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The New Left. 1968 and Post Scriptum

La Nueva Izquierda. 1968 y post scriptum

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The author, a well know theorist and activist of the civil rights movement and the movement against the Vietnam War, published the first part of this article in 1968. There, he analyses the emergence of the New Left in the United States –and its global connection– through the social structure, the actors' class background and their cultural configuration to account for the aspirations and limits that accompanied the middle class youth that lead this movement. The dilemmas that emerged between the racial, ethnic, social and economic axes that defined the actors framed the diverse social movements and throw light on the promises, scope and weaknesses that characterized them.

In the post scriptum, written explicitly for the *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales* 50 years later with a great analytical and existential wisdom, the author inspects the way in which class profile, radicalization and separatism led to an isolation of the New Left from the natural support basis it should have reached. It evaluates the consequences of its integration either to the Old Left or to the system, as it manifests in the turn towards right that progressive and democratic sectors had in the United States.

NOTA INTRODUCTORIA

El autor, teórico y activista del movimiento de los derechos civiles y de los movimientos contra la guerra en Vietnam, publicó la primera parte de este artículo en 1968. En él, analiza la emergencia de la Nueva Izquierda en Estados Unidos –y su conexión global– a partir de la estructura social, la pertenencia de clase de los propios actores y su configuración cultural para dar cuenta de las aspiraciones y limitantes que acompañaron a la juventud de clase media que encabezó este movimiento. Los dilemas que emergieron entre la configuración étnico-racial, social y económica de los actores enmarcados en el movimiento por los derechos humanos arrojan luz sobre las promesas, alcances y debilidades que éste tuvo. En el *post scriptum*, escrito explícitamente para la *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales* 50 años después, con una gran sabiduría analítica y existencial, el autor revisa el modo como el perfil de clase, la radicalización y el separatismo condujo a un aislamiento de la Nueva Izquierda de las naturales bases de apoyo que debió haber alcanzado. Evalúa las consecuencias ya sea de su integración a la Vieja Izquierda o bien al sistema, tal como se manifiestan en el viraje a la derecha que los sectores

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Furthermore, he underlines the way it influenced the inequality and vulnerability that prevails among the social class –the "precateriat"– the left should have represented, and projects itself in the current situation and in *Trumpism*. Without a doubt, the depth, realism and theoretical and practical vision of Michael Walzer have turned him into one of the representative figures of political theory. JBL.

Keywords: New Left; 1960s civil rights movement; Vietnam War; movement radicalization; political theory; United States.

progresistas y democráticos tuvieron en Estados Unidos, y cómo se reflejó en la situación de desigualdad y vulnerabilidad prevaleciente en gran parte de las clases sociales que la izquierda debió representar, e incluso en el *Trumpismo* hoy. Sin duda, la profundidad, realismo y visión teórica y práctica de Michael Walzer lo han convertido en una de las figuras representativas de la teoría política. JBL.

Palabras clave: Nueva Izquierda; movimiento de derechos sociales de los sesenta; guerra de Vietnam; radicalización del movimiento; teoría política; Estados Unidos.

Introduction

It is not easy to get at the New Left. Already encumbered with its own myths, hard pressed by the endemic frustrations and outrages of American society, racially split, infiltrated by Old Left sectarians, the object of a curious literary cult, it is no longer the open movement of the early sixties with its buoyant optimism and transparent passion. Whether anything at all survives of the radical efflorescence of those years is itself a question. I am going to answer that question in the affirmative, but only after a rather tortuous description of what has been a tortuous, though also very short, history. Rarely in the past has a "new" radicalism been confronted so quickly with so many impossible choices; rarely has the political resiliency and stamina of the young been so severely tested. Today, a sense of isolation, an embittered mood, a dangerous desperation mark many elements of the New Left like so many scars of battles fought and lost: the collapse of the civil rights movement, the failure to organize the poor, the continued escalation of the Vietnam war.

