

What Legacy from the Radical Internationalism of 1968?

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Seattle used to be just a city. Since December 1999, it has become shorthand for grassroots protest against the injustices of global capitalism.

This is hardly the first time a place-name has come to symbolize a watershed in opposition movements. There were a host of such markers in the huge wave of U.S. protests against racism and the Vietnam War during and after 1968: “Chicago” (referring to the 1968 Democratic Convention where police beat demonstrators as they chanted “the whole world is watching”); “San Francisco State” (where a 1968–69 strike led by students of color made the first major breakthrough in the fight for Ethnic Studies); and “Cambodia” and “Kent State” (referring to Richard Nixon’s ill-fated 1970 invasion of Cambodia and the shooting of four white students by the Ohio National Guard).

For the rebellious youth of the late 1960s, those locations-turned-emblems did not just register as external events. They spurred personal transformations that led thousands to adopt a revolutionary anticapitalist outlook. Radicalization ran both broad and deep. In 1968 more college students (20 percent) identified with Latin American revolutionary Che Guevara than with any of the candidates for the U.S. presidency.¹ A 1971 *New York Times* survey indicated that four out of ten students—nearly 3 million people—thought that a revolution was needed in the United States.² Radical sentiment ran even stronger in the African American community and by the early 1970s had penetrated deeply into the Puerto Rican, Chicano, Asian American,

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and Native American populations. A 1970 survey showed that 30.6 percent of black enlisted men in the armed forces planned "to join a militant Black group like the Panthers" when they returned home.³ The radical battalions of 1968 and after were not unified around one program or doctrine. Still, their perspective was characterized by a few predominant themes, reflecting the fifteen years of civil rights, Black Power, and antiwar protests that had shaped their political evolution.

Antiracism and anti-imperialism were in the forefront of the new radical outlook. Its main international inspiration came from the national liberation movements that seemed to be daily shattering the notion of U.S. invincibility. It was a time when the Vietnamese and Cuban Revolutions, People's China, and Marxist-led armed movements in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East appeared to mesh into one unstoppable torrent. The activists of 1968 regarded solidarity with the Third World (the period's most common term for what today is usually called the global South) as their prime internationalist responsibility. Well into the 1970s, the militants galvanized by this outlook, which most regarded as a Third World-oriented variant of Marxism, constituted a dynamic political trend and were considered by capitalism's guardians as a force to be reckoned with. Even after this trend passed its peak, its most tenacious partisans played important roles in the antiapartheid movement, the Central America solidarity movement, the Rainbow Coalition electoral upsurge, and other battles of the 1980s.

Yet today the nature—indeed the existence—of this current has been largely erased from even the left's historical memory. The civil rights movement and the broad anti-Vietnam War movement have been extensively chronicled and receive much deserved scholarly and activist attention. But the dominant view even in progressive circles is that the young people who embraced revolutionary ideas after 1968 had essentially "gone crazy," and that the early "good sixties" were replaced by a later "bad sixties" characterized by political madness.⁴ The post-1968 work of organizations rooted in communities of color—the Black Panther Party, and to a lesser extent the Young Lords Party, La Raza Unida Party, the American Indian Movement, and a few others—is sometimes given a certain due. But for the most part intellectually ghettoized, these experiences are not seen as central to a United States left that remained vital into the 1970s.⁵

Now is a good moment to set the record straight, to appreciate the influence Third World Marxism once enjoyed, and to analyze why the broad revolutionary trend inspired by this outlook failed to make an effective transition to the changed terrain of later years. The special timeliness of this task is due to "Seattle"—to the stirrings of a new generation against global capitalism, to the emergence of a new internationalist current manifesting impulses toward solidarity with the global South. Such a current especially has much to learn from an earlier generation that exhibited the same impulses, albeit under very different conditions, thirty years ago.

Roots and Contours of Third World Marxism

The explosive radicalism of the late 1960s evolved out of the sustained, large-scale protests that had gathered steam ever since the mid-1950s. The prime force initiating the evolution from 1950s conformism to 1968 revolutionism was the civil rights movement. First coming to prominence via the Montgomery bus boycott and spearheaded by Dr. Martin Luther King, his Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the fight for racial equality played a decisive role in reopening space for all expressions of dissent in the wake of McCarthyism. The movement's fight to end legal segregation and the white monopoly on political power challenged deeply entrenched interests and was protracted and bitter. Its success, legislatively expressed in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, was a monumental achievement.

Breaking Jim Crow was an indispensable precondition for opening the path to further gains not just against racism but for all democratic movements. Further, by sweeping away the legal edifice of segregation, the civil rights movement pushed millions toward the recognition that racial inequality was not simply a matter of unjust laws or individual prejudice, but was related to the country's economic and social structure. And when the black freedom struggle shifted its center of gravity to the urban metropolises of the north and west after 1965, with violent rebellions exploding in one city after another, a huge constituency "ready for anything" had come into being. According to the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, almost one out of every five residents within the affected areas participated in these uprisings, and the majority of African Americans felt that the rebellions would improve black economic and social conditions.⁶

Beginning in the mid-1960s, the antiracist upsurge was joined by an outpouring of protest against the Vietnam War. The first major nationwide antiwar demonstration, called by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) for April 17, 1965, beat back a harsh red-baiting campaign and mobilized a then unexpected turnout of 15,000 plus. Just two years later, more than six times that number would march on the Pentagon, militant antiwar actions would sweep the country, and Martin Luther King would denounce the war and link it to the maintenance of racism and poverty.

These movements, moreover, were growing at a time when fights against Western colonialism and neocolonialism gripped the entire Third World. Vietnam stood at the pivot, but new armed organizations such as Uruguay's Tupamaros and Chile's Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR) sprouted throughout Latin America. Marxist-led guerrilla movements were gaining ground in every country of Portugal's African empire—Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was picking up the banner of popular struggle against Israeli settler colonialism, and armed left-wing movements were spreading in Asia from India to the Philippines. Che Guevara's 1967 call to "create two, three,

many Vietnams" did not appear to be just an expression of sentiment, but resounded as an eminently practical program.

Meanwhile, the Non-Aligned Movement, which numbered twenty-five countries at its first summit in 1961, grew to fifty-plus member states by 1970 and consistently expressed its solidarity with armed liberation efforts. Plans to build a new society in China (the Cultural Revolution) and Cuba seemed to offer fresh, grassroots-based models of socialism.

This Third World rebellion against U.S. and West European domination also and inevitably constituted a head-on challenge to white supremacy. It resonated with young people across the globe, particularly in U.S. communities of color, where a new generation of activists termed their constituencies "Third World peoples" within this country's borders.

Through the 1960s, world and national politics became ever more volatile, and then came the jolts of that turning-point year: 1968. The nationwide Tet offensive in Vietnam, which came as a near complete surprise to the U.S. command, revealed the complete failure of Washington's counterinsurgency efforts and raised the prospect of the first outright U.S. defeat in its long war-making history. Tet, and the antiwar surge it intensified at home, also led directly to the ouster of the first of two presidents to be driven from office by the upheavals of the 1960s and early 1970s. On March 31, 1968, a besieged Lyndon Johnson announced that he was abandoning his reelection bid and that peace talks with the Vietnamese liberation forces would soon begin.

Four days later Martin Luther King was assassinated, setting off black rebellions in more than a hundred cities. In Washington, D.C., flames reached within six blocks of the White House, and machine guns were mounted on the Capitol balcony and White House lawn. King's murder convinced tens of thousands of activists that "the system" was incorrigibly corrupt and could not be reformed. This sentiment was reinforced by the assassination of Robert Kennedy two months later, by the bloody police riot at the Chicago Democratic Convention, and by both major parties fielding pro-Vietnam War candidates (Nixon vs. Hubert Humphrey) for the White House.

On the eve of the Democratic Party's gathering in Chicago, the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia, a watershed not only in international politics but also for the new radical generation. Just as a new wave of young people were becoming revolutionaries, the Soviet Union was acting like anything but a force for freedom and liberation. The Soviet response to the Prague Spring and "socialism with a human face," along with the suspicion and even hostility with which the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) viewed most of the 1960s left,⁷ led the vast bulk of new radicals to look elsewhere for strategies and models.

