

Socialist ferment in the United States: Rise, fall, and aftermath of the Sanders challenge

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This old anvil laughs at many broken hammers.
Time is a great teacher.
Who can live without hope?

In the darkness with a great bundle of grief
the people march.
In the night, and overhead a shovel of stars for
keeps, the people march:
“Where to? what next?”

Carl Sandburg, *The People, Yes* (1936)



Bernie Sanders, a U.S. Senator who openly identifies as a socialist, has run highly credible campaigns to obtain the nomination of the Democratic Party to be its candidate for President of the United States. This was the case both in 2016 and 2020. There is no question that he has had a powerful impact on mainstream politics in the United States. In order to understand this, it makes sense first to look at Sanders himself.

Bernie Sanders had been a radical activist in the 1960s, particularly engaged in civil rights and anti-war organizing, undertaking efforts for democratic and social reforms, and openly identifying with socialist ideas, including in the state of Vermont where he settled in 1968. In the 1980s, he had patiently and effectively campaigned to become, first, Mayor of Burlington, then a U.S. Congressman, and finally a U.S. Senator. Sanders was willing to work with Democratic Party liberals, but he never dropped his identity as a political independent and as a socialist.

Defining himself as a “democratic socialist,” Sanders seems politically closer to Sweden’s former Prime Minister, the Social Democrat Olaf Palme, than – say – to Soviet Russia’s Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin.

Nonetheless, in many ways, especially on most economic and social issues, he was far to the left of the

rightward-moving Democratic Party. The Democrats, especially those gathered around Bill and Hillary Clinton, were adapting to the neo-liberal onslaught initiated by Ronald Reagan. Disgusted with the Democratic leadership’s “reasonable” efforts to compromise with the strident conservatism of the Republican Party, Sanders – still as an independent and a socialist – ran a remarkably effective campaign for the Democratic Party nomination for President of the United States, first in 2015-2016 and again in 2019-2020. His well-organized and vigorous campaigns generated immense enthusiasm among millions of people.

In order to make sense of “the Bernie Sanders phenomenon” in the United States, it is necessary to go beyond superficial perceptions. Different variants of such superficiality can be found among supporters and critics. It boils down to being what we might call *Bernie-centric* – keeping one’s focus very much on the persona and political ideas of Bernie Sanders.

Among enthusiastic supporters, “Bernie” represents something wonderful called “socialism.” For many (with Sanders’ encouragement) this adds up to three key elements: (a) being honest – refusing to play the mainstream political game dominated by slick consultants, corporations, billionaires; (b) standing up for the majority of the people, explicitly noting that the social/economic/political deck is stacked against us,

but that we all deserve and could actually have decent living standards, working conditions, and quality of life; (c) advocating a dramatic package of sweeping social reforms reminiscent of the New Deal of Franklin D. Roosevelt and similar to the what has been achieved through “welfare state” programs in such countries as Sweden, Denmark, Norway, etc.

The socialist case against Sanders – and its inadequacy

According to many of his left-wing critics, however, “Bernie” isn’t really a socialist at all. Despite social-democratic social programs, the Scandinavian countries that he points to have capitalist economies. Far from being a socialist, Franklin D. Roosevelt was a wealthy liberal politician from the capitalist class whose New Deal reforms were designed to rescue the capitalist system from a possible socialist overturn during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Regardless of what he chooses to say in public, Sanders himself undoubtedly understands the inadequacy of this way of explaining socialism. He has long proclaimed his identification with the early twentieth-century icon of U.S. socialism, Eugene V. Debs. Here is how Debs himself defined socialism, in a well-known declaration that Sanders could hardly have missed:

I believe ... in common with all Socialists, that this nation ought to own and control its own industries. I believe, as all Socialists do, that all things that are jointly needed and used ought to be jointly owned—that industry, the basis of our social life, instead of being the private property of a few and operated for their enrichment, ought to be the common property of all, democratically administered in the interest of all.

The fact that Sanders has been running for the *Democratic Party* nomination for President, according to his critics, is another clear indication that he cannot be considered a genuine socialist. He is keenly aware, as is any serious student of American politics, that the Democratic Party has historically (no less than the Republican Party) been absolutely dedicated to the health and welfare of U.S. capitalism. Nor would he have been shocked by Democratic Congressional leader

Nancy Pelosi’s recent re-affirmation, “we’re capitalists, that’s just the way it is.” The Democratic Party has long been controlled by a centrist-liberal elite funded by the forces of corporate-capitalism, just as the Republican Party is controlled by a conservative elite funded by another wing of corporate-capitalists.