The war is perhaps the most important explanation for all that has happened. It is for many of us, and especially for young radicals, a daily humiliation simply to live in the United States while that war is waged in our name. And that humiliation breeds the terrible anger (and the self-hate) and the desire for dramatic "confrontations" that have become characteristic of many student leftists. But there are other reasons, if not better ones, more deeply rooted in the experiences of the past seven years.

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The Post-Affluent Generation

As a visible political movement, the New Left has its origin in the wave of sympathy and support for the Negro civil-rights struggle that swept northern campuses in the early sixties and culminated in Mississippi Summer 1964. But if the militancy of black students is easy enough to account for, that of their white counterparts is not. Negro radicalism, even in its most extreme forms, fits admirably into any of a dozen conventional explanations; the white New Leftists are harder to figure out. The struggle for civil rights was less the cause than the occasion for their commitment. Once the call went out, it became clear that many of them had been waiting –but why had they been *waiting?*– and that they had been prepared for political action by something other than the sheer oppressiveness of their surroundings.

New Leftists tended to be middle-class students, often at the most prestigious of our universities. Theirs was the radicalism of a generation for whom neither security nor money had ever been a problem. Their parents, by and large, had been children during the worst of the Depression, had married and raised families of their own during the War and the post-war boom of the forties, and had rarely managed to convey to their offspring any sense but that of easy expectation. They had outlived, outgrown, or outmanoeuvred the various radicalisms of their youth, arriving finally, many of them, at a state of mind which eager sociologists called the end of ideology. They were comfortable, often newly comfortable, and their children inherited from them, in addition to their comforts, only the vaguest idealism, corroded by a new and very strong feeling for the possible pleasures of private life. Yet many of these same children became New Left radicals.

It is a cliché of current political analysis that the New Left grew up as a youthful revolt against the emptiness and hypocrisy of middle-class life. As with most other clichés, there is a truth here, but a truth badly stated. Middle-class life is both interesting and honest enough so long as its discipline serves a real purpose, that is, the pursuit of security and wealth by men and women who possess (or remember having possessed) neither. The radicalism of young people today is not so much a revolt against the emptiness of their parents' lives –for their parents' lives have often been full of struggle, risk-taking, and achievement– as against the possible emptiness of their own lives were they simply to take over what their parents have won. For many of them the discipline of professional careers and suburban respectability makes no sense: it will bring them nothing they don't already have.

Like every new generation, they want useful and exciting work to do. *But what is the useful and exciting work of the post-affluent generation?* There is a very old "Old Left" answer to this question, to the effect that only when material goods have been won is it possible to pursue moral goods. "First feed the face, and then talk right and wrong." The

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faces of middle-class America are well-fed, so now it is the time to talk. And of course the first thing young people have to say is that the world they would have inherited (and will yet inherit) from their parents is all wrong. They mean partly that it is wrong that their easy affluence isn't more widely shared, that in the pursuit of security and wealth so many Americans have been left so far behind.

But the specific content of New Left radicalism is not determined by the culture of poverty any more than it is determined by southern Negro culture –neither of which it's leading participants can possibly know, but rather by the culture of plenty. And what New Leftists dislike about the culture of plenty is precisely that controlled efficiency, that careful calculation, that concentration on self and family, that inwardly focused zeal, all of which have been central to the rise of the middle class as a whole and of this or that ethnic group into the middle class, and all of which today's poor will one day emulate. The politics of this culture is largely passive (whatever its conventional moral commitments), marked by the same inward concentration: middle-class Americans surrender almost eagerly the very idea of an active public life, forgo the excitements of political action, and seek instead (and *get*) protection and peace of mind at the hands of a benevolent state bureaucracy.