For tens of thousands, that elsewhere turned out to be the communist parties

of China, Vietnam, Cuba, and other Third World countries. Inspired by these parties and the ideology they espoused, layer upon layer of U.S. activists decided that a Third World–oriented version of Marxism was the key to building a powerful left within the “belly of the beast.”

Third World Marxism saw national liberation in the global South as the cutting edge of the worldwide progressive movement, and it put opposition to racism and military interventionism at the very center of activists’ vision. It riveted attention on the intersection of economic exploitation and racial oppression, pointing young organizers toward the most disadvantaged sectors of the working class. It embraced the revolutionary nationalist impulses that then held tremendous initiative in communities of color, where Marxism, socialism, and nationalism intermingled and overlapped. It linked aspiring U.S. revolutionaries to the Third World parties and leaders—from Mao and Che Guevara to Ho Chi Minh and Amilcar Cabral—who were proving that “the power of the people is greater than the man’s technology.”

Third World Marxism promised a break with Eurocentric models of social change. With its sympathy for militancy, confrontational tactics, and armed self-defense, it appealed to those who had directly experienced the massive state repression of the 1960s. In general, its spirit was far more in tune with sixties sensibilities than was the temper of the more cautious Old Left groups—mainstream (pro-Soviet) communist, Trotskyist, and social democratic alike.

Third World Marxism pointed a way toward building a multiracial movement out of what had developed as a deeply segregated U.S. left. (The first self-identified “Rainbow Coalition” was initiated in 1969 by Chicago Black Panther Party chair Fred Hampton; it included the Panthers, the Puerto Rican Young Lords Organization, and the Young Patriots, a group of poor, mostly Appalachian whites.) Third World Marxism seemed to many the best framework for taking the most radical themes articulated by Malcolm X and Martin Luther King and transforming them into a comprehensive revolutionary ideology.

1968: Poised for Take-Off

Based on Third World Marxism, a host of new (or transformed) organizations and institutions emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Together they formed a dense network of overlapping—sometimes cooperating, sometimes competing—forms. As of 1968, many components of this network were just beginning to gain mass influence or assume definite shape. But as the political earthquakes of this pivotal year shook the country, one wave of young activists after another turned leftward and transformed Third World Marxism in the United States from a set of ideas into a trend poised for take-off.

The period’s largest circulation radical newspaper, the *Guardian*, and most prestigious left-wing journal, *Monthly Review*, played linchpin roles. In 1968, the

Guardian was just emerging from a wrenching generational and political transition. The paper had been founded as *The National Guardian* during Henry Wallace's 1948 presidential campaign; in 1967 a staff rebellion led to a younger and more radical group of activists assuming control of the paper. The masthead slogan was changed from "progressive newsweekly" to "radical newsweekly." Coverage of national liberation movements was stepped up, and the new *Guardian* established itself as the left's premier source of on-the-spot reporting from Third World battlefronts. The paper was an enthusiastic partisan of Cuba and China and began to offer harsh criticisms of the Soviet role in world affairs.

Monthly Review (MR), for its part, enthusiastically welcomed the Cuban Revolution and backed China after the bitter split between Beijing and Moscow erupted in the early 1960s. Monthly Review Press issued a steady output of volumes promoting Marxism, Leninism, and Third World revolutions. In 1968 it distributed *Guardian* correspondent Wilfred Burchett's *Vietnam Will Win!* that moved thousands of activists from opposition to U.S. intervention to outright support of the Vietnamese National Liberation Front (NLF) as much as any other single book. The Chinese Cultural Revolution particularly impressed *MR*'s editors, and *MR* played a bigger role than any other U.S. intellectual institution in promoting the ideas of Mao Tse-tung, not least by publishing *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* by William Hinton, the paperback edition of which sold a remarkable 200,000 copies.

Widespread distribution of materials from China's Foreign Languages Press and from Cuba also figured heavily in the creation of the Third World Marxist current. By 1968 inexpensive copies of articles by Mao, Che, and Fidel Castro as well as Marx, Engels, and Lenin were available in every large city and college town.

In terms of building a popular base, Third World Marxism struck its deepest roots in communities of color. The Black Panther Party (BPP) was pivotal in this regard. The Panthers were not a Marxist organization in any strict sense, but combined shifting strands of nationalism and Marxism into an eclectic mix. Still, they were the most prominent revolutionary organization in the country in 1968 (and in the immediate years after), and they proved the single most important group in the transition of thousands of activists from New Left radicals, Black Power advocates, or militants of color to partisans of Third World Marxism. In September 1968, FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover publicly termed the Panthers "the greatest [single] threat to the internal security of the country" and ordered the intensification of efforts to disrupt and destroy the BPP via the FBI's infamous Counterintelligence Program, COINTELPRO.⁸

The year 1968 also proved a watershed for the Asian American and Chicano movements. Until 1968, organizations of Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, Koreans, or other U.S. residents of Asian descent had formed on a nationality-specific basis. But

the formation of the Asian American Political Alliance at the University of California-Berkeley that spring set in motion a new dynamic. A few months later, a similar group was formed at San Francisco State University. That summer saw the first nationwide Asian American student conference, and by the end of the year a radical Asian American movement was spreading nationwide.

Almost simultaneously, a pivotal event revived the Chicano community's militant political tradition. On March 3, 1968, over one thousand Mexican American students walked out of Lincoln High School in Los Angeles in the first of a series of high school "blow-outs." That same year saw the formation of the militant Brown Berets and of *CASA-Hermandad General de Trabajadores* (Center for Autonomous Social Action-General Brotherhood of Workers), a socialist-led group based among Mexicano workers.

Fueled by the intersection of class exploitation and racial oppression, a vibrant radical current took root among black workers in Detroit. On May 2, 1968, a group of black activists calling themselves the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) spearheaded the first wildcat strike in fourteen years to close Detroit's Dodge main plant. Within weeks, hundreds of workers were attending DRUM-sponsored rallies, challenging the United Auto Workers' leadership, and flocking to newly formed Revolutionary Union Movements (RUM's) at other facilities. The resulting shock waves extended into the inner sanctums of corporate America: "No less an authority than the *Wall Street Journal* took them [DRUM] very seriously from the day of the first wildcat, for the *Wall Street Journal* understood . . . that the Black revolution of the sixties had finally arrived at one of the most vulnerable links of the American economic system—the point of mass production, the assembly line."⁹

Simultaneously, a new generation was revitalizing the long struggle for Native American sovereignty, and 1968 saw the founding of the American Indian Movement (AIM). While Marxism would not gain as strong a following in the Indian movement as it did in several other constituencies, this movement's stress on self-determination, its links with indigenous peoples across the globe, and its belief in the legitimacy of armed resistance (punctuated a few years later by the seventy-one-day standoff with federal troops at Wounded Knee in 1973) reinforced key themes struck by Third World Marxism.

On campuses, the cataclysms of 1968 accelerated a radicalization process that had already begun spreading nationwide. Students of color were frequently in the forefront. The first ever building takeover on a college campus took place in March 1968 at Howard University, and after 102 hours, the black student militants won most of their demands. The Third World Liberation Front launched one of the hardest fought student strikes of the decade at San Francisco State in November, and, after four-and-half months and hundreds of arrests, forced the administration to set up an Ethnic Studies program.

Reflecting the racially separate workings of most of the 1960s left, the thousands of white students moving toward Third World Marxism were organized in different, overwhelmingly white groups. The most important of these was SDS, expanding frenetically amid the upheavals of 1968. During that single year, SDS went from roughly 30,000 members and 250 chapters to 80,000–100,000 members and 350–400 chapters.¹⁰ Its internal politics were becoming both more influenced by Marxism and more factional, due in part to the presence of cadres from the then Maoist Progressive Labor Party (PL) since 1966. SDS leaders opposing PL, unwilling to be outflanked on the left, increasingly came to embrace a form of Third World Marxism. Contact was established between influential members of SDS and Cuban and Vietnamese communists. An alliance was also forged between key SDS leaders and the Black Panther Party; Panther support work became an integral part of many chapters' activity and the Panther influence on SDS became not just generally ideological but direct and personal. PL was beginning to issue bitter critiques of the Panthers ("all nationalism is reactionary") and the Vietnamese ("negotiating with the United States is selling out the revolution") just as thousands of non-PL SDSers were starting to give their allegiance to these forces as the standard-bearers of worldwide revolution.

