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A groundswell of discontent is rippling across Europe and the Americas. But is that what’s really threatening democracy?

STEVEN HAHN

EUROPE’S LEFT NATIONALISTS
They want internationalism—in one country.

DAVID ADLER
Letters
@thenation.com

The Nation.

Fuzzy Math
As a taxpayer, I’m appalled by the Pentagon’s inability to pass the full audit mandated by law. Dave Lindorff’s stunning article “Exposing the Pentagon’s Massive Accounting Fraud” [Jan. 7], which describes how the Defense Department can’t account for some $21 trillion in funds since 1999, should move Congress not only to freeze the department’s budget but also to open an official investigation. In the meantime, The Nation must continue to pursue the matter, including its FOIA request for the Navy’s financial statement.

Kudos to Lindorff and The Nation for bringing this shocking fraud to light.

Robert Ladendorf
Los Angeles

Lindorff’s story about the unaccountably strange financial practices at the Pentagon is important, especially within the larger context of military funding. History’s most expensive semantic coup was certainly achieved in the late 1940s, when the US War Department became the Defense Department. Wars are dangerous, but in a worried world, we can always be sold more defense.

After 9/11, the George W. Bush administration founded the Department of Homeland Security (current annual budget: $40.6 billion). I don’t recall anyone left, right, or center having had the courage to ask, “If the Department of Homeland Security keeps us secure, what does the Defense Department do?” (One answer, after we were attacked by a group of terrorists from Saudi Arabia and Yemen, was to invade Iraq to rid us of Saddam Hussein and his alleged weapons of mass destruction. The logic and efficacy were indeed hard to follow—and, it turns out, so was the money.)

We must stop calling it “defense spending” and refer to it instead as “military expenses.” We should also put the Air Force back under the Army. The Air Force primarily exists to handle strategic nuclear arms—true weapons of mass destruction. We’d save lots of taxpayer money by downsizing the excess generals and cutting administrative costs. And we should demand honest and thorough congressional accounting.

I am not a pacifist. As a Vietnam veteran, I am personally familiar with overwrought military interventions. How about a fair, fit, and accountable military? I would also very much like to see a wiser, less impulsive, much less racist, much less misogynistic, much less greedy, much more honest commander in chief—someone without such a bad case of megalomania. That would also constitute a cost-effective way of strengthening our nation.

George Cartter
Vacaville, Calif.

Where There’s Smoke...
Those of us in Northern California who have escaped burning (so far) deeply appreciate Ben Ehrenreich’s thoughtful comment “The Fire This Time” [Dec. 17/24, 2018]. Hugely disturbing was this revelation: “In August, as fires raged through Northern California, the Democratic National Committee passed a resolution to ‘welcome’ donations from the fossil-fuel industry, reversing a ban it had voted in two months earlier. This would be corrupt and cynical in the best of circumstances, even if the status quo wasn’t literally in flames.”

In the wake of the horrendous recent fires in both Northern and Southern California, as well as the publication of the dire United Nations and federal reports on climate change, it is profoundly unacceptable that the group that will in part be responsible
Accountability Time

Donald Trump will be held to account in 2019. The prospect that the president and his associates will face serious congressional oversight, and that this scrutiny will provide vital checks and balances for the remainder of his disastrous presidency, is no longer in doubt. The voters settled that question in November, when they swept Trump’s Republican allies out of the House committee chairmanships they had co-opted in the service of a legally and morally indefensible president. Representative Elijah Cummings, who will now take control of the powerful House Oversight Committee, got it exactly right when he said, “Voters made clear they wanted transparency, integrity, honesty, but they wanted something else: accountability.”

Of course, there is good reason to demand that the new Democratic-controlled House send the right policy signals by approving bills to raise wages, expand access to health care and education, and address the existential crises of inequality and climate change—even if the Republican-controlled Senate refuses to go along, and even if Trump threatens to veto those bills. But the most urgent pressure that Americans can bring to bear involves the revitalization of the oversight infrastructure that crumbled during the subservient tenure of former House speaker Paul Ryan. “The saddest part of the last two years was that Ryan completely gave up our responsibility for oversight in the House,” says Congressional Progressive Caucus co-chair Mark Pocan. “As a separate but coequal branch of government, we saw no responsible actions of oversight for anything that the president or his administration did.

“Now, we’ve got a lot of pent-up work that has to happen,” Pocan continues. “But we can do that at the same time that we’re passing legislation and putting ideas forward. And it’s not just the Judiciary and Intelligence and Oversight and Government Reform committees—the ones that are traditionally seen as the committees that do this—that will be stepping up.” Trump’s ablest critics will now be positioned to issue subpoenas demanding the release of tax returns and other records, to compel key figures to face questioning, and to expose failed policies and egregious conflicts of interest not just in the White House but elsewhere in the executive branch, like the departments of Defense, Labor, and Health and Human Services.

Representative Barbara Lee secured support in the last Congress for rescinding the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force, which has been used by three successive presidents to justify military adventurism. But Ryan blocked her move, just as he blocked a bipartisan push by Representative Ro Khanna to end US support for Saudi Arabia’s brutal assault on Yemen. Now that Ryan is gone, the House must signal that it will no longer cede authority over decisions concerning war and peace to the White House. Groups that have long sought to rein in US militarism, like Peace Action and the Friends Committee on National Legislation, now have an opening to achieve dramatic policy shifts; Americans who are rightly fearful of this president’s impulsive nature should recognize that this is essential activism on behalf of accountability—and a saner foreign policy.

The ultimate accountability issue involves the question of whether Trump’s presidency should continue. Once ardently dismissive of demands for an impeachment inquiry, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi now says she wants to “wait and see what happens” with the report from Special Counsel Robert Mueller on Russian interference and broader questions of wrongdoing by the president and his associates. Other House members are clearer in their belief that the damage this administration has done to civil society and to vulnerable communities is already so severe that, in the words of newly elected Representative Rashida Tlaib, “Now is the time to begin impeachment proceedings against President Trump.”

It will fall to House Judiciary Committee chair
Norman Birnbaum

His influence extended far beyond The Nation.

Norman Birnbaum, who died on January 4 at age 92, was a valuable friend of this magazine. Upon hearing the news of his passing, Nation editor and publisher Katrina vanden Heuvel said, “Last August, I sent Norman a birthday greeting, and we corresponded about his health, his memoirs, and the large absence in his life left by his dear friend—and former Nation editorial-board member—Marcus Raskin’s death. In his letter to me, Norman wrote: ‘It is impossible for me to imagine my life without The Nation.’” For those of us who have worked with Norman, it’s hard to imagine The Nation without him. He contributed articles, editorials, and reviews to our pages for an astounding six decades.

We envy the students who regularly imbibed his wisdom at the Georgetown University Law Center, where for many years Norman was a professor of political science. But we shared their good fortune when he held forth at our editorial-board meetings. Victor Navasky, who brought Norman to the board while serving as The Nation’s editor, recalled: “Whatever the term ‘Jewish intellectual’ means, Norman was it. And he was religiously faithful about attending board meetings. He brought the rigor of an academic to the practice of opinion journalism.” At those conclaves, Norman eloquently held forth on the current political mishegas. His manner could be professorial, but his presentations were always leavened with subtle irony and a martini-dry wit. As his students pro tem, we emerged from those conclaves better armed intellectually and ideologically.

Of course, Norman’s influence extended beyond The Nation. He contributed to many of the important journals in the postwar American intellectual firmament, including Partisan Review and Dissent. Before his long tenure at Georgetown, his career spanned two continents. The title of his recent memoir, published last year by New Academia, sums up this intellectual odyssey: From the Bronx to Oxford and Not Quite Back. As the journalist and former Clinton aide Sidney Blumenthal once said: “Norman’s friends, acquaintances, and enemies would fill an encyclopedia of the intellectual history of the 20th century—and now the 21st…. His story is an unlikely but emblematic American one. It’s a Bronx story, and a Berlin story—and Madrid and Paris, and Amherst and Georgetown.”

Norman’s journey took him from Townsend Harris High in New York to Williams College in Massachusetts, where his matriculation was interrupted by a stint at the Office of War Information during World War II, and then on to Harvard for graduate work, where he received a master’s degree in 1951 and a doctorate in 1958. At Cambridge, Norman worked alongside Henry Kissinger as a teaching assistant. Kissinger he disliked, but Harvard’s reputation he duly respected: “The best, we believed, was being thought and said, at that very moment, at Harvard…. What I now find remarkable is the intellectual docility with which we conducted ourselves.” Intellectual docility was a quality that Norman jettisoned as he went on to become an independent radical thinker, scholar, and teacher.

After Harvard, he traveled to Germany for additional study, even though, as he later confessed, “all the books and journals I needed were in Harvard’s library, which was much larger than any in Germany itself. That wasn’t the point.” The point for him, as an American Jew, was to study firsthand the causes of Nazism’s disastrous hold on the German people. His networking talents garnered him important friends among the German Social Democratic movement, and those years were fruitful in other ways. As Philip Pochoda writes, “No other US scholar knew the European literature, European politics, and socialist history as well as he did.”

From Germany, Norman proceeded to a teaching post at the London School of Economics; in England, he made contact with lead-
Class Struggles

Dear Liza,

I’m a single mom of four who lives in California and works 25 hours a week. Three of my children have flourished in the school system here. My 16-year-old, however, has made me think twice about public schools and their ridiculous rules.

My daughter is a beautiful soul with tons of creativity. She is respectful and smart, but she has never done well in school. In elementary school, I was told she was hyper and fidgety. In middle school, she was teased, and in high school, the bullying started. She’s now a junior with extreme anxiety about school. Over the years, I’ve learned how to calm her down in the morning, but she’s often late to class. I’ve talked with the school about the bullying and her anxiety. We’re in touch with her medical doctor, and I have her in counseling as well. I’ve tried a private tutor. I’ve also enrolled her in art classes, a gym, and now cosmetology lessons. She responds well to me, because I know how to handle her anxiety by loving her and accepting that she’s different.

I feel that all the school system wants to do is squash her spirit. We are endlessly harassed about her tardiness, even though her grades are fine and she has no discipline problems. I’ve searched for ways out, but even homeschooling is still subject to public-school laws. Do you know of any way to unschool your child and get them out of the government’s clutches?

—Free Spirit’s Mom

Dear Mom,

I should be writing to you for advice on how to handle my own teenager. Look at all the wonderful ways you’ve found to encourage your daughter’s interests, find her the mental-health care she needs, and help her get to school each morning. Everyone deserves a parent like you!

You and your daughter are both doing your best, but her school is screwing up. While parents often worry that schools aren’t developmentally appropriate for young children, we don’t worry enough about the effect of the school environment on adolescents. Austerity measures such as large class sizes, plus neoliberal education “reforms” that emphasize competition and quantitative measures of achievement, can foster anxiety, especially in already-vulnerable kids.

Teenagers need developmentally appropriate structures. Denise Pope, a senior lecturer at Stanford University’s Graduate School of Education, says having an “advisory” period each day, in which a teacher-adviser keeps an eye on students’ well-being, cuts down on bullying and gives students an advocate within the school. Pope—who is a co-founder of Challenge Success, an organization that helps parents and schools provide children a more balanced and academically fulfilling life—also points to research showing that a later start time to the school day is physically and mentally healthier for teens.

But you don’t have time to push this school for such reforms; your daughter has only a year and a half left. So ask her if there’s anything she likes about the place once she finally gets there. Friends? Art teachers? If not, Pope emphasizes, there’s no reason for her to stick it out when she has so many interests outside of school.

If she decides to leave, I doubt that you’ll need to homeschool her; for someone her age, there are other good options (most provided by the government, so don’t lose faith in the public sector yet!). If your public-school system has choices, she could perhaps transfer for the last year (if there’s a school that’s more arts-focused or otherwise better suited to her learning style). Also, you live in California, which has a fine community-college system. Many community colleges offer dual-degree programs, allowing kids who have left high school to earn their high-school equivalency and associate degrees all in one place. Or, Pope adds, your daughter could simply leave high school, “take the GED, and be done.”

Dear Liza,

I celebrated New Year’s Eve with friends at an open-bar event. As is often the case in such situations, we imbibed a good deal. Just before

(continued on page 8)
The Social Menace

Facebook will spy for anyone with the cash to buy your secrets.

Back in 2011, The Onion’s now-defunct TV series ran a sketch in which then–CIA director Leon Panetta bestowed a “medal of intelligence commendation” on “the Overlord,” Mark Zuckerberg, for inventing the “single most powerful tool for population control” the agency had ever enjoyed. These days, Facebook is fulfilling the predictions of even its most dystopian satirists; the only thing The Onion got wrong was the CIA’s competence. According to a devastating investigation last December by The New York Times, Facebook is running a de facto spy agency—not for the US government, but for anyone willing to purchase its data.

Among the recent revelations: Facebook sells the names of its users’ “friends” without consent and allows certain corporations to read and delete private messages. It also sells the names and contact information of users and then lies about it; permits the companies that purchase its data to conceal this fact; and allows these same companies to ignore the preferences of people who disable their sharing settings.

Meanwhile, another investigation, this one by Privacy International, found that Facebook “routinely tracks users, non-users and logged-out users outside its platform through Facebook Business Tools.” In other words, Facebook spies on people who don’t even use Facebook.

NBC’s Dylan Byers recently published an anonymously sourced complaint that Facebook executives “are fed up with The New York Times after weeks of what they see as overtly antagonistic coverage that betrays an anti-Facebook bias.” Yet not only did Byers fail to identify any inaccuracies in the Times’ reporting; he didn’t even manage to get a single on-the-record response from the company.

Perhaps Facebook executives have grown sheepish because they’ve been caught lying so frequently. In the company’s early days, Zuckerberg explained that his credo was to, “like, make things happen and then, like, apologize later.” While it’s true that Facebook apologizes for its missteps a lot, sometimes it just lies. For instance, after the Times reported that Facebook had paid an opposition-research firm, Definers, to dig up negative information on the liberal financier and philanthropist George Soros, Facebook chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg announced, “I did not know we hired them or about the work they were doing.” Later, it emerged that Sandberg herself had ordered the investigation.

