

Behind Recent Attacks on Herbert Marcuse

By George Katsiaficas

The Black Lives Matter movement involved tens of millions of people going into the streets at great risk to their own safety. The mobilization of so many people in so many places ushered in a new era of progress in the cultural self-understanding of millions of people, especially around the history of American racism and police murders. With attributes of a cultural revolution, dozens of statues of racist heroes were torn down, streets and buildings renamed, sports teams' mascots called into question, and long-standing grievances about racism finally examined. The role of police has been questioned widely for the first time in decades. And not only in the USA but all over the world.

For many of us, these were significant transformations that need to continue. Trump supporters and many conservatives, on the other hand, have launched a counteroffensive. A key battleground today concerns "critical race theory" (CRT), a term latched onto by opponents of BLM to villainize open discussion of racism. So afraid are conservatives of the racist history of the United States being publicly told, more than 17 states have introduced or passed legislation that would forbid teaching CRT. Arkansas Senator Tom Cotton introduced federal legislation banning CRT trainings from the US military, and as similar bill prohibiting public service workers from training in CRT was quickly introduced. On August 11, 2021 the Senate approved a bill introduced by Republican Senators Marco Rubio, Kevin Cramer, and Mike Braun that prohibits federal funding to promote "divisive concepts, such as Critical Race Theory."¹

Across the country, Republicans are gerrymandering electoral districts, infiltrating school boards and launching legislation to prevent open discussion in classrooms and public spaces of the many-sided history of this country. Running primarily on a platform to ban CRT from classrooms, newly elected Virginia governor Republican Glenn Youngkin defeated former governor Terry McAuliffe. His backroom supporters operated more than 1,300 "local news sites" that attacked CRT. Republican legislatures are stepping up attacks on women's rights, seeking to overturn Roe and restricting family support items in the budget at the same time as nearly three women are murdered every day by intimate associates.²

A part of the Right's offensive against the cultural renaissance has been to demonize radical theorists who paved the way for today's movements. Chief among them is Herbert Marcuse, whom right-wing critics in 2021 have blamed for CRT, cancel culture, Scientology, and a variety of other phenomena with which he had no relationship. Marcuse was a staunch advocate of movements for revolutionary change, a Marxist critic of capitalism, and firm supporter of African American liberation and feminism. Before he passed in 1979 (a decade before CRT was founded), he was a major influence on radical activists. Hated by both Soviet Communists and the Vatican, he was adored by revolutionaries around the world.

¹ Erika Stone, "SENATE VOTES TO BAN FEDERAL FUNDING TO TEACH CRITICAL RACE THEORY," The Black Wall Street Journal, August 12, 2021. <https://theblackwallsttimes.com/2021/08/12/senate-votes-to-ban-federal-funding-to-teach-critical-race-theory/>

² theguardian.com/us-news/2021/sep/26/femicide-us-silent-epidemic

Witty commentator Matt Taibbi recently posted, “Marcuse-Anon: Cult of the Pseudo-Intellectual: Reviewing ‘Repressive Tolerance’ and other works by Herbert Marcuse, the quack who became America’s most influential thinker.”³ To be sure, Taibbi is no intellectual. Reading Marcuse for him is “like eating a bowl of thumbtacks.” His disdain for intellectuals is premised on his belief that “They can justify anything.” Even if he is wrong that Marcuse “became America’s most influential thinker,” one notices a certain respect in his exaggeration of the philosopher’s impact. He believes Marcuse’s “ideas today are as ubiquitous as Edison’s lightbulbs.” Taibbi falsely blames Marcuse for cancel culture and connects him to QAnon in his title. Nonetheless, he understands that Marcuse believed “the working class is still the historical agent of revolution.” Blessed or cursed with a short attention span, Taibbi completely misses Marcuse’s role in a Berlin soldiers’ council at the end of World War 1 and seems not to know of his long service fighting Naziism as an analyst for the Office of Strategic Services (forerunner to the CIA) during and after World War 2. Most surprisingly, Taibbi channels Marcuse “from the grave” and finds him cheering “countless recent new stories,” such as the firing of actress Gina Corano. Taibbi mistakenly attributes to him the expression “Too Much Democracy.” Nonsense! That vile distinction belongs to Samuel P. Huntington, author of *The Crisis of Democracy*, advocate of forced bombing of Vietnam to urbanize the population, war criminal par excellence, and critic of what he called the “democratic distemper.”⁴