Most SDSers did not participate directly in the internal debate over doctrine or support any of the main sides. But several thousand—including a large percentage of those who were by now devoting nearly all their waking hours to politics—were invested in the outcome. And tens of thousands more, while repelled by the messiness of factional battle, shared the broad Third World Marxist view that seemed to inform all sides.

Finally, 1968 also saw the founding of the first organization of what would soon become the fastest growing tendency within U.S. socialism and communism. The Revolutionary Union, pathbreaker of the self-identified "new communist movement," was formed by a small core of San Francisco Bay Area organizers who had decided that Third World-oriented Marxism provided not only a compelling ideological framework but that building a new Leninist vanguard on that basis was the key to social revolution.

1969–1973: Surge in Influence and Organization

The years immediately following 1968 constituted the heyday of Third World Marxism's influence. It was a volatile, no-business-as-usual time. Richard Nixon's inauguration in January 1969 did not bring his campaign-promised end to the war in Vietnam, but rather it brought with it further escalation and killing. Nixon's policy of "Vietnamization"—gradually withdrawing U.S. ground troops to lower U.S. casualties while conducting a ferocious bombing campaign that encompassed Cambodia and Laos as well as Vietnam—failed to assuage antiwar sentiment. Protests surged

and, linked to the advance of revolutionary movements throughout the Third World, more and more antiwar activists embraced a broader anti-imperialist perspective. Meanwhile the economic costs of the war began to come home with a vengeance. The polarization between communities of color, where expectations and aspirations had been significantly raised during the 1960s, and the myriad institutional forms of white supremacy stayed razor-sharp.

The spread of large-scale protest movements to whole new constituencies added fuel to the fire. Between 1969 and 1973 women's liberation became a mass social force, the modern gay liberation movement was born, and a broad-based prisoner and prisoners' rights movement took shape. Also, in an unprecedented development, resistance to authority bordering on continuous open mutiny began to characterize the U.S. armed forces on the ground in Vietnam. A top pro-war army officer concluding a tour of military installations bluntly told it like it was: "By every conceivable indication, the U.S. army in South Vietnam is approaching a state of total collapse, with individuals and units avoiding or having refused combat, murdering their officers, drug-ridden, and dispirited, where not near mutinous . . . the morale, discipline, and battle-worthiness of the U.S. armed forces are, with a few salient exceptions, lower and worse than at any time in this century and possibly the history of the U.S."¹¹

In this context, the institutions and informal circles based on Third World Marxism expanded manifold. The *Guardian* went all out to popularize Third World Marxist ideas, and the paper became a key site of communication and debate for the emerging revolutionary trend. By the end of 1969, the paper had doubled its number of pages and increased paid weekly readership to 24,000, the highest total since its initial years.¹² Favorable coverage of Third World revolutions, along with iconic imagery of Mao, Che, and dozens of anonymous (and often female) guerrillas, began to permeate what was then termed the "underground press." As of 1970, the Underground Press Syndicate included 200 papers with 6 million readers, and another 500 underground papers existed in high schools.¹³ Hundreds of new black community newspapers were also launched between 1968 and 1973. The *Black Scholar* was launched in 1969 and quickly achieved a circulation of 10,000. The magazine featured consistently positive coverage of Marxist-led African, Cuban, and Chinese movements. Dozens of new Chicano publications appeared, linked together by the radical Chicano Press Association.

Organizing Workers and the Racially Oppressed

Such rapid expansion of the radical press both reflected and spurred extended outreach campaigns and base-building projects. Following longstanding Marxist tradition, Third World Marxists targeted the working class as the key agent of revolutionary change. Yet this trend distinguished itself by making a priority of reaching

workers of color and all strata suffering from racial and nationality-based oppression and of integrating antiracism and Third World solidarity into its day-to-day work with workers of all backgrounds.

The BPP continued to set the pace. Despite being the government's central target for infiltration and repression, the group kept expanding in numbers and influence from 1969 through 1971. At its peak, the BPP attained a membership of roughly 4,000 in several dozen cities and circulation of its newspaper reached 100,000 per week.¹⁴ Panther leaders visited and gave glowing reports about China. They praised Cuba, a country that gave sanctuary to many party members fleeing the United States to escape frame-ups and arrests. The most Marxist and internationalist aspects of the Panthers' efforts receded after a bitter split between Huey Newton— and Eldridge Cleaver—led factions in 1971. But for four of the most crucial years in the ideological formation of a new radical generation (1968–71), those features of the Panthers' program had a tremendous impact. The group's emphasis on reaching the poorer strata of urban blacks, who had demonstrated their capacity to rebel during the previous years' urban uprisings, combined with their stress on multiracial alliances, influenced most other groups that identified with Third World Marxism.

Indeed, for many the Panthers served as a direct organizational model. This was especially true within the Puerto Rican movement, which experienced a "*Nuevo Despertar*" (new awakening) in the late 1960s.¹⁵ A pioneer group in that awakening, the Young Lords Party (YLP), aimed to be a Puerto Rican counterpart to the BPP, and some activists briefly held dual membership in both organizations.

The first Young Lords were former Chicago gang members who became politicized and worked closely with the Panthers. But the center of gravity quickly shifted to New York City, whose Young Lords chapter plunged into an ambitious grassroots campaign in Spanish Harlem. Drawing support from Puerto Ricans of all generations, the Young Lords expanded geographically to build chapters in Newark, Philadelphia, Bridgeport, Boston, and Detroit as well as in New York neighborhoods beyond Spanish Harlem. The YLP launched a bilingual newspaper, *Pa'lante*, which in 1970–71 sold almost 10,000 copies every other week.¹⁶

Puerto Ricans and other Latinos fighting urban renewal on New York's Upper West Side launched El Comité, another revolutionary group, in 1970. It soon turned explicitly to Marxism and developed a student sector and a workers' organization. El Comité members also began the process that in 1975 would result in launching the Latin Women's Collective, a key institution in the decade's efforts to organize working-class Latinas.

The Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP), which became the largest group on the Puerto Rican left, grew out of the island-based Movement for Independence (MPI). Radicalized by the student protests, labor militancy, and antiwar demonstra-

tions that swept Puerto Rico in the 1960s, MPI transformed itself into a Marxist-Leninist party. The PSP regarded Puerto Ricans in the United States as an integral part of a single Puerto Rican nation, and its program stated that PSP's "primary role in the U.S. is to unleash the national liberation struggle, in all its fury, in the very hearts of North American cities to which a significant portion of our colonized population was forced, and to link that struggle to the struggle for revolutionary transformation of North American society."¹⁷ More than 2,000 people attended the founding meeting of the PSP's U.S. branch in 1973.

The years 1969 to 1973 saw an explosion of Asian American activism, with young militants spotlighting the racist character of Washington's war in Vietnam, turning to community organizing in Chinatowns, Japantowns, and Manilatowns, and linking up with Asian farmworker militants and left-wing veterans of earlier generations. Third World Marxist ideas held virtually undisputed hegemony within Asian American radicalism, not least because of the prestige of the Communist Parties in Vietnam, China, Korea, and the Philippines and of the Zengakuren student movement in Japan. Militants formed a host of new Asian American revolutionary organizations, including the Red Guard Party and Wei Min She in the San Francisco Bay Area, the East Wind Collective in Los Angeles, and I Wor Kuen (IWK) and the Asian Study Group in New York. In 1973, a year after Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in the Philippines, revolutionary Filipino activists formed the Union of Democratic Filipinos (*Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino*/KDP), which for the next fifteen years anchored solidarity work with the Communist-led armed struggle against Marcos and advocated socialist revolution in the United States.