On other occasions, the company promises—really, really promises this time—to never do it again. In fact, Facebook seems to exercise little meaningful control over its own site, save perhaps for banning nudity. How else to explain that, after the massacre in a Pittsburgh synagogue, advertisers were allowed to target users who had an interest in “white genocide conspiracy theory”? It’s not just Trump fans that Facebook indulges. According to journalist Maria Ressa, individuals associated with Philippine strongman Rodrigo Duterte use the site to send threatening messages, including one to her that read: “I want Maria Ressa to be raped repeatedly to death.” And in Turkey, “Facebook removes everything and anything from their social media platform when the Turkish authorities ask them to do so,” according to Yaman Akdeniz, a law professor at Istanbul Bilgi University.

Facebook has committed countless other sins. Those of us concerned about the collapse of journalism’s democracy-defending business model were not surprised to learn that Facebook misled media outlets about the number of views their videos were receiving. Remember when newspapers and magazines were “pivoting to video”? That costly pivot defenestrated many a publication—and yet the metrics driving those decisions were nonsense.

Finally (at least for now), The Wall Street Journal reported that right-wing efforts to work the refs have been so effective that Facebook appointed Joel Kaplan, a former George W. Bush adviser who threw a party for Brett Kavanaugh to celebrate his Supreme Court confirmation, as its conservative-ideology commissar. Kaplan recently killed a project called Common Ground, which would have encouraged civil discussion among users with different political beliefs—because, the Journal reported, he feared that it “could trigger claims of bias against conservatives.” With Zuckerberg’s backing, Kaplan also wanted to partner with the Trump-friendly propaganda rag The Daily Caller for Facebook’s anemic fact-checking system. (The company’s newsfeed, I’ve noted previously, is already loaded with Fox News’ dishonest programming.) Luckily, Kaplan lost that battle when the Poynter Institute, a journalism nonprofit, suspended its accreditation of the Caller’s fact-checking operation.

Kaplan also protects the likes of Trump and Breitbart from any interference on the site, regardless of how many lies they tell or racist insults they hurl. Facebook employees told the Journal that an initiative called Cross Check “contradicted Facebook’s efforts to limit the spread of misinformation and hate speech because flagged posts from those pages often didn’t come down.”

According to Josh Bolten, a former Bush chief of staff, Kaplan’s mandate at the company is to “demonstrate to people that Facebook is being fair,” because “a lot of people on the right are suspicious of most media outlets and social-media platforms.” Note the circular logic: The mere suspicion of anti-right-wing bias is used to ensure more right-wing programming, and each new win by the right ensures its increasingly ambitious demands. It’s hard to imagine an easier reef for conservatives to work than Zuckerberg and Facebook. Unfortunately, there’s never been a more effective means—or a more ominous political moment—to spread misinformation, disinformation, and incitements to violence.
There is no doubt about it. A restful night’s sleep is one of the most important components of a healthy life. Unfortunately, many people, particularly seniors, have a hard time getting to sleep. Thoughts and worries race through their minds, creating stress and denying them the relaxed state they need to fall asleep. What’s worse, even once they drift off, they tend to wake up many times during the night and can’t get back to sleep quickly. When morning comes they are groggy and fatigued… and the cycle continues the next night.

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Throughout his long career as a teacher and activist, Norman contributed to the democratic dialogue with several scholarly works. Norman also served on the founding editorial board of New Left Review. However, his European days were numbered; as Norman once put it, sensing the rise of the New Left in America, “I could no longer justify remaining in Europe as a rejection of a reactionary nation.”

Norman returned to the States to teach at Amherst College, where he criticized America’s ruling elite—including the person he called its “general secretary,” the international banker John J. McCloy—for, among other things, its conduct of the Vietnam War. McCloy, then serving as chairman of Amherst’s board of trustees, demanded an apology, but Norman refused to kowtow. With that, McCloy resigned from the board—and while Norman continued teaching, it was a reminder that the enemies of academic freedom are many and powerful.

Throughout his long career as a teacher and activist, Norman contributed to the democratic dialogue by writing several scholarly works, including The Crisis of Industrial Society and After Progress: American Social Reform and European Socialism in the Twentieth Century.

Norman was kindly and avuncular, a friend and mentor to many. He is gone now, but his spirit will live on. In his 1988 book The Radical Renewal, he modestly admits that he has not said the final word on the subject. “If we are to reenact, in contemporary terms, the early American belief in a republic of virtue,” he writes, “we shall have to find a new philosophical basis for both social inquiry and politics. That is a matter for further reflection.” We hear you, Norman.

(continued from page 4)

midnight, I went to the restroom, where I waited in a long line. As I was nearing the front, my friend’s husband (let’s call him “Brad”) appeared behind me and groped me. When the next bathroom opened up, I ran in. I was mortified, and told my husband about it when we got home.

I’m conflicted over whether to say anything to my friend or Brad. He’s never done anything like this before and was very inebriated. That’s no excuse, but while I’m still uncomfortable, I can get over it—especially if I never see signs of inappropriate behavior from him again. My husband feels I’m owed an apology. I agree, but I also think it’s likely that Brad doesn’t remember any of this. I don’t want to make a big deal of the incident and cause my friend unnecessary distress. I don’t like not telling her, but assuming this is one-off behavior on Brad’s part, is it worth embarrassing her and, truthfully, myself?

—Anguished Celebrant

Dear Anguished,

Your husband is right that you deserve an apology. But it’s your call. Sometimes, we rightly feel a social responsibility to report or confront a predator, and friendship may require us to rat on a badly behaving partner. Often, we owe it to ourselves to speak out when our rights are violated. But I don’t think any of these obligations apply here. I don’t sense that you want the apology badly enough to endure the unpleasant process of pursuing it. Also, there’s no evidence this guy is a dangerous or chronic groper. By confronting either your friend or her husband, you risk enlisting two women in unrewarding emotional labor. Neither of you deserves the angst or the hassle. I don’t believe women have a responsibility to provide moral guidance for men unless we are their moms. I say let it go, if that’s your inclination, and start the New Year without drama.
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The End of Likability

The nasty women of America deliver on their promises.

Last month, Politico asked how Elizabeth Warren could “avoid a Clinton redux—written off as too unlikable before her campaign gets off the ground.” The piece (written by a woman, sigh) ran the day the Massachusetts senator announced she was “exploring” a run for the White House. No time to lose, apparently, when it comes to setting the narrative. A supersmart ambitious Democratic woman? Arroint thee, witch!

Because what is likability if not a deference to men—with a self-deprecating smile? A likable woman doesn’t talk too loud or too much. She doesn’t take up too much space, isn’t too sexy or too dowdy, and gracefully eludes confrontation. In short, she doesn’t demand anything that men would rather keep for themselves, be it political power or sexual autonomy or the right to be safe after having a couple of drinks. A likable woman doesn’t challenge women, either, by reminding them of the compromises they’ve made and the edges they’ve trimmed off their personalities.

Recently, though, there have been encouraging signs that women have stopped looking over their shoulders every five minutes for male approval—and it’s driving conservative men berserk.

Take Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Everything about her sends them up a wall. She’s young, female, brown, and left-wing—the polar opposite of Congress’s white, male, right-wing oldsters. She says she’s working-class but somehow has nice clothes. She’s made a couple of slips in interviews, so obviously she’s an ignorant ditz. Grover Norquist even compares her proposal to raise taxes on the top income brackets to slavery.

Most recently, conservatives leaked a video of Ocasio-Cortez dancing on a rooftop during college. Maybe they thought a young woman looking carefree and adorable was the equivalent of appearing in soft-core porn—something former Republican senator Scott Brown actually did, by the way, without suffering any harm to his reputation as a solid all-around good guy with a pickup truck. On Lou Dobbs’s show, Republican strategist Ed Rollins called her a “little girl.”

The new congresswoman’s response to all this was to tweet a video of herself dancing into her office. Then, when Republicans booed her for voting for Nancy Pelosi to chair the House, Ocasio-Cortez tweeted merriely: “Don’t hate me cause you ain’t me, fellas.” The old ways of chastising uppity women, evidently, are backfiring.

The faux outrage at Ocasio-Cortez lasted mere hours before being overshadowed by Rashida Tlaib’s cursing. Speaking at a MoveOn gathering, Tlaib, one of two newly-elected Muslim women in Congress, said she had told her son, “we’re gonna impeach the motherfucker.” A raft of politicians and pundits swiftly schooled Tlaib in manners and morals; you’d think Congress was a Baptist prayer meeting—at least for women. After all, Dick Cheney did tell Pat Leahy to go fuck himself on the Senate floor in 2004—and later called it the proudest moment of his life. (Nancy Pelosi on Tlaib: “I’m not in the censorship business.” Well played, Ms. Speaker.)

Women dancing, women cursing, women running for president, women not apologizing—what is the world coming to? After carefully managing their appearance and behavior for so long, left, liberal, and even not-so-liberal women are full of piss and vinegar and rage. They give no fucks because they have no fucks left to give. “Himpathy”—philosopher Kate Manne’s marvelous coinage to describe the tendency of both sexes to feel sorry for awful men—is no longer the automatic response. Just ask Brett Kavanaugh. Or Louis C.K. Or R. Kelly, who, after 30 years of abusing underage black girls with impunity, was definitively outed in a three-part Lifetime documentary.

Women dancing, women cursing, women running for president and not apologizing—what is the world coming to?

Much credit for this awakening goes to the Women’s Marches, which will take place again on January 19. The first march, after Trump’s inauguration, was a collective scream of fury, determination, and joy: the largest demonstration in US history. Critics called it a symbolic one-off, but it was the opposite: Women went home and...
joined election-oriented groups like VoteRunLead and Indivisible. Without the marches, we would not be celebrating the fact that there are more than 100 women in the House today, all but 13 of them Democrats. In state after state, women are changing the face—and politics—of local government.

Recently, the Women’s March has run into difficulties. Linda Sarsour, Tamika Mallory, and Carmen Perez, three of the four original co-chairs of the national organization Women’s March, Inc., have in the past expressed their affection for Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan. That’s definitely not likeable! And not in a good way.

They’ve since backed off, but it took too long and has fallen short of the complete repudiation many marchers would like to see, given Farrakhan’s long history of anti-Semitism. Some Jews have decided not to march; others are defending the leaders and turning the conversation to Jewish racism; others still are down-playing Farrakhan’s importance completely. It’s all very confusing. Meanwhile marches are being cancelled in Chicago and New Orleans, while New York City will have two competing ones: Women’s March, Inc. and Women’s March Alliance. Oy.

I understand why Jewish women would want to stay home—that was my first inclination, too—but I think the stronger case is to march and struggle. I don’t want to stomp on the grass roots and help destroy a multiracial movement that has transformed so much for women in such a short time. So, as an atheist half-Jew I will be marching in DC with a contingent of Jewish women, definitely a first for me—and I hope I’ll be carried along by a vast wave of fierce women, likable or not. Maybe I’ll see you there.

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**SNAPSHOT / RICARDO MORAES**

**Mine, All Mine**

A policeman flies over an illegal gold mine in northern Brazil. The country’s newly inaugurated far-right president, Jair Bolsonaro, has promised to open up more of the country’s natural resources to private mining and logging corporations.

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**A Presidential Negotiating Stance**

If he can’t get the wherewithal To build at once his precious wall— A wall that’s thick, a wall that’s tall, The strongest, toughest wall of all— Then to the floor he’ll surely fall, And pound his little fists and bawl.

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Europe's Left Nationalists

Are open borders at odds with progressive politics?

by DAVID ADLER
N MAY 2016, AT A CONFERENCE FOR GERMANY’S LEFT-WING DIE LINKE PARTY, TORTEN FÜR MENSCHENFEINDE (“Pies for Misanthropes”) struck again. Sneaking up the side of the conference hall, a member of the anti-fascist organization threw a piece of cake at Sahra Wagenknecht, a prominent Die Linke member in the Bundestag. It was a direct hit: Wagenknecht’s face was covered in chocolate frosting, a streak of whipped cream extending from ear to ear.

Torten für Menschenfeinde targeted Wagenknecht for her vocal position against an open-border policy for Germany. Earlier that year, she challenged Chancellor Angela Merkel’s decision to accept more than 1 million refugees, arguing that Germany should impose limits on entry and deport those who abused German “hospitality.” The cake attack—which followed a cream-pie offensive against a member of the far-right Alternative for Germany—isolated Wagenknecht in her party, which had otherwise pledged support for Merkel’s policy.

Nearly three years later, however, Wagenknecht and her views on migration have gone mainstream, in Germany and across Europe. In September 2018, Wagenknecht and her husband, Oskar Lafontaine, founded Aufstehen (“Rise Up”), a political movement combining left-wing economic policy with exclusionary social protections. The movement has garnered over 170,000 members since its official launch; according to a recent poll, more than a third of German voters “could see themselves” supporting Wagenknecht’s initiative.

“I am tired of surrendering the streets to the [anti-Islam movement] Pegida and the Alternative for Germany,” Wagenknecht said at the launch event. Onstage, she was joined by allies in Germany’s Green Party and the Social Democratic Party. “As many followers of the political left as possible should join,” several Social Democratic politicians wrote in a joint statement.

By founding Aufstehen, Wagenknecht became a member of the new vanguard of left politics in Europe. In France, Jean-Luc Mélenchon leads La France Insoumise, a left-populist movement that has been critical of mass migration. “I’ve never been in favor of freedom of arrival,” Mélenchon has said, claiming that migrants “are stealing the bread” of French workers. He is now the most popular politician on the French left, widely considered the face of the opposition to President Emmanuel Macron and a champion of the Yellow Vest movement.

