



the **PROG**

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REDMAPing North Carolina: A Decade of Decline from Republican Gerrymandering

by: Sam Cryan

“Mr. Speaker. How dare you usurp this process!” – NC House Democratic Rep. Deb Butler

On 9/11, with most Democratic members absent from the North Carolina House of Representatives after being told that there would be no votes that morning, a surprise budget veto override vote occurred. Since a two-thirds majority of the members present voted in favor, the veto override moved to the Senate, thus breaking a long stalemate within the legislature. Every single day for the previous two months, the Republicans had placed the veto vote on the agenda, waiting for enough Democrats to be absent so that they could push their nightmare of a budget through. This budget is a Republican’s wet dream: implementing new corporate tax cuts, refusing to expand Medicare, ignoring teacher pay, and limiting funds to investigate chemicals polluting our waters. Thanks to a brazen abuse of power, it is now one vote away from becoming the 2020 budget for North Carolina.

As the Democrats’ microphones were being shut off right before the vote, one of them shouted, “Mr. Speaker. How dare you usurp this process!” Yet this was just the latest in a long series of underhanded tactics that Republicans have employed to usurp democracy in North Carolina. Whenever I see a news article from North Carolina, where I was born and spent my whole life before college, I brace myself to read about whatever the NCGOP’s latest assault on democracy is. I’ve watched my home go from the model for a New South to the laughingstock of the other states.

Since gaining a majority in 2010, the NCGOP has systematically removed checks and balances within NC’s political framework, while promoting an extreme, conservative future for the state. For example, Republicans created House Bill 2, a law (which is still partially in effect) requiring people to use the bathroom corresponding with the gender on their birth certificate, a law which is estimated to have cost the state 3.76 billion dollars, not to mention the fact that it is based on an openly transphobic premise. When a Democrat won the governorship in 2016, the lame duck Republican administration stripped him of most of his powers. And then in 2018, the NCGOP attempted to force several state constitutional amendments through the legislature, two of which would have further diminished the governor’s powers. But this only barely covers the damages which Republicans have done to North Carolina’s economy and political structure. It’s gotten so bad that even my Republican friends on Facebook balk at the latest actions the

legislature has taken.

Less than half of the voters in North Carolina want this extreme conservative future. After the 2018 election, in which Democrats got over 50 percent of the vote, the party only received 42 percent of the seats in the Senate and 45 percent in the House. With more votes than the Republicans, Democrats ended up only barely breaking a Republican supermajority. How did North Carolina get to be so broken?

The answer to this question requires a trip back to 2010—the year of the Tea Party, and a new mission among Republicans called the Redistricting Majority Project (REDMAP). REDMAP poured millions and millions of dollars into state congressional races around the United States, specifically targeting the legislative bodies that get to draw the new congressional boundaries. Republicans knew that whoever controlled the map-drawing process would be able to gerrymander the maps to make sure that the party stayed in control. The goal of REDMAP was to gerrymander in favor of Republicans, and it was chillingly effective.

Buoyed by this group’s money, Republicans were able to take majority control of North Carolina for the first time in over a hundred years, and with that control came the power to draw the new maps for the next election. Thus, the NCGOP guaranteed themselves a supermajority in the state House and state Senate, as well as the US House of Representatives—in 2010, North Carolina sent seven Democrats and six Republicans to the House; in 2012, that balance changed to three Democrats and ten Republicans. Reflecting on his work, Rep. David Lewis, one of the map drawers, said “I propose that we draw the maps to give a partisan advantage to ten Republicans and three Democrats, because I do not believe it is possible to draw a map with eleven Republicans and two Democrats.” North Carolina had the most unfair districts of any state or country analyzed by the Electoral Integrity Project, so much so that the project no longer considers North Carolina a democracy.

Wayne Goodwin, chair of the North Carolina Democratic Party, commented, “From targeting people based on their race to dividing them based on their political beliefs, Republicans for a decade have rigged our state and silenced voters to cling desperately onto power.” Now, however, change is possible. Just last month, a state court issued a ruling prohibiting the use of political

leanings in drawing the district map in North Carolina, stating, “The 2017 Enacted Maps, as drawn, do not permit voters to freely choose their representatives, but rather representatives are choosing voters based upon sophisticated partisan sorting.” On top of that, every computer used in the redistricting process and every meeting in which legislators discuss redistricting must be livestreamed to the public, allowing an incredible amount of transparency between the politicians and their constituents. Bob Phillips, the plaintiff, calls it a “big win for our democracy.”

There is a chance now to fix the decade of decline that Republicans subjected North Carolina to, but the Republicans haven’t given up yet. Though Phil Berger, the Republican Senate Leader, has claimed, “We [the NCGOP] intend to respect the court’s decision and finally put this divisive battle behind us,” adding that “it’s time to move on,” one Republican politician was recently caught trying to make his home district an easy win for himself (he has since announced he will be retiring once his term ends).

Republicans also continue to try to pass off maps that still have significant Republican-favoring bias as new and bipartisan. The Republicans recently designed several gerrymandered maps, and then attempted to make their selection seem random by bringing in the state lottery machine to decide which of the skewed maps would be used. But randomly choosing between gerrymandered maps doesn’t mean that the maps aren’t gerrymandered. It is now up to the court to decide if the new maps are gerrymandered. I hope the courts recognize the Republicans’ latest trick and ensure that North Carolina’s maps “reflect the will of the people,” as the recent ruling says they must.

