

Editors' Introduction

This special issue of *Radical History Review* is devoted to “Radicalisms in Transition.” It was planned much before the events of September 11, 2001, when coordinated attacks on U.S. targets took place, destroying structures of great symbolic and strategic significance. Yet those events will inevitably change the ring of this latest issue’s title. Perhaps not surprisingly, pervasive feelings of uncertainty and insecurity following the suicide flights have ushered in a new wave of nationalistic fervor in the United States. Alongside calls for unity and solidarity, the U.S. government is using the media to prepare Americans to accept a “new era” in which civil liberties and rights that we had taken for granted will come under scrutiny, be curtailed or eliminated outright—all in the name of democracy and freedom. What historically has been considered a land of immigrants has become a “homeland” in need of defense. In the midst of such a climate, we might easily forget this attack’s unimaginably indiscriminate nature and underestimate its global impact. The World Trade Center housed a truly multinational population of workers and institutions; as we write this introduction, citizens of sixty-four countries are believed to have lost their lives in the attacks. Furthermore, no national allegiances bound the terrorists, and they belonged to organizations structured much like transnational corporations. Financial markets around the world are suffering historic losses; no one knows for certain when the process of economic recuperation will begin. And perhaps most worrisome, the political fallout from U.S. attempts to create, by any means necessary, the international coalition that will spearhead “America’s New War” remains unclear.

And yet, while the devastation and upheavals created by these acts of violence become evident everywhere, we would like to suggest the importance of remembering, precisely in times like these, that not all forms of radicalism serve the forces of oppression. Indeed, the radicalisms of concern to us in this volume are

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broadly defined by their resistance to oppression and economic exploitation as well as by their commitment to social justice and human rights. The transitions indicated in the title reference various sociohistorical processes that have impacted the practice of politics during the last twenty-five years or so: changes in political structures, in geopolitical alignments, in the organization of the economy, in ideological commitments, and more generally, in the cultures of politics. Recognizing that no single issue of a journal can offer a panoramic coverage of this topic, we have not attempted to assemble a collection of essays that provide a broad, systematic, topical, and geographical sampling of radical movements around the globe. Instead, we simply hope that this issue of *Radical History Review* will generate further debate on the status of radical movements and the importance of activism today, encouraging future contributions to our journal on current worldwide trends in radicalism.

As editors, we believe it is important to look back at recent history to provide a context in which to understand the social, economic, and political changes that engendered groups capable of the kind of violence witnessed on September 11, but that also led to many of the movements discussed in this volume. The general outlines of the story will be familiar to many readers. During the 1980s, in the aftermath of the Iranian hostage crisis—an attack on U.S. citizens that also appeared unthinkable at the time—the conservative governments of Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom ushered in a backlash against progressive agendas and particularly the social programs that enacted them. Internationally, these conservative governments engaged in foreign policies that supported a wide range of movements and activities broadly defined as “anticommunist,” of which funding the Mujahideen in Afghanistan was only one example. As a result, neoliberal views and policies became common sense within international debates. At the same time, in countries like Iran and Chile, as in many other places around the globe, governments with very different ideological commitments and economic agendas reacted strongly against progressive radical movements, successfully suppressing any semblance of effective opposition through mass arrests, torture, and executions. Many, with either nostalgia or delight, composed requiems for the left. Premature commentaries on the movement’s so-called defeat multiplied in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square butchery of prodemocracy demonstrators by the Chinese authorities in 1989 and Beijing’s espousal of “capitalism the Chinese way.” The collapse and subsequent disintegration of the Soviet Union and communist regimes in Eastern and Central Europe, accompanied by the rapid rise of national and ethnonational chauvinism throughout the region, only seemed to provide further evidence for the irreversible victory of neoliberal democracy’s proponents.

While groups on the right of the political spectrum, particularly in the United States, could not contain their joy and self-congratulatory exhortations about “the end of ideology” and the vindication of capitalism, the reaction of those on the left proved much more varied. Some pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese communists

bemoaned the collapse of the Soviet Union or the developments in China respectively as some cataclysmic loss of their revolutionary models. Others, however, were not as forlorn. Many of them had long abandoned the Soviet or Chinese archetypes as worthy of emulation, not to mention those groups, such as the anarchists, who had never sympathized with the notion of a communist state. Despite these varied interpretations from the left, most progressives in the early 1990s certainly acknowledged that, to different degrees depending on local conditions in various parts of the world, the major developments in Europe and China had inaugurated a new political, social, and economic global climate that limited the maneuvering space of movements of resistance and progressive change on all levels, from grassroots to transnational. Many such movements faced new hurdles as they met the onslaught of reinvigorated forces of the political right and global capitalism. The United States intensified its political and military hegemonic intervention around the globe, and neoliberal “free-trade” corporate imperialism quickly set out to exploit the new opportunities availed to it by the post–Cold War international political realignments and the growing economic misery in much of Central and Eastern Europe. Now global corporations could explore the “advantages” of cheap labor markets and lack of adequate social and legal measures protecting the rights of workers in places such as Poland and Albania, much as they had done previously in Mexico, Korea, and elsewhere. Such exploitation went hand in hand with much overbearing posturing and talk of ever expanding new product markets.