Apparently unrelated to Taibbi, extreme right commentator Liz Wheeler recently published an anti-Marcuse diatribe in *Newsweek*.⁵ Wheeler built her reputation by supporting Trump, especially when she worked at One America News, Trump’s favorite news channel and home base for the Big Lie (Trump won the election). Like her idol, facts are no impediment to her story. In her *Newsweek* article, she intoned, “It was Marcuse who helped morph critical theory into critical race theory in the United States, by identifying a new ‘worker’ for the revolution who could be re-educated to overthrow societal norms: racial minorities... Underneath the conservative popular base is the substratum of the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colors.” According to Marcuse, “their opposition is revolutionary even if their consciousness is not.” Wheeler went on to argue that, “the designers and adherents of critical theory admitted their true intent. Not equality under the law. Not civil rights. Not freedom, liberty and justice for all. Not a better life for racial minorities. Critical theorists admit their intent is to use racial minorities as the vanguard for a Marxist revolution. Thus, critical race theory was born.”

One might expect *Newsweek* to fact-check before publishing. As is well known, CRT began in 1989 following an eponymous workshop in Madison, Wisconsin, organized by Derrick Bell, Kimberle Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, and others. “Critical theory” dates to the 1930s as a term often used to denote the ideas of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, or the Frankfurt School (of which Marcuse was a prominent member) . While she may be ignorant of its origin,

³ Matt Taibbi, <https://taibbi.substack.com/p/marcuse-anon-cult-of-the-pseudo-intellectual-1d3>

⁴ See my critique of Huntington at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ebdbc8bbc7d4955c7859db2/t/5f0f6580b0413d396f20d8c1/1594844545837/huntington.pdf>

⁵ Liz Wheeler, “Critical race theory is repackaged Marxism” <https://www.newsweek.com/critical-race-theory-repackaged-marxism-opinion-1599557>

Wheeler understands the latent potential of CRT to “defund the police...abolish prisons...abolish capitalism...”

Not to be outdone, Christopher Brooks wrote his own version of Marcuse’s relationship to CRT in July 2021: “As Marcuse’s words suggest, neo-Marxism and its related ideologies often support a sort of groupthink that removed voices of dissent from the public square by pretending to listen to them while invalidating them with high-brow Marxist rhetoric. Critical race theory is being used in a similar way, although it was not necessarily intended for that purpose...There is no sharing of the center, no room for a melting pot. There is one way to see things.”⁶ Again, a caricature of Marcuse stands in for the theory he espoused.

Christian Parenti Joins Right-wing Chorus Attacking Herbert Marcuse

The latest voice in the chorus attacking Marcuse and “critical race theory” belongs to none other than Christian Parenti, a left-wing professor whose diatribes against colleagues he deems insufficiently class-oriented are growing increasingly sectarian. In November, amid a continuing series of posts criticizing “identity politics,” Parenti published his essay, “The First ‘Privilege Walk’ - How Marcuse’s widow used a Scientology-linked cult’s methodology to hook the left on identity politics and psychobabble.”⁷

Parenti feels that consciousness raising about our intersectional identities in relation to others will hinder the development of class consciousness. He uses this concern to attack the pioneering anti-racism work of Erica Sherover-Marcuse in ugly and unprincipled ways, and he seeks to tar Herbert Marcuse in the process. Long before she married Herbert Marcuse, Erica Sherover was centrally involved in co-counseling, also called Reevaluation Counseling (RC), a cluster of group therapy techniques designed primarily to examine and transform racist and sexist patterns of speech and action.