The New Left defines itself by opposition: hence its counter-ethos, focused outward, reaching for personal contacts beyond the family circle, emphasizing spontaneity and openness. And hence its counter-politics, demanding a share in the perils and pleasures of power, planning to replace benevolent administration (or certain specified benevolent administrators) with small group democracy and popular participation. It might well be said of most New Leftists that they can afford to be warm, loose, open, and free; that they have time enough and to spare for public activity; and that they have been well trained indeed in all the skills necessary for political participation. But this is no disparagement of their zeal; it merely suggests that their zeal is closely connected, as is everyone else's, to their social position. New Leftism is the politics of a post-affluent class, or of some part of that class, and is probably a politics fully available only to members of that class.

Unfortunately, however, it has only sometimes been possible for young radicals to centre their activities in those social areas or to concentrate on those issues where their ideology and experience are directly relevant. Most often they have been driven by the condition of their society and by the moral demands of their age to involve themselves in the life and politics of pre-affluent groups. Thus, some of them have engaged themselves in the Negro struggle for equality and others in the war (some even in the War) on poverty. And they have sought, as best they could, to apply their ideology and act out their zeal in radically unfamiliar circumstances.

The primary result of this effort is the theory and practice of community organizing, the central theme and the dominant mystique of the New Left today.

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Community Organizing

Community organizing might be crudely described in this way: it is an effort to teach participatory democracy to the poor. Or, less crudely, it is an effort to persuade the poor that they have a great deal to gain through a particular sort, and less to gain through any other sort, of political activity. I should say at once that not many of the poor have been persuaded, and perhaps for good reasons. For the most immediate goals of poor people in the United States today are most unlikely to be won through community organizing in the New Left style. That is not to say that such organizing is of no value, even in the short run, but it is valuable only in so far as it plays into or leads toward the creation of larger organizations –trade unions and political machines– of a sort that New Leftists generally do not regard with favour. The struggles of pre-affluent men and women require for their success two things above all, mass and discipline, and New Left organizing, in part precisely because of its personal intensity and democratic virtue, cannot provide either. The one great advantage of the poor is their number, and that can only be given its proper weight when all the poor in a given area are mobilized for some concerted action, through union solidarity, for example, or bloc voting, mass demonstrations, and community boycotts. Popular participation obviously plays a significant part in any such mobilization, but so does central (and sometimes charismatic) leadership, an efficient staff, and a widespread willingness to obey commands. Full-scale internal democracy may have to be sacrificed –as it often has been in socialist parties and trade unions in the past– for the sake of the immediate struggle.

It has been one of the achievements of the New Left to remind us (again!) of the full extent of that sacrifice and of the legacy it leaves to the future. That legacy is twofold: bureaucratic service organizations, centrally controlled, generally benevolent, but unresponsive to popular demands, on the one hand; and passive members with only the dimmest memory of the battles waged in their name, on the other. If the most pressing purposes of the poor are served by this outcome (and they are), surely it is not amiss to suggest that certain broader human purposes are not. This is the burden of radical criticism today and it is the key reason for New Left attempts to organize the poor in other than the obvious and conventional ways. Some New Leftists, of course, argue that the conventional ways won't work, won't bring even the limited gains for which they were designed. That seems to me wrong, and perhaps it would be useful to suggest just how wrong it is by attempting a quick outline of the conventional ways and the limited gains. I mean to point up the precise role and ultimate inadequacy of New Left organizing and, at the same time, the possible truth of the New Left critique. The five stages that I am going to describe have been derived from the history of the labour movement and of various ethnic groups: I believe they apply also to today's poor in general and to Negroes in particular, though perhaps to Negroes only with some amendment.

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Stage one: passivity –sporadic violence. This is a period of oppression sullenly endured. Poverty is opposed and sometimes overcome only by individual efforts. The poor, whether identified ethnically, racially, or simply economically, constitute what Marx called a class in itself but not for itself. Its members are invisible as men; they are treated in effect like things. Occasionally they rebel against this treatment, but the rebellions are formless, without discipline or program, rural or urban *jacqueries*.