Sanders has complained, of course, that “we need a Democratic Party which is not the party of the liberal elite but a party of the working class of this country.” Yet the structures of wealth and power within the party, while allowing for the absorption and cooptation of left-wing elements and rhetoric (up to a point), have invariably preserved the party’s rock-solid commitment to corporate capitalism. Understanding this, Sanders nonetheless promised (as he had in 2016) to support whoever won the Democratic Presidential nomination.

Although Sanders thunders against “the billionaires,” his critics add, in regard to foreign policy, he has never been willing to break decisively from the parameters of a foreign policy shaped by the billionaires and their political representatives. Within those parameters he argues for diplomacy rather than aggression, international cooperation rather than strident nationalism, and reduced military spending. But the clearly articulated anti-imperialism characteristic of, for example, Eugene V. Debs, is absent from the Sanders program.

While all of this has been quite sufficient for many socialists to reject Sanders with contempt, a great majority of those who consider themselves socialists in the United States see things quite differently. But we cannot afford to restrict our analysis to an orbit around the negative or positive qualities of Bernie Sanders. Historical materialist analysis requires attention to broader contexts. One must go back in time to understand the realities from which Sanders emerged. Rooted in this deeper analysis, we are carried beyond the termination of Sanders’ most recent campaign, to consider future possibilities.

Historical context

Born in 1941, Sanders is a child of the twentieth century. By 1900, with the original native inhabitants cleared away, the vast and resource-rich United States was already the world’s industrial powerhouse, becoming the most dynamically growing capitalist force

on the planet. It drew waves of immigrants from across Europe (including the Polish Jews of Sanders' family), Asia, and Latin America into the burgeoning and multi-faceted working class. Laborers from Africa had also been brutally transported thanks to the slave trade so essential to the early stages of capital accumulation, transitioning to wage-slavery after the Civil War. A partially democratic republic with a mass politics dominated by contending business interests, populist enthusiasm, and considerable corruption of various kinds, the political terrain was dominated by incredibly powerful political machines of the Democratic and Republican parties, which spent considerable effort constructing election laws designed to ensure their shared control of the American polity.

Nonetheless, the early twentieth century also saw the rise within the United States of a mass socialist movement led by Sanders' hero, Eugene V. Debs. Despite contradictions and limitations, these socialists had a powerful impact and made immense gains. Their influence was certainly felt within the country's diverse working class (including such immigrant families as the one Sanders grew up in). But they were smashed when the economic and political leadership of U.S. capitalism mobilized to join in the First World War of imperialist slaughter, followed by the prosperous and reactionary "roaring Twenties." The Great Depression of the 1930s brought another surge of working-class radicalism, spearheaded by a variety of socialist and Communist forces that not only had a substantial base in the increasingly militant labor movement, but in the cultural and intellectual life of the nation.

A sophisticated section of the capitalist class, associated with Franklin D. Roosevelt's sweeping New Deal reforms, was able to engineer the containment of the left-wing upsurge, soon helping to channel most of it into a Second World War which not only brought the depression to an end, but helped ensure U.S. predominance in the world capitalist economy.

From the late 1940s through the 1960s, one of the defining realities in the United States was unprecedented prosperity that allowed for improvements in the quality of life for a majority of the U.S. working class – what some saw as a sort of "welfare capitalism." This was driven in part by the strength of the trade unions, and it was reinforced by the dynamics of consumerism.

At the same time, U.S. capitalism had achieved hegemony in the global economy – except for the spread of revolutions and Communism. This led to the Cold War, with the United States government becoming the leader of a global anti-Communist alliance. It also fostered a powerful military-industrial complex which played a major role in U.S. economic and political life. The Cold War reinforced by a fierce anti-Communism on the U.S. political scene. Taken together, these things shattered left-wing organizations and influence. At the same time, there was the crystallization of what has been called a "social compact" between the government, Big Business, and the moderate trade union movement, designed to ensure social harmony with policies beneficial to the working class.