In the United Kingdom, Jeremy Corbyn leads the Labour Party and offers a radical vision of socialist transformation. And yet, although he was a vocal advocate for migrant rights during his tenure at Westminster, Corbyn has expressed deep skepticism about open borders as the party’s leader. “Labour is not wedded to freedom of movement for EU citizens as a point of principle,” Corbyn said, committing Labour to a policy of “reasonable management” based on “our economic needs.”

The rise of these left-nationalist leaders marks a momentous turn against free movement in Europe, where it has long been accepted as a basic right of citizenship.

Forget The Communist Manifesto’s refrain that “the working men have no country”; the new face of the European left takes a radically different view. Free movement is, to quote Wagenknecht, “the opposite of what is left-wing”: It encourages exploitation, erodes community, and denies popular sovereignty. To advocate open borders, in this view, is to oppose the interests of the working class.

By popularizing this argument, these new movements are not just challenging migration policy in Europe; they are redefining the boundaries of left politics in a dangerous, and inopportune, direction. Over the next few decades, global migration is set to explode: By 2100, up to 1 million migrants will be applying to enter the European Union each year.

Right-wing populists have already begun their assault on migrants: In Italy, Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini has called for “mass cleaning,” while Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has proposed that recent arrivals should be sent “back to Africa.” As left-nationalist movements charge ahead in the polls, it is not immediately clear who will challenge their pessimistic view of migration and fight for the right to free movement.

In 1870, KARL MARX WROTE A LETTER TO TWO GERMAN MIGRANTS IN NEW YORK CITY, IMPLORING THEM TO “PAY PARTICULAR ATTENTION” TO WHAT HE CALLED “THE IRISH QUESTION.”

“I have come to the conclusion,” Marx wrote, “that the decisive blow against the English ruling classes cannot be delivered in England but only in Ireland.” For Marx, Ireland would play a decisive role because of its mass emigration—the Mexico of its time. “Ireland constantly sends its surplus” to America, imploring them, “Let them eat cake: German anti-fascists attacked Aufstehen co-founder Sahra Wagenknecht... with chocolate frosting.

The rise of left-nationalist leaders marks a momentous turn against free movement in Europe.
come a key reference point for the left critique of free movement. The passage is cited as evidence of a fundamental tension between the traditional goals of the left—equality, solidarity, working-class power—and a policy of open borders. "Karl Marx identified that fact a long time ago," announced Len McCluskey, general secretary of Britain's Unite the Union and a close ally of Jeremy Corbyn, in 2016.

But critics of free movement often neglect to mention Marx's conclusions: "Given this state of affairs," he wrote, "if the working class wishes to continue its struggle with some chance of success, the national organizations must become international."

Marx's analysis of mass migration did not lead him to advocate harder borders. Instead, it made him support international mobilization to protect workers' rights in a world of free movement.

After all, Marx himself was a triple émigré: He fled Prussia to Paris, faced exile from Paris to Brussels, and—after a brief incarceration by the Belgian authorities—found his way to London. And he was hardly a model immigrant: Poor, sick, and a notorious procrastinator, Marx was much more of a scrounger than a striver, leeching off the largesse of Friedrich Engels.

As such, Marx had little sympathy for the "ordinary English worker," who "hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standards of life." The solution to the Irish question was not to bow to these prejudices, he argued, but to dissolve the antagonism between the various camps of the working class. "A coalition of German workers with the Irish workers—and of course also with the English and American workers who are prepared to accede to it—is the greatest achievement you could bring about now," he advised.

Following Marx, the concept of left internationalism came to be associated with support for free movement on both ethical and strategic grounds. Ethically, open borders gave equal opportunity to workers of all nationalities. More important, the movement of people across borders created new opportunities for a coordinated challenge to capitalism. Internationalists like Marx supported free movement for the same reasons they supported free trade: It hastened the pace of history and heightened capitalism's contradictions.

"There can be no doubt that dire poverty alone compels people to abandon their native land, and that the capitalists exploit the immigrant workers in the most shameless manner," wrote Vladimir Lenin in 1913. "But only reactionaries can shut their eyes to the progressive significance of this modern migration of nations.... Capitalism is drawing the masses of the working people of the whole world...breaking down national barriers and prejudices, uniting workers from all countries."

Back in Lenin's day, a very similar debate over the merits of migration was roiling through the European left. But while the pessimistic view of Wagenknecht and others left nationalists has now taken hold in many parts of the continent, Lenin's, at the time, prevailed.

At the 1907 Congress of the Second International in Stuttgart, Germany, leaders of the Socialist Party of America introduced a resolution to end "the willful importation of cheap foreign labor." Morris Hillquit, a founder of the party, argued that migrants from Asia—the "yellow races," unlike those from Europe—amounted to a "pool of unconscious strikebreakers." The convention rejected the resolution: "The congress does not seek a remedy to the potentially impending consequences for the workers from immigration and emigration in any economic or political exclusionary rules, because these are fruitless and reactionary by nature."

Lenin would never forget the incident. In a 1915 letter to the Socialist Propaganda League of America, he called out the American socialists for their efforts to restrict Chinese and Japanese migration. "We think that one can not be internationalist and be at the same time in favor of such restrictions," he wrote. "Such socialists are in reality jingoists."

By the time of Lenin's letter, of course, Europe's great powers had been whipped into a frenzy of nationalist violence. In the First World War, British soldiers sang "Rule, Britannia," the Germans sang "Deutschlandlied," and they all marched to their deaths. Even the Social Democratic Party of Germany—a key player in the Second International—voted in favor of the war. Citing the need for national self-defense, large swaths of the European left abandoned the cause of open borders.

But by the end of the next world war—which left another 80 million people dead and 60 million more displaced—support for free movement had moved from the margins of the left into the heart of the postwar political establishment. When the United Nations convened in Paris to draft its Declaration of Human Rights in November 1948, the committee considered mobility a matter of "vital importance." "Freedom of movement was the sacred right of every human being," commented the representative from Chile. "The world belongs to all mankind," added the representative from Haiti.

The architects of the European Union took this view of free movement as fundamental to the project of European integration. In the 1957 Treaty of Rome, which laid the foundations for a union in Europe, diplomats and ministers included the "freedom of movement for workers" as one of the four freedoms—alongside those of goods, services, and capital—that would govern the European Economic Community. This decision sought to encourage Europe's reconstruction by enabling workers to move where they were needed most.

Over the next three decades, this fourth freedom shifted from a provisional economic measure to a right of European citizenship. The 1985 Schengen Agreement eliminated internal borders and the customs checks that went along with them; the 1992 Maastricht Treaty established a European Union citizenship that guaranteed free movement on the basis of personhood, not participation in the labor force.

Such was the grand ambition of the Socialist French president François Mitterrand. "It is to turn the whole
of Europe into one space,” he announced in a televised Bastille Day interview in 1990. “Now the barriers and the walls have collapsed. The storm is not over…but we are getting there.”

The transformation of free movement from a radical demand to a pillar of EU governance was critical to the emergence of left nationalism in Europe. Since the Maastricht Treaty—signed and celebrated by socialists like Mitterrand—the hope for the European Single Market as a force of social cohesion has largely failed. Today, the European Union looks less like a workers’ utopia and more like a neoliberal fortress: demanding, enforcing, and policing a free-market order. Banks, corporations, and investors may be free to move their capital across the continent, but national governments are not free to implement policies that address their local needs. It is out of this contradiction—and Mélenchon’s view that the EU is a “totalitarian project”—that the new left vanguard has formed.

In short, the terms of radicalism have changed. A century ago, left movements advocated international integration as the answer to “bourgeois chauvinism under the guise of patriotism,” as Lenin put it. Today, they advocate national devolution as the answer to the unfettered power of globalized capital.

Both approaches aim to challenge capitalism and advocate a fairer redistribution of resources; the latter, though, views international institutions as instruments of capitalism rather than as potential vehicles for worker power. Its goal, best expressed by the left-wing advocates of Brexit, is to take back control from those institutions: “a once-in-a-lifetime window of opportunity” for a “radical break with neoliberalism,” as Thomas Fazi and William Mitchell, authors of Reclaiming the State, wrote in their 2018 Jacobin article “Why the Left Should Embrace Brexit.” As a result, for these critics, the right to free movement is the sacrificial lamb in a radical break with the European Union.

Fazi and Mitchell, for example, don’t mention migration once in their 3,000-word brief for embracing Brexit. In their framework, the priority is first and foremost to build a socialist economy, which they claim is impossible within the constraints of the single market. Migrants, then, are collateral damage.

Most left nationalists in Europe don’t stop there, however; they view the demise of free movement as a worthy end in itself. These critiques can be broadly divided into three types: economic, cultural, and political. And all of them aim to justify the introduction of new border controls.

The most prominent of these critiques, building on Marx’s 1870 letter, rejects free movement on the basis of worker exploitation. “The state has a duty to protect men and women from foreign workers who take their jobs away for lower pay,” said Oskar Lafontaine, co-founder of Aufstehen, in a defense of border controls in 2005. Likewise, in a Guardian op-ed supporting Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s 2017 presidential bid, Cambridge lecturer Olivier Tonneau asserted that the “noble principle of freedom of movement” had been “perverted into forced economic migration, which undercut wages and stirred tension between peoples.”

Jeremy Corbyn makes a similar argument. After the Brexit referendum, Corbyn laid out his opposition to free movement in the European Union. “If freedom of movement means the freedom to exploit cheap labor in a race to the bottom, it will never be accepted in any future relationship with Europe,” he wrote.

The problem is that there is virtually no evidence to support the claim that foreign workers depress wages and discourage the employment of native workers. In a landmark report in September 2018, the United Kingdom’s Migration Advisory Committee found that “migrants have no or little impact on the overall employment and unemployment outcomes of the UK-born workforce.” In fact, it added, “there is some evidence to suggest that skilled migrants have a positive impact on the quantity of training available to the UK-born workforce.” The findings in Britain echoed those of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which found in 2014 that migration “contributes to spur innovation and economic growth” and that migrants give more in taxes than they take in benefits.

“Crudely,” wrote economist Jonathan Portes in a recent article summarizing two decades of his research, “immigrants are not taking our jobs.”

The real threat to labor standards is not freedom of movement, but rather its restriction. And as countries like the United States have learned time and time again, harsh border controls are not effective deterrents to migration: According to a 2007 study in the journal Regulation & Governance, border enforcement has had “remarkably little influence on the propensity [of people]
to migrate illegally to the USA.”

Upon their arrival, unauthorized migrants are vulnerable to exploitation, undermining the entire labor market—exactly the problem that the restrictionists identify. Unauthorized labor is largely off the books, and without legal protections, the people performing it lack bargaining power against their employers. One wide-ranging study found that 37 percent of unauthorized migrants in the United States suffered minimum-wage violations, compared with 21 percent of authorized migrants, while 85 percent of unauthorized migrants were not paid overtime, compared with 67 percent of their documented counterparts.

On a more conceptual level, the economic critique fails to hold together. In making the case for managed migration, many people distinguish between two classes of migrants: economic migrants in search of work, and asylum seekers in need of refuge. The latter pose a humanitarian concern, which many left nationalists are (for good reason) happy to accommodate, while the former threaten the labor market and therefore merit tighter regulation. “When we are talking about economic migration,” Labour MP and UK shadow secretary for international trade Barry Gardiner told the BBC, “the economy has to work in favor of the British people and the British public.”

Under closer examination, this distinction falls apart. Every day, scores of young men arrive in Southern Europe after harrowing journeys from their homes. But the European Union draws a hard line between those worthy of asylum and those migrating for economic opportunity. Boys from Syria—who are recognized as refugees of war—tend to receive asylum swiftly, while boys from Pakistan have little hope of it, despite the fact that many have fled similar levels of violence. “Migration is something that people do to try to survive,” Jeremy Corbyn once told the House of Commons. “Every case is a human story.”

The cultural critique doesn’t bother with this distinction. Rather, it takes aim at all migration on the basis that it erodes, dilutes, or otherwise undermines national culture. Free movement is “not also a principle of socialism,” wrote the left-wing British journalist Paul Mason in 2017. “It says to people with strong cultural traditions, a strong sense of place and community (sometimes all they have left from the industrial era) that ‘your past does not matter.’” By calling their heritage into question, then, migration threatens to incite even stronger xenophobia among working-class communities.

Yet there is very little empirical basis for these claims, either. In case after case—from the Brexit vote to Germany’s general election last year—areas with the fewest migrants have expressed the strongest cultural grievances. And research suggests that contact between different communities—gay and straight, black and white, Shia and Sunni—is actually a route to reducing intergroup prejudice. In other words, if the goal is to reduce xenophobia, borders are not the solution; interaction is.

The very fact of anti-immigrant attitudes in Europe often leads to a political critique: European citizens never had a full say on the rules that would govern their union, whether on immigration or environmental regulation. The principle of free movement is meaningless in the absence of democratic support for it, this argument goes. And, once again, we find a rationale for exiting the European Union: Only then will voters be able to shape their own political future.

But while some people advocate exit as a pretext to curb migration, others, like Costas Lapavitsas, a former member of the Greek Parliament for Syriza and author of The Left Case Against the EU, view it as a way to reconstitute a fairer, more global kind of free movement. The freedom to move within the EU is, in fact, premised on restricting free movement into it—a system known as “Fortress Europe.” Rather than reforming the EU from the inside and defending the principle of free movement, these critics believe that exit is the best route to a more humane immigration policy. In other words, they want to destroy free movement in order to save it.

Such critics often consider themselves to be internationalists, tweeting support for sister parties and criss-crossing the continent to speak on their panels. But make no mistake: This isn’t your grandfather’s internationalism. It has little in common with Lenin’s optimistic view of migration “uniting workers from all countries.” It hinges on a decidedly nationalist desire to claw back national sovereignty, to undo the excesses of liberalization, and to reclaim the borders of the nation-state. Mélenchon, for his part, has stopped playing the “International” at his public rallies. He prefers to fly the Tricolore and sing “La Marseillaise” instead.
The new left-nationalist vision emerging in Europe is not shared worldwide. Over the last decade, pundits and politicians have frequently pointed out the similar trajectories in Europe and the United States. The 2008 financial crisis exposed the deep interconnections between their banking systems, while the populist earthquake of 2016 revealed the shared fault lines in their democracies.