Stage two: early mobilization –demonstrations, riots– sectarian activity. Now group consciousness begins to develop and with it there comes a proliferation of (generally tiny) associations of militants who claim to represent the group as a whole and who turn out radical, often imaginative, programs in its name. Sometimes these are secret associations, pledged brotherhoods with blood oaths and an esoteric lingo; sometimes open bands of ideological zealots; sometimes they are made up of home-grown militants; sometimes, as in the case of the New Left today, of missionary radicals. These sectarian clubs really represent nobody, but they do help to stir up and they also symbolize a new mood of self-assertion, manifest also in demonstrations, strikes, and riots –in which the sectarians play a part, sometimes an important part. None of these, however, can yet be sustained; nor, when they are brutally suppressed, do they leave behind significant organizational residues.

Stage three: high mobilization –political parties and machines, trade unions. Genuinely representative organizations at last appear, usually operating within the political or economic system, challenging its present elites but not necessarily its basic structure. These organizations can be more or less radical in character, their agitators commonly employ a populist rhetoric of one sort or another. The sectarian militants are gradually pushed out of them, however, as large numbers of men and women rush to join, ready now to accept the discipline and share in the hard work necessary to sustain co-operative action. Bloc voting and strikes are typical expressions of the new political competence of previously oppressed and excluded social classes. Both, it should be said, have only limited purposes.

Stage four: partial success –accommodation. The oppressed groups, or a significant number of their members, break into the affluent or near-affluent world, which expands to admit them. Unlike the old aristocracy, the Western middle classes seem capable of infinite expansion. This is true in large part because of the economic growth which they champion, but it is also true because the middle classes have no exclusive style; their way of life can be imitated and sustained at different income levels. Hence rising groups have been able to establish themselves, if not on the peaks of bourgeois wealth and power, then, so to speak, on the slopes –higher or lower. They seize one or another local government, and use its financial resources to help themselves. They win bargaining power in one or another industry and use that to boost wages, establish grievance machinery, etc. These

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are real successes, which should not be denigrated; they are also partial successes, which do not fulfil the programs of stages two and three.

Stage five: demobilization –bureaucracy. Even partial successes have to be defended, but they don't have to be defended by the same kind of organizations that achieved them. The relatively high level of mobilization and action necessary to the achievement now ceases to be necessary. Active participants are largely displaced by competent bureaucrats; open struggle gives way to private negotiation. Tests of strength still occasionally occur; it is possible to imagine temporary reversions to stage three. But by and large accommodation works; it gives rise to a characteristic passivity, manifest now as privatization, the enjoyment of the limited delights of middle-class society, the rearing of children capable of a new discontent.

This is the long-term process into which New Leftists have inserted themselves by journeying south or into the slums and ghettos of our northern cities. Their stated purpose is to avoid its likely outcome. They are, after all, the products of that outcome, and so they know or think they know, and even more they feel, how awful it is. I suspect they have some difficulty communicating that sense, even if it does serve to reinforce the natural defensiveness of oppressed and deprived social groups. Has there ever been a myth more generally useful than that of the poor little rich boy, here personified by the young radical from the suburbs who seeks refuge in the slums? But since this young radical is committed to teaching slum dwellers those political skills necessary to escape the slums, and since that escape is widely desired, his position must be extraordinarily ambivalent and painful. For where will the poor go when they escape (either individually or collectively) except into one or another section of middle-class America? This is a difficulty which some New Leftists have resolved by finding, or pretending to find, values among the poor superior to those they knew at home; the poor already have a collective life –a life focused outward to the street and the gang rather than inward to the family– and, above all, a personal looseness and spontaneity which any middle-class American, so it is said, might well envy (and which many do envy). Hence they need freedom and power –to be what they are– rather than bourgeois wealth and security. Possibly a discovery of some moral significance is involved here, even if it is often marred by a perverse sentimentality. But what political conclusions can be drawn from it? On the one hand, the poor cannot win even minimal political power without transforming themselves, not totally, but in important ways. And on the other, post-affluent middle-class men and women cannot become either poor or Negro, no matter how hard they try. Such parallels as may exist between New Left and ghetto styles are temporary and coincidental, not harbingers of a shared future.