Republicans may still be trying to rig the game, clinging desperately to the power that they illegitimately stole almost a decade ago, but now people have noticed. Contacting your representatives and advocating for map-drawing reforms is one of the many ways to act and take back democracy. Additionally, the Princeton Gerrymandering Project has found possible routes to map drawing reforms in every state, along with laying out what individuals can do to get involved. Regardless of what happens with North Carolina’s maps, brand new maps are going to be drawn in 2020 for every state in the country. Only by holding the map drawers accountable can citizens expect fair maps.

The Eco-Communist Insurrection

by: Marc Schorin



photo credit: Jeanne Menjoulet

Insurrectionists are nobody in particular. They are individuals mobilized in their discontent, forced into action by the inaction of others. In that networked individuality, they are nobodies. They are not a body at all, and that radical decentralization (from here on designated as “spontaneity”) renders them the most powerful political body on earth. However, they do not realize that they exist. In order to combat the particularly destructive force of capitalist-induced climate change, “insurrectionists” should be defined as a specific kind of early-stage revolutionary, and their program sketched out. After insurrectionists come guerrilla fighters, and after guerrilla fighters, freedom fighters. Then an economic and political system of communism may be built by revolutionaries.

The unique challenges posed by climate change must be met within a specifically ecologically-minded framework, catalyzed by a specifically motivated subsection of the revolution. This framework is eco-communism, and the subsection is first and foremost the insurrectionist. This article will focus on insurrectionists in particular. To truly understand the purpose of insurrectionists, some basic facts of climate change must first be understood. In broad strokes, they are, as culled from NASA’s website:

- >Levels of carbon dioxide (among other greenhouse gases, which have a propensity for absorbing heat) in the atmosphere have risen from three hundred to four hundred parts per million since 1950. This concentration is higher than it has been for at least half a million years.
- >Crucially, the rise in levels of carbon dioxide is caused directly by the exorbitant

greenhouse gas emissions of a handful of corporations.

>According to a 2017 CDP report, one hundred corporations are responsible for about 71 percent of carbon emissions since 1988—equaling about one trillion tonnes.

>As a result, the Earth as a whole has warmed about 0.9 degrees Celsius since the end of the 19th century, resulting in, among other phenomena, extreme weather patterns and ocean hydroxa. These phenomena are collectively known as “climate change.”

>Climate change has proven disastrous for entire ecosystems and human communities that are unequipped to repair infrastructure or, at a basic level, ensure the safety of their loved ones.

>These communities are largely poor and, given the well-established and widely-accepted connection between poverty and systematic racism, disproportionately of color. That communities of color suffer more from climate change than white ones is a phenomenon called “environmental racism.”

Those are the basic facts as far as the eco-sciences have been able to determine. They were known before the Paris Agreement and they are known after: the only thing revealed by the studies that flurried around the 2016 political milestone is that scientists have long been desperate to get the attention of political leaders who have consistently ignored the suffering of their constituents—and these politicians continue to do so.

So much for climate change. The weaponizing of climate change—that is, the ability of the ruling class to exploit the ensuing political instability and scarcity of resources—must be faced by a total reorganization of society. Ultimately, to state the obvious, such a reorganization is a revolution. However, America is not yet capable of revolution. We are behind every other so-called “First World” country in our understanding of socialism and our ability to implement its policies. What is needed before revolution—the reorganization itself—is the will to revolt. This will is embodied by the insurrectionist.

As said before, insurrectionists are nobody in particular. Literally, there is no single body politic that encompasses insurrectionists, and also in the colloquial sense, they are nobodies. Rather, they resemble “knights of faith,” a term employed by Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard to designate those everyday heroes who are plentiful, anonymous, alone, and outside of the realm of morals. (“Morals” is also a specific term used in a particular sense; it describes systems of faith, civil or religious dogma, that informs one’s bad conscience.) That is, they do not act out of any inherited moral code, but rather out of necessity. The only element that differentiates insurrectionists from knights of faith—and it is a major difference!—is that they do not have faith.

“Faith”—another term from Kierkegaard—is a rational belief in the absurd. Revolutionaries, as distinct from insurrectionists as defined in this argument, would count themselves among the faithful: they believe in a better world, they have faith in it, precisely because the idea is absurd. However, as is typical of believers, revolutionaries are usually paralyzed by their own faith;

they wait for the absurd in passivity. Insurrectionists are different. They are not motivated by ideals or a higher, all-encompassing truth. They rebel, rather, because they must.

What that motivating need is specifically is difficult to ascertain. Insofar as insurrectionists are individuals, they are motivated by myriad concerns that are impossible to systematize; however, insofar as they are members of their societies and are dependent upon others for survival, they are also driven by historical forces beyond any one person's control. And climate change is the epitome of such a force.

However, would the institution of eco-communism destroy whatever security the working class had been able to attain?

The answer is likely both yes and no. "Security" only has meaning insofar as one is surrounded by instability. The current economic-political regime creates instability in its insatiable demand for growth. Eco-communism is not about growth—we no longer have any need for growth. Rather, we seek stability, renewability, a seamless marriage between production, consumption, and accumulation. At one point, the costs of growth exceed the benefits; this is why classical economics seeks equilibrium and stasis.

The macroeconomic system sought out by eco-communism understands the entire world as a single ecosystem (an economic interpretation of the Gaia hypothesis) that breaks down into infinite smaller ones. Everyone interacts with a number of overlapping economies/ecosystems. We should work towards an open-system "eco-nomics" of recyclability: what is produced is consumed and recycled, with enough of all three to avoid depletion. This is the core of what eco-communism means, and begins to explain why insurrectionists are the only ones who can lay the groundwork to accomplishing it. After the groundwork is laid, production and consumption would have to be regulated—but at what scale? In the initial stages of eco-communism, the state will likely play a regulatory role in the economic structure (and no other!), to the extent that it will oversee all transactions to ensure fair play. But the insurrectionist cannot be concerned with this. There is no question of what happens after, because the situation is one of life or death. However, as their insurrection develops, as resources grow scarce again, they will find themselves in need of planning. Cooperation among producers to determine what should be produced, how much, etc., can only exist at first as spontaneous. A handful—maybe—of producers will decide to band together out of charitable generosity, or else they will feel compelled to by their circumstances. However it happens, it cannot immediately be organized by an overseeing group. The bare minimum should be sought after. Machinery has allowed for leisure for the ruling classes, but we have yet to realize a leisured society.