Parenti found audio tapes of a 1984 session which Sherover-Marcuse led where participants were asked to take pride in their intersectional identities. Based on one case, he concludes the exercise shamed a white participant, who years later turned into a Trump supporter. Willow Simmons, who participated in that 1984 workshop felt compelled to say she was “white and proud.” As she subsequently recalled, “And where I nearly choked with guilt and disgust on my affirmation of white pride, the Latina woman’s affirmation was a cause to celebrate. The women of color at the workshop recalled the pain they experienced being raised in a racist environment and realized that they had never been encouraged or given an opportunity to express their legitimate anger.”

Does Parenti celebrate the liberating experience of Latina women? No. On the contrary, using psychobabble evident throughout his essay, he labels their joy as “cultivation of socially

⁶ Christopher Brooks, “Historically Speaking: The big problem with teaching critical race theory,” The Morning Call, July 18, 2021. <https://www.mcall.com/opinion/mc-opi-historically-speaking-nineteen-third-version-brooks-20210708-3mdzejtgdvaznd275hmavq76dy-story.html>

⁷ Christian Parenti, <https://nonsite.org/the-first-privilege-walk/>. By way of full disclosure, I was a personal friend of both Herbert Marcuse and Erica Sherover. I can attest to the fact that they did not agree on the particular issue raised by Parenti, namely co-counseling (as we called it then). During many of the nights when Ricky would leave to attend her various meetings, it was my pleasure to hang out with Herbert and keep him company. On more than one occasion, Herbert remarked that he considered co-counseling a kind of “pop psychology.”

destructive narcissism” through “wacky gestalt therapy.”⁸ His choice of sympathy for Willow and disdain for Latinas joy indicates his own unacknowledged bias. While Parenti trivializes group therapy as “Oppression Olympics,” could the privilege walk be a form of measuring social capital, an important resource for the maintenance of a class society? In his haste to connect Sherover to Scientology, Parenti fails to consider such an alternative. He gives little or no justification for yoking Sherover’s work on privilege walks to Scientology. At several points he asserts that “identity politics” and privilege walks obscure class oppression, but he never explains how. It would’ve been much more helpful to the reader if Parenti had instead examined in dispassionate detail the questions he raises about privilege walks.

The point Parenti seeks to make is that when individuals take personal responsibility for racism, patriarchy, and “non-class” forms of oppression, they miss and minimize class struggle. He feels that co-counseling, RC, and all of the various forms of group therapy in use today only cause individual blame-taking while letting corporate capitalism off the hook. He believes confessional culture (in which people publicly take responsibility for such social problems like race, gender, and class oppression) only has ill-effects like making people suffer lower self-esteem, while ignoring the primary planetary problem, capital as a self-expanding value.

If we take a less controversial subject to illustrate his point, guilt-ridden drives to stop environmental devastation by encouraging individual recycling overlooks the fact that the destruction of the earth is mainly caused by capitalism’s unending need for growth and corporations’ production of cancer-causing products like Round-Up as well as profitable but toxic packaging for consumer goods. I think many of us would agree that individual recycling is time consuming and does not address the primary cause of planetary destruction, but we recycle nonetheless as part of a global effort to rescue our planet.

So far so good, but Parenti forgets individual responsibility entirely since he believes taking any individual responsibility only deflects from the larger struggle against capital. If we examine his title, it reflects precisely his disdain for individuals’ being held responsible for their impact in the world. “Marcuse’s widow”? Since when are we reverting to calling females by reference to their male partner rather than by their own names? Has Parenti learned nothing about sexism in the past 50 years? To hell with feminism and women’s calls to be treated with respect! After all, to my great disappointment, the system has turned 1960s feminists’ calls for an end to war into “women in combat” and their advocacy for greater female political representation into a score of female Republican extremists. Does that mean we throw out feminism?

In his willfully crafted essay, he complains that “sketches of Ricky Sherover-Marcuse litter the web.” Wait, did he say “litter”? As in garbage? Beyond impolite, he is insulting. But no matter, for in his next phrase, Parenti complains that these sketches “never mention that she was the daughter of a very rich man, the daughter of an actual capitalist...” (In fact, for several years, Sherover’s father was a major supplier of weapons to the Spanish republic as they fought Franco. He secretly worked with US President Franklin Roosevelt against Hitler and was a long time loyal communist. He subsequently purchased a large steel factory in Venezuela.)