But given its own internal contradictions, capitalism always breeds resistance. Beginning in the 1960s, a youth radicalization and "new left" began to grow dramatically (which, as we've noted, included Sanders himself). Combined with the residual elements of the "old left," these young activists helped draw more and more people into defending democratic rights, opposing mindless consumerism, opposing the persistence of poverty, opposing racism, pushing for women's rights, and opposing destructive aspects of U.S. foreign policy.

In addition to the rise of a remarkable civil rights movement, there were movements against the threat of nuclear war, against militarist and imperialist policies, and especially against the U.S. war in Vietnam. As this new radicalization extended into the 1970s and early 1980s, other issues increasingly came into play. These included heightened struggles for women's liberation, struggles to defend the environment, resistance to oppression regarding sexual orientation, and more.

Contradictions

The fact remains that the internal contradictions of capitalism in our age of globalization involved an initial decline of profitability for big business, as well as the decline of U.S. capitalist hegemony in the world economy. Conservative neo-liberal policies were designed to counteract this through the 1980s and 1990s and into the twenty-first century.

The 1980s saw what came to be known in the United States as "the Reagan Revolution" – the onslaught of neo-liberal policies that ended the social compact

between business, government, and labor. It sought to replace “welfare capitalism” with an unbridled “free-market capitalism,” as well as to smash the power of the trade unions and the organized left. This coincided with the collapse of Communism, due to the authoritarian contradictions of the Communist countries themselves.

It also coincided with the development of a so-called “right-wing populism,” playing on biases and fears and bigotry that existed among many within the working class. It was used to pull masses of people away from the organized labor movement and from liberal and left-wing perspectives, in order to support a conservative agenda which enhanced the wealth and power of big business. The leadership of the Democratic Party relied on slick packaging to promote a presumably forward-looking “neo-liberalism with a human face.” This proved unconvincing even to many life-long Democrats.

The brilliant candidacy of Barak Obama in 2008 – in his contest first with Hilary Clinton for the Democratic



nomination, and then with Republican John McCain – made use of a campaign rhetoric and promises that were explicitly left-wing in their thrust. Obama did this in order to win, which indicated to astute observers that among the electorate there was, in fact, a hunger for the kinds of promises he was offering. Once he assumed the Presidency, however, despite all of his rhetorical eloquence, Obama tacked rightward, back to the orientation of the Democratic Party’s corporate-liberal elite.

The hoped-for solutions not forthcoming, a disappointed electorate demobilized sufficiently to allow right-wing populism space to grow and attract many of the disaffected, for example, with the so-called “Tea Party movement” and successful Republican candidacies of strident reactionaries. This was fueled by a dramatic growth of inequality, the erosion of the so-called “American Dream,” and a steady decline in quality of life throughout the working class.

Yet the consequent decline in authority of “mainstream” capitalist politicians – both Democrats and Republicans – also generated the growth of insurgencies and challenges from the left.

Discontent grew particularly among those in those within the lower strata in society. This was especially pronounced among masses of younger people whose futures looked increasingly bleak in the new context. Right-wing populism failed to address their needs and sensibilities. Many were drawn to anarchist perspectives, some to socialist ideas, others to a less defined “progressive” liberalism.

Out of this came the dramatic push-back of the semi-spontaneous “Occupy Wall Street” movement, that set up encampments and militant protests throughout the United States, with the slogan “We Are the 99%.” The persistence and intensification of often lethal police brutality within African American communities led to a similar upsurge of the nation-wide Black Lives Matter movement. A new feminist upsurge – culminating in the “million-woman march” of 2017 – added an essential component, as did a working-class upsurge that involved a massive occupation of Wisconsin’s state capital and culminated in a nationwide wave of successful teachers’ strikes.

In addition, there was an intensification of the struggle against the destruction of a livable environment

– with actual disasters related to climate change giving real-time emphasis to the cause of environmental justice.

Strategy and program

The Presidential primary campaigns of Bernie Sanders, in 2016 and 2019-20, came out of this rising tide of radical ferment and activism.

Despite much enthusiasm to the contrary, the point of the Sanders campaign, it could be argued, was neither to win the Presidency and initiate a new socialist order nor to somehow transform the Democratic Party into a force for socialism. Neither of those have been genuine possibilities. The reason for this is that socialist forces – although they have grown substantially – are not sufficiently developed (either ideologically or numerically or organizationally) to actually have the capacity to overcome the power of pro-capitalist forces, whether inside the Democratic Party or inside the state apparatus or inside the social and economic order. And Bernie Sanders possessed no magic wand to make up for that stark reality.