A leisured society is one of stability, a society in which what is produced is distributed in the most efficient manner possible, i.e., with as little surplus as possible.

In a gig economy, surplus is less tangible; surplus belongs to the leisured classes. These are

the people who have been able to afford their own leisure-society bubble within a capitalist system. They range from the middle to the upper classes; they are educated; they consider themselves to be hard-working or else fundamental to society's survival when in fact a large number of them are parasites on the economic and political systems. What they are served in cafes, bars, and concerts is an embodiment of their access to leisure; it is the surplus leisure of the servers that is accepted with every restaurant meal. While of course it is hardly restaurants that are emitting the majority of greenhouse gases, they uphold the kind of hierarchies that reward the destruction of the environment. That point of intersection is what interests the insurrectionist—every kind of worker not only deserves but needs respect and more than a living wage. The insurrectionist's implementation of this concept takes the form of the guerilla.

Guerilla warfare is the insurrectionist's only avenue of revolution: it is the spontaneous, necessary reaction of the oppressed against their oppressor. The oppressor, to state the obvious, is more powerful than the oppressed. One side simply has more money and guns than the other. As a result, the only means the oppressed has to fight the oppressor is with the advantages left to them: the support of the people, knowledge of local terrain, and surprise.

How can such a coordinated effort be planned by people marked by their spontaneity? An answer to consider is that the strategic effort is a necessity taken on by the more cunning of the insurrectionists after an initial few acts of sabotage. Under the guidance of the more cunning, sabotage becomes more effective, and insurrectionist movement becomes more coordinated. In the past, the more cunning have co-opted any and all revolutionary efforts until a new tyrannical regime replaces the old one. Instead of oppose the cunning in the first place, the insurrectionists should allow them to organize the revolution, and then co-opt it back. That is, once insurrectionists have no need to be insurrectionists, they can be compelled not by necessity but by their own desires.

This is the goal of eco-communism: a society in which everyone is not only free to but actually wants to pursue their own desires. In any case, once necessity is not the driving force of a revolution, it is time to move on from the guerilla squads to a more stable entity, such as an army of organized saboteurs. These are freedom fighters in the truest sense—a) they fight for their own freedom and nobody else's and b) they are free to be driven by anything other than necessity. These fighters overpower the political, the cunning, the resentful—they are simply more free. It is these fighters who are then able to set up eco-communism as a praxis. But to achieve this state of being, they must be trained as guerilla fighters (or, rather, they must take on their own training) with this telos in mind.

What must be insisted upon in this particular revolution's education is independence—a development of the individual's psyche in a way most schools today certainly do not provide. Education today typically seeks to mold students in the image of the institution; obviously, this is no way to foster freedom of thought or purpose. In-

dividuality and creativity should be nurtured as ends in and of themselves: though of course they serve the practical purpose of leading students towards the tools that will allow them to build a better world.

The better world is an equilibrium. It is not fiery and bold, but passive and restful. Innovative, creative, nurturing. It draws from a kind of strength that is not seen today, when strength is seen as inherently dominating. A true break from the ruling ideologies of today will demand a redefining of strength and morality.

What this world looks like in reality, in its details, is impossible to say. One can only point oneself and others towards a path of betterment. What this looks like is simple: an abolishing of the existing order. My suggestions would be to abolish every corporation responsible for pollution, to seize whatever assets are liquidable and to redistribute them among a) their workers/communities as retributions, and b) their eco-friendly competition. This kind of sweeping change must then be overseen by a similarly new organization; that is, the organization must be new, but the pieces don't have to be. I mean that the governing body would be a representative amalgamation of directly-elected local community leaders—utilizing people who are already community leaders and eco-friendly competition that is already up and running to redistribute the benefits of capitalism. That kind of redistribution of wealth would, in fact, promote the kind of even playing field and eco-friendly alternatives that liberal-leaning free-market ideologues claim to espouse. The way to get there is through guerilla sabotage, and the way to get to effective guerilla sabotage is a freedom fighter's education.

We must set up a society that breaks from the servility of the ruling regimes. The obsequiousness of politicians, corporations, scientists, and the press to their own greed is killing us all. Only by overthrowing their rule can we save ourselves. We are faced with necessity: we must overthrow the ruling class, or else die out at the hand of an establishment that is paralyzed in the face of the climate change they continue to wreak upon the world. This manifesto did not have the time to address the complete abolishment of this establishment, which will require the abolishment of a number of its instruments of control—the state, police, gender, sex, and sexuality, among others.

A continued study of these mechanisms should be encouraged.