⁸ Parenti, 7.

Parenti claims the internet's omission of Sherover's wealthy background is HER doing. Ricky Sherover-Marcuse died in 1988 at the age of 49, before the internet emerged from its infancy. The internet's first web browser was launched on April 30, 1993, five years after Marcuse-Sherover passed. But inside the psychobabble bubble in which Parenti lives, the internet's omission "seems to betray not only Oedipal rage, but also a guilty conscience. The charge could be: rich girl convinces people to focus on race and gender instead of class." Wait a second. Did he say "girl," not woman, as a sexist put-down? Parenti blames her for what has been posted about her after her death, an indication how his zealous attempt to tar her blinds him to basic facts. His misguided psychoanalysis of the reason for the omission ("a rich girl's guilty conscience and Oedipal rage" led her to cover up her capitalist father) is indicative of deep misogyny more than anything about Sherover-Marcuse. Parenti's line of reasoning also has nothing to do with Herbert Marcuse, who always insisted that "Marxism is not family psychology."

Privilege Walks

Parenti builds his essay around what are sometimes known as "Privilege Walks," group therapy exercises developed by Sherover-Marcuse (among others). During Privilege Walks, individuals are asked to take one step forward or backward in response to a few dozen questions about their lives. Participants are thereby asked to publicly acknowledge and take responsibility for their identities. Corporate human resource departments and universities have made massive use of this group counseling technique.

Parenti finally tells us the reason for his misogynistic hack job on Sherover-Marcuse. "The real effect of a focus on 'privilege' is to hide the problems of class power and exploitation that are at the heart of capitalist social relations." For Parenti: "The fallacies of the Privilege Walk's assumptions are revealed in the track record of identity politics. Over the last forty years, even as women, people of color, and LGBTQ people have made tremendous social gains, economic inequality has soared." Is Parenti blaming the identity politics of women, people of color, and LGBTQ people for the ravages brought by neoliberalism? For white males in the US, the ongoing decline in their status and wealth lies at the root of Trump's appeal. Wait a moment though. Is Parenti blaming victims of racism and sexism for the past decades' massive impoverishment caused by the capitalist system? Isn't he thereby letting neoliberalism off the hook?

How can he understand that the BLM movement helped to "to hide the problems of class power and exploitation"? Does he understand nothing about police? Their main function is precisely to "protect" private property, especially of corporations and banks. The BLM movement presents a great opportunity for people of his persuasion to open discussions of capitalism, to probe for mutual understandings and actions. Rather than organize around "class politics," his approach is to condemn identity politics using less than factual discourse and personalized attacks.

Near the very beginning of his essay, Parenti rejected out of hand the idea that that "macro-level social phenomena have micro-level causes." If that is the case, then how can he blame micro-level identity politics for the macro-level ill effects of neoliberalism? Logically he cannot; but logic and truth are the least of his concerns. Parenti continues: "...fighting horizontal forms of oppression, while important, is not the same as, nor does it add up to, the vertical conflict: class

struggle over who controls the economy and how the social surplus is distributed.” Class struggle for him is a master narrative that diminishes to the vanishing point the relevance of real-world conflicts about job discrimination based on race and gender, movements against police violence against racial minorities (like BLM), and efforts to stop femicide. No doubt the victims of these forms of oppression would disagree that they are fighting “horizontally” while Parenti and company are fighting “vertically.” For him, identity politics “avoids class struggle.”⁹ For millions of people, their involvement in recent social movements has expanded their understanding of US capitalism and politics (and at the same time, exhibited the irrelevance of sectarians like Parenti).