But one of the most striking patterns in the migration debate is the divergence in attitudes on the two sides of the Atlantic. While the left vanguard in Europe backtracks on its support for immigration, support on the American left is surging. In 2006, 37 percent of Democrats believed that immigration to the United States should decrease, while 20 percent believed that it should increase. In 2018, only 16 percent of Democrats believed that immigration should decrease, while a whopping 40 supported its increase. Compare that with Britain, where 49 percent of Labour voters think that immigration is too high, and a microscopic 5 percent think it’s too low.

The rapid rise in support for immigration on the American left marks a historic role reversal. Recall the 1907 Congress of the Second International, where the Socialist Party of America’s motion to restrict immigration was dismissed by its European counterparts. Today, there is virtually no Democratic politician who offers a tough line on immigration. Within the Democratic Party’s progressive wing, in particular, we find a vigorous defense of migrant rights and a call to abolish immigration-enforcement agencies altogether—a far cry from the criticism of free movement flourishing in Europe. As Labour MP and shadow home secretary Diane Abbott stressed in her remarks at the Labour Party’s conference in September: “Real border security…that is what Labour stands for.”

What explains this sudden divergence in transatlantic attitudes? And what can it tell us about the left-nationalist case against free movement?

One plausible driver is demographics. Much has been made of the United States’ transition from a predominantly white country to a majority-minority one within the next three decades. Meanwhile, the fast-growing Latino community is also the most active in its pro-immigration movement. It is possible, therefore, that public opinion is simply shifting with the tides of American demography.

But the demographic story is insufficient to explain this transatlantic divergence. After all, the percentage of foreign-born residents in the United States is almost exactly the same as that in Germany or France—13.1 percent, 12.8 percent, and 11.7 percent, respectively. A country’s demographic profile, therefore, does not necessarily dictate its attitudes toward immigration. In any case, it is difficult to see how these long-term trends could produce such a sudden shift in attitudes.

Instead, the key factor is the electoral system around which these demographics change. In the United States, a polarizing two-party system has laid the groundwork for a full-throated defense of immigration from the left. As Republicans vow to “build the wall,” Democrats advocate breaking it down. As President Trump radicalizes the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency, senators like Elizabeth Warren and Kirsten Gillibrand call for its abolition. As a Republican administration detains migrant children, the Democratic Party demands amnesty for them. In short, the politics of immigration is a politics of opposition.

“America’s views on immigration have changed more over this short period than at any time in any other country in history,” says political scientist Rob Ford of the University of Manchester. “It would suggest, paradoxically, that harsh migration policies create the conditions for a radical turn in a pro-immigration direction.”

Ford’s comments should provide a measure of cold solace to immigration advocates in Europe. As far-right parties come to power across the continent—creating an anti-immigrant “axis” from Berlin to Vienna to Rome, as Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz eerily described it—so the terms of left opposition may once again tilt in favor of free movement. In their own way, by seeking to destroy the right to freedom of movement, the European alt-right may end up saving it.

But the extent of the divergence between the European and American cases raises fundamental questions about how we define the left today. What does it mean that Democrats associate the European economic critique of free movement with their Republican enemies, or that they associate the European cultural critique of free movement with the emergent alt-right marching through cities like Charlottesville, Virginia?

(continued on page 25)
WILL AMLO SEEK JUSTICE FOR MEXICO’S

Thousands are missing in the country’s drug war—many of them seized by government security forces.

by DAVID PALEY
ONE NIGHT LAST MARCH, JESSICA MOLINA WAS AWAKE IN BED, recovering from surgery at her home in the Mexican border city of Nuevo Laredo, when she heard pounding at her front door. Her husband, José Daniel Trejo García, a car mechanic, slept through the noise and didn’t stir until Mexican Marines in full combat gear burst into the couple’s bedroom.

“They entered in a completely straight line, as if it was an operation,” Molina recalls. “There were around six who came into the bedroom, and 11 in all in the house.” A red laser dot appeared on Trejo García’s forehead as a Marine trained his weapon on him.

Molina says she heard the Marines say twice that they had the wrong house, and she tried to calm her husband, assuring him that it was all a mistake. But the Marines insisted that Trejo García used the alias “Willy” and was the suspect they were looking for. He shouted in protest as the Marines pulled him out of bed and forced him, shoeless, out of the house.

The other Marines in the house went after Gabriel Gaspar Vásquez, a friend of the couple’s from the southern state of Oaxaca, who was resting in Nuevo Laredo before attempting to cross into the United States. A Marine who noticed the couple’s security cameras asked Molina where the information from them was stored. They seized not only the data contained in the security cameras, but also the couple’s modem, their CPU, a scanner, a computer, watches, phones, and a stash of dollars and pesos. In total, the Marines were in the couple’s home for 32 minutes.

“When they dumped my purse, while they were taking him away, my passport fell out, and one of them turned around and asked, ‘Are you a US citizen?’ And I said, ‘Yes, sir,’” Molina adds, because she was born in Houston. Upon learning this, the Marines’ attitude toward her changed immediately. “Respect her—she’s a US citizen,” said the one who emptied her bag. “I think my citizenship saved my life,” Molina concludes.

Yet Trejo García and Gaspar Vásquez haven’t been seen since that night of March 27, 2018, when the Marines dragged them from their beds and took them away. They are among the 51 recorded cases of disappearances at the hands of Mexican Marines between January and May of last year in Nuevo Laredo. And they are part of a much longer list of people who have disappeared in Mexico since the country’s War on Drugs took off in December of 2006—officially, that number is more than 37,000.

The crisis over these disappearances in the past 12 years is perhaps the deepest wound in this battered country inherited by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, popularly known as AMLO. In his inaugu-ral speech on December 1, López Obrador campaigned for the Mexican presidency on a promise of “hugs, not bullets.”

But beyond the 43 young men, López Obrador has said little about the tens of thousands of other desaparecidos. He campaigned on a promise of “hugs, not bullets,” and his security plan states that his administration will implement a “paradigm of public security that is radically different from that which has been applied in previous sexenios,” or six-year presidential terms.

In November 2018, a controversial internal-security law authorizing the Mexican Army’s participation in law enforcement was struck down by the Supreme Court. By the end of the first week of AMLO’s presidency, 50,000 troops—made up of units of the Military Police, Naval Police, and Federal Police—were deployed to patrol 150 regions of the country. López Obrador has promised that this combined force will be enlarged and shaped into a new National Guard over the next three years. Under his proposal, which requires congressional approval and constitutional reforms, the National Guard will be under the control of the Army. In the interim, the Marines, which fall under Navy command, will retain control of the coastal and border regions. López Obrador insists that a new National Guard is necessary to bring security to the country, but his critics say that his plan is a repeat of the militarization from the previous two administrations. Before securing congressional approval of the plan or legalizing the National Guard, the president announced that recruitment would begin immediately, according to procedures similar to those of the army.

While López Obrador was being inaugurated in Mexico City, I traveled to Nuevo Laredo, the epicenter of the most recent rash of government-involved disappearances, to interview survivors and witnesses. The city is ringed by truck stops and parking for semi-trailers.

Indeed, transportation drives the local economy: A whopping 38 percent of all trade between Mexico and the United States passes through the port of Laredo, on the Texas border. Nuevo Laredo is also a key transit point for drug traffickers and is considered the cradle of the powerful Zetas cartel, which is said to have gained control of trafficking in the city in the early 2000s.

The first documented wave of disappearances at the hands of the Marines took place in June 2011, the second in 2015, and the third—and largest—in the first half of 2018. The bodies of nine of the 51 people disappeared by the Marines in Nuevo Laredo last...
year, including two minors and three women, were later discovered by their families or the authorities.

“In the cases from 2011 and 2015, and now in 2018, the Attorney General’s Office has refused to investigate the Marines,” Raymundo Ramos, president of the nongovernmental Human Rights Committee of Nuevo Laredo, tells The Nation. “They open investigations, and first they investigate and criminalize the victims, then their family members—but they never, ever touch the Marines.” Ramos and people like Molina whose family members were disappeared have received death threats and have been smeared in the media—including being accused of associations with criminal activity—for raising their voices about the role of the Navy in these disappearances.

Nor are these abuses limited to Nuevo Laredo: Since 2007, Mexico’s National Human Rights Commission has issued 46 recommendations, or calls for investigation, regarding possible crimes committed by the Navy (compared with seven such recommendations in the previous 10 years). “We saw it in 2011, we saw it in 2015, and now in 2018,” says Ramos, who calculates that, since 2010, the number of disappearances (and extrajudicial executions, in which the victim’s body was later found) committed by the Marines in Nuevo Laredo is around 70.

The abuses don’t just include disappearances. In March of last year, after a day of shoot-outs with cartel members in Nuevo Laredo left one Marine dead and 12 wounded, Marines firing from a helicopter killed three members of the same family, including two children. A surviving eyewitness claims that the Marines rappelled down from the helicopter and prevented an ambulance from arriving while the victims bled out. The Navy initially denied involvement in the civilian deaths and later claimed that the family was killed in the cross-fire during a battle with cartel gunmen.

There may be a U.S. connection to the disappearances as well. Leaked State Department cables reveal that the United States has been extensively training and sharing information with the Mexican Marines and the Army since 2009, while cooperation between US and Mexican police goes back decades. In 2012, US Marines began deploying to Mexico to train their counterparts under the umbrella of Security Force Assistance training, while three Black Hawk helicopters were delivered to the Mexican Marines under the Mérida Initiative. In early 2018, the head of the US Northern Command, Gen. Lori Robinson, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that US Marines had trained over 1,500 Mexican Marines in 2017 “to help prepare those troops for the fight against the cartels.” This means that over one-third of the nearly 4,000 Mexican Marines active in anti-narcotics activities from January to September 2018 may have had US training.

According to Ramos, the Mexican Navy has the closest relations “in terms of training, supply, information exchange, and operations” with US forces. “It is the institution that the US chooses to ensure the lives of its federal agents—DEA agents or otherwise—when they are in Mexico,” he adds.

Nuevo Laredo’s downtown was bustling with shoppers on the day López Obrador took office. A few dozen non-Mexican migrants sat along the main pedestrian bridge connecting the city to Laredo, Texas, unable to get past the Customs and Border Protection officers policing the US half of the bridge. Not far off, members of 12 families whose loved ones had disappeared at the hands of the Mexican Marines earlier in 2018 gathered at Estación Palabra, a former train station that is now a community center.

Many of the family members present expressed hope that the new president would prioritize the search for the disappeared. Gabriela and Erika Castro, two sisters in their late 20s, survived a Marine attack on a political gathering in a junkyard in Nuevo Laredo on May 16 of last year. Over 100 people had come together to decide whom they would support in the city’s mayoral race when the meeting was interrupted by three truckloads of Marines, who pulled up firing warning shots.

After forcing everyone who couldn’t run away to lie on the floor, the Marines confiscated jewelry, money, and phones from those present. “They insulted me, saying they were going to kill me, that they were after me, after all of us, and that they would kill us like the dogs that we are,” Erika Castro said. “They were Marines, from head to toe in tactical uniforms. They had helmets, the helmets had cameras—their faces were covered.” The sisters didn’t recognize their accents but said they thought the Marines were from Mexico City.

“They beat me, they pulled me by the hair across the junkyard’s offices out to where they had everyone lying down—more than 50 people, all face-down,” Gabriela Castro recalled. “They humiliated us, they beat us, they insulted us, saying it would be the last time we would see the light of day.”

Relatives and friends eventually arrived on the scene, together with local journalists. Video footage shows women pushing past the Marines, who shouted insults at them and began to retreat. Those on the ground stood up and gathered to do a head count. No one had been shot, but many had been beaten. And one man—José Luis Bautista Carrillo, Erika’s long-term partner and the father of her two children, who had also been beaten and interrogated by the Marines—was missing.

The Castro sisters went straight to the naval base to demand that Bautista Carrillo be returned. Since then, they’ve been searching for his body, eventually meeting up with other families to look in ditches around the city. There they found the bodies of two other men disappeared by the Marines earlier in the year.

The Attorney General’s Office has thus far refused to consider the video and photographic evidence made available by the sisters. In a demonstration of the flagrant impunity enjoyed by the Marines, no one has been charged, despite videos showing their participation in
the raid and more than 100 eyewitnesses who can testify to the events of that day. Also among the disappeared is Jorge Antonio Hernández Domínguez, a US citizen born in Dallas. He was only 18 when, on April 4, 2018, he and Juan Carlos Zaragoza González were forced off the street in Nuevo Laredo into vehicles belonging to the Marines. Neither man has been seen since.

On May 30, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, then the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, issued a statement demanding that the Mexican government “take urgent steps” to end the wave of disappearances. Two days later, the Marines were withdrawn from Nuevo Laredo. Three captains, 24 officials, and 230 Marines were sent to Mexico City as part of an internal investigation into their conduct. However, they were never interviewed in person by the Attorney General’s Office. The Marines under investigation have since been redeployed in different parts of the country, and there have been no arrests or detentions.

Nuevo Laredo is part of a much larger constellation of sites where massacres and disappearances have been carried out over the past 12 years under the pretext of a War on Drugs, funded and supported by the United States. Family members in other border states, especially those who have spent years searching for their loved ones, are skeptical about the change in government.

“I’ve been through three presidents: Fox, Calderón, and Peña,” said Silvia Ortiz in an interview at her kitchen table last November. “They made so many promises, and none were kept.” Her daughter, Silvia Stephanie Sánchez Viesca Ortiz, was disappeared on November 5, 2004. Every Saturday for the past three years, Ortiz has led a search team composed of family members of the disappeared into the dry fields surrounding the city of Torreón, about 330 miles southwest of Nuevo Laredo, in the state of Coahuila.