In practice, New Left community organizers move in two rather different directions, both of which lead them away from the specific content of their own ideology, away from participatory democracy if not from small groups. Some of them –perhaps the best of

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them– throw themselves into the conventional Old Left work of organizing the poor into unions and political machines, striving for marginal differentiation, but often rediscovering Old Left illusions about the long-term effects of their work. They argue, as Marxists did before them, that *this time* accommodation will not be possible, this time the organized poor will lead a revolution rather than another invasion of middle-class society. Other New Leftists have pursued the logic of their sentimental identification with the poor as far as it will go. They identify not only with the American poor, but with the poor the world over; they see the ghetto writ large in the Third World; they describe ghetto riots and *guerrilla* insurrections as if they were the same thing. They extend their commitment at the expense of its efficacy and perhaps because it has had, so far, so little efficacy. And then they eagerly await what they can hardly participate in: an apocalyptic Third World challenge to the America they grew up in. What the American poor make of all this can only be imagined.

New Leftists went into the slums for two reasons: because they were conventional middle-class youth, well-trained and highly competent, with something to teach; because they were unconventional middle-class youth, radically discontented, contemporary *narodniks,* certain that they had something to learn. The two reasons were both good ones, but the tension between them was hard to live with, especially in difficult conditions of daily struggle and danger. What has often (not always) happened, I think, is that middle-class radicals at work in the slums and ghettos have lost confidence in their own talents, above all in the value of their critical faculties and self-discipline, and have become the passive advocates of the going form of slum and ghetto militancy (as of the going form of Third World militancy), whatever its precise content. This is perhaps especially the case with Black Power, which seems so entirely at odds with any authentic New Left ideology, but which few New Leftists would today repudiate. It is also true more generally: the moral and psychic tensions of the encounter in the ghetto, for example, go a long way toward explaining the current New Left view of violence, with its peculiar mix of fascination and fear. Violence is one of the things middleclass radicals learned about among the poor, from the poor themselves, and from the oppressors of the poor. The New Left originally was committed to non-violence, indeed to a special sort of gentleness, openness, personal contact, and cooperation –all of these post-affluent values. America as a whole was and is differently committed, and the politics of personal contact was first transformed into the politics of "confrontation" with all its rhetorical extravagance and misplaced emotion through the experience of community organizing, the encounter with the other America. The young missionary in the slums had endlessly to prove himself in the face of local suspicion and police brutality. Often in proving himself he lost, himself, surrendered his special vision and his greatest strengths, and ceased to be useful to the people he had come to help. Among experienced New Leftists, community organizing is said to

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have a "radicalizing" effect; perhaps it does; it also has an alienating effect, turning middle-class radicals into vicarious *guerrillas* and Leninist ideologues –neither of these being much-needed sorts of people in America today.

The Vietnam War

The continued escalation of the Vietnam war has served to aggravate all these tendencies. It over-determines the New Left thrust toward rage, alienation, self-hate, and ideological rigidity; it produces an apolitical politics in which what seems to be at issue is more often the integrity of the individuals involved than the policy of the state. I don't mean to suggest that the New Left response to the war –there hasn't, of course, been a uniform response– has been irrational or even that it's wrong; I'm not sure what a proper response would be. America these days is infinitely hard on its radicals. All of us have come, however reluctantly, to share Allen Ginsberg's vision: "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving, hysterical, naked." Perhaps New Leftists are especially susceptible, and not only because they are –as they undoubtedly are– among the best minds of the new generation; they are especially susceptible also because of their anomalous position in the other America. Their authentic ideology is a response to the special world of affluence, efficiency, and bureaucracy; their authentic politics is one of participation and personal responsibility. But neither this ideology nor this politics provides any adequate means of coping with a brutal, immoral, and seemingly endless war, or with the men who carry on that war. In a peculiar way New Leftism is parasitic on liberalism; it takes off, so to speak, from the peaks of liberal success. When liberals act like the ugliest reactionaries, the New Left is disarmed –capable certainly of the most passionate denunciations, the most outraged expressions of betrayal and contempt, all of this well-deserved, but utterly incapable of effective action and sometimes even of coherent thought. Young radicals have talked a great deal about building a mass movement against the war, but the techniques they have adopted (and which are probably most appropriate to them) are ill-suited to that goal. They tend instead to create enclaves of moral men in an ugly and insane world, men whose mark is not their commitment of middle-class competence and discipline to a cause, but rather their willingness to "put their bodies on the line." But what else ought they to do? It is not as if anyone had succeeded in building an anti-war movement distinguished by its size, its unity, or its effectiveness, which New Leftists might join or where they might work part-time even while maintaining their enclave. In the absence of a meaningful liberalism the burden of moral expression has fallen disproportionately on them, and they have both assumed that burden and suffered from it.

