected in ways that are only in service of accumulation of capital** (Melamed, 2015) rather than in service to collective wellbeing. **This technology of anti-relationality is exemplified in the experience of enslaved Africans taken from indigenous social relations and denied connection with others in ways that were life sustaining** (Melamed, 2015; Robinson, 1983). **All relations were required to be in service of capitalist accumulation. Today racial capitalism manifests as a police officer kneeling on the neck of a Black man because he was suspected of using a fake $20 bill at a corner store, or as a housing crisis in which police (literally) bulldoze an encampment of unhoused people because residents want the playground back, or when white people protest having to wear masks in public during a global pandemic when the majority of deaths are of Black and brown people. This anti-relationality manifests in all the ways racial capitalism continues to enable the exploitation of Black people’s ideas, labor, and bodies.**

#### That structures anti-Black and gendered relations that require the constant accumulation of Black women and non-gender conforming people to uphold a carceral state.

**Alexander 22** (Qui Dorian Alexander, University of Toronto, Assistant Professor of Gender, Sexuality and Trans Studies in Curriculum and Pedagogy is a Puerto Rican/Black/Afro-Latinx trans-masculine non-binary FTM person) Pedagogies of abolition: A phenomenological exploration of radical study in Black trans communities. Diss. University of Minnesota, 2022, DM

**While the foundations of the Black radical tradition articulated the interconnectedness of race and class, it failed to recognize the ways that other systems of oppression also interlock with race and class.** This is **not a question of whether there were/are women in the Black radical tradition; rather an assertion that patriarchy is yet another system of domination that is in service to racial capitalism. Black feminists brought this assertion to light “from the lived experience of existing within and resisting multiple and connected practices of domination and normalization”** (Cohen, 1997, p. 441). By having **an analysis of how Black people experience interlocking oppressions on the basis of race, class and gender (Carruthers 2018), Black feminism challenges the Black radical tradition to move into its most revolutionary potential.** Having **a gender analysis of racial capitalism acknowledges not only that gender is always at work, but that racial capitalism is always gendered.** **When bodies are racialized, they are also gendered. Black feminism, as defined by the Combahee River Collective** (1977), is **a framework rooted in the lived experiences of Black women that understands systems of oppression that oppress Black women (including but not limited to racism, sexism, heterosexism and classism) are interlocking.** Black feminism **seeks to develop an analytic that understands how the synthesis of those oppressions impact the everyday lives of Black women and gender non-conforming people.** The women of the Combahee River Collective understood that **gender was never at play in a vacuum and that their oppression as Black women was not limited to the effects of patriarchy alone. Therefore, to understand how gender was at work alongside race and class, their analysis had to work beyond the category of women.** We have a great deal of criticism and loathing for what men have been socialized to be in this society: what they support, how they act, and how they oppress. But **we do not have the misguided notion that it is their maleness, per se—i.e., their biological maleness—that makes them what they are. As Black women we find any type of biological determinism a particularly dangerous and reactionary basis upon which to build a politic.** (Collective, 1977, p. 275) **Combahee was firm in asserting that understanding their oppression as Black women was not determined by their biology. It is important to clarify that considering gender in relation to racialized capitalism must go beyond just the consideration of women.** Engaging **the study of gender is bigger than just understanding gender identity or individual embodiments of gender and pushes us to consider the ways that gendered systems and processes are actively at work. Spillers** (1987) **argues that enslavement was actually an ungendering process, stripping Black female bodies of the qualifications of womanhood.** Spillers (1987) asserts that **gendering happens in the realm of the domestic. Because Black women were denied participation in the domestic cultural signifiers (particularly those in relation to family building) that would deem them women (a construction determined by white patriarchal values), they became ungendered. This transpires by a combination of interconnected racial capitalist processes. Black bodies are reduced to flesh, a captive subject position and demarcation of complete objectification. Under these conditions, one is neither female, nor male, as both subjects are taken into "account" as quantities. The female in "Middle Passage," as the apparently smaller physical mass, occupies "less room" in a directly translatable money economy. But she is, nevertheless, quantifiable by the same rules of accounting as her male counterpart.** (Spillers, 1987, p. 72) **This is the first instance in which Black female bodies are ungendered as they are inserted into a racial capitalist system. Enslavement denies access to feminization.** In order to preserve property relations, the enslaved were prohibited from participating in systems of kinship. **Childbirth (another white patriarchal standard of womanhood) for the enslaved female was reduced to genetic reproduction of the enslaved** (Spillers 1987). **Enslaved females were not afforded a relation to their offspring in the context of mother and child. Therefore, the construction of family within white patriarchal standards could never be achieved by enslaved females, denying them not only access to the category of woman, but also denying the ability to create kinship and ultimately reaffirming racial capitalist property relations. Ungendering offers a framework to understand how Black women were left out of (or never even considered within) the category of women.** The enactment of (cisheterosexual) **patriarchy is also a racial capitalist practice.** In other words, **binary categories of gender and sex are functions of white epistemologies upholding ideologies in service of capitalist accumulation.** **This challenges us to “disentangle ourselves from a reliance on ‘woman’ and instead think through the ways in which “femininity and masculinity are moving in and across all kinds of bodies”** (Green & Bey, 2017, p. 442). **Black women have often had both their femininities stripped from them and their masculinities weaponized against them because of their Blackness. There is a legacy of white women being centered within (while Black women were left out of) the category of women, particularly in the fight for women’s rights.** In this regard, **captive flesh figures a critical genealogy for modern transness, as chattel persons gave rise to an understanding of gender as mutable and as an amendable form of being**...**the ungendering of blackness is also the context for imagining gender as subject to rearrangement.** (Snorton, 2017, p. 57) **Snorton asserts that Blackness inherently complicates understandings of gender. The fungibility2 of Blackness destabilizes gender as a static category.** The idea that gender is fixed within the body or subject to permanence is ruptured by the impossibility of (Black) gendered normalcy (Bey, 2019). Snorton (2017) brings Blackness and trans-ness into conversation within a historical context, essentially arguing that **Blackness is trans and transness is Black and that fungibility is enabled through ungendering. “Black is a modifier that changes everything”**(Ellison et al., 2017, p. 166). **This understanding shatters binary ways of thinking about the constructions of race, gender or class: Black/white, man/woman, rich/poor. These binary contractions flatten the complexity of how these concepts are entangled and how they manifest in the world.** The **work is to notice dichotomies in an effort not to be trapped by them. This resistance to binary thinking sharpens our analysis by articulating the ways in which gender complicates racial capitalism. Black transness then becomes a way of reading race, class and gender at work, a method of recognizing contradictions in order to hold multiple truths and make more strategic decisions for our movements. Black trans people embody understandings of living with contradictions and complexities in both historical and contemporary contexts. This ability to hold multiple contradictions develops a deeply nuanced way of thinking. It is** why I **believe a Black trans-led abolitionist movement is calling to “defund the police.”** It is **a complex and nuanced demand, which Black trans people have the embodied experience to steward.** Black trans people are not only disproportionately victims of violence but are also disproportionally policed and incarcerated (Bassichis et al., 2015). **A high profile example is the case of CeCe McDonald, a Black trans woman who defended herself from a racist, transphobic attack from a white supremacist, and subsequently was incarcerated and charged with murder. While incarcerated she became an abolitionist and part of an emergence of radical queer and trans organizing working to push forward a new vision for liberation that is rooted in abolition** (Bassichis et al., 2015; Fischer et al., 2018; Ransby, 2018).

#### This system is imploding. There is an urgency to challenge racial capitalism and its global hold on capital. Failure to find the best methods to organize the masses against climate change, US hegemony, and capitalism ensures mass violence.

**Riva et al. 24** (Sara Riva University of Queensland. She is a feminist whose research looks at the intersections of neoliberalism, migration, humanitarianism and the border. Her work has been published in the Journal of Citizenship Studies, Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies, Geopolitics and Journal of Refugee Studies) “Border abolition now”, Pluto Press, 2024, pp.243-245, DM

