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A.M. Gittlitz, C. Derick Varn

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When Trump won again, the last eight years flashed before our eyes.

We were returned to how we felt during the collective devastation of November 2016, when we were forced us to face with sober senses that the Democrats were incompetent, that history had not ended, that the liberal electoral coalition could *never* save us from the coming barbarity, and that the ambient *goodness* of progressive branding was no match for the sincere cruelty of the atomized capitalist subject.

In the weeks that followed, a "Trump bump" swelled the ranks of the Democratic Socialists of America and newly-minted anarchists and antifascist groups alike. A leftist coalition converged on Washington D.C. on January 20th, with early-morning blockades preventing thousands from entering Trump's inauguration ceremony. Hundreds of protesters were kettled, arrested, and charged with felony rioting during the "J20" protests. Hundreds more escaped to brawl with the

alt-right, burn a limousine, and hurl cement at riot police on K-Street until sundown. The next day, millions of feminists filled the streets of every major city, vowing to fight. A week of spontaneous blockades of international airports coast-to-coast countered Trump's "Muslim Ban." Many liberals participated in these mobilizations, but there was little talk of reform. Against this new regime, we labeled ourselves the *resistance!*

Yet the militancy conceived in that post-election truth that the Democrats were equally at fault never fully articulated itself on that basis, and thus could never break with the official "Resistance" of Democratic politicians and their NGO networks. Within a few months, ACLU lawyers and liberal judges limited the extent of the Muslim Ban, and the bulk of the Women's March coalition was converted into a "Get Out the Vote" project. The most anarchistic element—the antifascists—triumphed against the ACLU-defended "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville. In the aftermath, collaboration between antifascist researchers, media platforms, and liberal prosecutors sent many of the alt-right's biggest villains to jail or into hiding.[1]

With the alt-right street-movement mopped-up after Charlottesville, the left-wing of the "Resistance" came to an end with the "Abolish ICE" blockades during the summer of 2018. For weeks, a loose coalition of anarchist activists had blockaded ICE detention centers nationwide. In Wyoming, a detention center was shut down—leaving the Latino population jobless as inmates were moved to an even more remote location. In downtown Manhattan, activists blocked an ICE processing facility for several days, until a debate emerged that perhaps we were doing more harm than good by preventing detainees from moving to their next hearing or jail cell. A long general assembly was held on the sidewalk in front of the facility's

[1] A.M. Gittlitz, "Anti-Anti-Antifa", *Commune* (2016). https://communemag.com/anti-anti-antifa/

Recent examples of autonomous projects that have successfully won the commitment of thousands of ordinary people include Standing Rock, antifascist organizing, the sanctuary-space movement, anti-deportation solidarity, the George Floyd Uprising, mutual aid networks, Stop Cop City, and the pro-Palestine encampments. These were popular movements that expanded with tangible wins, delegitimizing the political class as they did.

These movements of course hit real limits, both external and internal. From without, they suffered repression and recuperation. From within, many always desired recuperation or were quick to accept it in the face of repression. These limits, however, come when the battle is already *lost*, and all previous uprisings are recalled merely as desperate pleas for mercy in the "language of the oppressed". This is the pure meaning of *resistance,* the defeated paradigm we must move past by reconceiving all our political activity as building a base of power in *our actual lives*—our homes, workplaces, neighborhoods—worth defending as *we would our lives*.

Until then, who wouldn't take avocado toast over tear gas?

doors. When a few intransigents stated that we *could not allow that door to open again,* the activists resolved to stay. As soon as word of the decision came down, a top activist from an NGO that provides legal support to detainees arrived, yelling that we were privileged, naïve adventurists who were hindering their work—and making the detainees' lives harder in the process. If we really wanted to help, we ought to volunteer for their organization. Perhaps they were right and our vision of small, uncoordinated cadres rendering ICE inoperable everywhere all at once was only making the system crueler. No one even attempted to defend the prior decision. We decamped immediately.