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At the same time, the war has intensified an ideological development that began in the slums. It has led New Leftists to see the affluent world from which they came as a world literally dependent upon the systematic exploitation of masses of men at home and abroad. The theory of imperialism is today more widely accepted in the United States than at any time in the recent past (with some reason, after all), and this means that one of the most important Old Left ideologies has become a prevalent New Left ideology. The more post-affluent radicals are driven to confront the painful realities of the pre-affluent world, the more such old ideologies are likely to gain ground. For they have, whatever their intellectual cogency, a certain moral relevance to the social conditions in which they were bred. Not necessarily such a relevance as will make them useful guides to political action: their effect is more often to make possible plausible explanations for the failure of whatever action is undertaken, and then to provide plausible reasons for a withdrawal from a corrupted America into sectarian rectitude. So the New Left inherits not the victories but the defeats of the past, and insofar as it makes its peace with that inheritance, begins to transform itself from a moral enclave into a political sect. That transformation has not yet gone very far; the New Left still possesses many of its original qualities. Whether these can survive the Vietnam war, however, is a hard question.

So long as that war continues, opposition to it is bound to grow, and the New Left forms of that opposition –most crucially draft resistance– are also going to grow. Draft resistance is not likely to end the war; nor is the New Left, having carried personal responsibility to such a pitch, likely to function usefully in whatever more moderate anti-war movement the country may eventually produce. Too many New Leftists have come to doubt the very capacity of the country to offer a politics they might support. The best that can be hoped for is that draft resistance will shame liberals into a less pusillanimous opposition to the war. Then the moral fellowship that it generates in the New Left will not be so totally alienated from American life as to be incapable of functioning creatively in the post-war world.

Post Scriptum

I wrote this essay early in 1968; it was published that same year. I am writing now half a century later. My account of the New Left was based on personal experience; I was intensely engaged in both the civil rights and anti-war movements. But I was a little older than the student radicals, and I had effectively aligned myself with the "old left" by joining the editorial board of *Dissent* magazine. So I worked closely with my more youthful comrades –but also watched them with a sometimes wary eye. I think that my account of their poli-

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tics and of its likely ineffectiveness was mostly right; my sense of their (and our) future was mostly wrong. Here in the United States, it's not been a good half century.

The breakup of the 1960s Left continued in the years after 1968. A strident militancy replaced community organizing, both among black civil rights activists and among the anti-war warriors, who were almost entirely white. The nationalism of the Black Panthers, who paraded proudly with guns in hand, may have met some kind of emotional need, but it did not make for an effective politics. Minorities need allies; they need to build coalitions if they are to advance their interests, and the Panthers were determined to go it alone.

The militancy of anti-war politics was of a similar kind, drifting toward violence, aiming to "bring the war home." The fact is that we, the anti-war activists, had already, by 1968, turned the country against the war. And now we needed to take credit for that, claim victory, even if it was incomplete –and work to build the largest possible movement to actually stop the war. But that's just what we didn't do. Militancy and violence produced a sectarian politics; the war dragged on, and the New Left pretty much disappeared. Well, there was a brief appearance of an American Maoism--much less interesting than the French variety.