**DM: We have to take into consideration that we’re living in a hyper-capitalist apocalyptic nightmare where we’re teetering on the brink of environmental collapse from climate change.** We have less than ten years to turn back the tide or else humanity and every other life form on this planet could cease to exist. **We’re seeing ever-increasing numbers of climate refugees coming to US, European, and Canadian borders fleeing from the Global South, trying to escape the consequences of climate change, but also imperialism and all the other forms of organized domination and the violences it produces.** For example, **the violence and corruption that happens from the mass extraction of natural resources from poor countries throws them into turmoil.** As a result, the wealthy get richer and the poor get poorer. **Poverty creates crime and criminals eventually get well organized and very rich.** Then people have to flee the gangs and drug cartels. But **those are not officially recognized categories or reasons to be granted US asylum. These gangs and cartels in Mexico, Colombia, Haiti, etc. are the direct result of US imperialism and the immense poverty produced through the systematic looting of Latin America and the Caribbean.** We’re **finding ourselves in a situation where if we’re not able to take power away from the state, overthrow the late-stage capitalist economic world order, end US hegemony, reverse the warming effects of climate change, and resolve all of the most serious/urgent crises of our lifetimes in the next few years, then the whole planet, everyone and everything on it, is going to irreversibly collapse into an abyss.** And so, we often find ourselves conflicted about how to best proceed with promoting our vision of the world and fighting back. **Under these circumstances of duress, what’s the best way to move forward with our goals? How do we bring people into the abolitionist movement? What do we do with those who will never accept an abolitionist agenda? Who can we partner with to support our agenda?** As a migrant organizer in Tijuana, I have come to the realization that migrants/refugees are the ultimate anarchists. They are mostly in favor of an abolitionist vision of the world. They just don’t know or use the words “anarchism” and “abolition” to describe themselves and their political orientation, but they are practicing anarchism in their daily lives. Migrants and refugees dexterously deploy direct action and mutual aid tactics to effectively avoid persecution, survive inhumane conditions and overall fly under the radar. They’re actively contesting the state’s power over their lives by not waiting for permission or papers to cross international borders, often living without an ID or a bank account for months or years at a time. There’s a saying one of my gay migrant youth organizer friends from Honduras says, “Todxs en el piso o todxs en la cama” (Either we all sleep on the bed or we all sleep on the floor), meaning nobody gets left behind. Migrants and refugees will largely share their resources and pass on essential infor- mation to others whom they just met on the road. Additionally, they travel hundreds of thousands of miles to pursue their dreams, or to escape from the most repressive governments. Whether that’s train hopping, riding bikes, hitch-hiking, and traveling in small groups or large caravans, migrants and refugees traverse borders like they don’t exist. Refugee youth will say: “F the police, we can’t work with the police. We won’t call the police, we won’t deal with the authorities. The authorities only exist to harass, arrest, deport and exploit us.” They already share our anarchist values, they just don’t know that the word for “f the state” is anarchism. Throughout the past 18+ years I’ve worked organizing migrants and I’ve come to the conclusion that if we find creative ways to expand alternative mutual aid or solidarity economies where power and ownership is collectivized, migrants would eagerly join abolitionist projects. What we really need to do is offer them a viable pathway to participate in a mutual aid economy, instead of the current capitalist economy. Migrants spend all their time and energy cycling back and forth between crushing dead-end jobs with terrible wages, like at a maquiladora or at a construction site, they don’t have the bandwidth to participate in anything that’s not paid work. **Our abolitionist movement needs to expand efforts to mass exit the capitalist economy and move toward a mutual aid or a solidarity economy**. Every job is a dictatorship of the boss and of the company. **It doesn’t matter that we have a “democracy” as our government if each workplace, where we go to almost every day and spend most of our time, is a dictatorship. All of us need to break free from the current economic system where every job is a dictatorship of capitalist bosses and the evil companies/corporations they represent. It doesn’t matter what the political system is if we have to spend most of our waking hours enduring a dictator boss in every workplace. If we generate meaningful, well-paid jobs that operate as worker cooperatives, our abolitionist movement will rapidly spread.**

#### The aff’s rejection of unionism is a product of neoliberal and capitalist relations that kills the labor movement and the working class. Their small-scale efforts at resistance are met with constant repression causing serial movement failure. Only the alt’s massive militant labor movement organizes unions beyond the values of labor liberalism which solves the case.

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Doing so will require **uniting** folks around a **class struggle union approach**. Believing in class struggle unionism is not enough. Unless we develop a trend within the labor movement that embraces **these** **ideas**, they will **remain** just that—**good ideas**. This raises a whole set of questions: Should we work in conservative business unions or establish new forms of organization? What is the role of middle-class socialists in the labor movement? Should folks take jobs on staff or rank and file? How should union militants relate to the union bureaucracy? Should the focus be on fighting the boss or reforming the union? How should we relate to progressive union officials?

These questions cannot be answered piecemeal but are best approached in what can be called a class struggle organizing approach. There are three major components to a class struggle organizing approach: • **A program to put the labor movement on a class struggle basis • A method of transforming the labor movement • A set of organizational techniques to accomplish the above**

All of this adds up to a very different mode of labor organizing from what we practiced for the last few decades. It puts class struggle ideas in command, relies on inspiration rather than technique, and seeks conflict rather than creating organization.

In each of the previous chapters we **contrasted a class struggle union approach from the labor liberal approach.** Likewise, in this chapter on organizational questions we find a distinct historical class struggle approach **to transforming the labor movement.**

Putting the Labor Movement on a Class Struggle Basis

The core of a **class struggle approach** is to build a labor movement based on **class struggle principles.** Labor activists Bill Fletcher and Fernando Gapasin put this in blunt terms in their 2009 book Solidarity Divided: “We are not interested in **perpetuating illusions**: the reality is that, absent an alternative, transformative trade unionism, **the** **United States will see no labor renewal.** **Rebuilding the AFL-CIO**, or even creating a new federation, **will have been an exercise in futility** unless we get to the roots of the problems facing organized labor.”1

The authors argue that to revive trade unionism we need a more comprehensive critique of unionism. Yet in **the absence of a class struggle framework**, for the last decade **activists have focused on pieces** **of a correct strategy**: new methods of organizing, union democracy, socialist electoral politics, and the like. Even my previous books focused on reviving the strike and militancy with less focus on the comprehensive viewpoint necessary to accomplish that. We need the whole package: an explicit **analysis of the billionaire class**, a class-wide approach, **class struggle ideology**, and **class struggle tactics.** But we also need a **plan and program** to build a labor movement on those ideas.

Today, many have simply given up on the labor leadership. Rather than demanding bold plans to organize industries, **labor activists** set up workers’ centers, **organize small shops**, or believe they can organize workers through sheer willpower. It is a strategy that says we can do it ourselves. **But it places no demands on national leaders of unions**. Unlike generations past, we do not propose militancy, an end to class collaborationism, or the use of the institutional power of the labor movement to take on capital.

The **problem with the small-ball approach** is it **lets the labor bureaucracy off the hook**. It makes the crisis of labor one of organizing techniques rather than **a failure of a workers’ movement capable of waging class struggle, leaving tens of millions of workers out of the picture.** This is the equivalent of **promoting personal financial self-help** as the **response to the austerity economy**. In contrast, previous generations of class struggle unionists demanded a labor movement capable of confronting capital on a grand scale. We need to think about what it would take **to either transform the existing labor movement or build a new one, or both.**

Previous generations of class struggle militants took a dim view of the existing labor movement. The IWW called the AFL the “American Separation of Labor,” referring to its narrow, exclusive craft organization, and called bureaucrats “labor fakers.” Similarly in the 1920s, William Z. Foster railed against the labor corruption, labor capitalism, and narrowness of the AFL.

Likewise left unionists of the 1970s saw themselves as organizing the rank and file against the union bureaucracy. Characteristic of the time, in his popular book False Promises, Stanley Aronowitz pointed the finger at union bureaucrats.2 Targeted in this critique were both the openly corrupt officials but also more common and damaging phenomena such as lazy overpaid business agents, staff who had contempt for line workers, and a class collaborationist approach to dealing with management. Labor officials were viewed as a key impediment to union reform.

While the 1970s labor activists prioritized reforming unions and building rank-and-file struggle independent of and in opposition to the labor bureaucrats, in recent years we find less emphasis on taking on the labor bureaucracy. With union density at 6 percent in the private sector, we don’t have a powerful labor leadership to critique. But even more, **the politics of labor liberalism allow for progressive views without requiring a challenge to the labor leadership.**

Historically, **class struggle militants** had a vision to **transform the entire labor movement** based on the application of class struggle ideas. In the words of Micah Uetricht and Barry Eidlin, their “ideological vision informed their unionism, making it militant, dynamic, and powerful.”3 There was a **core connection between** their **views** of the economic system **and their concrete program to change the labor movement.**

Looking at historical examples can make things clear. In the 1920s, the labor movement was in desperate shape. Although production was shifting away from craft to industrial manufacturing, the AFL stubbornly stuck to their old ways and refused to organize on an industrial basis. Rather than fight, AFL officials fell for labor-management cooperation schemes, set up labor banks and other businesses, and engaged in much corruption.

William Z. Foster, the leader of the 1919 steel strike and a labor leader in the Communist Party, headed up the Trade Union Educational League, which had an ambitious program to put the labor movement on a class struggle basis. The policy statement of the group stated, “The Trade Union Educational League proposes to develop unions from their present antiquated and stagnant conditions into modern, powerful labor organizations, capable of waging successful war against capital.”4

The plan to move the labor movement forward was central to TUEL’s strategy. Specifically, they proposed the rejection of class collaborationism and adoption of class struggle, industrial unionization, organization of the unorganized, the shop delegate system, and creating a labor party.5

TUEL activists in each industry then developed plans specific to their industries. So in the rail industry, concentrations of TUEL members supported amalgamation of the rail unions and opposed the Railway Labor Act. In other industries they put forward specific agendas based on industrial unionism and sharp class-on-class struggle.

In the auto industry, TUEL began publishing shop newsletters written in a rank-and-file manner and agitating for class struggle tactics. “In the 1920s and 1930s Communists in auto were the main voices on behalf of industrial unionism and class struggle,”6 according to historian Roger Keeran, who studied the incredible influence of the Communist Party in auto in the 1930s. Keeran noted the Communist Party had tireless organizers and disciplined groupings. But he also zeroed in on the importance of their programmatic ideas.