"Abolish ICE" continued only as a midterm campaign slogan, merging with a resurgent hope around the shock election of a young socialist "squad" in Congress, and the slogan "Bernie would have won"—a sibling slogan to "If Hillary had won we'd be at brunch right now." This return of liberal electoral rationale stirred a perverse hope within the hearts of the Resisters: Perhaps it was *Hillary and Trump*, and not the *Democrats and Republicans*, who were to blame.

The lure was cast. A to-go box of eggs benedict dripped before us. With good lawyers, politicians, and bureaucrats checking-and-balancing our way towards safer harbor in 2021, the stakes were lowered. How could we fully enjoy our bacon-infused bloody marys if we believed fascism had arrived? Little by little, the "Resistance" taught us. In the process, it reverted to activist hobbyism, squeezed in between work, good times, and good food among friends.

And with that, resistance fully transformed into "Resistance". Not long after, it arrived at the Democratic Party's "graveyard of social movements."[2]

[2] Joel Jordan & Robert Brenner, "Elections & the Democrats", *Against the Current* (2004). https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/atc/379.html

The Democrats returned to power in 2018, 2020, and outperformed the polls in 2022. Biden increased funding for ICE and built miles of the border wall to almost no protest. A mass movement finally emerged at the end of 2023 demanding the US stop arming Israel's genocide in Gaza. Popular as this sentiment was, it was seen by much of the former "Resistance" coalition as threatening the Democrats' chances against Trump in 2024. Police expelled pro-Palestine encampments by force across Democrat-run cities. When Harris marketed herself as a "uniparty" entity who would finally exorcize the country of Trumpist possession, many of us even quietly hoped that shanking us would at least pay off.

Now we've circled back to that plain truth of 2016: like bottomless-brunching weekend warriors, the Democrats only binge on "Resistance" in order to purge it from the work-week political landscape. This, and not *winning*, is their primary function. Trump's victory should be the decisive, incontrovertible confirmation that the bourgeois state can never be anything but an enemy.

This pill is less bitter than the last. With both sides running on racism, genocide, and neoliberal economics, the candidate who most plausibly could promise to bring down the price of eggs won. It may be a sign of maturity that we now roll our eyes rather than rend our garments. But a new season of resistance will begin, nonetheless. Rather than ignore them entirely, the lessons learned from the last eight years must be brought to these struggles as they form.

We can be certain Trump's regime will be one of war on the working class, its artillery aimed primarily at the undocumented underclass. No matter how many of the 11 million among this group he is able to deport, those who remain—many of them children—will be terrified into submission. Their exploitation will drop the price of eggs without even cracking the profits of the brunching bourgeoisie.

Protests outside reopened and new ICE detention centers will return. But the most effective resistance can only come from the undocumented workers themselves, who are far more organized than the left often imagines. It is crucial to find and cover these stories.

Resistance will undoubtedly also come against a new Red Scare targeting environmentalist, feminist, queer, No Borders, and pro-Palestinian activists. Any instance of direct action will be labeled "terrorism", and in the event of a mass uprising, Trump has promised a military assault. Such a situation could ratchet up social unrest.

Even if all Trump's damage is contained within the bounds of his first term, he will fill the courts and bureaucracies with authoritarians of all sorts: white nationalists, neoreactionaries, Project 2025-programatists, and neoconservatives. Professional Democrats will lose jobs, but they can at least feel accomplished in having ushered in a new reactionary Deep State that will crush any progressive movements for generations to come.

As they become a permanent loyal opposition, the Democrats will deploy strategies to lure us back to their table. It will not be a hard case to make. Running as a Democrat, or entering its patronage network, is the easiest way to bring popular demands rooted from the struggle towards the surface. There, they can grow until mowed down, again and again.

Eventually, the Democrats may again dangle another Sanders before us. By then, it will be no use to warn our comrades that the sirens of social democracy are calling them to champagne graves. Everybody wants something like a revolution, but intellectual denunciation cannot sate real hunger. Mass mobilization requires something more tangible than *pie in the sky*. We need a sustainable, antifragile, and *confident* force, welcoming enough to join, with a clear and plausible vision of working towards immediate and long-term goals.