Policed Bathrooms Stalled: How the Conservative Anti-Transgender Coalition is Splintering

by: K Stiefel

When we talk about political stances on LGBTQ+ issues, a lot of perspectives get tossed together. Often, the distinction between any two finer points won't prevent a larger consensus; a man who believes that queer people are living a life of sin, and a woman who believes that queer people corrupt others into becoming queer themselves would both openly assert that queer people should not be allowed to teach children. This is a part of how coalitions form and people come together to lobby for a common cause. On the political "right" of discussions around LGBTQ+ people, there is a longstanding partnership between people who are morally opposed to and reflexively scared of LGBTQ+ people and their actions. In 2018, however, while campaigning for Massachusetts Ballot "Question 3", a veto referendum which asked residents whether or not to uphold a recent state law mandating gender identity discrimination protections, the right-wing coalition encouraging voters to veto the law fell apart and began attacking itself. One campaign firmly seated itself on the previously undefeated "bathroom sexual predator" scare tactic. This argument was then denounced and openly criticized by another right-wing campaign which argued that transgender people did not deserve civil rights at all. While this schism was not the only reason that the protections were upheld, it was the first reactionary campaign that used the fears around bathrooms to be defeated in part by its own allies. This splintering demands a close analysis in order to inform strategies of how to both shut down the right and bolster the left on supporting trans people.

The "sexual predator" scare tactic that has galvanized so many people against transgender public accommodation laws is fairly recent, only premeiring during a 2015 Houston ballot initiative campaign against an equal opportunity ordinance. Fear mongering around trans/gender non-conforming people as sexual deviants and predators is not a modern invention. The particular image, however, of a man walking into the women's restroom to assault school-aged girls is one that the campaign curated and unleashed with an artistically questionable video ad. During the 30 second spot, the phrases "ANY MAN ANYTIME" followed by "CLAIMING TO BE A WOMAN" and "REGISTERED SEX

OFFENDERS" are superimposed on close ups of a presumably cisgender man in an empty women's bathroom. It ends with a female-coded narrator voice asking us to "protect women's privacy" as we see a white-passing girl with a backpack entering a stall as the man steps in behind her. It would be naive to suggest that these are not emotionally compelling images, but why is there a young white girl in this call to action for Houston, one of the three metropolitan areas in the country with the largest Latinx population, where less than half the population is white?

White women's tears have historically been evoked to galvanize action against oppressed social groups, most dramatically with those belonging to marginalized racial identities. Long before the 1915 feature film *Birth of a Nation* glorified the KKK in the White House to roaring applause, the trope of fragile white female purity besieged by black men had been a justification for racism. In *The Fair Sex*, Pauline Schloesser traces the roots of this racialized and gendered mythos back to the American Revolution and argues that in the post-war era, white women were tasked with maintaining the nation's virtue. Once you start thinking about it, examples in modern life, located everywhere from the workplace to news coverage, become apparent. One relevant example in American politics is the

figure of the undocumented immigrant (Latinx) rapist and criminal who threatens the safety of our (white) cities. In a horizontal transfer, we see that the new "man in a dress" predator is merely the old game of the socially conservative pitting white (cisgender) female purity against a new group: transgender people. In the same way that women must be protected from Muslim refugee rapists and murderous black "superpredators," they must also be shielded from the perverting spectra of "transgenderism." The liberal left is not guiltless in upholding these implicit racial messages either; trans people of color, or POC, are usually missing in ad campaigns for accommodation laws. Whether this is purposefully done to increase appeal to white supremacists or accidentally overlooked by racially homogenous institutions of privileged identities, the end result is the same. While black trans femmes (who face the most violence) are the perfect candidates for tragic stories on the Trans Day of Remembrance, they are rarely the first ones chosen to convince voters that trans people deserve respect. The pro-protections Massachusetts campaign unfortunately does not deviate much from this pattern in its messaging.

It is also important to note that pro-protections movement primarily showed cis-passing (also sometimes referred to as "stealth") transgender



photo credit: Florian Palucci

teenagers. Transgender teenagers are one of the highest risk groups for suicide because a lack of support can be devastating, but the ones showcased were evidently from supportive families and there was no mention of at-risk youth. The choice to use children as potential victims—by both sides of the campaign—is not an accident. Due to children’s cultural association with innocence, it heightens the fear of a potential attack in both cases. At the same time, however, the choice by pro-protection campaigners to only show cis-passing transgender teenagers completely ignores the implicit messaging in the right’s fear-mongering videos that older, non-passing trans women are predatory “men in dresses”. They instead concede that adult trans people are a taboo subject. The campaign chose not to show non-stealth, gender non-conforming, or adult transgender individuals that face elevated levels of discrimination because of their visible status as transgender—despite comprising large sections of the community. By only showing cis-passing trans individuals, these ads reinforce the notion that only those who conform to the beauty standards of our cis-sexist society are worthy of support. Thus, the emphasis on children in the pro-protection legislation campaign messaging is doubly problematic.

The actions of both those defending and opposing the Massachusetts law were typical when compared with similar ballot initiatives. Surprisingly, not even the left lobbying to keep the hard-won protections was extreme. The 2015 Houston campaign, which was defending a broad equal rights ordinance, based its messaging on bolstering city pride around civil rights (“Discrimination Has No Place in Houston”) and calling bathroom concerns stemming from the law illogical. The only real update in Massachusetts to the general approach of the Houston campaign was intentionality; after all, people involved in the Houston campaign had considered the appeal of a civil rights ordinance to be self-evident. The revamped Massachusetts strategy involved larger advertising and grassroots canvassing campaigns centered around grandstanding transgender citizens, normalizing

their existence, and explicitly emphasizing the necessity of civil rights. The right-wing Massachusetts coalition (who called themselves “Keep MA Safe”) campaigning to veto the new law asserted that, regardless of civil rights, the risks were too high to give excuses for “men in dresses” predators to access women’s restrooms. Even their 2018 video ad mirrors the 2015 Houston one, though the acting from their ad’s (white) young woman is arguably worse. “ANY MAN” and “ANY TIME” make a reprise, but are joined by “EVEN CONVICTED SEX OFFENDERS” this time around. The only way one can tell they are from different campaigns is that “Keep MA Safe” shot theirs in color. Whether it was fear of the proactive campaigning on the left or the supposed leftist leanings of Massachusetts in general, a bigger right-wing lobbying organization “MassResistance” took note of the situation. They were worried enough to begin their own sub-group devoted to a pro-veto ballot initiative campaign one month before the vote.