Communist influence also stemmed from the correspondence of their ideas to the aspirations of auto workers and to the requirements of unionization. **The ideas of industrial unionism, unity of all auto workers, aggressive strike action, and rank and file control provided a far more realistic blueprint for unionization than the AFL’s craft unionism, avoidance of strikes, reliance on government mediation, and control from the top down.**7

They combined class struggle ideas with an overall plan to move labor forward.

Similarly, Farrell Dobbs, the Trotskyist organizer of the 1934 Minneapolis truckers’ strike, explains the steps in putting the Minneapolis Teamsters local on a class struggle basis: First they had to battle their way into Local 574, which had jurisdiction over the coal yards in which they were employed. Steps could then be taken to convert the union into an instrument capable of serving the workers’ needs. Policies based on revolutionary class consciousness could be introduced. Rank-and-file militancy could be channeled into a showdown fight with the trucking employers. Conservative union officials who failed to meet the test of battle would begin to lose influence over the membership.8

Dobbs shows that the politics of class struggle unionism were systematically employed to go into battle with employers and in the process transformed the union. This systematic plan led to the success of the truckers’ strike, but it also moved on to transform the Minneapolis Central Labor Council and contribute to organizing trucking in the Midwest.

During the decades leading up to the 1930s, groups such as the IWW, the Western Federation of Miners, and others pushed a program of labor militancy, industrial unionism, racial unity, and strike action as the way forward for labor. Although they were great organizers, activists, and strike leaders, they also put forward a vision of how to take on capital on a grand scale.

This element is missing from much of today’s labor commentary. Unlike class struggle unionists of decades past, progressive unionists today place few demands upon national unions. In the absence of a realistic plan to move labor forward based on a class struggle approach, we are left with ineffective solutions.

We can elect **more militant leaders** but can supply **no guidance for how they will behave differently once in power.** • We can **build alternative unions or organizations**, but **without tactics capable of taking on capital they end up being marginal to class struggle or foundation-funded nonprofits**. • We can move from fad to fad such as alternative unions or bargaining for the common good, **but we will not have challenged the fundamental shortcomings of modern unionism**. • We can perfect organizing techniques, but **without a class struggle policy we are left with simply being better organizers or more committed activists.**

Overall, much of today’s labor commentary on union revival sees the problem as organizing techniques or organizational form rather than a fundamentally different approach to class struggle. **This is killing the labor movement.**

In the 1970s and 1980s, most left-wing groups put forward concrete plans to fight back against the burgeoning anti-union offensive. A vibrant left wing offered an alternative way forward for the labor movement based on class struggle principles. Labor activists aggressively pushed an anti- concessions line, opposed the “Team Concept” model of labor relations and other labor-management cooperation schemes being forced upon autoworkers, fought US military intervention against left-wing governments, and supported reform movements within the unions. Their approach was oppositional in character and explicitly based on left-wing class struggle politics.

Over time, however, many of **these activists put their politics in their pockets, abandoning class struggle unionism in favor of labor liberalism and accommodation with the bureaucracy**. There were likely a number of reasons for this. By the early 1980s, most **Marxist groups had imploded, and many adherents had abandoned class struggle theory.** Many of the ex- leftists approached the labor movement on a very practical basis, leaving theory to the law professors and labor liberal staff. **On the one hand, this was good because they rejected the sectarian excesses of the 1970s. However, many essentially abandoned class struggle unionism, which is the only hope for the working class.**

In part, this can be **attributed to the relative weakness of the anticapitalist left during this period. With the waning of the great social movements of the 1960s and the rise of neoliberal ideas, left-wing and socialist ideas were marginalized within society as a whole, including other social movements.** It is **not surprising that the labor-movement left mirrored the weakness of the left overall.**

In addition, the labor movement in the 1980s was fiercely anticommunist. **Left-wing or class struggle politics were ruthlessly suppressed. Class struggle unionists were red-baited and had little opportunity to express explicitly socialist politics**. So, many learned to keep their politics to themselves and adopt frameworks that fit better within the existing context. But with the increasing popularity of antiestablishment and socialist ideas today, **now is the time to challenge neoliberal ideas in our movement.**

For decades we have allowed the liberal law professors and the labor education crowd to dominate the discussion of labor strategy. With the increasing receptivity for socialist ideas among younger folks and labor activists, we have new opportunities for discussion of class struggle ideas. It’s time for class struggle unionists to take the lead.

**The starting point is to realize what we are up against.** Labor activists by definition are optimists—how else do you motivate people? **The problem is, without a realistic estimate of the conditions we face, it is hard to develop a sufficiently radical response. But revolutionary optimism alone is not enough. Missing are the systematic and withering critiques made by previous generations of labor leftists.**

The **minimum necessary elements of a class struggle program today must include a plan to organize the key sectors of the economy, establish international solidarity, and revive militant labor tactics capable of bringing capital to its knees**. Such **a strategy must include both demands on unions and workers’ centers and independent class struggle initiatives. Of course, having the perfect ten-point program is not enough, so it requires concrete organizing, struggles within unions, and strike activity.**

#### Resistance cannot be a metaphor, a focus on material conditions must be the starting point to dismantle violence. The 1AC falls into an abstracted and domesticated politics that mirrors the failures of late market capitalism that remains within a fascist world.

**Gilmore 22** (Ruth Wilson Gilmore is a prison abolitionist and prison scholar. She is the Director of the Center for Place, Culture, and Politics and professor of geography in Earth and Environmental Sciences at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York) Abolition geography: Essays towards liberation. Verso Books, 2022, pp. 63-68, DM

We are in an **epoch of social revolution—capitalism hasn’t won, but not for lack of trying. It is both possible and necessary to pass the word that these times too might pass, but not inevitably toward a more secure fascism. At the same time, (passive) counterrevolutionary forces are pampering into being an intellectual comprador class comprised of some of the very people who have been engaged in the post-1945 freedom work to decolonize our minds.** The late poet-warrior, Audre Lorde, warned that the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. As with any theoretical premise, Lorde’s caveat is useful only if the elements whose paring away enables its elegance and urgency are added back, so that the general truth of the abstraction has concrete meaning for day-to-day life. The issue is not whether the master uses, or endorses the use of, some tool or another**. Rather, who controls the conditions and the ends to which any tools are wielded? Control is not easy. In the culture of opposition, control, tentative at best, results from risky forays rather than documentable ownership through capital accumulation.** Lorde proposes a decisive seizure whose strategy works toward multiple ends. **First, Lorde’s focus on tools requires us to concentrate on fundamental orderings in political economy. If the master loses control of the means of production, he is no longer the master. Thus, relations of production are transformed in the process. Second, her focus on the master’s house guides our attention toward institutions and luxury. The house must be dismantled so that we can recycle the materials to institutions of our own design, usable by all to produce new and liberating work.** Thus, the luxurious is transformed into the productive. Without both parts of the strategy at work, nothing much is different at the end of the day. said, in forays into the printed page during the last and current centuries, that will tell us what happened and what might happen? **How is literary production a political act? What theoretical work might be hidden in a story, a character type, a way of telling? How can the interpretive skills refined through these processes of thought be turned toward understanding cultural expressions that are not bound to the page, such as the various arenas of popular culture—music, dance, movies, costume, language? What are the processes of creating audiences? And, most of all, why bother? Intellectuals studying these questions lay consistent claim to politics as both cause and effect of their work, harking back to the practitioners (themselves mostly still at work) who shook higher education to free up some intellectual and material resources on behalf of the always already excluded.** The need for oppositional work is unquestioned. But what is oppositional work? As the old folks say, if you’re going to talk that talk you’ve got to walk that walk. Oppositional work is talk-plus-walk: **it is organization and promotion of ideas and bargaining in the political arena. Oppositional studies programs originated in and through struggle, and their contemporary quality is various—dependent in large measure on the strict or lax attention paid to the questions of dialectics and contradictions with which Audre Lorde demands that intellectuals engage.** Of course, the originary communities that occasioned oppositional studies haven’t remained suspended outside of history awaiting the return of the native intellectuals. Quite the contrary. The tumultuous upheavals of systemic crisis throughout the overdeveloped world have reached into every corner of society, transforming both the streets and the campuses. **When, as is the case in the United States, the fastest growing group of unemployed consists of white, male, white-collar workers, no institution is unaffected: laws, the church, the military, elected and appointed officials, education—all bow beneath the yoke of austerity, as though such penance, rather than control of profits, will banish generally felt want. The daily management of capitalism’s reorganization demands the doctrine of austerity, which is carried out according to time-honored dogmas of the United States: blame the poor, reward the rich, and talk fast to the middle (the economically broad and racially and culturally confusing category to which most people in the United States assign themselves).** On the campuses, **the “poor” are not necessarily those completely devoid of resources, but they are the johnnies-come-lately, the Black studies and other oppositional studies units which are, like Rodney King, at risk—as stand- ins for the great masses of superfluous human beings whom the state must control, or discard, to organize reliably new relations of production in the New World Order.** In response to this threat, **a move toward connection outside the campus makes sense. After all, who but those who, in the first instance, let us scale the walls from their shoulders will stand ready to catch us should we be knocked back out?** (But here begin strange meanderings, which more often than not lead to culs-de-sac in the shadow of the master’s house, which is still standing!) There are four broad, **overlapping tendencies in contemporary oppositional studies which weave through the literary theory world, but not there alone: individualistic careerism, romantic particularism, luxury production (insider trading), and organic praxis.** Briefly, **these trends are as follows. The first, individualistic careerism,** is the competition to know the most about **some aspect of the politically and oppositionally “new”—the new text, performance, tune, theory. This competition, driven as it is by the market anarchy of late capitalism, is characterized by a lack of connections. As Margaret Prescod puts it, careerism promotes one particular aspect of social change without integrating that struggle into the larger struggle for social change.** In **academic work, “careerism” assigns primary importance to the fact—and survival—of oppositional studies within the intellectual and social structure of the university, the master’s house.** In this regard, **“individualistic” refers both to the practitioners of such cloistered studies and to the studies themselves. Their disarticulation from the larger struggle for social change enables the system to reproduce itself through a multiculturalized professional managerial class.** The class is disinclined to or incapable of bringing about realignment of what Stuart Hall has called “**the fatal coupling of power and difference.” Romantic particularism purports to reclaim an oppositional epistemology and aesthetic that had been obscured by the historical forces of Europe let loose in the world.** In fact, **it fails to escape the universalism elaborated by the modern university insofar as it reproduces, in form and function, idealist philosophical assumptions about who and what works, for whom and to what end. Romantic particularism has great appeal outside the university through its identification of an “authenticity” in cultural practice that needs recognition, though hardly revision.** Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s 1990 Florida courtroom defense of the ultra-machismo rap group 2 Live Crew as “literary geniuses” was a strategically wily move on his part.1 After all, he helped save some Black men from punishment for “crimes” few white men are charged with committing. **However, the result of his approach is to maintain the struggle against racism at a level of abstraction (that is, unacknowledged maleness) that refuses to engage the complexities of power within the ranks of the disfranchised. He reads nauseating lyrics as unassailably valid African American cultural practice (“It’s a Black thing; you wouldn’t understand”), in spite of many, many Black women’s daily struggles to get out from under the crap of that rap. The third, and most distressing, category is that of luxury production— what Canadian intellectual Melissa Freedman calls insider trading for the advantaged elites of theory high or low. There is certain usefulness in figuring out just how an expressive cultural form does its work. However, in the rush to understand, a theoretical eclecticism, mingled with an institutionally encouraged tendency to substitute adequate abstraction for adequate theory, produces work which readers become servants of rather than work which serves readers.** The point is not that reading must always seem transparent and require neither dictionary nor sustained contemplation. Nor is it that complexity is itself bad, nonproductive, or coopted by definition. Nothing could be further from the truth. **But what has happened is that an inward-looking practice is effectively closed off, a dead end of all the labors that produced it—perhaps like a diamond forever, but so what, and at what human costs? In universities over the past generation or so, theory has assumed pride of place in most of the traditional academic disciplines—especially in the humanities—and, by extension, in the oppositional studies corners as well.** In fact, it is quite possible that the **theoretical urgency running through oppositional studies has been sluiced back to the mainstream, refreshing stagnant waters there.** In any event, in **the United States, “theory,” its own discipline and end, pays. Somewhere along the way, intellectuals are so overwhelmed by discovering the production of knowledge that they have forgotten about “just knowing something,” as Barbara Harlow puts it.**