The Chicano movement grew substantially, with watersheds in spring 1969 when the first ever National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference was held and, a month later, when Mexican American student leaders founded *El Movimiento Estudiantil de Aztlán* (MEChA). CASA, whose Marxist leadership had ties to Mexico's sophisticated communist movement, expanded its base among workers of Mexican descent. Likewise, an important section of the La Raza Unida Party (LRUP), which took shape as probably the most broadly based center of Chicano militancy between 1970 and 1972, located itself in the Third World Marxist milieu. A strong Marxist current also existed within the early 1970s movement for Chicano Studies and among the radical artists who linked the new generation to the tradition of Mexican revolutionary artists such as David Alfaro Siqueiros and Diego Rivera.

In June 1969, the various RUMs that had formed in Detroit combined to found the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. Expanding its work within the auto plants and via community and student organizing, the League argued that black workers would play the pivotal role in a working-class revolution. The League recruited some of the period's most talented organizers, including James Forman, known nationwide for his contributions as executive director of SNCC. The group

established ties with caucuses of militant black workers throughout the country, and League offshoots remained a significant force in Detroit even after it broke apart in 1971.

One of the most innovative organizing efforts of the period was the Third World Women's Alliance (TWWA), which grew out of the SNCC Black Women's Liberation Committee and was formally founded in 1970. The Alliance pioneered the concept of "triple jeopardy": that women of color faced the combined and intersecting burdens of capitalism, racism, and sexism. It declared in 1971: "Whether we are Puerto Rican, Black, Chicana, Native American, or Asian, our struggle is one. There is one enemy to be smashed: imperialism and capitalism. The Vietnamese people, and in particular the Vietnamese women, have taught us these lessons."¹⁸

Discussion of strategies for bringing revolutionary politics to the working class meanwhile moved center stage within white student radicalism. Debate over contending approaches became ever more heated within the SDS, and the group could not survive its escalating factional warfare, splitting into PL and anti-PL camps at its June 1969 national convention. The PL-aligned section quickly faded and was altogether gone within a year or two; the opposing Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM) group split into RYM I, the Weatherman faction, whose few hundred core members abandoned mass organizing and went underground less than a year later, and RYM II, whose cadre sought to build revolutionary collectives among working-class youth and within a year was immersed in trying to build a new communist party.

This organizational disaster disoriented and disillusioned many SDS members and constituted a serious setback for post-1969 efforts to organize on campuses. But for several more years at least, most of the thousands of SDSers who had embraced Third World Marxism carried on in other forms. A large contingent relocated from college towns to large cities, moved into working-class neighborhoods, and took jobs in auto plants, other industrial sectors, post offices, hospitals, or public schools. Flush with optimism, they believed prospects were good for building a solid base in what seemed an increasingly restive and angry working class. There were more and harder fought strikes in 1969 and 1970 than there had been in any year since 1946. The early 1970s also saw the outbreak of rank-and-file insurgent movements in a number of major unions, with black workers, young workers, and often Vietnam vets in the forefront.

Other ex-SDSers plunged into prisoner support efforts anchored by organizations of color. Protests "behind the walls," spearheaded by black and Latino inmates, frequently turned into open revolt, and there were at least sixteen prison rebellions during 1970 alone. The bloodiest confrontation took place in September 1971 at Attica: 1,200 inmates, many advocating revolutionary politics, seized control of half the prison and took hostages. Negotiations were stonewalled by Governor

Nelson Rockefeller; the ensuing military assault left twenty-nine inmates and ten hostages dead, every single one shot by the attacking police.

Still other battle-hardened student radicals persevered as anchors of the continuing antiwar movement. After Nixon invaded Cambodia, these cadre were stalwarts of the largest campus protests in U.S. history: close to 4 million students took part in strikes at upwards of one thousand colleges and universities.¹⁹ A year later many of these same people organized for the half-million strong antiwar protest in Washington, D.C., on April 24, while others took part in the “Mayday” effort to literally shut down the capital. The latter effort resulted in the largest number of arrests in U.S. history (12,614; most of them were later ruled illegal).

Though militancy on U.S. campuses began to ebb after 1970, activists who had turned to Third World Marxism continued to see student organizing as an important supplement to reaching workers and communities of color. These cadre set up Radical Student Unions and “Attica Brigades” on numerous campuses. Supporters of the Panthers, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, and nationalist groups such as the All African People’s Revolutionary Party, launched in 1969 by former SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture), gained influence within Black Student Unions. Revolutionary politics predominated in numerous chapters of MEChA and leftists led the Puerto Rican Student Union. Third World Liberation Fronts modeled on those at San Francisco State and Berkeley formed on dozens of other campuses. Finally, ex-student revolutionaries helped start new radical caucuses in the academic and professional worlds (Union for Radical Political Economics, Health Policy Advisory Center, etc.), while partisans of Third World Marxism for a time led the National Lawyers Guild.

International Solidarity Projects

Given their internationalist focus, Third World Marxists prioritized solidarity efforts with national liberation revolutions and sought especially to reach workers and the racially oppressed with their anti-imperialist message. They played central roles in local affiliates of one of two major national anti-Vietnam War coalitions—the People’s Coalition for Peace and Justice—and anchored anti-imperialist contingents at continuing antiwar actions between 1969 and the final end of the war. Coalitions like New York’s Third World Front Against Imperialism, formed, among other groups, by the Black Panther Party, El Comité, and the Third World Women’s Alliance, took shape in numerous cities.

The Union of Vietnamese in the United States, which supported the peace program of the National Liberation Front (NLF), was a vital component of early 1970s antiwar efforts. So, too, was Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), whose 1971 Operation Dewey Canyon III in Washington provided some of the most dramatic moments of the entire antiwar movement. The Operation began with a 1,500

vets, wives of dead GI's and Gold Star Mothers marching to Arlington Cemetery; it culminated at the steps of the Capitol with hundreds of veterans tossing their silver stars, Navy crosses, battle ribbons, and purple hearts over the fence. By this time VVAW, which had started in spring 1967 with a half-dozen members, numbered 11,000 and included a left wing that called for an outright NLF victory. In 1973, VVAW adopted an explicitly anti-imperialist program.

Solidarity with Marxist-led armed movements in Africa was the focus of the African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC), which a number of activists from the Youth Organization for Black Unity and Malcolm X Liberation University in North Carolina began to build after a 1971 trip to Africa. The United States-based activists forged direct ties with the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) and Amílcar Cabral's African Party for the Independence of Guinea and the Cape Verde Islands (PAIGC). Mobilizing for the first African Liberation Day actions after their return, they turned out 60,000 demonstrators (30,000 in Washington, D.C.) in May 1972. Soon the ALSC had grown into a nationwide network, its chapters able to mobilize 100,000 demonstrators in thirty cities for the second African Liberation Day on May 26, 1973. The next month ALSC declared itself an "anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist Black United Front," and for a brief period it stood out as the broadest grassroots coalition of activist Marxist and nationalist groups in the African American community.

The Venceremos Brigade (VB) was another project that drew strength from direct contact between North Americans and Third World revolutionaries. The idea of organizing U.S. activists to work and travel in Cuba originated after a SDS delegation visited Havana. The first Brigade, with 216 participants, left for Cuba in November 1969. A much larger second Brigade went in March 1970, more contingents followed, and the Brigade became an annual activity that has lasted to the present day. The Brigade gave priority to recruiting young people of color and became a key site of ideological development as well as networking among black, Puerto Rican, Chicano, Native American, and Asian American activists.

Solidarity with Chile was also a focal point of early 1970s internationalist work, both before and after the bloody 1973 United States-backed coup that toppled the elected government of Socialist Salvador Allende. Work promoting sympathy with China and the normalization of United States-China relations, spearheaded by United States-China Friendship Committees formed beginning in 1971, also played a significant role. In 1973, coalitions involving these Friendship Committees and revolutionary groups sponsored celebrations of the anniversary of the Chinese Revolution (October 1) in over two dozen localities, with 5,000 attending the events in New York and the Bay Area. These years also saw the launch of many publications, still extant, focusing on Third World solidarity, for example the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* (begun in 1969) and the *Middle East Report* (launched as *MERIP Reports* in 1970).