However, things did not always go smoothly for the self-proclaimed victors. Former allies turned against them—not only in Afghanistan; let us not forget Iraq—and the left was not dead and buried after all. Not all progressive individuals and movements plunged into bouts of disillusionment and despair over the developments in China, the Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe. Global expansion and capitalist consolidation by the United States and its NATO allies met with continued condemnation and resistance. Some of this resistance emerged out of longtime struggles for justice (in different settings) just bearing fruit as the Cold War rivalries began to fade from memory. In South Africa, for example, apartheid was finally brought to an end in 1994. In Nicaragua, the Sandinistas remained a popular political and social force even after voters forced them out of office in the polls in 1990, largely in reaction to U.S. economic and military pressure. A beleaguered government in El Salvador finally permitted the leftist guerrilla organization Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) as a legalized political force in the country in 1992; the FMLN went on to become a powerful political party in the national elections. In other words, the setbacks and victories of movements committed to different forms of social justice by different means depended on a complex interplay of national and international conditions and developments.

But resistance came also unexpectedly, in new forms and from new sectors. By the late 1990s, there was suddenly much talk of the resurgence of the left. The

meteoric, widespread explosion of progressive opposition to the post–Cold War forces of political, military, economic, and social oppression took many leftist groups and individuals, even the most optimistic among them, by surprise. The 1990s also witnessed the appearance on the scene of a younger generation of progressive activists, with a new array of local/global and national/transnational commitments and solidarity networks. In some ways, this younger generation and its more determined espousal of certain issues, as in the case of gender identity politics, gender rights, or the environment, has had a marked salutary effect on the surviving former movements of the left and their new splinter groups. Many of these had previously not paid adequate attention to such issues or may have even dismissed them outright as bourgeois concerns. In addition, the younger generation has shown a great deal of resolve in not only striking back at the right, but also in condemning human rights violations, economic mismanagement, and political miscarriages by governments in China, Cuba, and other remaining communist countries. In this respect, present-day progressives appear to reject the old, firmly partisan divisions that generally resulted in the right's criticism of communist regimes and the left's counterreaction committed to Soviet or Chinese platforms.

The Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, Mexico, on January 1, 1994—the very day the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect—the 1998 demonstrations in Indonesia against the imposed austerity programs of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the 1999 Seattle protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the subsequent flurry of local and international opposition to neoliberal corporate globalization and antilabor legislation—such as the large-scale demonstrations in opposition to the Western Hemisphere free-trade summit in Quebec City in April 2001, the June 2001 rallies in Sweden protesting the European Union summit and president George W. Bush's European visit, and, most recently, the anti-G8 summit protests in Genoa, Italy, in July 2001—have firmly reestablished progressive groups as a force to be reckoned with. In conjunction with these struggles, new international and transnational organizations and solidarity networks have emerged all over the world, many within so-called Western nations, but some also in more unlikely places like Algeria. Whether it be in defense of civil society, gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender rights, the environment, or in order to expose and combat the global forces of unrestrained capitalism, these networks foster close cooperation between various local, national, and international trade unions and labor movements, citizens' associations, indigenous groups, progressive journalists, students, and others committed to the cause. We are not suggesting that all of these movements overlap or share one grand agenda for change. But it seems clear that many of these campaigns and radical trends have roots in earlier struggles and movements and that they all point to the resilience of commitments to progressive change and the broad range of current-day opposition to exploitation and oppression.

Internet technology itself has eroded some of the former distinctions between national, international, and transnational progressive organizations. Web sites such as Protest.net can be accessed from around the world, as they simultaneously strive to reach out to broader audiences in advocating a host of local and global issues and by serving as clearinghouses for activist information. Of course, there are limits to the promise of new information technologies, for the majority of the world's population not only lacks access to such technology as it continues to encounter different forms of oppression and injustice, but also to national, international, or transnational solidarity and advocacy groups. These people lead their daily struggles for basic rights and social justice in local settings and contexts, even if extra-local forces and events cause their plight.

Religious fundamentalism in its different manifestations—at times aligned with exclusionary nationalist ideologies ranging from the “puritanical” Islamist (as opposed to Islamic) Taliban in Afghanistan, to the Hindu Nationalist BJP ruling faction in India, various Orthodox or Catholic Christian-nationalist movements in Russia and Eastern Europe, Palestinian fundamentalist groups such as Hamas, Jewish ultrafundamentalist groups in Israel, or the Christian Right in the United States—pose new political and cultural challenges to progressive movements. The Algerian government has used its bloody war against militant Islamist groups as an excuse for cracking down on its secular critics, a group of people the Islamist factions have also targeted. In Egypt, meanwhile, some progressive activists find themselves prey not only to an older pattern of state repression, but also to President Hosni Mubarak's cynical new ploy for appeasing some of his Islamist opponents while persecuting his secular ones: the forced divorce of prominent (Muslim) couples belonging to the secular opposition on charges of apostasy and deviation from Islam, which religiously nullifies their marriage contracts. The recent arrest and trial of around fifty-two individuals at an Egyptian disco on charges of immorality and affront to religious sensibilities (i.e., homosexuality) is another such example.