Ortiz and others from the collective, known as Grupo Vida, participated in a so-called “pacification” forum held by López Obrador’s transition team in August. “I think we made it clear to the incoming government that we do not agree with what they were proposing in terms of the means of pacifying the country, especially with regards to forgiveness. We don’t agree with that,” Ortiz said. “We proposed a Truth Commission, and made sure they understood that it isn’t something to be taken lightly.” Only a handful of the pacification forums initially planned by the government were held before the remainder were canceled or closed to the public. Officials said that the cancellations were necessary to properly evaluate the information already gathered, and because the conditions of respectful listening had been broached.

Thus far, Grupo Vida has found more than 120,000 human remains. Most are charred and broken into tiny pieces, but they still contain DNA that could lead to a positive match. “That’s how we’re finding [the disappeared], and that’s why we can’t forgive,” Ortiz said. “We want justice.” I asked her what justice meant to her, and she said it would mean finding all the mass graves, identifying all the human remains, and returning anyone who is disappeared and still alive back to their families.

On the road between Torreón and Nuevo Laredo is Monterrey, the 10th-largest city in Mexico. There, I spoke with Leticia Herrera, whose son Roy Rivera Hidalgo was disappeared on January 11, 2011, during a home invasion by uniformed police. Rivera Hidalgo, who was 18 at the time of his disappearance, was studying translation at the Autonomous University of Nuevo León. His mother has since become the leader of the

(continued on page 25)
The Ideas Primary

In a crowded field of contenders, progressives have a real chance to shape the 2020 election.

by ROBERT L. BOROSAGE
The 2020 presidential campaign began long before
the midterms ended. Reporters have already started
covering the gaggle of Democrats (20? 30?) said to be
“looking at” a run. Pollsters and pundits are already
handicapping the horse race, brandishing polls that
mostly register name recognition. The scramble for
campaign money and talent is now well under way. More
interesting for voters, the Democratic campaign is starting off with an “ideas
primary,” with potential candidates competing on reform proposals and mes-
sages, seeking to hone their distinctive appeal.

This cycle’s ideas primary is already fierce. Trump’s calamitous presidency
has exacerbated racial and nativist divisions, while utterly failing to deal with
the toxic legacy of endless wars, growing inequality, pervasive corruption, and
existential threats like climate change. The Bernie Sanders insurgency in 2016
proved that voters are looking for candidates with an authentic commitment to
sweeping change. Democratic presidential contenders realize they must now
appeal to the party’s aroused, progressive activist base.

Sanders, not surprisingly, has set the pace. His focus on inequality and the decline in conditions for working
people is now party gospel. The core of his 2016 agenda—
Medicare for All, a $15 minimum wage, tuition-free public
college, a trillion-dollar investment to rebuild America—
has increasingly become standard Democratic fare. Other
presidential hopefuls—Elizabeth Warren, Kamala Harris,
Cory Booker, Kirsten Gillibrand—have signed on as co-
sponsors of his Medicare for All bill. Sanders has contin-
ued to raise the stakes, moving recently to indict our failed
foreign policy, from the endless wars to a global economic
order that works for the few and not for the many. Most
recently, he’s led the effort to end our complicity in Saudi
Arabia’s brutal war on Yemen, and he’s backed an ambitious
effort called the Progressive International, meant to coun-
ter the spread of right-wing authoritarian governments
and reform global financial institutions. After suffering
some hard knocks in 2016 on the issues of comprehensive
immigration and criminal-justice reform, he’s also learned
to champion both as central to taking on institutionalized
racial injustice.

Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren, who es-
sentially launched her campaign on the last day of 2018
by announcing the formation of an exploratory commit-
teer, is competing with Sanders with her own populist re-
form agenda. She has put forth the most aggressive anti-
corruption legislation in recent memory, calling for an end
to the revolving door between Congress and corporate
lobbying firms, restrictions on big money and dark money
in campaigns, and much more. In addition to the Con-
sumer Financial Protection Bureau, which she helped cre-
ate, Warren has continued to offer bold ideas on reforming
the financial markets. Her call for “accountable capitalism”
would make major corporations more responsible to workers and communities and not simply to shareholders. She’d
curb CEO pay and require large corporations to put workers on their boards. Beginning with a demand to break up
the “too big to fail” banks, Warren advocates for anti-trust
enforcement and has become an increasingly forceful op-
ponent of the corporate trade deals that have had such ru-
inous results for American workers.

Other potential Democratic candidates have joined this
progressive ideas primary. California Senator Kamala Har-
s has introduced the LIFT the Middle Class Act, which
would provide up to $6,000 a year to married couples mak-
ing less than $100,000, with the $200 billion price tag par-
tially paid by repealing the Trump tax cuts. Ohio Senator
Sherrod Brown has joined with California Representative
Ro Khanna to call for nearly doubling the earned-income
tax credit, with 21 million more Americans eligible, at a
cost of about $1.4 trillion over a decade. New Jersey Sena-
tor Cory Booker has proposed redressing the racial wealth
gap with baby bonds, providing every newborn child with
a trust account of $1,000, supplemented each year de-
pending on the income level of the parents. The accounts
would have about $50,000 when their beneficiaries reach
adulthood, for use in buying a house or paying for higher
education or advanced training, and would be funded by
progressive hikes in the capital-gains and estate taxes. New
York Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, along with Harris and
Booker, has expressed interest in a federal jobs guarantee,
which would provide a decent-paying job for anyone will-
ring and able to work. Booker has also become an increa-
singly sharp critic of monopoly, after witnessing the crush-
ing effects of Walmart, Amazon, and Big Agriculture on
small towns and rural communities.

Not all of the democratic candidates will
join this ideas competition. Many are likely to
run as restorationists, believing that Trump’s
grotesqueries will leave voters longing for a
return to “normalcy.” Were he to announce
his candidacy, former vice president Joe Biden would
clearly be content to run on his résumé, his blarney, and
a promised restoration of the pre-Trump status quo. Beto
O’Rourke offers a fresher version of Biden: liberal on
social issues while aligned with the New Democrats—the
Wall Street wing of the party—on economic questions.
Business leaders like former New York mayor Michael
Bloomberg, and moderate governors like Colorado’s
John Hickenlooper, may well see an advantage in run-
ning as a manager who can get things done.

The good news is that the ideas primary offers reformers, activists, and grass-roots groups their best opportunity to have an impact on the political debate. In 2008, health-care organizers enlisted then–North Carolina Senator John Edwards, a leading Democratic primary contender, in the cause of comprehensive health-care reform. Then the Service Employees International Union sponsored a high-visibility forum on health care in the vital early primary state of Nevada. That forced Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama to commit themselves to the issue as well. Similarly, in the 2016 election, Black Lives Matter activists brought the demand for criminal-justice reform from the streets into the campaign, directly challenging the candidates to make it a priority.

In the run-up to the 2020 election, climate-change activists will likely play a similar role. The chilling scientific warning that we have little more than a decade to transition our energy systems from fossil fuels has not yet been absorbed into our national politics. Leading Democrats agree that climate change poses an existential threat, but they continue to relegate it to a fourth or fifth talking point on their agenda. Some candidate—Washington Governor Jay Inslee? Oregon Senator Jeff Merkley?—is likely to gain significant attention by taking the threat seriously and championing a Green New Deal, a wartime-scale mobilization to meet the challenge.

Yet many of the party’s traditional operatives are fearful of the ideas competition. They worry that the so-called screamers—the ones who want to “break the chain”—will overwhelm the more measured and mature candidates, those they see as better able to govern effectively. These party insiders believe that Democrats can win over voters in the affluent suburbs by offering a promise of moderation and competence—what might be dubbed the Hillary Clinton strategy redux—in contrast to Trump’s unending circus. Given that Clinton did win the popular vote in 2016, this argument is not without merit. What’s clear, however, is that seeking bipartisan cooperation with the Republican Party of Donald Trump and Mitch McConnell is a fool’s errand. And moderation will not deliver the structural reforms needed to make this economy work for working people once more, or meet the critical challenges at home and abroad that can no longer be ignored. A successful president must assemble a coalition for fundamental change, not simply an electoral majority to hold office. The candidate with the boldest ideas doesn’t necessarily win, as the Sanders insurgency demonstrated in 2016. But one thing is clear: The coming year will feature not only continued opposition to Trump’s clown show, but also a debate about the fundamental reforms needed to transform this country. That presents a real opportunity for progressive groups, activists, and intellectuals. In a field of dozens of candidates looking to distinguish themselves, big ideas—good and bad—will have a chance to gain a public platform. There aren’t many redeeming features to the American institution of the permanent campaign, but this might be one of them.
On International Human Rights Day in 2017, Jeremy Corbyn delivered a speech at the United Nations’ Geneva headquarters in which he laid out his vision for a new global system based on “cooperation, solidarity, and collective action.” The present migration crisis, he argued, has been fueled by a mix of economic inequality, war, and climate destruction, and its solution lies in addressing those underlying causes.

“European countries can, and must, do more as the death rate of migrants and refugees crossing the Mediterranean continue to rise,” Corbyn said. “But let us be clear: The long-term answer is genuine international cooperation based on human rights, which confronts the root causes of conflict, persecution, and inequality.”

Yet even in this vision, freedom of movement still appears suspect. At best, it distracts us from the true solution—a Band-Aid under which the real problems of the world continue to fester. At worst, it numbs us to injustice by celebrating migration instead of condemning the conditions that force people to migrate. “People do not leave for pleasure,” Jean-Luc Mélenchon said in 2017. “Exile is suffering.”

Mélenchon is certainly correct, as is Corbyn in his insistence that we must tackle the root causes of the crisis. The big problem here is that no amount of international coordination will significantly reduce migration in our lifetime. Before the end of this century, up to 2 billion people could be forced to migrate on account of rising sea levels alone. Even if Europe’s entire left vanguard were to come to power and make good on its promises, families around the world would continue in their relentless pursuit of a safer or better life abroad.

Sahra Wagenknecht has described the policy of free movement as “naive.” But the evidence suggests that hard borders threaten international solidarity, not strengthen it; fortify inequality, not decrease it; and inflame xenophobia, not reduce it. Europe’s new left nationalists may not grasp the likely results of their attempts to curtail free movement: scores of deaths on the sea, an explosion of slums at the borderlands, the continued economic exploitation of desperate migrants, and an increasingly militarized system of passport apartheid.

This is Corbyn’s formulation flipped on its head. In the short term, migration controls might win some votes and throw some sand in the gears of international capitalism. But over the long term, such controls can become their own root causes of conflict, persecution, and inequality.

For now, activists—not political parties—are shouting the loudest in support of open borders. At the Labour conference in September, the Labour Campaign for Free Movement passed out thousands of flyers to attendees. In Berlin, demonstrators marched against the far right under the banner of “Global Freedom of Movement.” For their part, the pie throwers have called for a Torturer Krieg—total cake warfare—until Germany’s leaders heed their call. “No activist wants to throw a pie at a politician,” they insist. “But a cream pie is a last resort…. The pie throw is the last measure at the border of humanity.”

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United Forces for Our Disappeared in Nuevo León, whose Spanish acronym is FUNDENL.

At her mother’s house, not far from the city center, Herrera talked about why her organization started carrying out land searches for human remains. “If we don’t go, they don’t go,” she said, referring to state and federal investigators’ unwillingness to act unless pushed by family members. Herrera emphasizes that pressuring politicians is central to FUNDENL’s work, but she is skeptical about the possibility for change.

I asked Herrera the same question that I asked Ortíz: What does justice mean for her? “Finding them,” she answered. “For us, that’s justice—there’s nothing else. There’s no concept of justice beyond going out and searching for and finding them. [The government is] offering a lot of other things, but we’re not hearing them talk about searching—and for us, for all the family members, that’s basically the only objective.”

The families I met with in Nuevo Laredo were more hopeful. “We have a lot of faith in López Obrador; we voted for him, and we expect change,” said Erika Castro. “We have faith he will give us answers. It’s what he promised.” The Nuevo Laredo families, who have been gathering informally since June, eventually decided to create an organization to demand answers as López Obrador stood before the nation in Mexico City’s central square. They selected Jessica Molina, a witness and survivor, as their group’s first president.

On the new government’s fifth day in office, Molina and Raymundo Ramos were in Washington, DC, presenting their case against the Mexican Marines in a hearing before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Across the table from them sat Alejandro Encinas, the new sub-secretary of human rights, migration, and population in López Obrador’s administration. In January, Encinas will visit Nuevo Laredo together with other representatives from the Mexican government to hear more testimony from families searching for their loved ones.

Encinas acknowledged the 37,000 disappeared as well as 2,000 clandestine graves, the majority of which are not being properly investigated or exhumed, and the 26,000 unidentified bodies held at state morgues and in common graves around the country. “That’s how big the problem is,” Encinas said. “Pretending to act or negating the existence of the problem won’t be how we…resolve it.” However, the proposed federal budget for 2019 commits fewer resources to the search for the disappeared than in the previous year.

For Ramos, the outcome of this first meeting with the new government was positive, and the terms of engagement are clear: Within six months, they expect searches for the disappeared, as well as investigations into the Marines, to show results. And they expect social and economic support for the victims or their families.

“Things have already changed in our country,” Encinas told those present at the hearing. “We have to acknowledge that Mexico is in the middle of a profound humanitarian crisis—a crisis of human-rights violations.”
Ben Ehrenreich Replies

I am happy to defer to Professor Straka on the finer questions of forest management, but, as he points out, not all wildfires are in forests—in other habitats, including chaparral, grasslands, and, in one case, a marsh. The Camp Fire, which destroyed the town of Paradise and took 85 lives, spread through an area that burned as recently as 2008 and had subsequently been logged. There is no chopping our way out of drought and rising temperatures. To suggest otherwise is delusional—and profoundly irresponsible. Ben Ehrenreich

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The Real George Bush

Greg Grandin’s op-ed “Poppy’s Bloody Legacy” offers a refreshingly true record of George H.W. Bush [Dec. 31, 2018]. One additional fact: In July 1990, US ambassador April Glaspie had the following exchange with Saddam Hussein over his threat to invade Kuwait. [Editors’ note: The exchange appears in transcripts released by the Iraqi government; Glaspie has claimed that the transcripts were doctored.]