#### The 1AC relies on an approach to radicality through appealing to individual strategies of resistance within scholarship. This process obscures Black life and inhibits radical force from material movements capable of coalescing to address racial capitalism

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This essay is a preliminary attempt to analyze varieties of disappointment, disillusionment, and exhaustion in contemporary Black critical theory, which I argue is linked to an ongoing crisis of temporality. By “crisis,” I mean a theoretical and affective discrepancy between temporality and history, an experience of time lived and theorized as an accretion of exhausted past possibilities and foreclosed futures. I argue that the experience of living in the aftermath of subverted, annulled, or still unfulfilled freedom dreams across the diaspora has intensified the feeling of disordered time, distorting or displacing an impulse toward engaging what Hortense Spillers calls the “total perspective against which the work of the intellectual unfolds” into ontology, which tends to obscure material conditions and the complexities of Black living (431, italics in original). A “crisis of temporality” has as its flipside a crisis of history, a conceptual blockage on navigating unresolved antagonisms and attachments to outmoded forms of thinking and desiring even as those antagonisms now assume new forms. I offer “Black situation” as a critical and theoretical framework through which to link the experience of time with historical analysis and engage such a perspective toward the end of theorizing what Lauren Berlant has called our “stretched-out present” (5).

The crisis of temporality, as a sense of temporal stuckness, manifests in some prominent strands of contemporary Black critical theory that rely on the sense of a static, quasi-ontological antinomy rather than antagonism or dialectical struggle to account for Blackness. I write more than a year following George Floyd’s murder and the subsequent uprising, a month after his murderer’s unlikely conviction in a Minnesota court, and as the COVID-19 pandemic exhaustingly continues. Ian Baucom’s claim in Specters of the Atlantic (2005) resonates: “Time does not pass or progress, it accumulates.” Time accumulates, he continues, “even in the work of forgetting or ending, even in the immense labor it takes to surrender what-has-been, or to make reparation on it, or to address its ill effects” (330–331). A critique of progress narratives becomes method. He is not alone. We can read him alongside Saidiya Hartman’s 2008 analysis of the “afterlife of slavery”—“skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment” (6). To a similar effect, Christina Sharpe, invoking Maurice Blanchot, has described the ongoing “wake” of chattel slavery as a “disaster”: at once historical and “deeply atemporal” (5).

“Crisis of temporality” names a structure of “deeply atemporal” feeling for those living in the wake of long- and shortterm disasters, a feeling of being cut off from transformative possibilities, or even livable futures. This crisis is organic to a historical conjuncture whose rhythms of attachment and sociality David Scott, discussing “the ethical-political experience of the temporal ‘afterness’ of our postcolonial, postsocialist time” (21), links to the problem of “living on in the wake of past political time,” what I would thematize as ambivalence (2). Answering Rinaldo Walcott’s call for “a theory of post-civil rights black disappointment,” this essay takes Black Nationalism—especially its insistence on a common transhistorical “Black experience”—to be one such temporal horizon, navigated as the “ruins” of what yesterday seemed like possibilities (118).

One cause of the current crisis for Black critical theory is the serial collapse, co-optation, or depoliticization of the most meaningful spaces within which Black people nurtured substantive alternatives to the present order. Moreover, as Black intellectuals have gained toeholds in previously barred institutions, the fates of Black lifeworlds have worsened globally. The tendency to individualize— through pathology or exception—makes it more difficult to conceive substantive forms of collectivity or solidarity. One result, as I will take up, is Black critical theory’s increasing tendency to invoke Blackness as fundamentally figural, as inhering in rhetorical, grammatical, and tropological configurations that are definitionally prior to any history. The figural easily slides into the ontological, which predetermines any possible “meaning” of Blackness and, moreover, undermines material analysis despite claims to radicalness. To be clear, chattel slavery—using the term as a shorthand for the array of ideologies, statutes, customs, stories, myths, and cultural logics that normalize enslavement—unsettles the myths and narratives of capitalist modernity; its legacies inform both institutions and concepts such as liberty and humanity without which thinking about our social world is difficult. When we mistake our shorthand for the contradictory practices that shaped the practices of slavery in different contexts, we enter into the play of tropes and grammars that shape contemporary self-understanding even as we adapt a posture of critique. In short, I worry about the ways a narrative thematization of slavery as coextensive with contemporary racially distributed violence obscures other ways of conceiving Black living.

One symptom of the crisis of temporality at issue here is a turn to ontology, which is also a tendency toward the figural. For some strands of critical theory, “Blackness” stands as a figure of some thing that stands outside of Western universalisms, which are always more specific than they might appear. For some, Blackness also figures as antithesis and therefore critique of the Western categories whose very capaciousness at once depends upon and disavows it. Staged in that way, a certain “Blackness” motivates a critique of systems of thought and social organization historically shaped by or juxtaposed with the formation of Western modernity. Presenting Blackness as a thing rather than a process requires abstracting a whatness (not to say “essence”) from concrete forms of Black life. In other words, Blackness becomes nominal. As such, critical intuition connects irreducibly unique events and practices into an intelligible form, a name, which can then be treated as natural or general. Presenting the generality of the concept as “historical” (meaning only that some past event or conceptual matrix is said to determine the present form of what usually appears as an antinomy) obscures the conceptual labor that (re)produces it. Theories proceeding in this mode, such as Afropessimism, often struggle to articulate a relationship between the singular and the exemplary. Afropessimism abstracts Blackness from more general histories of colonial modernity or racial capitalism so that it seems to be cause rather than effect. Afropessimists’ trenchant critiques of the social order target conceptual logics and theoretical formations that depend on unacknowledged but constitutive exclusions that its authors—linked more by a common way of posing questions than their answers— gather under the sign of “anti-Blackness” (as distinct from “antiBlack racism”).