What happened to the young radicals? Some of them simply returned to the middle class from which they had come; they became, as one of their sharpest critics remarked, dentists. The best of them, after some period of recovery, joined the older left and went to work with labor unions and the established organizations of the liberal-left –defending free speech, voting rights, and the welfare state. Many of the women of the 1960s became the feminists of the 1970s. Feminism and gay rights are the success stories of the past half century.

But the larger success that I foresaw –of blacks, and women, and Hispanic and Asian immigrants, and every minority group, fighting their way into a steadily expanding and more and more secure middle class– has not come to pass. That kind of success depended on an expanding economy and also on the ability of the old left, of the labor movement and its allies, to shape economic policy. Instead we have endured neo-liberal economics, growing inequality, and the creation of a new class, the "precariat"–men and women living on the edge, their lives precarious, their income and well-being vulnerable to unemployment and foreclosure. And the Democratic Party, which looked in the 1930s and again in the 1960s as if it were becoming the American version of Social Democracy, drifted rightwards and became the advocate of a gentler neo-liberalism.

The New Left, of course, disdained social democracy, but that was in fact the future it should have aimed at –the best we could have done. I now suspect that the drift of American politics toward the right and then the farther right began in the 1960s. Let me tell a story that suggests the beginning.

In 1967 I was co-chair of the Cambridge Neighborhood Committee on Vietnam. We were attempting to organize the city against the war. As part of our organizing effort, we put a statement on the election ballot affirming the city's opposition to the war –so we could go

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door to door asking for votes. In the November referendum, 40% of the Cambridge electorate voted against the war. A graduate student in sociology did a statistical study of the vote and discovered (to our dismay) that the greater the value of your house, the higher the rent you paid, the more likely you were to vote *against* the war. We lost every working class, every ethnic neighborhood, in the city.

We should have expected this, though being old and new leftists, with conventional views about the working class, we didn't. The people canvassing for us were middle-class students, just like the students I described in my essay. Because they were students and while they were students, they were exempt from the draft. Going door to door, they were talking to people whose kids weren't exempt; many of them were in Vietnam. This was a cross-class engagement, but not one that pushed worker families toward the left. The push was in the other direction –and it was greatly intensified by some of the anti-war activists who insisted on carrying Viet Cong flags in every demonstration. We offended the patriotism of the people we were trying to convince. We should have been carrying American flags and arguing that patriotism required opposition to the war.

So that was the beginning of the Left's break with its natural (as we thought) constituency –the first appearance of the people who became the "Reagan Democrats," many of whom, with their children, ended up voting for Donald Trump. Of course, many other things happened between 1968 and 2016. The rightward drift of many (not all) American workers doesn't have to do only with the supposed lack of patriotism on the left. Social issues like abortion and gay marriage, which didn't figure at all in New Left politics, have also had a major impact. But the simple fact that the Left can't mobilize its old class base goes a long way toward explaining our current situation: inequality, vulnerability, anger, frustration –and Trumpism.

But maybe, just maybe, we are on the brink of a leftist revival –which will be, again, the work of the young.

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Michael Walzer is Professor Emeritus at the Institute for Advanced Study. He is one of America's foremost political thinkers. He has written about a wide variety of topics in political theory and moral philosophy, including political obligation, just and unjust war, nationalism and ethnicity, economic justice, and the welfare state. He has played a critical role in the revival of a practical, issue-focused ethics and in the development of a pluralist approach to political and moral life. He served as co-editor of the political journal *Dissent* for more than three decades, retiring in 2014. Currently, he is working on issues having to do with international justice and the connection of religion and politics, and also on a collaborative project focused on the history of Jewish political thought. Walzer's most recent books include *Arguing about War* (2004), and *Paradox of Liberation* (2015), *A Foreign Policy for the Left* (2018).