There was an underlying logic of the campaign, however, and it was several-fold: (1) to identify the power structures and policies dominant in the United States as being controlled by the small class of billionaires, designed to preserve the latter's power and expand their wealth at the expense of the rest of us; (2) to put forward radical reform proposals – challenging the perspectives and power of the billionaires – that make sense for our diverse working-class majority and are consistent with socialist perspectives; (3) to explicitly associate the word “socialism” positively with these understandings and proposals, inserting that into the popular consciousness and mainstream political discourse; (4) to help crystallize a mass base and a strong network of activists and campaigners that could make this a force on the U.S. political scene.

These four goals have been advanced powerfully through both Sanders campaigns. Of particular interest are the shifting (and still fluid) ideological trends among radical activists in the United States since the early years of the twenty-first century. The anarchism that was initially compelling for many had failed, over more than a decade, to provide any clear direction in the struggle to replace the capitalist status quo with something

better. The Sanders campaign, in contrast, was able to win increasing numbers of radicalizing youth, and radicalizing workers, to the idea that something called “socialism” could offer the solutions they were seeking.

Of particular importance, transcending the specifics of the Sanders campaign, is the actual program that was articulated in 2020, which can stand the socialist movement in good stead well into the future.

The Sanders platform for 2020 did not call for the overturn of capitalism. But it could make powerful sense to a majority of the people. And it collides with what the capitalists feel able to allow. In our own time, the whirling out-of-control of crises into impending catastrophes could mean that such a collision of aspirations would have revolutionary possibilities.

The Sanders program calls for a redistribution of wealth downward from the billionaires to the working-class majority – with a \$15 an hour minimum wage, health care for all, affordable housing for all, efficient public transit systems, quality public education for all, a cancellation of student debt for those attending colleges and universities, increases in social security for the elderly, and more.

It also projects an immense set of Green New Deal policies that would transform our energy system to 100 percent renewable energy, in electricity and transportation no later than 2030, with complete decarbonisation of the economy no later than 2050. According to current science, such things are absolutely essential for the preservation of humanity. At the same time, the Green New Deal would end unemployment through the creation 20 million jobs needed to solve the climate crisis, with massive assistance to all communities and workers impacted by the transition.

All of this would cost many trillions of dollars. The Sanders programs shows how this could be paid for – not off the backs of the working-class majority, but through squeezing down the exorbitant super-profits of the top 1 percent and their corporations that dominate in the economy and resources, as well as closing loopholes and eliminating inequalities in the U.S. tax structure.

Success and defeat

“This is a campaign of the working class, by the working class and for the working class!” Sanders emphasized at many mass rallies. “The line received

thunderous applause, as it always does,” reported two journalists from the *New York Times* (Jennifer Medina and Sydney Ember, 3/9/2020). Commenting on “fissures along class lines in the Democratic Party,” they added:

“At campaign events over the past year, Mr. Sanders has spoken to tens of thousands of people who come to hear his message of political revolution — who come to imagine a country with universal health care, no student debt and a \$15 minimum wage. Almost every line he says onstage rises to a crescendo, inviting cheers of appreciation.”

This was something new in the political mainstream: a major candidate explicitly calling for some kind of “socialist” solutions on behalf of the working class, denouncing rule over our economic and political system by the billionaires, calling for a Green New Deal that will protect the global environment while providing decently living conditions and human rights for the overwhelming majority of the people, at the expense of the wealthy.

“How come nothing really changes?” asked Sanders in one of the 2019 Presidential debates. “How come three people own more wealth than the bottom half of America?” He went on to note:

Nothing will change unless we have the guts to take on Wall Street, the insurance industry, the pharmaceutical industry, the military-industrial complex, and the fossil fuel industry. If we don’t have the guts to take them on, we’ll continue to have plans, we’ll continue to have talk, and the rich will get richer, and everybody else will be struggling. — Quoted in Megan Day and Micah Uetricht, *Bigger Than Bernie: How We Go From the Sanders Campaign to Democratic Socialism* (London: Verso, 2020, p.x)

Such things resonated in the course of the Sanders campaign. They approximate the consciousness of millions in the U.S. working class, although the upward swing has certainly not yet encompassed a majority. What’s distinctive is not the lack of such class consciousness among all workers, but that millions have rallied to this way of seeing things. Polls indicate that 43 percent of U.S. citizens now perceive socialism

positively, as do 51 percent of those aged 18-29, and 57 percent of registered Democrats. Such remarkably high percentages, taken by themselves, must be seen for what they are — very fluid indicators that can have more than one meaning (what does the word socialism, for example, mean to one or another person who views it positively?), that can fluctuate up or down, and that can be impacted by a variety of developments in society.