It is with MassResistance’s relevant ideology that the finer points of anti-trans movements became important. They subscribe to the idea perpetuated by pseudo-academics, like Ryan T. Anderson in his book “When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment”, that transgender individuals do not exist. Instead, it is more accurate in their minds to describe someone who is trans as someone who is cisgender but suffering from extreme mental illness such that they have deluded themselves into thinking a change in sex, which is not distinct from gender in this ideology, is possible. Thus, the most humane approach to transgender issues is to convince these poor unfortunate souls that they are the gender they were assigned at birth. This ideology not only lends itself to supporting conversion therapy, but actively supports it as the only compassionate response to discovering a loved one is questioning their gender identity. Letting people who believe they are transgender use the restrooms they want to only feeds into a dangerous delusion from this perspective. The original pro-veto campaign was failing to address this broader ideology by claiming that

transgender people only pose a risk in public restrooms. MassResistance felt the need to add their own campaigning, explicitly stating that transgender people do not need and do not deserve civil rights protections, to correct the message and improve their chances of winning.

When the law was upheld with a sixty-eight percent majority, MassResistance turned the blame entirely onto Keep MA Safe for their blatant misinformation on the nature of transgender people. In an “analysis” post hosted on their website, the organization discusses how this “nightmare” was caused by “conservative groups trying to use a clever side argument to avoid getting into the real fight.” They paint their intervention as necessary, explaining (as expected):

“They [MassResistance’s “No to 3” ballot committee] felt strongly that three important points were not being presented to the public: (1) the LGBT movement’s “civil rights” argument has no basis whatsoever; (2) that “transgenderism” is actually a mental disorder and a destructive ideology, and (3) this law forces people to accept an absurd lie – men can never become women. Thus, the “yes on 3” people were pushing bizarre lies and an Orwellian mandate on society.”

MassResistance detail their struggles to save the doomed campaign further as hindered by “conservative” reporters “skittish” to publicize their “more inflammatory alternative arguments.” This, of course, left voters with a “terribly skewed presentation of the issue” and misled them into upholding the destructive law. The post ends by foretelling that, unless the right-wing coalition changes their tactics, they will suffer defeats as they did with the “gay marriage battles.” One man’s doomsday is another’s respite from harassment and discrimination.

Temporarily putting aside the absurdity of MassResistance’s ideology, we must ask ourselves: What are the most effective ways to stop these attacks on trans existence? While MassResistance asserts that they share the same ideology as Keep MA Safe (hence the “side argument” comment), this reads too much into the original campaign’s stance. MassResistance is morally opposed to the existence of transgender people; Keep MA Safe is merely afraid. One’s fear of transgender people can be assuaged as trans people are normalized, but one’s moral conviction that we should not exist at all is irreconcilable with our very existence. The only way to convince Ryan T. Anderson, MassResistance, and their followers that they are wrong is to completely restructure their beliefs—both religious and pseudo-scientific. This is the work of several lifetimes and requires much more than a single ad campaign. By insisting that transgender people are normal human beings whose gender identities happen not to match the one assigned at their birth, and by normalizing the existence of trans people in everyday spaces, we can chip away at the political right’s coalition. We can begin to distinguish between those who are merely afraid of transgender realities and those who seek to actively harm transgender people, and pursue strategies accordingly. For the present, at least, capitalizing on this ideological schism to isolate and weaken these “inflammatory” voices is the best next step.



photo credit: Jeffrey Beall

Politicizing Depression

by: Beatrice Ferguson

Following her second appearance at the Democratic debates this summer, author and Presidential hopeful Marianne Williamson faced scrutiny for past comments regarding depression and the use of antidepressant medications. In a July interview on CNN, Anderson Cooper criticized Williamson for indicating that the distinction between clinical depression and sadness is defined arbitrarily and for implying that antidepressant medications produce a numbing effect. He pointed towards past tweets, including one from November of 2018, in which Williamson seemed to question the medical basis for depression diagnoses: “There is a blood test for diabetes. There is no blood test for depression. Anti-depressants [sic] are overprescribed...”