The "New Communist Movement"

Within the broad Third World Marxist milieu, a significant layer of activists set out to build tight-knit cadre organizations. This contingent, the self-defined "new communist movement," recognized that a slacking off in mass protests could be on the short-term horizon. But they believed any such lull would be short-lived and followed by an even greater popular upsurge. They believed it was urgent to prepare a militant vanguard so the revolutionary potential glimpsed in the 1960s could be realized next time around.

To guide this process, not just Marxism but Marxism-Leninism was deemed indispensable. This was a common view at the time, with harsh critics of Leninism such as former SDS leader Carl Oglesby acknowledging in 1969 that "There was—and is—no other coherent, integrative, and explicit philosophy of revolution."²⁰ From 1969 through the mid-1970s, the new communist movement grew faster than any other left current. At its height it held the allegiance of roughly 10,000 core activists and influenced many thousands more. Its leadership and membership ranks were more racially integrated and diverse than those of any other ideologically defined socialist tendency.

New communist movement cadre were among the most dedicated on the left and were in the forefront of base-building efforts in the trade unions and people-of-color communities. Hundreds experienced blacklisting from employers, were beaten by police or right-wingers, and served time in jail. Movement partisans played pivotal roles in many of the projects already mentioned and led grassroots strike-support efforts for some of the biggest labor battles of the early 1970s. Many of the formations that had embraced Third World Marxism—from the *Guardian* and I Wor Kuen to offshoots of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and the Young Lords—threw themselves into the new communist project. Following the path taken by the Revolutionary Union in 1968, a host of new Leninist groups such as the October League and the Workers' Viewpoint Organization were formed, and the Communist League, which traced its roots to a far left faction of the CPUSA, overlapped with these groups in both outlook and support base.

In these years, the Communist Party of China (CPC)²¹ was more ambitious than any other Third World communist party in presenting its views as a rallying point for leftists worldwide. Largely for this reason, the specifically Maoist components of the new communist movement were at first much better organized than the sections that looked as much or more to the Cuban or Vietnamese Revolutions or to other variants of Third World Marxism.

The momentum enjoyed by the new communist movement, and especially the initiative it held within communities of color, was widely recognized on the left. Even opponents such as Stanley Aronowitz admitted that "like other sections of the American left, many [Black] movement activists adopted Marxism-Leninism as the

'guide' to their action. . . . A version of Marxism merged with nationalism became the hegemonic discourse of Black radicalism."²¹

Attempting to turn such momentum into lasting organizational clout, the *Guardian* and others sought to bring the different new communist groups together for dialogue and eventual unification in 1973. The most public effort along those lines, a *Guardian* forum titled "What Road to Building a New Communist Party?", drew more than 1,200 to a New York auditorium while thousands of additional activists around the country read transcripts or listened to tapes of the event. Exuberance about both short- and long-term prospects spread throughout the new communist ranks.

Unrealized Promise

With such an impressive array of organizational initiatives encompassing thousands of the most hardworking and skilled cadre from the tumultuous 1960s, Third World Marxism seemed poised to transform spectacular short-term growth into institutional durability and broad influence. But after 1973 its progress stalled, by the end of the 1970s its prestige had sharply declined, and by the late 1980s it had nearly disappeared altogether. The reasons lay in a combination of economic and political changes beyond its control and its own shortcomings and misjudgments.

Third World Marxists had based their strategy on a few cornerstone premises: Following an anticipated Vietnamese victory, national liberation movements would win power in many other countries and break free of the capitalist world economy; Third World nations would develop ever greater unity against imperialism; U.S. capital would face steadily mounting economic troubles as it lost control of its far-flung empire; and the resulting domestic squeeze would push the population, especially the working class, toward anticapitalism. Further, it was believed that the traditional ways of "doing politics" had become so discredited that it was possible to consolidate a large left-wing base while essentially ignoring the electoral arena.

This perspective seemed plausible in the very early 1970s. Indeed, anxieties along those exact lines gripped important sections of the policy-making elite. And some elements of these views did turn out to be at least partially correct: Third World struggles continued to register advances in several regions through the 1970s, and the U.S. economy did experience some very rough going as the long postwar boom came to an end.

But overall, the strength of Third World movements was exaggerated and the resilience of U.S. capitalism qualitatively underestimated. Moreover, anticipation that the 1970s would see a steady, if uneven, shift of popular sentiment leftward proved completely off the mark. The overriding reality of the 1970s was an across-the-board capitalist counteroffensive and a tectonic shift to the right in mass politics.

Third World movements for self-determination did not actually have the eco-

nomic base to achieve the results revolutionaries hoped for and imperialists feared. Rather than beginning a new wave of innovative socialist projects, the 1970s national liberation victories proved to be the final phase of the post–World War II anticolonial tide. While the Vietnamese and other communist-led struggles were able to achieve national independence—no small accomplishment—they were not able to escape the capitalist-dominated world economy and in fact were terribly bled by Washington’s economic retaliation and sophisticated use of “low-intensity warfare.”

This limitation was closely connected to the structural weaknesses of the largest countries that had embarked on the socialist path. During the 1970s, deep-seated flaws in the models employed by both the USSR and China began to eat away at those societies’ apparent stability. Further, the Sino-Soviet split that had erupted in the early 1960s widened into an unbridgeable chasm by the end of that decade. The two strongest anticapitalist powers were unwilling to make common cause against imperialism, qualitatively weakening the international progressive front.

In the United States, meanwhile, the guardians of capitalism successfully maneuvered to regain the initiative. Some retrenchments (cutting U.S. losses by withdrawing from Southeast Asia) were required. But the technological, financial, political, and ideological reserves at capital’s disposal meant that, after considerable scrambling, such adjustments could be made without the level of shock and crisis the left (and many nonleftists) had anticipated. Plus, a host of factors were at play that made translating popular discontent into durable radical allegiance a formidable task. These have deep roots: The weakness of the socialist tradition within the U.S. working class and, in contrast, the widespread consensus behind an essentially proimperialist version of patriotism; the pervasive racial fault lines that, among other things, lead so many white workers to believe they have more in common with their white exploiters than their nonwhite coworkers; an entrenched two-party, winner-take-all electoral arrangement that erects tremendous structural obstacles to radicalism’s ability to gain a stable footing in the political system.

1973–1976: Major Bumps in the Road

Between 1973 and 1976, all these factors began to make themselves felt, checking the momentum of Third World Marxism.

The Energy Crisis of 1973–74, followed by the recession of 1974–75, was central to this process. The slump was the worst since the Great Depression; unemployment reached its highest point in thirty-five years. But contrary to left-wing expectations, the downturn did not produce an outpouring of worker militancy or a new wave of radicalization. Rather, it played a role that recessions have often played in the history of capitalism, “disciplining” the working class, exacerbating intraclass divisions, and narrowing many workers’ vision to issues of immediate survival. Furthermore, the slump led to massive layoffs in auto, steel, and other key industries.

Those expelled from the plants included a disproportionate share of those workers most open to left politics, young workers and, especially, young black workers. Most of the rank-and-file insurgencies that had spread through various unions between 1968 and 1973 lost ground or collapsed.

Simultaneously, a massive government/media campaign to blame the slump on the oil-producing countries of the Middle East fueled jingoism among broad layers of the population. While the Energy Crisis was a product of market manipulation by the big oil transnationals, it was convenient for the establishment to target the Arab countries that had briefly conducted a selective oil embargo against the United States for backing Israel in the 1973 Middle East war and then followed the embargo by a price hike. (Iran, a supporter of Israel, also endorsed the higher oil prices for economic reasons and in order to obtain additional Western weapons.) Abuse was heaped especially on "the Arabs" and "Third World radicals." This crusade tapped into the resentment millions felt at what they believed to be the "humiliation" of the United States' forced withdrawal from Southeast Asia.

This propaganda offensive was not effectively countered by the broad coalition that had opposed the war in Vietnam. The antiwar movement's radical wing celebrated the 1973 Paris Peace Agreement and the 1975 final revolutionary victory as important blows to imperialism and tried to get this message out. But other political actors had protested the war mainly because "American boys" had been dying in combat and consequently did not oppose the new casualty-free jingoist campaign. Worse, the grip of Zionism on U.S. politics (especially on mainstream liberalism) meant that many who in the late 1960s had been in opposition to Washington's Vietnam adventure joined in whipping up anti-Arab hysteria.