The essays appearing in this issue draw examples from around the globe: Central America, South Africa, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, and the United States. Though dealing with very different instances of radical politics in widely disparate contexts, they nevertheless share a common historical interest in understanding the impact of global trends of political, economic, ideological, and cultural change shaping leftist movements and practices. Furthermore, readers might recognize an emphasis on the continuities between earlier and current forms of radicalism. Thomas and Jacqueline Keil examine the relations between the state and labor movements in Romania since the overthrow of the Ceaușescu regime in 1989. The authors provide a historical analysis of the rapid growth of independent trade unions in Romania since 1989, examining their role in local and national politics and the impact of dire economic conditions on their membership, demands, and

ideological makeup. In their conclusion, the authors point to the Romanian radical right's notable success in ideologically infiltrating some of the independent labor movements, asserting that the progressive Romanian left has been very slow in developing as a competing ideological and organizational force.

In the next article, Max Elbaum examines the emergence and rapid expansion of a broad array of "Third World"-oriented Marxist ideologies and movements in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. He examines the diverse forces and events that contributed to the appeal of this particular brand of Marxism to various groups and notes some of the dialogues as well as rivalries that developed between a number of these organizations. Elbaum then turns to the various domestic and international developments eventually leading to the diminished appeal of "Third World" Marxist ideologies in the United States during the late 1970s and the 1980s. However, he stresses the present-day legacy of these earlier ideologies and movements as well as the valuable lessons they can offer to progressive groups today.

Two of the contributions to this volume focus on the connection between activism and the professional practice of history from very personal perspectives. As part of our recurring section of "Reflections," Alex Lichtenstein interviews South African historian Martin Legassick. Their conversation illuminates the intricate connections between the antiapartheid movement in exile and the emergence of a Marxist revisionist school of South African historiography. Legassick's intimate knowledge of the various ideological trends that helped shape the antiapartheid movement, and the conflicts they generated, emphasizes the role of organized labor as the leading force of progressive radicalism within the struggle and provides a much more complex and detailed picture of the antiapartheid movement than is generally received in the United States. Legassick describes how the Marxist historiography emerged within this context of activism and ideological debate, assessing the lasting impact of this influence and his own changing views on the appropriate relationship between intellectual endeavors and academic pursuits.

Jim O'Brien's essay picks up the discussion on the relation between intellectual pursuit and political activism as it played out in the lives of historians Staughton Lynd and Jesse Lemisch. O'Brien traces the different paths Lynd and Lemisch took in pursuing their common goal of combining history with political and social activism, beginning with their early disagreement in the 1960s on whether radical historians could best serve society from within or outside academia. The author concludes that, regardless of their differences, both men have remained deeply committed to progressive change and have proven highly influential in shaping younger generations of radical historians in this country.

The final article by Christopher Capozzola examines the AIDS Quilt Project in terms of the interplay between identity politics of gender and nation, politics of memory and activism. The author explains that, shortly after its inception in 1985,

the project served not only as a powerful means of national remembrance, but, by drawing attention to AIDS as an American epidemic, it contested conservative definitions of Americanism. In this respect, and in the project's broader objective of mobilizing political and public opinion and resources in fighting the spread of AIDS and caring for the victims, the AIDS Quilt became a vigorous form of political activism that assumed different forms and complexities over the years. Capozzola points out that the Quilt project has become more inclusive in terms of class, race, culture, and gender as the AIDS epidemic has affected more and more groups in society. He also notes that the project organizers have devoted greater attention to AIDS as a worldwide epidemic in recent years, moving away from the earlier national focus to the arena of international and transnational activism.

This issue also includes a document that has acquired particular importance given the events of September 11. It is a position statement from the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), a grassroots women's organization fighting the brutal oppression of Afghani women under the Taliban regime. The inclusion of this piece should not be interpreted as an endorsement by the editorial collective, *Radical History Review*, or the editors of this issue. Nevertheless, we felt the statement was appropriate to include as representative of the type of movement of analytical interest to us. Indeed, RAWA is just one of the several groups working on human rights issues in Afghanistan at the local and international levels. RAWA stood against the Soviet invasion of the country, but also against the various fundamentalist factions that emerged from it and that currently remain at war in the region. At the same time, the group criticizes the United States and its allies for not taking a stronger position against the abuses committed by the forces they created during the Cold War. The document offers RAWA's interpretation of the situation that has befallen the Afghani people since; we hope it will give a more human face to the population of Afghanistan.

Finally, we also include "Teaching Radical History," "Public History," "(Re)Views," and "The Abusable Past."

It is our sincerest hope that this issue will counter some of the more pessimistic rhetoric coming from the left that sees in the aftermath of the attacks on the United States a triumph for the forces of conservatism, whether in the shape of religious fundamentalism or nationalistic militarism. As the cover art for this issue by Haleh Niazmand suggests, we believe that the question to ask is not whether enough room for progressive activism and change still exists, but rather "can you commit?"

—Mansour Bonakdarian and Yvonne Lassalle