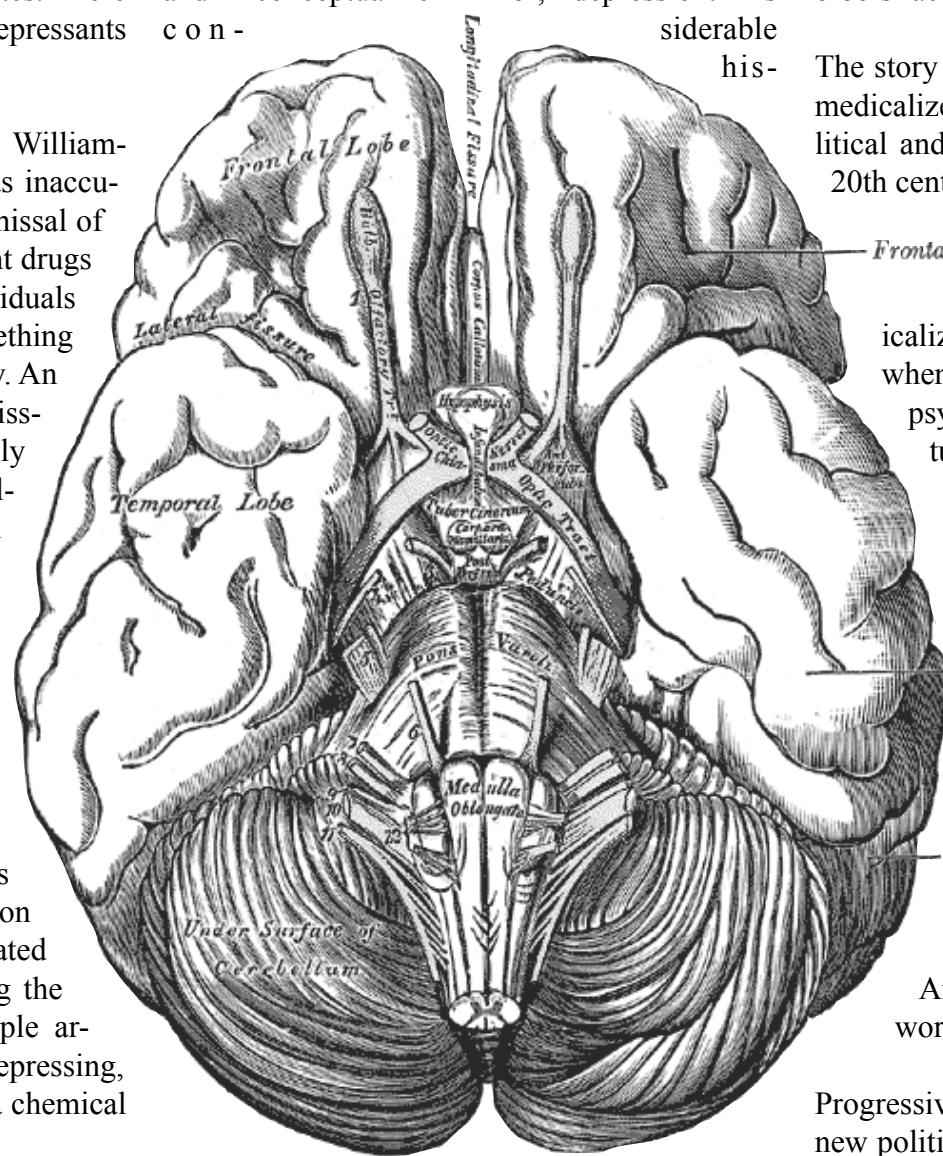
This summer, I was heartened to see Williamson’s arguments widely condemned as inaccurate and harmful. I applauded the dismissal of her fallacious claim that antidepressant drugs are linked to violence or “numb” individuals using them. However, there was something about the backlash which left me wary. An underlying assumption of many dismissals seemed to be that depression is solely and inherently a medical problem. Williamson’s comments about depression were in some response articles placed alongside a list of her “anti-medicine” and “anti-science” comments. A friend I spoke with about Williamson’s comments insisted that what she said was dangerous because it equated depression, which originates from issues within the brain, with sadness, which primarily arises from external forces. This assumption was perhaps most clearly demonstrated by Anderson Cooper who said during the interview: “Clinically depressed people aren’t depressed because the world is depressing, they’re depressed because they have a chemical imbalance.”

In the United States, depression is often understood as a product of brain pathology. It is common to hear depression explained as a “chemical imbalance” in the brain or likened to other medical diseases. For example, the nation’s largest mental health organization, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, has recommended that individuals fight the stigma associated with depression by emphasizing the similarities between physical disease and mental illness.

And even though most will acknowledge that depression is far more complex, this framing does not only affect the way we talk about depression. At the federal level, efforts to fight rising rates of depression tend to focus on the brain. Shortly before the publication of the most recent edition of the DSM, a guide used for the diagnosis of psychiatric disorders, the director of

the federally-funded National Institute on Mental Health (NIMH) criticized the guide for not basing diagnoses on laboratory measures. In response, the NIMH developed the Research Domain Criteria Project (RDoc), a new framework for diagnostic models and research built on the assumption that mental illnesses like depression are fundamentally “biological disorders involving brain circuits that implicate specific domains of cognition, emotion, or behavior.”

Yet with depression rates rapidly rising in the United States, there is reason to turn a more critical eye towards the way we speak about, and conceptualize of, depression. As considerable his-



torical and sociological scholarship indicates, the medicalization of depression has a long political history which cannot be disentangled from the emergence of industrial capitalism and the growth of the pharmaceutical industry. Moreover, an individual, medicalized conception of depression obfuscates how material conditions contribute to widespread suffering and rising rates of depression. We must shift from viewing depression exclusively as a problem of the individual brain, and instead embrace depression as a political issue—one that necessitates immense material change to be addressed.

In 2001, a series of commercials for the antidepressant drug Zoloft first appeared on television across the United States. Each ad featured

a cute, squishy blob with a cartoonish frown and a looming cloud above it. As the blob slouched onto the screen, a voiceover rattled off the symptoms of “depression, a serious medical condition affecting over 20 million Americans.”

Then, a cartoon image of two neurotransmitters appeared with a sluggish stream of dots bouncing back and forth between them. “While the causes are unknown, depression may be related to an imbalance of natural chemicals between nerve cells in the brain,” the voiceover continued. The Zoloft logo flashed above the neurotransmitters and the dots began to flow more freely. The little blob’s face became a beaming smile.

The story of the development of this particular, medicalized view of depression is one of political and economic transformation during the 20th century. The medicalization of depression aligned with the interests of capital, which both covertly and overtly supported the medicalization process. This becomes apparent when looking at two instances in America’s psychopharmaceutical history: the institutionalization of psychiatry and the advent of modern antidepressants.