The toll was all the heavier because many sixties activists had been drawn into a new liberal-led effort to reform the Democratic Party by 1973 to 1975. George McGovern's successful bid for the 1972 Democratic presidential nomination was the most visible expression of this new initiative that tried hard to enlist white college students, liberal feminists and, to a lesser extent, the emerging layer of African American elected officials. Suddenly the "traditional channels" that had seemed irreversibly closed in 1968 appeared to reopen, and many of the constituencies Third World Marxists hoped to reach saw opportunities here to achieve at least some of their objectives. Especially as militant grassroots activity began to ebb in the black freedom movement and the student movement (after more than a decade of near continuous flow), many sixties veterans tried to seize these opportunities without adequate consideration of their complexities (for example, how to successfully keep an independent power base while participating in an alliance led by procapitalists?).

Finally, a dramatic shift in China's policies divided the Third World Marxist ranks. During the 1960s the Chinese Communist Party had presented itself as the main champion of Third World aspirations and criticized the Soviet Union for vac-

illating in its support of armed liberation struggles. This stance was a prime source of Beijing's attraction for sixties radicals. But especially after Richard Nixon's 1972 visit to China, opposition to the USSR became the central preoccupation of Chinese foreign policy, and support for liberation movements that accepted Soviet aid was cut back or stopped. China indicated its willingness to join an anti-Soviet alliance with even the most reactionary imperial powers. The consequences of this shift remained muted until the United States was finally thrown out of Southeast Asia in 1975. But less than a year later China called for strengthening NATO, saying that a "restored capitalist" USSR was the "main enemy" of the peoples of the world and siding with the United States and apartheid-backed contras in Angola against the Angolan liberation movement supported by Africa's other revolutionary movements, Cuba, and the USSR.²²

These changes led to widespread disillusionment with China on the left. They took place even before Mao Tse-tung died in 1976, after which information about the dirty underside of his Cultural Revolution became available and Mao's successors criticized and abandoned what they now called a catastrophe for the Chinese people. This about-face discredited and removed the other key factor that had made China a pole of attraction in the late 1960s.

Despite these unfavorable developments, some sections of the Third World Marxist trend continued to grow. The Puerto Rican left conducted some of its most successful activities in the mid-1970s. In October 1974 the Puerto Rican Socialist Party was the principal sponsor of a pro-Independence rally in New York that drew an overflow crowd of 20,000-plus to Madison Square Garden. In 1976, PSP anchored a broad-based radical coalition formed to protest the official U.S. bicentennial celebrations. Coalition-sponsored demonstrations on July 4, whose main demand was for a "Bicentennial without Colonies," turned out 50,000 protesters in Philadelphia and San Francisco.

Third World Marxist-led solidarity efforts around Chile, defense of the Angolan revolution, and the anti-Marcos struggle in the Philippines likewise remained vibrant. And the largest components of the new communist movement, utilizing the tight nationwide structures they had fashioned over the previous years, added new recruits from continuing campus activism as well as from their organizing efforts in workplaces and communities of color.

These bright spots notwithstanding, this period was mainly characterized by a halt to Third World Marxism's forward motion. The pattern of whole layers of activists shifting leftward and gravitating toward Third World Marxism from 1969 to 1973 was not reproduced. The radical milieu within which Third World Marxism had thrived began to shrink, depriving this current of crucial links to the constituencies in which it had hoped to sink roots. Facing unanticipated political changes both within the United States and abroad (especially in China), Third World Marxism no

longer offered a unified and compelling political analysis, eroding this trend's internal unity, self-confidence, and attractive power.

The Late 1970s: Sliding Downhill

Developments in the late 1970s made things even more difficult. The rightward shift in U.S. politics accelerated. The so-called New Right emerged as a powerful nationwide force, adding fierce attacks on feminism and homosexuality to the time-tested backlash arsenal of racism and anticommunism.

Additionally, galvanized by a section of capital and the shock troops of the New Right, a wide swath of U.S. society mobilized behind "a broadly embracing 'Have' politics" antagonistic to the interests of people of color and the poorer sectors of the working class.²³ Expressions of the rising "Have" coalition included a "rolling earthquake of suburban protests . . . antibusing movements, campaigns for a return to educational 'basics', landlord and realtor mobilizations . . . and, most importantly . . . the 'Watts Riot of the Middle Classes'—[California property tax-cutting] Proposition 13 and its spinoff revolts."²⁴ So strong was this motion, and so weak the bonds of working-class solidarity, that "a section of the traditional New Deal coalition, especially suburban white skilled workers, was conscripted to the 'Have' side."²⁵ By the end of the 1970s, the New Deal coalition was in tatters, replaced as the country's dominant alignment by the pro-inequality, militarist, and antilabor coalition that elected Ronald Reagan.

All this took place during the presidency of Democrat Jimmy Carter, who, while using the rhetoric of human rights, directed a new turn toward militarism and intervention in foreign policy. In response to the huge popular movement against the Shah in Iran, Carter insisted on backing this guardian of Western interests to the very end and, after he was overthrown, welcomed him in the United States. His actions led directly to the hostage-taking at the U.S. embassy in Tehran, an event exploited to whip up national chauvinism on a scale not seen since the early days of the Vietnam War.

Simultaneously, Carter started a new round of escalation in the nuclear arms race by arm-twisting NATO into deploying a new generation of ultra-fast "Euromissiles" in Western Europe. Laying the groundwork for a new round of direct military intervention in the Third World, the 1980 "Carter Doctrine" proclaimed Washington's intention to use military force to "protect" Middle East oil or accomplish any other objective deemed to be of vital U.S. interest. Within months, Carter approved \$5.7 million in military aid to combat El Salvador's growing popular rebellion, and the CIA began organizing former Somocista National Guardsmen into a contra army to fight against the Sandinista government that had come to power in the 1979 Nicaraguan Revolution.

Making matters even worse, China was backing rather than opposing Wash-

ington's turn to a "Second Cold War."²⁶ Top leader Teng Hsiao-p'ing visited Washington in January 1979 and told *Time* magazine that the CPC unequivocally viewed the United States as part of a united front against the USSR.²⁷

Of course, all of these events involved powerful social forces far beyond the control of the entire U.S. left. No matter what policies they had pursued, Third World Marxists in the United States could not have reversed the rightward motion of U.S. politics or stopped Washington's military muscle-flexing around the globe. To the contrary, it was all but inevitable that these shifts would take a toll on the Third World Marxist ranks and that the damage would be exacerbated by the bitter conflict among the Third World countries (China vs. Cuba and Vietnam) that had once seemed a unified vanguard of world revolution. But things were made worse by Third World Marxism's own shortcomings.

Having come of age in the turbulent late 1960s, most Third World Marxists made undue generalizations from their youthful experience and embraced a "voluntarist" perspective on the pace and ease of social change. They came to believe that virtually anything could be accomplished if revolutionaries only had sufficient determination and correct ideas. When combined with Third World Marxism's overoptimistic assessment of the balance of class forces (in the Third World and within the United States), this led to serious misassessments of the actual realities of the late 1970s. The right's influence tended to be regarded as far more fragile than it was, and prospects for a 1960s- (or 1930s-) style mass radicalization were still considered strong (as long as the revolutionaries remained faithful and pure). Such misjudgments led directly to ultra-left tactics in mass movements and sectarian policies toward progressive groups and reform leaders who did not share all the movement's goals. It fostered inflated rhetoric and encouraged building organizational structures and an overall style of work that was out of touch with the sentiments of the social base the revolutionaries were trying to reach.

These problems especially afflicted the new Leninist groups within the Third World Marxist milieu. After their freewheeling and dynamic formative stage, they fell into a dogmatic "quest-for-orthodoxy" mindset and embraced rigid, top-down organizational models. These problems affected not just the groups that followed Beijing's foreign policy, but also the post-1976 antidogmatist trend that tried to develop a version of Third World Marxism that would retain the movement's traditional anti-U.S. imperialist thrust and carve out a space independent of both China and the USSR. (This trend included the *Guardian* and the leaderships of the Union of Democratic Filipinos and the Third World Women's Alliance as well as many local Leninist workplace-organizing collectives.)