Although he expressly rejects the Afropessimist label, Fred Moten’s early work is instructive for the ways he reframes historical struggles as conceptual, even ontological, abstracting those struggles from specific contexts. In the Break (2003) develops Moten’s concept of “objection,” the ongoing processes by which Black people refuse objectification and commodification. Objection can be literal, conceptual, or both. Isolating the moment in Karl Marx’s discussion of commodity fetishism where prosopopoeia endows the commodity with fictive, impossible speech, Moten observes the consequences of Marx’s ignoring enslaved people—commodities who did speak, scream, and otherwise object. Moten’s procedure thus avoids simply opposing Blackness and Western modernity in order to demonstrate the degree to which philosophers often rely on an implicit account of Blackness that they disavow. Few working in Black critical theory have emphasized Black social life more or done so to more bracing effect. Yet continually foregrounding the white supremacist logics that Blackness subverts can make Blackness seem merely reactive. More concerning is it that figuring Blackness as a matter of discursive positioning suggests that solutions are within philosophy, which makes the ultimate effect of objection ambiguous. Moreover, as we will see, objection is always present .

Both Moten and the Afropessimists take up Hartman’s work, but their respective ways of navigating the “ruins” of an older, outward-looking Black Nationalism ultimately dulls the critical edge of their work. Where Hartman insists on “terror of the mundane and the quotidian . . . the diffusion of terror” and violence in places critics generally had not looked—“pleasure, paternalism, and property”—(Scenes 4), Moten attunes us to a “terrible beauty” in scenes of subjection that seeds rebellions past and to come. Black aesthetics thus express an “[e]xhaustive celebration of and in and through our [Black] suffering” (Black and Blur xiii). Drawing on Cedric Robinson, Moten conceives “the performative essence of blackness” (Black and Blur 16) as fidelity to “the ontological totality, granted by a metaphysical system that had never allowed for property in either the physical, philosophical, temporal, legal, social, or psychic senses” (Robinson 168). The relative absence of temporality as a theme in this work—the relative privilege of mediated performance rather than the performers and their publics—indicates a more general problem in contemporary criticism related to theories of Blackness and Black politics that miss the complexities of those performers and audiences comprise the aesthetic event.

A notion of tradition corresponding to “the ontological totality”—which resonates with earlier Black Nationalist critical procedures—grants a form of aesthetic autonomy that ultimately alienates artworks from communities. The artists, meanwhile, correspond with a community that appears on no map (a fantasy that media such as print, film, and sound recording often invite), and thus this mode of analysis need not concern itself with historical transformations of those communities. Ironing out historical differences, his work leaves the impression that Black aesthetics develop according to an atemporal logic that allows discrete moments—a representation of Aunt Hester in Frederick Douglass’ 1845 Narrative and Hartman’s Scenes of Subjection (1997) and a Marvin Gaye recording from 1976—to appear both simultaneous with one another and unmediated.3 Moten’s refusal to draw lines between historical periods, genres, and mediums enables such startling connections—what he might term the ante-historical aspects of Blackness. The drawback is that it becomes difficult within such an analysis—perhaps even beside the point—to inquire about specific historical processes, the networks of performance and publication that materially reproduce both Black aesthetics and counterpublics. Rather, to make a very small distinction, his sensibility is deeply historical, even as his analysis proceeds by way of astonishing montages of moments and details whose connections are forged in and through his critical practice.

One notes that Moten’s engagement with aesthetic objects, framed by Black feminist thought and Derridean deconstruction, tends to serve a larger critique of Western phenomenology. Black texts, functionally identical with Black performances, become iterations of an underlying Blackness, discussed above, which they imperfectly embody. That framework allows for a notion of tradition that unites disparate performances, textual and otherwise, across time. His claim that “[c]elebration is the essence of black thought, the animation of black operations, which are, in the first instance, our undercommon, underground, submarine sociality” leaves us at something of an impasse when our project is to move between Blackness and Black people, Black life and Black lives (Machine 197, my italics). These are roughly analogous to the relationship between poetry and poems, music and songs.

The strangely out-of-time aspect of his approach to aesthetics also informs Moten’s articulation of Blackness. In the opening pages of his pathbreaking In the Break, Moten defines Blackness in three ways: it is “the extended movement of a specific upheaval, an ongoing irruption that anarranges [sic] every line”; “a strain that pressures the assumption of the equivalence of personhood and subjectivity”; and “always a disruptive surprise moving in the rich nonfullness of every term it modifies” (1, 255n1). Movement, upheaval, irruption, disruption, surprise—Blackness apparently acts of its own volition. As Moten has subsequently written, there are important distinctions between Blackness and (individual) Black people: to “say that Blackness is intrinsically experimental is not the same thing as to say that Black folk are intrinsically experimental” (“Forum” 130). Moten’s textual metaphors are therefore symptomatic of the degree to which Blackness for him is abstracted from the quotidian and historical contingencies of social life. Akin to Derridean differance , Blackness differs/defers meaning, prevents conceptual closure, inhabits those fields of thought from which it seems excluded. The misfit—indeed, the indistinction—between the general and the specific makes Blackness nominal. Moten elevates the idea that Black performance, rooted in colonial slavery, carries secret meanings opaque to the white disciplinary gaze to the place of the West’s selfreproduction as self-identical and modern. Doing so makes Blackness a proxy for philosophical problems, which in turn confers on it a curious form of autonomy: every potential example is true; plus, the heuristic value of any example is already subsumed by the concept’s generality. From within this theoretical frame, it is difficult to see how Blackness can be anything other than a position in discourse.

#### The idea that their academic speech act is radical commodifies the material work of institutional resistance, which plays into the hands of elites.

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Radical as a brand, not as politics American capitalism has mastered the ability to commodify radical political figures, histories, and movements. Most relevant to this discussion are two particular ways that this happens. The first way involves selected histories that are popularized in order to encourage a certain line of political thought. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr’s position on non-violence is a great example of this. We are taught a version of Dr. King’s work that elevates his non-violent approach and minimizes his eventual condemnation of capitalism and his opposition to the imperialist war against Vietnam. Subsequently, we have a distorted perspective of King’s confrontation with the white supremacist status quo that frames his effectiveness on his ability to appeal to the moral sensibilities of white people. In other words, we are taught that getting white people to recognize our pain and suffering is how to empower our community. This discourages us from disrupting the system and building independent Black institutions. The second way that this commodification happens is by advancing the notion that any activity that is understood to be generally disruptive, controversial, or evoking radical rhetoric is itself radical. The best example of this is the so-called “resistance” that has emerged since the election of Donald Trump. The resistance is described as fighting white supremacy and patriarchy, and challenging the status quo, merely because of a particular set of espoused statements of radicalism. Standing in solidarity with dreamers, or protesting the Muslim ban, or wearing a pink hat are gestures that are often associated with “the resistance.” This is a form of incorporated resistance where activists, professors, non-profit professionals, etc are allowed to make grand statements of resistance or even revolution, but ultimately their ability to confront and change the actual structures of power is inhibited. This fact will be further explained later. The point here is that commodification is carried out when an activity or rhetoric that is generally understood to be disruptive is characterized as radical, regardless of whether or not it actually challenges the existing power arrangement. The term radical simply becomes a brand that is used to compete for attention and recognition as a warrior of social justice without any accountability for producing material results. White leftists absorption of Black politics White progressive, leftist and liberal political and social formations have a parasitic relationship to Black people and our suffering. Harold Cruse describes in his work “Crisis of the Negro Intellectual” the way in which white liberals (which in the context of Cruse’s work includes socialists and communists) position themselves, institutionally, as the arbiters of Black political thought. He writes: The Negro intellectuals of today are the victims of the intellectual default of yesterday. The intellectual, theoretical, and cultural methods of self-orientation and self-leadership have been taken out of their hands. The Negro intellectual has been bereft of the means of solving his own problems because his class has traditionally been maneuvered into the position where his problems are solved by others. Instead of being able to essay his own solutions, the Negro intellectual has been transformed into a problem by the white liberal, who prefers to keep him in that position. The white liberal problem solver has been institutionalized as an organic part of the entire civil rights movement and is the emasculator of the creative and intellectual potential of the Negro intelligentsia. Negro intellectuals cannot effectively interpret themselves in the arts, in social criticism, in the social sciences, in research fields, etc; nor can they make objective interpretations of their own relation to the American scene that have any impact on American affairs. Harold Cruse "Crisis of the Negro Intellectual" Baked into the political and intellectual ethos of white liberals, progressives, and leftists are the belief that their fight for social justice is about solving Black people’s problems, which implies that we are not capable of doing that ourselves. This obsession on the part of white people with trying to solve Black people’s suffering distracts from the more legitimate political and intellectual endeavor of dealing with the pathology of white people’s collective proclivity toward oppression. Toni Morrison does this beautifully in her 1993 interview with Charlie Rose when she says: The people who practice racism are bereft, that there is something distorted about the psyche, its a huge waste… its a profound neurosis nobody examines. It is crazy, it feels crazy… I am not a victim, I refuse to be one. Toni Morrison "I Love Myself When I am Smiling and Then Again When I Look Mean" Even though there is discussion in white liberal spaces about issues like white privilege, there is often too much attention paid to Black suffering and not enough attention paid to the “profound neurosis” that characterizes the social and political behavior of white people that control white liberal/progressive institutions. Given the fact that white people control many of the mainstream institutions that curate which Black people are given legitimacy in particular political and social circles (i.e., Universities, non-profits, philanthropy, mainstream labor organizations, mainstream, and progressive media), Black people often find ourselves navigating a political economy where our livelihoods and our political and social viability is dependent on seeking approval from white liberals and the institutions that they control. Rarely are there authentic public conversations among Black people who identify as radicals about this dynamic because it would expose uncomfortable truths and, quite frankly, ineptitudes that would discredit their claims that they are radical.