In the 2018 *Jacobin* magazine article “Medicalizing Society,” Zola Carr points to events of the early 20th century as laying the groundwork for the medicalization of depression. The article explains that in the decades following the Civil War, the rise of industrial capitalism and increasingly brutal conditions for American workers triggered a wave of working class militancy.

Progressive Era liberal reformers developed a new political vision for rectifying the unrest associated with industrial capitalism. Carr writes that reformers “offered a prescription of harmonious social integration” in which society existed as one integrated organism. This necessitated the “emotional adjustment” and “mental health” of the individual. The desires of capitalists to quell brewing working class radicalism, and the Progressive vision of social integration, meshed well with the incipient field of psychiatry. Early psychiatrists promised to help individuals adjust to their environments.

Leading industrialists provided a significant influx of cash for aspiring psychiatric foundations and psychiatrists, who in turn diagnosed labor discontents as not the product of material conditions, but of individual pathology. According to Carr, “the problems the new psychiatry aimed to solve were a medicalized gloss on the political problems of society itself.”

Just over forty years later, researchers at the pharmaceutical company Eli Lilly began exploring a potential link between increased levels of the neurotransmitter serotonin and alleviated depressive symptoms. After over a decade of research and testing, Eli Lilly developed the drug fluoxetine hydrochloride which promised to treat depression by regulating the brain's reuptake of serotonin. The drug was approved by the FDA and in January of 1988, Prozac was available for prescription.

The drug experienced a meteoric rise and quickly became the most popular antidepressant ever released. By 1995, 15 million people worldwide were prescribed Prozac, and Eli Lilly netted over two billion dollars in profits from its sales. It introduced an entirely new class of psychopharmaceuticals, known as selective-serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), appearing for consumers as Paxil, Celexa, and Zoloft, among others.

The success of SSRIs, however, was not always certain. In their history of the drug's development, Eli Lilly researchers explained that they believed the market for antidepressant drugs was already at its saturation point and that Prozac would have only limited success. Indeed, by the late 1980s, there was considerable skepticism towards psychiatry. This was in part as a result of an anti-psychiatry backlash in the 1970s and 1980s, in which leftists argued that psychiatric medicine was a tool wielded to enforce psychological conformity and stifle individuality. Furthermore, there was particular concern about the over-prescription of psychopharmaceutical drugs to women. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, antidepressant drug prescriptions primarily consisted of tranquilizers like Valium and Librium and, throughout the 1980s, spates of publicized addiction stories appeared in the media. "Innocent Addicts: Women Hooked on Prescription Drugs," headlined one Women's Day article in 1984. Exemplified by First Lady Betty Ford's admission to a rehabilitation center for alcoholism and tranquilizer addiction, it became clear that many middle and upper-middle class white women were addicted to these drugs. The prescription rate for tranquilizers began to decline. Pharmaceutical companies intending to market SSRIs needed to ease public apprehension towards psychopharmaceutical drugs.

In response, they adopted a marketing strategy directed at both physicians and consumers which emphasized a neurological basis for depression. As David Herzberg explains in *Happy Pills in America: From Miltown to Prozac*: "Responding to fears of addiction and oppression, both biological psychiatrists and drug marketers produced a vision of technologically crafted drugs emerging from newly sophisticated brain sciences." Thus, if depression was caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain, as advertisements would indicate, SSRIs could work with precision and address the disease at its root cause, rather than merely lulling sufferers into a haze.

Many SSRI advertisements throughout the 1990s and 2000s emphasized the biological nature of depression, putting forward versions of the "chemical imbalance" narrative that we recognize today. Zoloft magazine ads depicted cartoonish neurotransmitters, demonstrating how depression constituted a sluggish flow of serotonin. "Celexa helps restore the brain's chemical

balance by increasing the supply of a chemical messenger in the brain called serotonin," wrote Forest Pharmaceuticals in a published FAQ about the SSRI.

Rather than offering a comprehensive history of the medicalization of depression, examining the institutionalization of psychiatry during the Gilded Age and the history of Zoloft demonstrates that understanding depression as a problem of the individual brain was not a product of scientific development alone. Instead, economic interests stood to directly benefit from a medicalized view of depression taking hold and worked to introduce such a view into the American mainstream.

Yet even if tracing the origins of a medicalized conception of depression requires looking at the role of economic interests, is there still reason to reject such an understanding? I long believed that describing depression in medical terms was important for fighting it, on the basis that doing so would reduce stigma. Yet by ignoring social and material causation, a medicalized conception of depression fails to grapple with the conditions that may generate it on such a significant scale.

Depression rates are rapidly rising in the United States. The increase is particularly acute among young people—a recent study found that over the last decade the rate of depression among teenagers increased by an astonishing 60 percent. If one believes, as Anderson Cooper stated in his interview, that "people aren't depressed because the world is depressing," one fails to grapple with the vast array of material factors contributing to these trends.

It is not difficult to develop a (far from exhaustive) list of examples of non-medical causes of depression generated by our current political and economic system. The link between poverty and a higher prevalence of depression is well-established, for example, yet routinely ignored when depression is understood in purely medical terms. Chronic stress and early traumatic life events (both in themselves linked with economic precarity and material deprivation) are associated with depression. Furthermore, it is not hard to imagine how the increasing drive towards atomization and competition which characterizes the neoliberal ethos may be linked to psychological pain. Many young people report intense loneliness—a 2018 survey found that over 20 percent of young adults always or often felt lonely.

And even ignoring for a moment the potential causes of depression, mental health care for individuals who are suffering from depression is, in itself, abysmal. The National Alliance on Mental Illness found that people in the midst of a mental health crisis are more likely to make contact with the police than to receive care. Austerity measures have left social services, including those providing mental health care, severely underfunded.