Saddam asks, “What is the United States’ opinion on this?” Glaspie answers, “We have no opinion on your Arab-Arab conflicts, such as your dispute with Kuwait. Secretary (of State) James Baker has directed me to emphasize the instructions, first given to Iraq in the 1960s, that the Kuwait issue is not associated with America.” (Saddam smiles). As Grandin suggests, the ensuing Gulf War, followed by W.’s Iraq War, broke the back of the Middle East.

Samuel Shem, MD

Newton, Mass.
There is, many believe, a specter haunting the Euro-American world. It is not, as Marx and Engels once exulted, the specter of communism. Nor is it the specter of fascism, though some, including former secretary of state Madeleine Albright, have warned of this. Rather, it is the specter of what journalists, scholars, and other political observers now routinely call “populism.” To be sure, there are few, if any, self-described populist movements afoot: no “populist” parties seeking to mobilize voters and constituencies, no “populist international” attempt to harness discontent as it spreads across national borders. Nor is there any “populist” language, sustained “populist” critique of the status quo, or “populist” platform as there once was in the United States at the very end of the 19th century.

“Populism” is instead a term meant to encapsulate the rage often found among white and native-born voters across Europe and other parts of the Western Hemisphere, who regard themselves as victimized by established political institutions, the corrupt practices of politicians, and the influx of migrants from afar. Indeed, these “populists” appear to be united both by shared grievances and by a disposition to place the blame not on the workings of the economic system or the excesses of economic elites (though anti-Semitic currents suggest some of this), but on the threats posed by immigrants to the national culture and economic well-being.

In the current parlance, that is to say, populism is less a movement than a menace. It seems to defy accepted political rules and norms, transgress recognized boundaries, and veer toward authoritarian solutions. Most of all, it threatens the institutions and practices associated with liberal democracy, long believed to be the foundation of American political culture and imagined, with the end of the Cold War, to have emerged triumphant over its rivals throughout the world. But what can this presumed struggle between populism and liberal democracy tell us about the making of our current political.

Steven Hahn teaches history at New York University and is writing a book on the illiberal tradition in American history.

THE POPULIST SPECTER
Is the groundswell of popular discontent in Europe and the Americas what’s really threatening democracy?

by STEVEN HAHN
climate and the future to which it may give rise? What, in fact, do these accounts really tell us about populism and, for that matter, liberal democracy?

The presumed opposition between the two resides at the center of Yascha Mounk’s *The People vs. Democracy*, although the book is chiefly concerned with what Mounk calls liberal democracy’s “crisis” and “decomposition.” The causes of this troubling state of affairs should be familiar to anyone who has listened to or read political analysts—on any point of the political spectrum—over the past several years. They include the slowing rate of economic growth in much of the West since the mid-1970s; the corporate offensive against unions and other forms of working-class power; the insolation of political elites from popular pressure; the expanding power of the executive and judicial branches of government; the emergence of new forms of social media capable of disseminating extreme ideas; and the erosion of ethnic and cultural homogeneity owing to new patterns of migration. Taken together, Mounk argues, these developments have dramatically increased economic inequality, raised deep suspicions about the integrity and responsiveness of political institutions, and encouraged the rise of nationalist movements that place immigrants and other ethnic and religious minorities at the root of their predicament. They have also, Mounk continues, caused liberal democracy to unravel into two strands, “undemocratic liberalism” and “illiberal democracy”—the latter another term, in his view, for populism.

Although none of this will be news to many readers, more arresting is the supporting data that Mounk offers up here. Polling and related surveys, he argues, show not only the erosion of trust in political institutions and democratic norms but also a growing support for authoritarian leadership, including military rule. Indeed, according to Mounk, the data show this trend to be especially notable among young people in a remarkable array of countries: Britain, Chile, Germany, Italy, Norway, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, and Uruguay, as well as the United States. Scholars of political development have long argued that when a society achieves a stable form of liberal democracy, there is little chance of it backsliding. But if Mounk is right, then all bets are off. “Once upon a time,” he tells us, “liberal democracies could assure their citizens of very rapid increases in living standards,” while “political elites…could effectively exclude radical views from the public sphere,” and the “homogeneity of their citizens…held liberal democracies together.” Now, all of this has changed, leaving us on the slippery slope to authoritarianism.

Maybe yes, maybe no. As alarming as *The People vs. Democracy* is, some of the data that Mounk presents has been subject to serious criticism—by Cas Mudde, Jeff Guo, and Pippa Norris, among others—both for overstating the popular disenchantment with democracy and for understating a wide range of attitudes that may lend it support. As always, the salience of polling data depends on what questions were asked, what choice of answers was provided, and what we make of the responses. Also, there are reasons to doubt the extent and depth of the crisis that Mounk describes. Elections during the past three years suggest that millennials can be mobilized in large numbers for democratic purposes; and, if anything, they seem to be moving left rather than right—certainly in the United States, where socialism is now viewed by many of them as an appealing alternative.

Whether or not Mounk’s data hold up, he is hardly alone in raising the warning flags for liberal democracy. Political theorist William Galston, a domestic-policy adviser to Bill Clinton during his presidency, does likewise in his concise and pointed *Anti-Pluralism*, which echoes many of Mounk’s arguments. During the past 25 years, Galston writes, partisans of liberal democracy have moved from “triumphalism to near despair,” as elites have grown skeptical of the need for popular consent and “populist movements” have erupted to express their opposition.

Like Mounk, Galston attributes the present dangers to the faltering of economic growth and to the “waves” (this appears to be the metaphor of choice these days) of immigration that have washed over Europe and the United States. Like Mounk, he focuses on how liberal democracies can be “deformed” by demagoguery on the one side and elitism on the other, and he remains committed to resuscitating the liberal-democratic way. Yet Galston seems even more worried about the threat that populism represents, and he writes about it almost in the language of contagion. Populism, he insists, is tribal: It feeds on feelings of economic and cultural vulnerability and thrives on binary and simplistic portraits of the world (“us” versus “them,” the “people” versus the “elites”). It draws strength from the “incompleteness of life in liberal societies” and attacks vital norms, pluralism chief among them. An “antidote” must therefore be found, preferably in what Galston calls liberal democracy’s “capacity for reinvention.”

For all their fretting and concern, however, neither Galston nor Mounk offers a compelling definition of populism or explains why the term is a useful rubric for the political discontent that has grown so powerful in recent years. Nor does either give us much of a sense of where populism comes from, whether it has a meaningful history, or whether a deeper historical perspective would serve our understanding better.

For both writers, those designated as populists can be disposed to immigrant-bashing and to various forms of nationalism and anti-elitism; and the word “populism” seems most useful as a demeaning and uninterrogated epithet that Galston and Mounk have embraced to express their own hostility to liberal democracy’s apparent enemies. So far as they can see, both populism and the crisis of liberal democracy are of relatively recent vintage—products of the end of the post–World War II boom, or the end of the Cold War, or the rise of terrorism and terrorism-related warfare. It is a perspective that offers some comfort in these volatile and unpredictable times: The shallower and more peculiar the roots of this noxious growth, the fewer the obstacles to plucking them out.

The ambition and appeal of Barry Eichengreen’s *The Populist Temptation* are to be found in the historical framing that Mounk and Galston avoid. A distinguished economic historian, Eichengreen looks to Europe as well as the United States and takes us all the way back to the Luddites of early 19th-century Britain and the Greenback and Populist...
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and firmly believes that populism must be combated and quelled—tellingly, the title of one of his chapters, “Containment,” evokes the US strategy toward the Soviet Union—and its grievances addressed. Otherwise, he warns, populism may descend into fascism.

Although Mounk, Galston, and Eichengreen recognize how liberal democracy and the international liberal (or neoliberal) order can be dismantled and reconfigured, none of them show an interest in mounting a critique of modern liberalism itself. Far from it: The gravity of the present crisis has made them feel all the more protective of liberal institutions, domestically and internationally, as though they were the last guards on a virtual Maginot Line for our civilization.

It is a disposition shared by many liberal and left-of-center commentators, who have, of late, found new allies against the forces of populist darkness in the FBI, the CIA, and the national-security state. Small wonder, then, that one of the most thoughtful critics of the liberal project and its results steps forth from the right side of the political spectrum.

Patrick J. Deneen’s Why Liberalism Failed isn’t a new take on the subject; readers acquainted with the work of Wendell Berry, Christopher Lasch, and Amitai Etzioni will find much that is familiar here. But in a measured and humane way, Deneen allows us to think more deeply about where we are and why, and about how we have become complicit in the making of developments that we claim to revile. “Liberalism,” Deneen writes, “created the conditions, and the tools, for the ascent of its own worst nightmare, yet it lacks the self-knowledge to understand its own culpability.” The current crisis of liberal democracy, in short, “is the culmination of the liberal order.”

Deneen is a political philosopher who decry what he sees as the long-term erosion of community standards, cultural life, and especially the means of self-governance. In his view, social bonds, shared commitments, a reverence for tradition, the cultivation of moral virtue, and the recognition of human limits have been steadily undermined by a hegemonic liberalism that regards the individual as the basic social unit and the state as the vehicle of progress. Denizens of liberal societies are instructed to act more selfishly, to hedge their commitments, and to regard relationships as flexible and fungible in pursuit of a liberty that, in the end, depends on the expansion of the state to secure its very prospects. Although “conservative” and “progressive” liberals may differ over how to use the state and the limits of such interventions, they share a commitment to the state as an essential means to achieve their ends, one designed to transcend the limitations of a particular local practice or norm. By celebrating personal emancipation from established authority and arbitrary cultural or religious traditions, liberalism creates its own forms of dependency. Deneen argues, forcing individuals to look increasingly toward an ever more distant and bureaucratic state that claims to advance their liberties while ultimately restricting them.

The practices and institutions of liberal democracy therefore obfuscate the disempowerment of those who try to register their political aspirations at the same time that globalization eviscerates popular control over the dynamics of economic life. Liberalism, Deneen contends, thrives on the flattening of culture and the reifying of technology; eventually, it undermines the relational webs that make for social and political cohesion. Thus, as liberal democracies lose legitimacy, they often “generate demotic demands for an illiberal autocrat who promises to protect the people against the vagaries of liberalism itself.”

As compelling as some features of this argument may be, Deneen also tends to resort to some rather tiresome critiques, especially of liberal learning and the universities. Joining many other conservative culture warriors since the 1980s, he rails against multiculturalism, the abandonment of the “great books” curriculum, and intellectual uniformity on campus, while longing for what he imagines are more traditional communities. For him, as for Wendell Berry, communities are the obverse of liberal estrangement: They sustain cultural bonds, self-governance, social humility, and spiritual nourishment. But neither Deneen nor Berry (or others who embrace this view) confronts the negative aspects that usually attend these communities: insularity, demands for conformity, hostility to outsiders, entrenched hierarchies organized around gender and race, and the infliction of so-called rough justice. Even so, Deneen does offer a useful counterpoint to the liberal-crisis theorists of our moment, who often miss how liberal democracy can
The critical assessments and warnings that mark these works are accompanied by a raft of remedies designed to stave off the worst of what their authors see coming or to reverse the tendencies that pose the gravest threats. Deneen, despite his conservatism, doesn’t favor a return to a “preliberal age” and suggests that we acknowledge liberalism’s achievements. But the path forward that he offers seems fanciful at best: He urges us to “outgrow” our “age of ideology,” to nurture “practices of care, patience, humility, reverence, respect, and modesty,” and to transform our households into small economies (“household economics,” in his words).

Mounk, Galston, and Eichengreen are far more policy-oriented and offer more practical programs. To defeat populism, they insist, liberals must promote robust economic growth and focus on full employment and higher incomes for working people. They must shift tax burdens to the rich and invest in infrastructure, education, and health care. They must also encourage worker participation in corporate decision-making, confront the appeal of nationalism, and rethink the organization of both national and multilateral political institutions (like the European Union) so that influence is more widely distributed. It is an impressive and likely helpful to-do list. But the irony is that these are precisely the sorts of programs that liberal regimes have long resistance, and their achievement would require both a serious critique of modern liberalism and popular mobilizations that might well appear “populist” in character.

The literature of the current moment is a bit reminiscent of the immediate post-WWII period, when historians and political scientists began to construct an idea of the American liberal political tradition and heaped scorn on movements like late-19th-century populism, which they likened to fascism and blamed for the rise of McCarthyism in their own time. Populism, they argued, was backward-looking, xenophobic, anti-Semitic, prone to conspiracy theories, and a product of status anxieties and economic insecurity. Richard Hofstadter, one of the most distinguished historians of the period, not only wrote about populism in this way but also saw it as part of a wider “anti-intellectualism in American life” and a “paranoid style in American politics.” Fears of popular unrest undermined access to meaningful forms of power and, during times of stress, lurch toward some type of illiberalism.

The 1838...
It was slightly more than a century ago, in November 1918, that revolution swept through Germany, bringing chaos to a country that, in the final days of World War I, was already in desperate straits and verging on collapse. Although it was obvious to nearly everyone that the war was lost, the fighting staggered on, even as a growing pacifist movement issued the cry for “Peace, Freedom, Bread!” In Kiel on the Baltic Sea, sailors at the docks refused the order for a last battle and went into open mutiny, while soldiers and revolutionary workers in Berlin called for a general strike. Kaiser Wilhelm II, an absurd and incompetent militarist, at last faced the truth that his time was up and abdicated the throne, leaving confusion in his wake. On November 9, Philipp Scheidemann, a member of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SDP), seized the moment to declare the founding of a new republic.