There is, for example, the stark fact of Sanders’ defeat, which some pundits take as a sign that the “socialist fad” is fading. A relative decline in Sanders’ vote percentages could be seen as reinforcing that interpretation: he won 43 percent of the primary vote in 2016 before accepting defeat, as opposed to only 30 percent in 2020. Of course, there is an anti-socialist bias in the corporate-owned mass media, but that was true in 2016 as well. What explains the decline in those voting percentages?

Some clues may be found among the six challenges Sanders faced in 2020.

First, politically and organizationally, U.S. socialists still aren’t “there” yet. The Sanders campaign’s organizational structure was quite efficient, and its base of volunteers and supporters impressive but loose, certainly not strong enough to do what must be done to defeat the capitalist power structure. There is not yet a mass socialist movement in the United States with adequate organization, political clarity, or balanced presence in both the non-electoral and electoral political arenas. That has yet to be built. This was related, as well, to an inability to mobilize key elements in the Sanders targeted base — the younger and poorer sectors of the working class — to actually go to the voting booth in sufficient numbers

Second, in contrast to 2016, the Democratic Party elite was not about to underestimate Sanders — it was ready, more adeptly maneuvering, and at the decisive moment able to mobilize its considerable resources to put its reliable favorite, Obama’s former Vice President Joe Biden, over the top.

Third, in contrast to 2016, when running against the corporate-liberal elite’s favorite of 2020, Sanders also faced a diverse array of centrist and liberal competitors, who were variously female, African-American, Hispanic, Asian-American, gay, and who were mostly younger. Parts of his potential base were drawn in different directions, but as these candidates withdrew, they worked hard to pull their supporters to Biden.

Fourth, the immense strength of the Sanders campaign could be found in its intensive door-to-door canvassing and its mass rallies that drew together thousands of supporters and onlookers. This mass organizing approach was suddenly, brutally brought to an end by the Coronavirus pandemic.

Fifth, in 2016 Donald Trump was neither the President of the United States nor expected to win. In 2020 he is the President, arguably the worst in U.S. history, doing much terrible damage to society in multiple ways. The corporate-liberal news media has hammered away on the theme, over and over, that Sanders is too radical to defeat Trump. Although some polls suggest otherwise, a significant number of voters (particularly outside of the youth profile) have been powerfully influenced by this view. There are indications that many sympathetic to the program of Sanders nonetheless chose to vote for the presumably more electable Biden.

Sixth, from the start Sanders locked himself into supporting whichever Democratic would win the Presidential nomination. This forced him to pull his punches in confronting other candidates. This became most obvious in the one-on-one debate that Sanders and Joe Biden had after all of the other Democratic candidates had dropped out.

Sanders' honesty and radical understanding bounced off the well-groomed and smiling opponent who is poised to become the Democratic Party's candidate for President. When Biden offered his own mild version of "the Green New Deal," Sanders objected that this underfunded version would not solve the actual problems, with Biden responding as the "practical-minded" optimist. At key points he tacked to the left, although also briefly red-baiting Sanders, with relative "restraint," to be sure. Spinning pleasant-sounding assurances about his long record, his commitments, his campaign, Biden seemed relaxed, confident of his front-runner status, and of Sanders' eventual support.

Where to, what next?

With the well-engineered "unity effort" that put an end to the Sanders challenge, many – including Sanders himself – have rallied to Joe Biden. According to the *New York Times* (4/16/2020), "Mr. Sanders has moved the [Democratic] party to the left, introducing policies ... that are now embroidered into the fabric of the

party." Barak Obama intones: "Bernie is an American original, a man who has devoted his life to giving voice to working people's hopes, dreams and frustrations." Biden embraces Sanders as the "most powerful voice for a fair and more just America."