With these weaknesses complicating an already unfavorable political situation, the Third World Marxist trend began to decline markedly. To be sure, activists

and groups from this current participated in numerous battles against the right, trying to hold the line against the concessions employers began to demand of unions and battling the antisocial services "tax revolt." They played the central role in mobilizing resistance to the first high court decision rolling back affirmative action (*Bakke v. University of California*) in 1977-78. Cadre groups and individuals espousing Third World Marxism anchored the anti-Bakke coalitions that turned out 20,000-plus for a Washington, D.C., demonstration in April 1978 and tens of thousands more at protests elsewhere during the two-year fightback.

Third World Marxists also continued as stalwarts of international solidarity work. They spearheaded support for the Zimbabwean revolution (which finally overthrew white minority rule in 1980) and were among the most active backers of the Iranian peoples' upsurge against the Shah. In 1978 activists in the Puerto Rican left and Puerto Rico solidarity movement formed the Vieques Support Network to assist Vieques residents trying to stop U.S. warships from using the area as a firing range, a fight that continues and has become an important component of solidarity activism today.

Still, Third World Marxism lost ground. The problems of voluntarism and sectarianism, combined with the objective difficulty of winning even small victories, made it very difficult to recruit and led to battle fatigue among many core cadre. Differences over political perspective especially between those who backed Beijing and activists more sympathetic to Vietnam and Cuba led to bitter interorganizational divisions and splits. Groups that had remained vibrant through 1975 or so, such as the African Liberation Support Committee or Vietnam Veterans Against the War, fell apart or became shadows of their former selves. Organizations that had retained their vitality through 1977, including the Puerto Rican Socialist Party and CASA, by the end of 1979 had lost members and begun to slide downhill. Standard-bearers of the early new communist movement such as the Revolutionary Union (after 1975 the Revolutionary Communist Party) and October League (after 1977 the Communist Party) split or altogether collapsed.

In addition, most Third World Marxist formations were unable to match their resolute antiracism, anti-imperialism, and commitment to working-class organizing with similar strengths on other battlefronts. They offered some of the most penetrating criticisms of the racial, class, and national-chauvinist blindspots of the dominant tendencies in the women's, lesbian/gay, environmental, and antinuclear movements. But, with a handful of exceptions, these groups were unable to incorporate the insights of those movements into an inclusive vision that dealt adequately with the complex interweaving of class, race, gender, and sexuality, or with the urgency of environmental protection. And since these newer movements were among the most vital of the late 1970s, especially among youth, Third World Marxism's shortcomings in these areas cut it off from potential sources of renewal.

The 1980s: Facing Reaganism

Then came the Reagan years with the intensification of the rightward course already evident under Carter. What has become known as “Reaganism” amounted to an all-out effort to reverse the setbacks U.S. imperialism had suffered between the mid-1960s and late 1970s. Internationally, it was a crusade to roll back the gains of national liberation struggles, undermine the Non-Aligned Movement, regain a nuclear edge over the USSR, and bolster United States’ competitive economic position vis-à-vis Western Europe and Japan. At home, the goal was to impose social austerity, take back the gains made by peoples of color and women since the 1960s, and undermine the trade union movement.

Reagan’s program spurred a renewed wave of popular protest, as every attacked constituency mobilized to defend its interests. On the peace and solidarity front, large-scale movements took shape in opposition to Reagan’s nuclear buildup, against U.S. intervention in Central America, and in solidarity with the resurgent tide against apartheid in South Africa. The Central America and antiapartheid movements in particular attracted large numbers of radical-minded young people and, especially the black-led antiapartheid movement, galvanized a multiracial constituency of activists. Key organizations within them (the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador [CISPES], the Free South Africa Movement, and many others) displayed tremendous creativity as well as tenacity, having absorbed many lessons from the anti-Vietnam War movement.

Large numbers of activists within these movements not only expressed solidarity with but also admired the revolutionary organizations that were leading the freedom struggles in South Africa and Central America: the African National Congress, El Salvador’s Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), and Nicaragua’s Sandinistas. But, in contrast to the late 1960s, this did not translate into the formation of a new wave of United States-based revolutionary organizations or a new political trend based on an updated version of Third World Marxism. In part the failure to do so reflected the changed international landscape. While Marxist-oriented liberation movements still played leadership roles in many Third World countries, they no longer held the kind of worldwide initiative,³ nor did they seem as closely linked and united, as they did in the era of “two, three, many Vietnams.” But it also reflected domestic realities. In contrast to their 1960s predecessors, hardly anyone in the radical 1980s generation saw revolutionary possibilities anywhere on the U.S. horizon. To be sure, the groups that survived from the Third World Marxism of the 1970s took up Central America and antiapartheid work, obtaining some fresh energy and sometimes recruits in the process. But this was not enough to revitalize the Third World Marxist current as such.

Likewise with the main multi-issue, multisector rallying point against Reaganism: Jesse Jackson’s 1984 and 1988 presidential bids and the Rainbow Coalition.

The Jackson/Rainbow upsurge did not take the same form as had the civil rights/Black Power motion of the 1960s, but in at least some respects it played a similar role. Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition had their strongest social base among the dispossessed within the African American community, and, as in the 1960s, this sector's mobilization behind a progressive program galvanized and drove forward all democratic movements. Moreover, from its springboard in the fight against racism, this upsurge was driven to challenge Reaganism in general. The resulting dynamic provided the basis for the "economic common ground," "moral higher ground," and antimilitarist, anti-intervention themes that crystallized Jackson's multisector appeal. There were enormous (and eventually unsolved) complexities in trying to make the Rainbow Coalition program, which went beyond the bounds of mainstream politics, into a force within the Democratic Party. But for several years the strategy of entering Democratic primaries allowed Jackson to present a radical message to tens of millions and construct a nationwide progressive apparatus.

The prominence of antiracism and anti-U.S. military intervention in Jackson's program, as well as the depth of his support in communities of color and among the most militant wing of organized labor, led most remaining Third World Marxists to see the Rainbow Coalition as a fruitful arena for activism. Here they shouldered at least their share of day-to-day work, and many attained positions of considerable influence, not least because by then most surviving Third World Marxist groups had broken with the crudest ultra-leftism and sectarianism of earlier days. But again, some temporary growth of particular organizations did not mean a resurgence of influence for Third World Marxist ideology. And when, under tremendous pressure from top-level Democrats, Jackson cut a deal and threw his weight against further development of the Rainbow Coalition as a semi-independent, grassroots-based democratic structure, the leftists who had pressed for such a form were not strong enough to prevail against Jackson and his inner circle. As the Rainbow Coalition structures lost their grassroots character after 1988, the Third World Marxists within them suffered further losses.

These events occurred at the same time that a crisis of unprecedented proportions was overtaking the entire Marxist, socialist, and revolutionary left. The 1989 Tiananmen massacre in China, combined with Beijing's ever-more-obvious use of capitalist mechanisms to stimulate economic growth, shattered just about all that remained of China's already tattered revolutionary prestige. The defeat of the Sandinistas in the elections of 1990—though primarily caused by Washington's long campaign to terrorize and stifle the Nicaraguan Revolution—demoralized many radicals who had looked to the Sandinistas as pioneers of the freshest, most democratic revolutionary project in decades.

But above all, it was the collapse of the Soviet Union that changed the world's ideological as well as political power terrain. Mikhail Gorbachev's effort at restruc-

turing Soviet society under the (initial) slogan “more socialism, more democracy” ended in the debacle of a disastrous hard-line coup, a Boris Yeltsin–led resistance and then counter-coup, and then the dissolution of the USSR itself. This removed the main counterweight to unfettered exercise of Western imperial power in the Third World, creating a new situation that Washington immediately took pains to demonstrate in Iraqi blood via the Gulf War. Because of the deep-seated flaws in Soviet society and the particular way in which Communist Party rule unraveled, the collapse of the USSR also opened the gates for an orgy of capitalist triumphalism throughout the world. Everywhere left of center manifested widespread disaffection with socialism and Marxism, in particular with variants of it that, like Third World Marxism, included doses of Leninism and defended the one-party state.