#### The alternative is to endorse abolitionist unionism. This moves beyond the counter-insurgent legacy of unions to organize mass sustained resistance that deconstructs carceral and labor exploitation through non-reformist reforms to abolish the state and its power relations.

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**Prison abolition** is a broad horizon, and the thinkers and writers who describe that horizon want not simply to abolish the prison itself but to **abolish the society** where prison was possible.[2] Accordingly, abolitionists in legal academia and elsewhere grapple with the idea that **liberation from capital** will be a necessary component of **the abolitionist vision**.[3] That is, **abolitionists know class struggle is an abolitionist struggle**.[4]

**Abolition, too, has never been a simply theoretical project.** We have been hastening the arrival of that broad horizon as long as our vision of it existed.[5] Recently, even legal scholars have begun pivoting to consider how we will get there.[6] Lawyers are distilling lessons from histories, proposing alternatives, and detailing strategies.

In that process, it has become clear that police unions pose a significant obstacle. Wielding outsized political influence like they wield their taxpayer-funded, taxpayer-facing weapons, police unions have strenuously opposed every effort to chip away at their murderous powers.[7] It is here that abolitionists have begun to ponder the relationship between organized labor and our anti-carceral movement: **unions are** positioned as **obstacles** to our liberation.[8]

This is not the first time that unions have been obstacles to our liberation. Unions fought against **immigration**,[9] against **racial** justice,[10] and against **gender equity**.[11] White working people’s own property interests in the enforcement of white supremacy gave rise to a segregationist labor movement.[12] And these histories inform how we arrived at today’s alignment between organized labor and police.

It is a funny thing, though, that alignment. There is no better summation of just how funny a thing it is than the following quote from Mariame Kaba’s forward to Andrea J. Ritchie’s Invisible No More: “the origin story of modern American policing is slave patrols and union busting.”[13] Twenty-six people, including two women, eleven children, and thirteen striking unionists died in Ludlow, Colorado at the hands of private police in 1913.[14] In 1926, at the Battle of Blair Mountain, fifty to one-hundred union members were slain by the sheriff’s forces.[15] The Little Steel Strike, in 1937, saw eighteen union members killed by the Chicago Police Department.[16] And eight days prior to the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., sixteen-year-old Larry Payne was murdered by Patrolmen Leslie Dean Jones during a march of striking sanitation workers.[17] This is nowhere near a complete accounting of union lives lost to police – instead, it is a simple representation of a historic dynamic.[18] Unions have taken on public, private, state, and federal police forces wherever they have exercised collective power. Union members are the people who have taken up arms against police when the liberatory movement has so demanded. The horrific history of police violence against working people eroded from public memory as neoliberalism rose to wrap movements in complex allegiances,[19] but labor history demonstrates that police protect property, not lives. **Police** enforce scarcity; they do not provide security. They **are not allies** of unions.

In **recognition of this** truth, today, **efforts like No Cop Unions and #DropTheCops**, led by rank-and-file union members and organizers, seek to transform the labor movement by terminating organizational affiliations with police unions.[20] This movement has inspired state-level union leaders to call for national disaffiliation,[21] and notably, at least one county-level labor council has successfully expelled police unions.[22] Graduate workers are also organizing to defund university police in the name of academic freedom.[23] In spite of business union leadership attempts to enforce the contrary,[24] **workers are building a new conception of their collective power** that Chelsea Birchmier, Austin Hoffman, Logan Middleton, A. Naomi Paik, and Angela Ting have named **abolitionist unionism**.[25]

Emergent legal scholarship on the promise of abolitionist unionism is coming in whispers and shouts from several arenas. Scholars writing about the history of unionization **amongst incarcerated workers** have offered significant implications for the law of unions today.[26] Legal theorists working to define and advance **abolition democracy** are recognizing the importance of this DuBoisian[27] concept to asymmetries of economic power.[28] They are also grappling with significant questions about the distribution of power itself, and about the **ability of abolitionists to build the type of power necessary to make decisions absent reliance upon the state**.[29] Law students are explicitly calling for the intertwining of these movements,[30] and labor law historians are chronicling the effects of the criminalization of economic radicalism on the movement for working people and demanding alternatives.[31] Labor law scholars are also engaging with abolitionist scholarship to discuss and evaluate the directions labor policy should take to facilitate new organizing.[32] They are also working to disambiguate critiques of police unions and general anti-union sentiment.[33] Even in constitutional law, authors are recoupling the Thirteenth Amendment and labor organizing.[34] And movement lawyers, as they define themselves, cite both **abolitionist organizing and labor organizing as critical components of the struggle to transform society.[**35] These scholars are not all abolitionists, and they are not all unionists, either, but their work is shaping the contours of the concept nonetheless.

The cords that weave union struggle into abolitionist struggle are storied. The syndicalists of the industrial revolution stood firmly against police and against militaries; they worked to build alternative relations of care to replace state-enforced scarcity.[36] The scholarship of each movement has been mutually constitutive – for instance, the distinction between **“non-reformist reforms” that take decision-making power away from the elite class and “reforms” that consolidate elite decision-making power has been central to abolitionist thought about the road from here to the horizon**.[37] That distinction was first described by the labor movement and was later brought to abolitionist organizing.[38]

Similarly, when he named **“mutual aid” as a tactic,** social anarchist and natural historian Peter Kropotkin cited the existence of the practice amongst **striking workers** as an example of its **feasibility**;[39] now, mutual aid occupies a critical space in both abolitionist organizing and abolitionist theory.[40] Scholars of the labor movement identified why, in 1935, through the passage of the Wagner Act, Congress declared that “the policy of the United States” is to “eliminate… obstructions” to “the exercise by workers of full freedom of association, self-organization, and designation of representatives” for the purpose of “mutual aid:” that is, for much of its early history, the labor movement was synonymous with the phrase “mutual aid.”[41] The motivating conception of labor action was to build more survivable relationships between members of the working class, as to render the capitalist class unnecessary.[42] Class struggle and penal abolition are both projects of mutual aid, and unions can re-emerge as the vehicles for sustaining those projects.

#### Frame this debate through a question of competing disagreements. That’s best to refine tactics and methods to challenge labor exploitation. And paintings of class struggle and its incremental wins for workers as irredeemable rests on class division that makes challenging labor exploitation impossible.

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**Class struggle unionists do not agree on all questions**. **We disagree on how much to focus on reforming existing unions versus creating new ones**, how much effort to put into electing new leaders, **the role of electoral politics, and a wide variety of questions big and small.**

Advocates of the **class struggle union approach** come out of **different political tendencies**. No one has all the answers, and it is important that folks keep an open mind. **One of the mistakes that left-wing labor activists made** in the 1970s was **thinking they knew all the answers,** engaging in sectarian behavior, and **refusing to work with other groups.** In reality, **this was a form of elitist intellectualism imported into the labor movement that set our movement back greatly.**

One of the concerns in writing a book about class struggle unionism is the far, far left wing (we call them ultraleftists) who love to preach at workers and think they know all the answers. Most of them have never organized a strike or bargained a contract, but they think they have the correct position on everything. They love the idea of class struggle unionism but are an obstacle to making it happen.

Writing this book I read a lot of pamphlets put out by the radical campus and antiwar activists who entered the labor movement in the 1970s. Many of them made me cringe. **Filled with left-wing jargon, attacking other groups, self-righteous and sectarian, they were the opposite of trying to integrate with the working class and build a socialist movement**. Many of these folks spent only a year or two in the working class but had no problem lecturing longtime trade unionists.

Although **many did good work and they had a class struggle approach, they set back left labor work for decades.** Many of the ex-leftists who remained active in the labor movement in the 1980s and beyond recoiled against their youthful 1970s excesses. **In doing so, many overcorrected, however, and essentially abandoned class struggle unionism.** To be clear, the overall approach of trying to build class struggle unionism was correct, but the know-it-all attitude and disconnect from reality of certain groups was a problem. It was a form of **middle-class intellectualism** rather than an **attempt to fit into a working-class movement.**

The goal is to spread **class struggle ideas** throughout the labor movement, **not isolate ourselves as the only true unionists**. Even today **some leftists believe that being the militant minority means putting out leaflets or, even easier, going on Facebook to denounce the union leadership as sellouts and every union leader as a bureaucrat. To these folks every contract sucks and every strike is a great defeat. They exist only in the world of ideas and as such can always be right.**

## ON

### 1NC---Case

#### Vote neg on presumption:

#### A)    Conflation – they conflate scholarship with praxis --- setting the burden for aff solvency at simple introduction of “new” knowledge just devolves into infinitely regressive debates about how new is new enough and means lectures, seminars, articles, and books all solve.