Because of the civil unrest in Berlin, the members of the fledgling government gathered to sign the new constitution in Weimar, a town some 300 kilometers to the southwest best known as the birthplace of German classicism. The Weimar Republic might have marked a peaceful transition—the founding of Germany’s first democracy. But the revolution was not finished. Just two hours after Germany had been declared a republic, Karl Liebknecht, leader of the anti-war Spartacus League, declared the founding of the Free Socialist Republic of Germany, a rival government that drew its strength from below and called for a shift in political power to the workers’ councils, following the model of the Russian soviets. The country lurched from monarchy to democracy not once, but twice.

For a short while, these two branches of the socialist movement—the majority Social Democrats and the pacifist independents—sustained a workable partnership. On November 10, the socialist paper Vorwärts carried the headline NO WAR BETWEEN BROTHERS! The new government of the Weimar Republic, the Council of People’s Deputies, consisted of leaders

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Munich 1919
Diary of a Revolution
By Victor Klemperer
Translated by Jessica Spengler
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ILLUSTRATION BY TIM ROBINSON
from both groups, but it was chaired by Friedrich Ebert, a man who had started his career as a saddle-maker and had risen through the ranks of the socialist movement to become general secretary of the SDP’s reformist wing. Under Ebert’s leadership, the new government made some noteworthy reforms, such as an eight-hour workday, and introduced direct, universal suffrage for men and, for the first time, women as well. But over the next few months, the alliance between the two groups crumbled, and Ebert’s government, fearing revolution, ordered soldiers into the streets to confront the Spartacists and the crowds of demonstrators who continued to press for further reforms. In Berlin, Liebknecht and another Spartacist leader, Rosa Luxemburg, were murdered.

Germany now verged on civil war. The fight between the republic and the revolutionaries spread outward from the capital, west to the industrial and coal-mining region of the Ruhr Valley and south to Bavaria, where revolutionaries seized control of the local government and declared Bavaria a free state. In the Bavarian capital of Munich, the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Council appointed the journalist and Social Democrat Kurt Eisner as minister president.

The revolutionary government in Bavaria lasted a mere 100 days. In February 1919, Eisner was assassinated by Anton Graf von Arco auf Valley, a right-wing anti-Semitic agitator from the Thule Society, the völkisch and mystical group that preceded the Nazis. In May of that year, leaders of the republic in Berlin dispatched the Freikorps, a bloodthirsty paramilitary force of decommissioned soldiers, to put down the left-wing socialists’ rebellion once and for all. In Munich, adherents of the Bavarian People’s Party cheered on the Freikorps as it went about its dirty work, murdering nearly 1,000 individuals, who were vilified in the right-wing press as the vanguard of a “Jewish-Bolshevik revolution.”

Observing all this chaos was the writer and academic Victor Klemperer. An assimilated German Jew and aspiring professor, Klemperer was a bookish man, a specialist in Romance literature and the author of a two-volume study on Montesquieu. Having received his doctorate on the eve of the war, he had served as an officer on the Western Front before taking up a professorship in 1919 at the University of Munich. Like many academics, Klemperer welcomed the republic and attached himself to the newly founded German Democratic Party (DDP), a group of liberal lawyers and other professionals who embraced democracy in principle but regarded the prospect of socialist revolution with a mixture of skepticism and anxiety. Klemperer also started to write reports on the Munich events for a newspaper in Leipzig under the ironic pseudonym “A.B.”—short for “Antibavarius.”

Klemperer was indeed an anti-Bavarian: For him, Munich was the antipode to Prussian seriousness, the symbol of bohemia and a playground for artists and café intellectuals who conflated politics with theater, making a show of revolution. His dispatches were composed in the cool style of a man who couldn’t quite bring himself to believe in the brutal reality he was seeing. When the Freikorps intruded upon the spectacle, he perceived it as a tragicomedy. “Everything is wretched, and everything is bloody,” Klemperer wrote, “and you always want to laugh and cry at once.”

A new book, Munich 1919: Diary of a Revolution, collects all of Klemperer’s reports on these events, and its editors have also included his later reflections from previously unpublished writings, composed in 1942, that look back on the era with the bitter advantages of hindsight. The effect is jarring, but also instructive: Klemperer reports on the revolution first as an eyewitness and later as a memoirist who already knows how things will unfold. Not unlike the novelist Thomas Mann, Klemperer would have characterized himself as an unpolitical German: He had no affection for social upheaval, and he shrugged off the early phase of the revolution as little more than “a political carnival.” But as time went by, he grew increasingly sober and, slowly, despite himself, came to the realization that great sections of the Munich bourgeoisie were not to be trusted.

Too much, perhaps, has been written in a celebratory key about the Weimar Republic, and too little about the disabling controversies that attended its birth. The November Revolution, after all, was not only the dawn of German democracy; it was also the crucible of counterrevolution. Klemperer himself never realized this as it was happening; his reports betray more blindness than insight. But they offer a sobering glimpse into an uncertain time when history might have tilted in a different direction. Through his writings, we can come to see how those first violent months of the Weimar Republic were only a prelude to the later catastrophe.

These days, Klemperer is celebrated as one of the greatest German-language diarists of the 20th century. He is best known for the two-volume collection of personal reflections that he wrote during his precarious years in Dresden from 1933 to 1945. The diaries were published long after his death, first in German and then in an English translation (unfortunately abridged) as I Will Bear Witness. In lapidary prose and a tone that oscillates between irony and alarm, he documents the creeping transformation of German society, the fears and petty compromises of average citizens who suffer even as they conform. Klemperer’s judgment is clear-sighted but rarely harsh: He sees that, under the conditions of a dictatorship, nobody can live without moral adjustment; everyone must struggle to get by.

Almost miraculously, Klemperer survived the Third Reich through a combination of unlikely circumstance and sheer luck. He had converted to Lutheranism in 1903 and volunteered as a reserve officer in the German Army. Decorated for his service in the First World War, he was allowed to continue teaching for a brief while even after the Nazis came to power. Though Klemperer was forced to wear a yellow star, his non-Jewish wife stood by his side all throughout the years that anti-Semitic legislation gradually inhibited the couple’s every move. First Klemperer was forbidden to own a typewriter; then his pension was canceled; finally, the pair were expelled from their home and forced to seek refuge in the so-called Jüdenhaus quarters alongside other Mischehen—the regime’s poisonous term for “mixed couples.”

In his diaries, Klemperer kept a close record of his life in Nazi Germany, documenting the daily brutality of its anti-Semitic legislation and its descent into the absurd (at one point, a ruling came down that Jews were forbidden to buy flowers). He also detailed the slow decay of his bourgeois existence in the bumedus, if bitter, tones of a professor for whom the greatest indignity is the lack of a quiet spot where he can read in peace. He rarely boasts of personal distinction: “I come from middling circumstances,” Klemperer writes, “and have achieved middling things. I have passed my days as a professor…a rather average accomplishment.” But his deliberate prose would earn him a posthumous fame. When the diaries were first published in Germany in 1995, they met with enormous acclaim, with some 150,000 copies being sold in the first year. Literary readings were
staged across the country, and in Munich both volumes were read out loud in an extended performance that lasted seven days.

Nor can we neglect Klemperer's other works. After the war, as a professor in East Germany, he published *LTI*, or *Lingua Tertii Imperii*, a book whose mock-academese Latin title translates as *The Language of the Third Reich*. A philologist at heart, Klemperer used linguistic criticism as a spiritual defense, slowly building a catalog of the barbarisms that the Nazis had inflicted on the German language. The book remains a crucial document for anyone who wishes to understand fascism as a cultural phenomenon. Following *LTI*, however, the muses seem to have abandoned him. A communist in name only, Klemperer grew resigned to his own duplicity during the last phase of his life. “I am an old liberal,” he wrote in 1957, “and my temporarily suppressed liberalism is showing ever more strongly through the layer of red makeup.” He died in 1960, at the age of 78.

Klemperer’s newspaper reports on the November Revolution are the work of a very different person. They lack the desperation of his later diaries, and they were clearly composed by a man who felt little fear for his personal safety despite the surrounding tumult. In one report, Klemperer writes of his wife, Eva, a conservatory-trained pianist plagued by illness, who was keen to continue her studies even in the midst of the storm. (“There she sat and played while gunfire rattled outside,” he noted, “and bullets caused plaster to rain down from the walls.”) Aloof from the violence and often insolvent in tone, Klemperer nonetheless offers us an acute report of the revolution, documenting the lines of political fracture that would weaken the German republic and ultimately bring it to an end.

On the left, the divisions were profound, signs of a serious disagreement over how the newly founded government was to be defined. Should it be one that presided over a pluralistic republic with a variety of parties, all devoted to the rules of the new Constitution and competing in a parliamentary framework? Or should it be a socialist government in the “council” sense, animated from below by workers’ groups and bent on a fundamental transformation of society?

The debate goes back to the very origins of the socialist movement in Germany. The Social Democrats were the heirs to two previous groups, the General German Workers’ Association and the Social-Democratic Workers’ Party, both founded in the 1860s. The two later fused into a single socialist organization that was forced underground during the era of anti-socialist laws. When the ban lapsed in 1890, the socialists resurfaced, and the newly christened Social Democratic Party of Germany emerged as the unified movement of the country’s left.

In the years leading up to the First World War, the Social Democrats made considerable gains. By 1912, the SPD had swelled in membership to become the largest party in the Reichstag. But with war looming on the horizon and the country consumed by a wave of truculent nationalism, the SPD found itself divided over the question of war. A majority faction backed a vote for war credits and declared a *Burgfrieden*, an archaic slogan denoting that a nation at war deserves the full devotion of all its citizens. A much smaller faction of the SPD, led by the stern-faced Liebknecht, condemned the military buildup as an imperialist venture and refused to authorize the credits. By 1916, Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, together with Clara Zetkin and other outspoken anti-militarists, had formed the Spartacus League, taking their name from a series of anti-war pamphlets they had distributed in defiance of the law. Toward the end of the First World War, a larger anti-war faction within the SPD also split off from the majority; along with the Spartacists, they founded the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD).

In retrospect, it would be hard to dispute the verdict that the USPD had justice on its side. The war, after all, was an unmitigated disaster: Germany alone suffered an estimated 1.8 million combat deaths; millions more returned from the front wounded or maimed. The total number of deaths for all of the combatant nations—Central Powers and Allies combined—reached nearly 10 million, and that figure doesn’t include civilian deaths or the devastating influenza epidemic of 1918, which claimed some 50 million to 100 million across the globe.

With Germany’s defeat came dissent and then open rebellion. When Scheidemann officially announced the founding of the new democratic government, the majority socialists and the independents already eyed one another with mutual suspicion. And when the Spartacists joined the demonstrations in the capital pressing for further reforms, Ebert made his catastrophic mistake: He ordered the military to fire on the crowds, a scandalous action that Liebknecht condemned as “Ebert’s bloody Christmas.”

The majority socialists, however, were just getting started. Under duress, the minister for military affairs called on the Freikorps to defend the new government in Berlin, leading to clashes across Germany between the revolutionaries and the right-wing paramilitary organization. In the midst of this violence, however, the majority socialists and the independents in Bavaria still found a way to come together to found the Free State of Bavaria, with USPD leader Kurt Eisner as minister president.

Klemperer was living in Munich during these early months of the revolution, and what he has to say about Eisner is hardly flattering: The Munich revolutionary was, he tells us, “a mediocre, spent man.” But he is no more sparing of Eisner’s killer, whom he condemns as an “overheated patriot.” The assassination seems to have stirred Klemperer from his apolitical slumber. On February 22, 1919, he filed this bitter dispatch with the Leipzig newspaper:

> [Ev]en in these past months, there has been no more of an infuriatingly senseless act than Eisner’s murder. No one doubted Eisner’s entirely pure intentions. He wanted nothing for himself; although the abruptness of his ascent had naturally filled him with self-assurance, he had none of the excruciating vanity of Karl Liebknecht or the bloody fanaticism of Rosa Luxemburg. He wanted to keep his hands clean of money, and of blood.

If Klemperer had once viewed Eisner with disdain, he now saw him as a kind of tragic hero, an idealist caught in a cynical age. Eisner “flew,” Klemperer writes, since the solid ground had long been pulled out from under him, and since he did not know what to do with solid ground anyway, and this is why the dead Eisner now has infinitely more followers than the living one ever did.

Eisner’s murder marked a turning point, not only for Bavaria but for German democracy itself, bringing the struggle between socialism and reaction into its most violent phase. For Klemperer, the change was unnerving. One can sense a shift in tone as he
slowly began to awake to a greater political realism. While many of his colleagues and students, who had once been indifferent to politics, now spoke openly of Eisner's assassin as a hero, Klemperer continued to find both sides repellent: “I could not warm to this bourgeoise,” he writes, “any more than I could to the Spartacists.” But he recognized that the clash in Bavaria between the revolutionaries and the counterrevolutionary bourgeoisie had degenerated into something far more repugnant, a foretaste of things to come:

And once the bourgeoisie began to realize that the council republican game they had watched half-apathetically, half-sullenly to that point could actually mean something worse for them than just a wild, carnivalesque performance, how did they demonstrate their awakening to resistance? Through spontaneous anti-Semitism. “Jewish pigs!” ranted individuals in front of the posters on the walls, “Jewish pigs!” roared the occasional small chorus, and flyers appeared blaming the Jews entirely for the Council Republic, for the revolution itself, for inciting the war, for its disastrous outcome.

By early spring, a new and more committed revolutionary government had taken over in Munich, led by leftist intellectuals like the playwright Ernst Toller and the anarchist theoretician Gustav Landauer, a bearded utopian whom Klemperer portrays as “more benevolent than fanatic.” Landauer's official title was exotic, a sign of his utopian spirit: Commissioner for Enlightenment and Public Instruction. But the new political experiment lasted only a week; it was soon displaced by a second council republic led by an even more radical faction.