Less than a year ago, when I encountered the notion that depression should not be understood in solely medical terms, I found such a claim

frustrating. I thought emphasizing the biological nature of depression reduced stigma and I refused to entertain the notion that most cases of depression were not caused by forces within the individual brain. In my mind, critics of a medicalized view of depression were those harboring stigma towards individuals with depression, parents refusing to vaccinate their children, climate change deniers, and essential oil peddlers.

Beyond that, the notion of a "chemical imbalance" in the brain seemed a comforting notion to me while I weathered my own bouts of depression. I was cripplingly sad, I reasoned, because of a crude biological destiny—my brain was wired for it. I quietly feared that looking for a culprit that was not serotonin would inevitably lead me to my own weakness. There was a strange comfort in the inevitability of my own pain.

I found an alternative in the writings of Mark Fisher, a writer and political leftist who struggled with depression throughout his entire life. In his *Capitalist Realism*, Fisher wrote:

"Instead of treating it as incumbent on individuals to resolve their own psychological distress, instead, that is, of accepting the vast privatization of stress that has taken place over the last thirty years, we need to ask: how has it become acceptable that so many people, and especially so many young people, are ill?"

Fisher calls not for the assumption that neurochemistry plays no role in depression, but instead emphasizes that its long-neglected social and material causation must be brought to the fore. He insists that we must view depression as a political issue, one demanding the extirpation of the conditions which generate widespread pain.

Of course, it would be absurd to argue that there is no biological causation for depression. According to Harvard Health, "There are many possible causes of depression, including faulty mood regulation by the brain, genetic vulnerability, stressful life events, medications, and medical problems. It's believed that several of these forces interact to bring on depression." Individuals with depression should not be dissuaded from seeking out all forms of help available to them, and antidepressant medications have proven to be greatly successful in helping those suffering with depression.

But we should not by default think of depression in medical terms that obfuscate its material causes. High rates of depression are not a biological inevitability—staggering numbers of young people do not need to be depressed. Rather than turning our attention to the individual brain and investing millions in technology to understand the biological basis for depression, we must turn our gaze outward.

The existence of widespread depression cannot be meaningfully challenged outside of the realm of politics—combating depression requires changing the material conditions which leave people chronically stressed, lonely, and alienated.

We must politicize depression.

Jewish Leftism on Campus: An Interview with Rafi Lehmann

by: Tamica Perera



AJP Panel on the meaning of the "Never Again" movement.

Rafi Lehmann is a senior in Princeton's history department and a member of the organizing team of the Alliance of Jewish Progressives (AJP), a student-led leftist Jewish organization.

TP: What is the mission of AJP?

RL: We aim to provide community for progressive Jews on campus—especially those students who have been excluded from our campus' Jewish institutions. We have three current projects: educating our campus community about anti-Semitism; working with our local allies to protect and support immigrants and refugees; and raising awareness about the moral disaster of the Israeli Occupation and our Jewish community's complicity in it.

TP: What are the movements you are in support of, as a group?

RL: We're officially affiliated with IfNotNow, a Jewish anti-Occupation movement, and Bend the Arc, a national progressive Jewish coalition, but we've partnered in the past with J Street, Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ), Open Hillel, and other progressive Jewish groups. This year, we're hoping to collaborate with Never Again Action, a Jewish movement on the frontlines of the struggle against ICE.

TP: What are ways for students on campus to join?

RL: We meet every Thursday, 8:30 to 9:30 PM, on the second floor of the Center for Jewish Life (though we're not officially affiliated with

the CJL). We have an open door policy—all are always welcome. Come for just one meeting or come every week—we'll be happy to see you no matter what. If you can't make the Thursday meetings, we normally host at least one major event a month. To keep up with our work, consider liking our Facebook page or joining our listserv. And of course, you can always reach out to me or any of our members if you want to learn more about getting connected.

TP: How is your club looking to grow this year?

RL: We're hoping to continue building our community—in terms of both numbers and organizing projects. We've made excellent progress over the past year, but at Princeton, the recruitment process never ends. We're also hoping to build more robust, welcoming spaces for Jews of color in our community, and we hope to connect with more graduate students this year. As always, we're looking forward to strengthening our relationships with our on-campus allies, like YDS, PCP, and SPEAR.

TP: What role do you think leftism, activism, etc. have in AJP (either the club itself or its mission and community)?

RL: I can only speak personally, but my Jewish identity is inseparable from my political identity. I grew up in a very conservative Orthodox Jewish community, and it was actually Jewish texts that guided me to my current political values. Our Jewish histories and traditions are rich with all sorts of radical ideas. Here at Princeton, for example, I've been studying East European

Jewry, with a focus on Yiddish diasporism and historical Jewish socialism. It makes me so sad that so few of our contemporary Jewish institutions have continued our ancestors' bold leftist political work, but that's what AJP is for!

TP: Do you have any words to prospective students?

RL: Join us! We would love to have you. Our members come from such a wide range of backgrounds, I can guarantee there will be a place for you. Some of our members had never participated in Jewish community before joining AJP. Some of our members had never participated in leftist political work. Some of our members have been doing both their whole lives. No matter where you come from, we will be thrilled to welcome you. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me or any of our members—we are always happy to chat over coffee or a meal.

TP: In five years, what do you want your club to look like?

RL: It's hard to say, given how quickly campus politics evolve. My primary hope is that we continue to provide a space for Jewish students on campus—especially for those who might feel excluded by the politics of our supposedly representative Jewish institutions. I also hope we continue to expand our work both on campus and beyond. For better or for worse, what happens on this campus has an audience far beyond the FitzRandolph gates. I hope we continue to lean into this opportunity to make our voices heard in the national conversation.

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