Despite his politician's rhetoric, Biden stands with the billionaires and is absolutely opposed to the kind of economic democracy and social justice that are at the heart of socialism. He is part of the problem that Sanders was campaigning against. Of course, four more years of Donald Trump's Presidency will, without question, be very horrible, which explains the deep desire of good people to defeat this grotesquely super-rich, bigoted and bullying narcissist by voting for Biden. But it seems a dubious proposition whether Biden – if elected – would be able to provide solutions to the multiplying crises that drove many desperate people to vote for Trump in the first place. Add to this the coronavirus pandemic and a global economic depression. What will be the result?

Four-to-eight years of a Biden Presidency seems unlikely to prevent the continuing decline of the quality of life in the United States or reverse an ongoing sense of hopelessness for a majority of the people. There are already sinister forces on the right (better organized, more disciplined, more horrible than Trump) prepared to offer "solutions." In the absence of a mass left-wing movement, representing the socialist democracy that Biden (no less than Trump) absolutely opposes, there is truly no hope for the future.

For reasons such as these, some Sanders supporters will not support Biden – instead choosing to support such protest candidates as the Green Party's eco-socialist militant Howie Hawkins, providing space for continuing to campaign on behalf of the Green New Deal. Others insist, quite reasonably, that "workers and socialists need an independent party of our own," although this presently remains more a slogan than a plan of action. Some will join in efforts that have proliferated since 2016, with some success, to elect open socialists on the ballot-line of the Democratic Party, the best-known example being the charismatic Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. This, on the other hand, ties socialists into the Democratic Party and into support of such staunch pro-capitalists as Joe Biden. There are some who question the wisdom of electoral activity

altogether, arguing instead for a focus on non-electoral social movements.

As suggested by such divergent pulls and tugs coming out of the Sanders campaign, there is no unified socialist movement in the United States. The largest socialist organization is Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), which has grown over the past five years – largely under the impact of the Sanders campaigns – from 5,000 to 66,000. Many of these are paper members, only 10 percent or so actually attending meetings and participating in DSA activities. Far from presenting a unified orientation, all of the pulls and tugs discussed here are reflected among the organization's membership.

The socialist ferment goes beyond the ranks of DSA, encompassing a proliferation of much smaller socialist groups, a subculture of journals and newsletters and position papers, study circles, educational conferences, forums, online discussions and debates, and more – not to mention a massive flow of books, a veritable renaissance of socialist thought and debate.

And the socialist ferment also goes beyond words. Organizations and social struggles within the diverse working class, encompassing many thousands of people in trade unions, community groups, as well as issue-oriented coalitions and activist collectives, interweave elements of socialist consciousness with practical struggles for winnable reforms. Elements of Bernie Sanders' campaign program were absorbed from such sources as these. It is likely that elements from that program, along with the eloquent explanations of Eugene V. Debs, will re-echo in future struggles of this socialist working-class movement-in-the-making.

Socialists in the United States (those who were active in the Sanders campaign and those who were not) are reflecting over their own experiences and the lessons of history. New experiences amid the coronavirus pandemic and the intensifying economic depression deepen and sharpen the process. It involves wrestling with the question of how a durable and ultimately victorious mass movement can be built to end the tyranny of capitalism and bring a society of the free and the equal. Such processes take time – but we don't have all the time in the world.

Post script. Since this article was completed, we have experienced a massive political upsurge sparked by murderous acts of police brutality. A more thorough analysis of this upsurge is not possible here, but we can note that it has involved developments related to Rosa Luxemburg's conceptualization of the "mass strike", resulting in a profound radicalization and still-in-motion political shift in the United States. Relevant to the content of the present article is this observation from Glen Ford of the online site Black Agenda Report:

"The Bernie Sanders presidential phenomenon, recently extinguished by corporate Democrats and their media allies, raised expectations among tens of millions of youth of all races that meaningful change – even some kind of 'socialism' -- was possible under the current order. With Sanders' abdication, his supporters have been forced to accept that they can't simply vote their way out of the contradictions of racial, late stage capitalism. They took to the streets in astounding numbers, in many instances outnumbering non-white protesters, providing a degree of white skin protection to darker activists in confrontations with police." (<https://www.blackagendareport.com/movement-gets-big-and-its-enemies-reveal-themselves>)