At this point, the government in Berlin was soon displaced by a second council republic, which was briefly sent to prison, along with Rudolf Hess and the rest of his fellow conspirators. The conduct of the majority socialists in the Spartacist opposition, even as he saw the violence that Epp and his forces had unleashed? Although Klemperer never completely abandons his detached tone, his final reports sound increasingly apprehensive.

When the death sentence of Eisner's assassin is commuted to life in prison, the news sends the Bavarian public into fits of celebration, and there is “greater rejoicing than has ever greeted a German victory.” Klemperer’s own students are ecstatic, a fact that he notes with growing disquiet. “They don’t realize what it is they’re celebrating,” he writes, “troops who dictate to the government how it should behave.” In his naiveté, however, he still failed to see that the ascendant militants among the younger generation understood perfectly well what they were cheering for: a nationalist counterrevolution. A decade later, those dreams would be fulfilled.

Assigning blame in history is too often a polemics' game, a facile way of settling present scores by turning past actors into good and bad characters according to whatever ideology we now happen to prefer. But in the case of the German Revolution of 1918–19, it seems altogether obvious that the blame cannot be distributed equally. Among Germany’s socialists, considerable blame must fall on the majority Social Democrats, who sealed a pact with the devil when they placed patriotism above peace and planted the seeds of division that would prove fatal to the socialist cause. To be sure, following Lenin’s seizure of power in Russia, fears of Bolshevism revolution in Central Europe were hardly unfounded. But the conduct of the majority socialists in Germany did nothing to deter this possibility. Their compromise with the forces of reaction only enhanced the prospect of civil war, opening a breach in the socialist movement that turned the radical flank from potential allies into an embittered and increasingly hardened opposition that could see little difference between bourgeois moderates and the radical right. Memories of the socialists' betrayal refused to die: By the end of the 1920s, as Stalinism tightened its grip, communists across Europe were accusing the Social Democrats of “social fascism.”
trist parties lasted just five years; the financial crash of 1929 was merely the final blow to a system already strained by party factionalism and economic disarray. After the crash, the moderate parties began to hemorrhage in earnest, sending citizens to both ends of the political spectrum. By July 1932, the Nazi Party was the largest in the Reichstag.

If there is a cautionary lesson in this grim tale, it is that the left can survive the fascist tide only if it sustains a united front. Especially in times of war, nationalism can be the fatal wedge, dividing moderates from militants and blinding both to the greater threat. Klemperer, for his part, continued to “float” in the political ether. His longing for order inhibited him from seeing where his true sympathies lay, and he remained an incorrigible moderate in an immoderate age. When the troops marched into Munich in the spring of 1919, Klemperer consoled himself with the thought that the reactionaries could be tamed and that the center would hold. Even during the pitched battle between the council government and Epp’s forces, he managed to convince himself that the Freikorps represented the “lesser evil.” By 1942, however, Klemperer recalled this earlier verdict with some discomfort. Though he still couldn’t bring himself to side with the Spartacists, he now saw that the right would be guilty of far greater atrocities. He was correct: Epp would later emerge as a prominent official in the Third Reich.

Klemperer’s diaries from the Nazi era are masterful; his reports on the November Revolution are less so. Though fascinating in their detail, they are remarkably shortsighted in matters of political judgment. One day in late 1919, when Klemperer was strolling down a sidewalk in Munich, a soldier leveled his rifle and called on him to halt.

“Oh, it’s you,” Klemperer said, upon looking at the soldier more carefully. The little man beneath the helmet was a professor of Catholic philosophy from the university, a “peaceable” and “pleasant colleague” who belonged to the left wing of the Weimar coalition. Klemperer showed him how to engage the safety on his gun: “There could be an accident otherwise,” he warned, “if you swing that rifle around so boldly.” “I know,” the man replied. “I shot the ceiling earlier.”

The two chatted for a few minutes more. “Say, who are we actually serving with Epp?” the professor turned soldier asked. “Is it really the republic and peace?” “It’s the lesser evil, in any case,” Klemperer observed. Years later, he added a comment: “I was pleased with my answer, but I was not very much at ease.” By then, however, it was far too late.

Miriam “Midge” Maisel has always been a woman who arranges things—and in case we’ve forgotten, the second-season premiere of Amazon’s The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel reminds us. The first moments of the episode are a gorgeous homage both to Hello, Dolly! and to the splendor of a 1958 department store: We swoop past the lovingly confected window displays of B. Altman’s and into the building, beyond the gleaming makeup counters and down the mail chute to the frenetic nerve center of the telephone switchboard, where, as usual, Miriam (Rachel Brosnahan) is doing her job—and everyone else’s. Meanwhile, courtesy of the soundtrack, the legendary yenta Dolly Levi reminds us of the feeling of soaring triumph—the emotional armor of hypercompetence—that comes with being “a woman who arranges things: like furniture, and daffodils, and lives.”

Much like a B. Altman’s holiday window, or much like Miriam herself—who, later in this episode, wears a raspberry swing coat that may or may not have literally made me salivate—The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel is...
always perfectly arranged. Created by Amy Sherman-Palladino (Gilmore Girls), Mrs. Maisel is one of the most gorgeous shows on any platform right now. The resources that Amazon has poured into the project allow for dazzling camera work, a candied palette, and intricate sequences—like the one above—as delicious as a cherry cordial. It's nostalgia enrobed in spectacle.

The show is as hardworking and eager-to-please as its heroine, and this may also be its biggest weakness: In episodic narratives, there are few things more enticing than the prospect of watching someone torch their own life, then try to understand who they are without the roles—obedient daughter, perfect wife—that have always defined them. But Miriam is still someone who rarely has to struggle. She is good at nearly everything she tries, quicker and brighter and more dedicated than anyone else; the word that best defines her is most. And the sweet sitcom chaos of the show’s plots often shields its characters from having to face the smoldering wreckage of their emotional lives.

Way back in the pilot episode, Lenny Bruce (Luke Kirby) appeared like an angel of radical honesty, watching over Miriam's first turn at stand-up comedy, and so, too, over her first experience of showing the world her raw and real self: Her first time performing was her first time not performing. The Lenny Bruce character has remained part of the show’s ensemble in a way that has little to do with the needs of the story, and a lot more to do, perhaps, with the world Lenny beckons Miriam to join—a world that is diametrically opposed to the one she knows, where she is, like Dolly Levi, a woman who arranges things, and who does everything for everyone and needs nothing for herself. You can have the pain of telling the truth, the show’s twin Jewish saints seem to say, or you can have the pain of hiding it. There is no painless path. All you can do is pick the pain you believe you are able to stand.

But Miriam doesn’t want to choose, and neither does the show that bears her name. Choosing the pain of self-exposure—of destruction, of rupture—might mean that the marvelous Mrs. Maisel would have to stop being quite so marvelous.

The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel wants to be comfort food, but it can’t resist plying viewers with sugar. The series has the production values of a prestige drama, but its poppy energy and whip-crack dialogue—the kind that fans of Gilmore Girls remember well—mean it is missing something that can be difficult to identify: silence. Rarely does a character have time for a moment of contemplation; rarely does a conversation pause or even slow down much. Characters talk to each other—and over each other—in the contrapuntal rhythm of vaudeville; each partner in a conversation appears to believe the other is their straight man. Even in their most private moments, they are playing to an audience.

In the first episode of this new season, Miriam’s mother, Rose (Marin Hinkle), flees her marriage for a bohemian existence in Paris, telling her husband, Abe (Tony Shalhoub), that she no longer sees meaning in her life. When Miriam discovers Rose’s disappearance, she and Abe track her across the globe, their journey accompanied by a series of conversations in which they are presumably meant to seem frantic, frightened, and emotional—but the show never really allows Abe and Miriam to veer into actual discomfort. Every exchange feels like a slalom race, with the characters careering from punch line to punch line, and most of the jokes, rather than being revealing, come across as if they were arranged for the comfort of the audience, and for that of the characters, too. As long as you can be funny, you can be in control; as long as you’re talking, you don’t have to listen.

Since Miriam is called away to Paris early in the episode, the viewer only sees her and her booking agent, Susie (Alex Borstein), share a handful of scenes. Some of the show’s most emotionally raw moments have come courtesy of Miriam’s relationship with Susie, as well as with Miriam’s former, perfect husband, Joel (Michael Zegen)—yet, somewhat tellingly, in this first episode of the new season, she maintains a safe distance from them. In fact, out of every character on the show, the one who seems most interested in actively trying to understand himself and his relationships is Joel, the mediocre Mr. Maisel.

As Miriam explores Paris, we follow Susie on her own picaresque adventure: Kidnapped off the street by a pair of heavies, she ends up charming them out of their mission to do their boss’s dark bidding, for now. On this show, the chickens have a hard time coming home to roost. It’s hard to hurt people you love; it’s also hard to watch characters you love be hurt, hard to watch them suffer the consequences, hard to watch them change, and perhaps become less lovable. And it’s hard to make viewers uncomfortable when you know, as Amy Sherman-Palladino knows well, what will make them feel pampered and delighted.
**ACROSS**

1 A bit of zesty sex with, um, a deer maybe? That’s almost certain to end badly for someone (4-3, 4)

7 and 29 Invert the second number and letter—that is one way to look smart (3, 3)

9 High-born snob lectures participant (5)

10 Vessel protecting North Carolina, formerly, with lack of interest (9)

11 Snarled: “Another Kennedy coming after $1,000” (7)

12 Fill with happiness and marvel at exquisite cargo (5)

14 Tailor names one measurement (6)

15 Tense about pros messing up travel document (8)

18 Satellite conveying a coach’s cookie (8)

20 Someone harmed Victor and Timothy (6)

23 Excellent purse is ruined (5)

25 Small cut of meat infused with, for instance, liqueur (4, 3)

27 Julia, a gangster in the early days (9)

28 Decapitate Venetian villain, leading to New York’s suffering (5)

29 See 7

30 Entire chain is broken? That’s what you get (11)

**DOWN**

1 “Heavy Metal”: possible name for Zorro’s company? (4)

2 Criticizes Confederate instruments (7)

3 Large reptile, turning up like this, becomes gold and red (9)

4 In France, one breaks most wild horses (6)

5 Pastoral rainbow over a goddess, for the most part (8)

6 Pennsylvania city is home to no puppet (5)

7 Social gathering to raise Norwegian male cattle (7)

8 Triumph over exotic termite when it is cold (10)

13 Get lost, assuming I am heading from Toronto to Rochester with a pet (7, 3)

16 Don’t start requesting something to keep you afloat for a surgical procedure (4, 5)

17 Liquid sort of contains oxygen and hydrogen? Indeed (8)

19 Whim: Practice recklessly after time runs out (7)

21 Barb, claiming connection, is a second-rater (7)

22 Hits comparatively ancient receptacle (6)

24 Awesome sequel for Bones? (5)

26 Wealthy people embracing publicity (4)

**SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3486**

ACROSS 1 C - HANGED
5 E.G. - GNOD (rev.) 8 NARCO (anag.) 9 TATE (anag.) 14 LITER (anag.) 12 LENTO (rev.)
13 INTERS - TATE 16 alternate letters
18 hidden (anag.) 19 GLITTER + 1
(t + tag rev.) 23 EX + POS?(p)
24 SPUNKIES + 26 FLOUR-I(SH)
27 BISH + SON 28 S(T)ONG
29 P(ROB)ATE

DOWN 1 anag. 2 pAIRED
3 GE(j)OME - TRY 4 HA - TAPE - T
5 EMINE(j)u 6 NT 8 GANG + L - Y
7 O - O + LONG - TEA (anag.) 10 anag.
14 TES(T)ILOT (anag.) 15 hidden
17 PEAK (rev.) + A BOOK [+ 2 def.
21 TOUCHEUP (rev.)
22 P(SEUD)O (anag.)

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Greece
JUNE 6–18, 2019 | Ancient World & Current Challenges

Few places rival Greece as a destination of great beauty and culture amid the historic landmarks of Western civilization. Yet Greece’s complexity today presents challenges for those working for justice and shared prosperity. We’ll strive to understand this dynamic country and meet with individuals working to chart a different course forward.

THE HIGHLIGHTS

• Meet with professor Dimitris Christopoulos from the department of political science and history at Panteion University and president of the International Federation for Human Rights, who will address some of the most significant challenges currently facing Greece, including the country’s relationship with the EU.

• Take part in a discussion about the refugee crisis with Lefteris Papagiannakis, Athens’s vice-mayor for migrant and refugee affairs.

• Immerse yourself in Athens’s vibrant street-art scene on a walking tour with a local artist to learn how the city has become known as a mecca for the underground art form, and meet with Athens-based photographer Eirini Vourloumis.

• Explore Nemea, one of the four city-states that held athletic games in ancient times, with professor Stephen Miller, who directed excavations of the ancient site between 1971 and 2004. (Pending Availability)

• Gain a better understanding of the state of Greece’s economy and the impact of austerity measures from a leading expert, and learn about the innovative ways people are fighting back and creating new economic opportunities.

• Visit spectacular sites, such as the Acropolis and Agora of Athens, the cities of Corinth and Epidaurus, the Acropolis of Mycenae, and more.

• Participate in a unique culinary experience and learn how to cook traditional Greek dishes with the help of a local chef. Visit a bucolic vineyard and family-owned olive-oil producer.

These are only a few of the highlights of this extraordinary program. See the full itinerary at TheNation.com/GREECE

This inclusive trip costs $5,620 per person ($940 single supplement) and includes hotel accommodations for seven nights, all transportation within Greece, all tours, all lectures, most meals, gratuities, and numerous other curated events and activities.

100% of the proceeds from our travel programs support The Nation’s journalism.

For more information, e-mail us at travels@thenation.com, call 201-209-5401, or visit us at TheNation.com/GREECE
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