#### B)    Leveraging – they strategically deploy existing work to justify their own call for the ballot which undercuts the work activists are doing beyond the university and demotivates teams from engaging in revolutionary strategies outside debate.

#### C)    Unending story – it’s impossible to determine when we’ve sufficiently done their method which pacifies radical activism and ensures burnout.

#### The racial contract is broken by abolitionist unionism since their Mills evidence says to challenge violence we need to understand and recognize the long blood history of Black people and recognize it as a political enterprise which our theory does.

#### The alt is a negotiation of the contract through radical unionism that rejects labor liberalism can break the promise of ownership through abolitionism that seeks to not repair but create something totally new that isn’t this world.

#### Ashley does not get to determine how debt should be given or paid even though Ahsley is a black femme she does not get to determine the debts of everyone who is a Black femme because she does not have an interpersonal relation to every single on of them which proves they recreate intercommunal violence by speaking for people who are not here.

#### Survival is metaphorical – That is wrong it is literal and material and only our debates under abolitionist center the survival of Black fems that is endangered by material accumulation to challenge the systems that never want Black fems to survive in the first place because the things that happen in debate are not insular and determined by what happens out there.

#### 1] Unions are anti-trump now and the only mechanism to stop the conservative counter-revolution.

**Aune 25** (Astrid Aune is the former Chief of Staff to the Chair of the Senate Labor Committee in New York) “Why Trump Keeps Losing In Court to Unions and the Workers Who Power Them”, https://ballsandstrikes.org/law-politics/trump-unions-losing-in-court/, July 28, 2025, DM

In the first year of President Donald **Trump’s second term, as rural hospitals and abortion clinics close, ICE raids escalate,** and **federal worker protections get gutted** by executive order, many liberal **institutions are still trying** to figure out how **to fight back**. But one movement isn’t flailing. It’s filing.

**Organized labor has become one of the most effective legal opponents of the Trump administration’s second-term agenda—not because it wants to, but because it has to**. Take, for example, CBS’s sudden cancellation of The Late Show, which is hosted by frequent Trump critic Stephen Colbert. While fans mourned and celebrities voiced their sadness at the loss of Colbert’s spot in the late-night circuit, the Writers Guild of America issued a statement castigating CBS for “terminating a show in bad faith due to explicit or implicit political pressure”—a choice they called “dangerous and unacceptable in a democratic society.” Not content to just issue a fiery statement, the WGA asked New York Attorney General Leticia James to investigate the cancellation, and sue if necessary.

This is the kind of speed and clarity needed to cut through Trump’s noise. So far, the labor movement is proving itself to be uniquely positioned to deliver.

Already, the Trump administration has focused on weaponizing the federal bureaucracy to target workers. He ignored statutory removal protections to fire the NLRB’s Gwynne Wilcox, taking advantage of the Supreme Court’s comfort with short, unsigned opinions to chip away at checks on the executive branch in the process. He’s made workers less safe on the job, freezing a critically important pending heat safety rule and gutting the black lung prevention program at the National Institute for Occupational Health. Despite promises to work on affordability, the Trump DOL revived the subminimum wage for disabled workers, and pushed executive orders that make it harder for federal employees to organize. Meanwhile, the nominee to replace Gwynne Wilcox as chair of the NLRB is a former partner at Morgan Lewis, a law firm that has represented Amazon in high-profile union-busting efforts.

The strategy isn’t subtle: use a barrage of obscure administrative tools—midnight memos, stop-and-go rulemaking, unannounced enforcement shifts—to move faster than the opposition can react. If your enemy is delayed, procedural chaos is your friend.

That is, unless your opponent knows how to file a TRO by breakfast. **Unlike most would-be challengers to Trump’s policies, unions don’t need time to get organized. They are organized. They have in-house counsel and outside counsel on speed dial, and are used to going to court in the middle of an organizing campaign to block employer retaliation or enforce a contract**. They know **how to challenge rulemakings at DOL and NLRB because they’ve been doing it for decades.** They have members—millions of them—**who can serve as plaintiffs, witnesses, press spokespeople, and direct action organizers.** Most importantly, **they proactively train their base to know their rights and how to enforce them in the moment, making every member ready for action the moment their rights are stepped on.**

And unlike many public interest organizations that depend on the slow churn of foundation grants and fundraising emails, unions are funded by dues—meaning they can focus energy on the work, instead of on fundraising. In February 2025, days after the Department of Labor became the next target of DOGE, a coalition of **unions filed multiple lawsuits to block DOGE from accessing Social Security data and confidential case data stored at the Department of Labor, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau**. In May, when Trump issued an executive order banning strikes and demonstrations by federal workers under the pretense of national security, the American Federation of Government Employees had a federal judge enjoining it within the week.

**Labor even has responded to ICE kidnappings**. Back in March, SEIU California President David Huerta was detained and injured by ICE agents during a protest in Los Angeles, marking the fourth run-in between one of SEIU’s own and DHS since the Trump Administration escalated ICE activity. SEIU condemned the incident, staging additional protests in more than a dozen major cities within days, rustling up statements of **support from politicians and even the more Trump-friendly union leaders. This rapid response effort created enough pressure to force the LAPD to release Huerta and other detained SEIU members within days.**

Similarly, in March, **Kilmar Abrego Garcia, a sheet metal apprentice with SMART Local 100, was deported to El Salvador despite having legal protections and a court order preventing his removal. The Trump administration later admitted to an “administrative error” in deporting Garcia, even eliciting a rare rebuke from the Supreme Court ordering his return**. Although traditionally the building and construction **trade unions have a more conservative tendency, they reacted strongly to Abrego Garcia’s deportation, raising over a quarter of a million dollars from members to support his family and sending direct appeals to rank and file to contact their representatives in support of bringing “Brother Kilmar” home.**

In each of these cases, union law departments didn’t act alone. They moved in coordination—with workers, organizers, and allies on the left all rowing in the same direction. And they did not need to create this structure to prepare for Trump. It was already in place, and well practiced from years of taking on some of Trump’s biggest supporters.

**This is what movement lawyering actually looks like. Labor’s advantage isn’t just speed or legal savvy—it’s structure**. Unions don’t treat legal work as a siloed, specialist domain. Workers are plaintiffs and messengers, who show up at agency hearings, enforce contract clauses, and use the Administrative Procedure Act like a baseball bat. **And unlike constitutional impact litigation, which often happens far in both time and space from where people actually live and work, labor’s legal fights are immediate, tangible, and winnable.** The stakes aren’t abstract—they’re about enforcing a broken contract, taking care of a workplace injury, or restoring a paycheck that disappeared.

Over the past several years, and especially since Trump took office again, there has been a great deal of headscratching about how the left plans to address the right-wing takeover of the courts. But people are already recognizing and responding to the labor movement’s successes: Among a bipartisan set of voters, organized labor’s popularity and enjoyment of public trust far outpaces every other institution. There might not be a roadmap for **stopping the conservative counterrevolution**. But making it easier for workers to organize—and **training labor** lawyers to fight on their behalf—**would be a fine place to start.**

#### 2] But ceding this creates union decline that increases racial ressentiment and ensures millions of white nationalists fill in, turns case.

**Dirnbach 21** (Eric Dirnbach is a labor movement researcher, activist, campaigner, organizer, educator, writer & socialist, based in New York City) “Union Membership and White Workers’ Racial Attitudes”, https://organizing.work/2021/02/union-membership-and-white-workers-racial-attitudes/, 2021, DM

The **Labor Movement** against **White Nationalism**

One of the reasons we may be seeing so much **conservative politics** among **white workers is that the labor movement is too small, at only about 11% of the workforce**. Most white workers don’t experience multi-racial union solidarity and union political education. I discussed this in more detail on a recent Laborlines podcast interview.

Indeed, in a fascinating footnote in the paper, the authors state that long term **union decline means an estimated 12% of white workers have higher racial resentment than they would have absent union decline. As the paper concludes about unions:**

As a **critical organization associated** with **promoting racial toleration weakens in organizational reach**, its relative influence over political outcomes and the formation of sociocultural identities, particularly **within the white working class**, will likely continue to weaken with it.

**Unions should do everything they can to be inclusive, democratic organizations based on solidarity among members, with a social justice framework.** In my view, **it’s also critical to have a socialist/anti-capitalist analysis that strengthens class consciousness, because this provides a worldview in opposition to toxic white nationalism, and also status-quo neoliberalism**. This framework helps workers who have a legitimate distrust of the Democratic Party, or who correctly see that the capitalist system is rigged against them, but otherwise might seek answers in right-wing ideology.