By the early 1990s, nationalism had come to play a very different role in the world than its overwhelmingly anti-imperialist and emancipatory form of the 1960s and 1970s, which caused further complications. Now nationalism was manifesting itself more frequently in campaigns for ethnically or religiously pure nation-states with no rights for minorities. “Ethnic conflicts” and “ethnic cleansing” spread across whole regions, including but not limited to areas previously under communist rule. Additionally, 1990s nationalist movements were as frequently characterized by conservative as by radical economic programs. This created overwhelming analytic and political problems for a current that had tended to see Third World nationalism as completely and inherently progressive, if not as the vanguard force against imperialism.

Even the Third World Marxist organizations that had persevered into the 1980s were unable to successfully navigate these immense transitions. A few solidarity projects and publications that originated in the late 1960s survived the Reagan years (often in somewhat changed form), and so did a handful of tenacious but tiny Leninist formations that can trace their roots to the 1970s party-building efforts. (A number of the largest remaining organizations from the new communist movement—the League of Revolutionary Struggle, Line of March, and Communist Workers’ Party—dissolved between 1987 and 1990.) But by the time the dust had settled from the Soviet collapse, the Tiananmen Square massacre, the Sandinista defeat, and the Gulf War, Third World Marxism as a distinct trend on the left was no longer a power.

Confronting Global Capitalism on New Terrain

Still, thousands of people whose political roots lie in the Third World Marxist tradition continue as stalwarts of progressive activity, especially in the trade union movement and communities of color. The vast majority now function as individuals rather than as members of revolutionary organizations, but they draw on their rich experiences in both mass organizing and left institution-building, and they are among the strongest voices for internationalism, for challenging white supremacy, for building

multiracial organizations and coalitions, and for constructing bridges between political generations.

In the movement against corporate-dominated globalization, symbolized by Seattle, these veterans have made their impact felt. The most widely read article analyzing the dynamics of racism and racial segregation within the Seattle upsurge, "The WTO: Where Was the Color in Seattle?", was authored by Elizabeth Martínez, whose activism goes back to SNCC, the late 1960s Chicano movement, and the Third World Marxist milieu.²⁸ The editor of the periodical in which her article first appeared, *ColorLines: Race, Culture, Action*, is Bob Wing, who cut his political teeth in the Third World strike at Berkeley in 1969, the Venceremos Brigade, and the anti-Bakke campaign.

Walden Bello, who has emerged as one of the most prominent analysts of corporate globalization and as a leader in the global South's resistance to it, was active for many years in the Third World Marxist sector of the United States-based left. Scores of the union leaders, staffers, and rank-and-file militants who are in the forefront of U.S. labor's opposition to corporate globalization, and of the fight against national chauvinist trends within the unions themselves, are veterans of the PSP, CASA, and the various components of the new communist movement. All these activists provide a direct human link between the dominant radical current of the late 1960s and 1970s and today's growing international movement against capitalist globalization.

The world has changed tremendously since the years between 1968 and 1973, and there is no way repeating approaches from that earlier time can be effective. Third World countries' battles for genuine sovereignty and economic development are taking far different forms than they did in the 1960s. No countersystem exists for liberation movements to connect with, so the old strategy of taking the noncapitalist road by hooking up with a socialist camp is now a total nonstarter. The mix of mechanisms by which the imperial centers control the Third World have altered substantially. Technological, demographic, and cultural shifts have changed the contours of politics and class struggle in the United States and all over the world. And the problems of voluntarism, dogmatism, and antidemocratic organizational practices that afflicted the Third World Marxist current would need to be overcome even if the world had not changed so much.

But, if anything, this vastly different world needs internationalism and antiracism more than ever. No project that aims at deep social transformation can succeed today unless it put the needs and interests of the global South at the forefront, grasps the central role of communities of color in changing the United States, and finds ways of building durable unity across racial lines. For those determined to make headway in these areas, there is much to learn from the long march Third World Marxists began thirty years ago.

Notes

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2. George Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968* (Boston: South End, 1987), 124.
3. Judith Clavir Albert and Stewart Edward Albert, eds., *The Sixties Papers: Documents of a Rebellious Decade* (New York: Praeger, 1984), 59.
4. This view is articulated most thoroughly in Gitlin's *The Sixties*, but the specific terms "good sixties" and "bad sixties" come from the description of Gitlin's volume in Paul Buhle, "Madison Revisited," *Radical History Review* 57 (1993): 248.
5. This pattern is documented in Elizabeth Martínez, "That Old White (Male) Magic," in *De Colores Means All of Us: Latina Views for a Multi-Colored Century* (Cambridge, MA: South End, 1998), 21–30.
6. Robert L. Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969), 126.
7. The CPUSA's negative stance toward the new generation was summarized by Peggy Dennis, a longtime party activist who was also the widow of pre-Gus Hall CPUSA head Eugene Dennis: "Throughout the 1960s decade the current Party leadership placed the organization in opposition to and in isolation from practically every new form of struggle that erupted in the ghettos, on the campuses and in the streets." See Peggy Dennis, *The Autobiography of an American Communist: A Personal View of a Political Life, 1925–1975* (Berkeley, CA and Westport, CT: Creative Arts Book Company and Lawrence Hill, 1977), 290–91.
8. Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret Wars against Domestic Dissent* (Boston: South End, 1990), 123.
9. Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying: A Study in Urban Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's, 1975), 24.
10. Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (New York: Random House, 1973), 664.
11. Irwin Silber, "U.S. Army in Vietnam 'Nearing Collapse,'" *Guardian*, August 4, 1971.
12. Jack A. Smith, "The Guardian Goes to War," in *Voices from the Underground: Volume I: Insider Histories of the Vietnam Era Underground Press*, ed. Ken Wachsberger (Tempe, AZ: Mica's, 1993), 103.
13. Katsiaficas, *Imagination*, 143.
14. JoNina M. Abron, "'Raising the Consciousness of the People': The Black Panther Intercommunal News Service, 1967–1980," in Wachsberger, 352.
15. Andrés Torres, "Introduction: Political Radicalism in the Diaspora—The Puerto Rican Experience," in *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices from the Diaspora*, ed. Andrés Torres and José E. Velázquez (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 1–22.
16. Pablo "Yorúba" Guzmán, "Ain't No Party Like the One We Got: The Young Lords and *Palante*," in *Voices from the Underground*, ed. Wachsberger, 304.
17. José E. Velázquez, "Coming Full Circle," in *The Puerto Rican Movement*, ed. Torres and Velázquez, 52.
18. Alliance Statement, *Triple Jeopardy*, November 1971.
19. Katsiaficas, *Imagination*, 120.
20. Carl Oglesby, "Notes on a Decade Ready for the Dustbin," *Liberation* 14.5/6 (1969): 6.
21. Stanley Aronowitz, "Remaking the American Left, Part One: Currents in American Radicalism," *Socialist Review* 67 (1983): 18.

22. On China's stance on Angola, the USSR, and its foreign policy generally, see Azinna Nwafor, "Liberation of Angola," *Monthly Review* 27.9 (1976): 1–12; Fred Halliday, *The Making of the Second Cold War*, (London: Verso, 1983), 161–62; and William Hinton, "The Soviet Union Is the Main Danger," in *Some Background Articles for a Discussion of the International Situation*, ed. Ad Hoc Committee for a Conference on the International Situation (New York: Ad Hoc Committee, 1976), 15.
23. Mike Davis, "The Political Economy of Late-Imperial America," *New Left Review* 143 (1984): 34.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Halliday, *Second Cold War*, 228–31.
27. Teng Hsiao-p'ing, interview by Hedley Donovan, *Time*, February 5, 1979, 32–35.
28. Elizabeth Martínez, "The WTO: Where Was the Color in Seattle?" *ColorLines* 3.1 (2000): 11–12.

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