**White nationalism** is a threat primarily because it divides and weakens the working class. In the competition of ideologies that help folks make sense of the world, **an anti-capitalist labor solidarity framework is a powerful one, which can actually deliver material benefits, but most workers never encounter it**. Of course this means we must also grow the labor movement dramatically. **If labor doesn’t organize tens of millions more workers, possibly the white nationalists will.**

#### 3] Unions can weaponize contracts and legalism towards community control against carceral unions and structures.

Margolis 22 [Carly Margolis, J.D., Harvard Law School, is an eviction defense lawyer focused on reducing collateral consequences in Greater Boston. TARGETING POLICE UNIONS, RETHINKING REFORM, N.Y.U. REVIEW OF LAW & SOCIAL CHANGE, Vol. 46:224, 2022, https://socialchangenyu.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/3-Margolis-1.pdf, JKS]

\*MPD = Metropolitan Police Department

The Council’s approach also departed from the labor reformists for its seeming neglect of public input on police discipline. Whereas Catherine Fisk and her colleagues proposed public hearings on police union contract proposals and additional transparency mechanisms, the Council merely eliminated disciplinary bargaining. The scant legislative materials surrounding the Emergency Act suggest that Council expected management to handle discipline in a way that was more accountable to the public than the union—but it is unclear how constituents can influence police management, apart from electing a Mayor sympathetic to community demands who might influence the police chief. Perhaps the Council thought new civilian oversight measures also passed in the Emergency Act would enhance police management’s accountability to the public. Perhaps the Council planned to reject Mayoral appointments for Police Chief absent certain promises of accountability—but prior practice does not indicate that Council held this goal or that this mechanism would be a particularly effective means of influencing police management.

The last police union contract ratification, in 2018, is illustrative. The D.C. Council’s Committee on Labor and Workforce Development invited only one opportunity for public input on the CBA—two days before the contract would be ratified. The contract was hailed as the first to reach ratification without impasse or arbitration in seventeen years, but was criticized for its failure to engage the impacted community, particularly on issues of discipline and salary. It appears that the Labor and Workforce Development Committee has not held a public hearing on the current contract negotiation. If 2018 is any indication, it will not invite public input until it is too late to make a difference.

By contrast, through its 2020 public letter campaign, Defund MPD asserted a direct role for the community in determining the new police union contract’s terms. Defund’s bargaining proposal suggests it viewed the contract as a locus of policymaking, akin to the District budget or legislative process. This approach reflects the reality that police unions inflect and develop policy through the collective bargaining process and asserts the importance of public participation, particularly of those most impacted by racialized police violence, in determining these policies. After the movement did not obtain the budget cuts and radical reforms it sought through the legislative process, it turned to the union contract as an alternative. Many of Defund MPD’s contract terms are now policy goals in its roadmap to reducing the MPD’s budget by 50% over the next three years. To the extent that shifting policy design into the hands of constituents directly impacted by police violence is a goal, Defund’s approach to the police union contract is a useful model.

Defund’s bargaining proposal reflects a “community control” approach to policing and budgeting. Social movements, including the Movement for Black Lives, have shown a growing interest in developing policies and platforms that give constituents direct control over public services like police, infrastructure, and schools. In their article The Institutional Design of Community Control, K. Sabeel Rahman and Jocelyn Simonson discuss the rationale and organizing principles for this model. Taking movements in Chicago and Oakland as case studies, Rahman and Simonson explain how movements have structured community control over policing into local legislation. For example, rather than instituting a community oversight board, Chicago organizers proposed a “Civilian Police Accountability Council” (CPAC) that would be empowered “to appoint the superintendent, to adopt rules for police conduct, and to sign off on all disciplinary decisions.” The CPAC would be composed of community members who had no personal or professional connections to law enforcement. This example illustrates the three design principles of community control: (1) control rather than input, (2) representation of the historically disempowered, and (3) the exercise of authority ex ante rather than ex post. Community members designed the standards for police discipline ex ante and were empowered to make disciplinary decisions, in contrast to civilian review boards, which assess misconduct ex post and provide recommendations that are seldom followed. By endowing impacted community members with real authority and shifting the moment at which that authority is exercised, community control models open the possibility of making structural changes to policing that get at its very foundation.

Community control’s transfer of authority and emphasis on ex ante policy design evokes a view of accountability broader than accounting for past wrongs. Accountability instead might imply iterative and transformative possibilities for violence prevention, including alternative, non-punitive systems of healing, like transformative justice. Simonson argues that such transfer of power is inherently reparative in that it restores power to communities that have been denied political power as a result of policing.

By drafting contractual provisions, Defund claimed a direct role in defining the scope and power of the police department ex ante. In the hands of Defund, the contract became a site of policymaking accessible to people impacted by police violence. Defund defined itself against the police union’s regulatory capture: “the road to abolition and a safe community is to disrupt and disempower [the FOP’s] control over our communities and the DC council [sic]. This fight is one of transparency and accountability versus the white boys club and DC FOP Power.” This move casts doubt on the D.C. Council’s choice to empower police management and reveals the limitations of the labor reformist proposals, which orient toward community input rather than community control and leave the structure of police bargaining intact. For example, Catherine Fisk and her colleagues’ proposal for California would allow the community to observe negotiations or comment publicly on bargaining terms—but only on matters of discipline and use of force, and without binding authority.

By contrast, Defund MPD viewed the contract as a vehicle for divestment. By claiming the CBA as a forum for communities to develop policy and influence the District budget, Defund opened the possibility for community control to be implemented in the police discipline process and perhaps in public-sector union negotiations across the board. The letter campaign itself embodied a democratic “input” model of accountability—whereby elected officials are meant to take direction from constituents on the substance of the CBA—but asserted the importance of community control over budgeting, discipline, and policy.

Community control evokes a deep critique of the legal system’s role in maintaining race and class oppression and asks for a model of democratic governance that restores power to the historically marginalized. As such, one critique of community control is that “communities” are not a monolith. They have diverse political composition, and inequities can arise in the transfer of power to the historically marginalized. That the composition of the “community” itself is contested and risks cooptation is not a reason to neglect such proposals. Rather, Defund movements, speaking in many voices, pose a powerful and dynamic counterweight to existing modes of policymaking—one that demands recognition, investment, and further inquiry.

Though Defund’s assertion of community control has just begun, it has already proven effective. The scale and presence of the mass movement on the ground in D.C. mobilized the D.C. Council to pass swifter and broader reform legislation in July 2020 than most cities have achieved today. From this position of leverage, Defund challenged reformers to address the police union contract as a site of divestment—and to reimagine community power in a way that addresses the roots of economic oppression and state violence.

#### 4] Militant unionism moves beyond control of unions from the top-down and moves beyond simple economic reformism towards mass struggle.

**French 24** (Nick French, Editor at Jacobin, writing at Left Notes, In These Times, Catalyst, and elsewhere. Organizing with the Democratic Socialists of America and Bread & Roses. Academic philosopher) “Workers Need Strong Unions and an Independent Party”, https://www.left-notes.com/p/workers-need-strong-unions-and-an, April 23, 2024, DM

The example of UNITE HERE that Nolan cites approvingly as a union that acts as “a political power player” gives a worrying glimpse, actually, of what it might mean to let unions by themselves run the political show. UNITE HERE is internally a **very top down**, undemocratic union. And its transactional relationship with Democratic Party politicians does not suggest a model of how unions can lead the way in winning transformative political change. Chicago’s UNITE HERE Local 1, for instance, endorsed Rahm Emanuel for mayor in 2015. The leadership of the Culinary Workers Union, UNITE HERE’s affiliate in Las Vegas — who Nolan singles out for praise — also famously opposed Bernie Sanders’s 2016 Medicare for All proposal.

That’s not at all to say that unions have to act in a narrowly sectional or conservative way — looking out only for their own members, everyone else be damned. But it does imply that putting the **labor movement** at the **center of our politics** can’t just mean letting unions “replace the role that political parties now occupy in our nation.” Instead, we need to **rebuild and revitalize unions** and figure out how they can act together, across sectors and industries, to raise workers’ living standards overall and create a more just economy for everyone. Moreover, they need to link up with **activists in social movements and socialist organizations to build a broader project that goes beyond economic demands.**

Historically, that has often meant workers channeling their power through national labor federations and labor-based political parties. Those classwide organizations allow for coordinated bargaining and the implementation of welfare-state policies that individual unions can’t or won’t make happen on their own. National labor federations can bring together workers in different firms and sectors, while political parties can also represent people who aren’t in unions for whatever reason or who aren’t engaged in wage-labor at all. And such **classwide organizations, unlike individual unions**, are responsible for formulating and trying to articulate programs that benefit the vast majority of society and thereby allow for the widest possible solidarity. Ultimately, we should be trying to extend that solidarity internationally, to **empower workers’ movements and other progressive forces beyond our own borders.**

In Sweden, for instance, **a massive labor movement** provided the base of a social democratic party that governed uninterrupted for over forty years. The national blue-collar union federation engaged in centralized bargaining across the economy that **reduced inequality among workers** while facilitating rapid economic growth, and the Social Democrats in parliament built up an incredibly generous welfare state and at times even provided aid and **assistance to national liberation struggles and governments in the Global South.**

Though the Swedish case is one of the most impressive, the great achievements of other social democratic countries (like Britain’s National Health Service) were typically the product of political parties that could articulate and push for demands that benefited the entire working class. That’s not even to mention attempts to transform the political economy to move beyond capitalist social relations entirely: that would certainly require a political vision that goes beyond the remit of any one union, and a political organization — a party — that can push for it.