I never heard of Privilege Walks before reading Parenti’s article, so I looked it up. The first hit that caught my attention was from the Dolores Huerta Foundation (named after the legendary United Farmworkers organizer). Their Privilege Walk offers a carefully chosen list of 24 statements, after which a person should walk one step forward or one step backward depending on their answer.¹⁰ Many of the questions (1/3 of the total) were about class:

- If there have been times in your life when you skipped a meal because there was no food in the house take one step backward.
- If your family had health insurance take one step forward.
- If you ever offered a job because of your association with a friend or family member take one step forward.
- If you or your family ever inherited money or property take one step forward.
- If one of your parents was ever laid off or unemployed and not by choice take one step backward.
- If either of your parents graduated from college take one step forward.
- If you took out loans for your education take one step backward.
- If you were encouraged by your family and family members to attend college take one step forward.

Upon factual examination, Privilege Walks that Sherover-Marcuse helped design do contain class-based exercises. In fact, her theory and pioneering work are based upon attempts to unlock the revolutionary potential of the working class. As she wrote in 1984, “...the subjectivity of the proletariat is not already emancipated and thus the development of an emancipatory subjectivity is to be conceptualized as a struggle against internalized oppression.”¹¹ A well-reasoned analysis of the links between psychological repression and economic exploitation is unveiled by

⁹ Parenti, 24.

¹⁰ <http://doloreshuerta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/privilege-walk.pdf>

¹¹ Erica Sherover-Marcuse, *Emancipation and Consciousness* (London: Blackwell, 1986) 120 as quoted by Parenti.

Sherover-Marcuse. Rather than take her arguments seriously, Parenti has nothing but disdain for “New Left radicals who in their attempts to liberate themselves and others, experimented with everything from LSD and group sex to ethno-nationalism and homemade bombs.”¹² He complains that the Old Left was “fighting violently repressive capitalist bosses and then fascism...required real toughness” while the “groovy Boomer” New Left was “childish and irrational.”¹³ I would love to see him parade his macho assessment of toughness to members of the Black Panther Party, at least 28 of whom were assassinated. Or to tell the Attica brothers that they were “childish and irrational” before Nelson Rockefeller sent in the police to murder 39 of them.

To his credit, Parenti comprehends Marcuse’s belief that the May 1968 rebellion in France, which involved more than 9 million workers going on strike, was “the first powerful rebellion against the whole of the existing society, the rebellion for the total transvaluation of values, for qualitatively different ways of life.”¹⁴ One need only wait for two paragraphs, however, for Parenti to accuse Marcuse of only seeing hope in the “Global North” in the ghettos.¹⁵

For some time now, Parenti has ridiculed accomplishments of BLM: “the liberal political class prefers progressive cultural change, renaming and redecorating, to the harder job of progressive economic change.”¹⁶ **“Redecorating?”** He turns movement victories into “redecorating,” normally a task left for women? In so doing, he tramples on the joyful feelings of millions of “ordinary” people who accomplished long-overdue changes to our built environment and historical memory. Why is he less concerned with BLM activists than with “the liberal political class”? It’s a slippery slope down the footsteps of right-wing crackpots like Ben Weingarten, who believes, “Thomas Jefferson’s statue was just removed from New York’s City Hall. People are deemed inherently evil based on their skin color, and the country deemed evil itself. ‘Equal rights for all and special privileges for none’ has given way to a ruling class ethos of unequal rights and special privileges.”¹⁷

Christian Parenti should know better than to follow in the tail of the growing right-wing assault against Marcuse, CRT, and cultural changes won by blood and tears of BLM. With so many other topics urgently needing to be addressed, among them the origin of the attacks on critical race theory and its future impact on class consciousness of Americans, Parenti could well have chosen better than to echo Taibbi, Wheeler and their ilk by casting blame for today’s maladies on Marcuse. Parenti’s essay is a waste of precious (intellectual) resources, and he does himself (and the truth) a disservice when the stakes are so high in our time — for people of color and the planet. He can and *should* put his talents to more noble use.

Guardian writer Cas Mudde argues strongly that “Anti-identity-politics leftists and liberals must stop acting as the useful idiots of the far right by advancing its pet issues and terminology. These campaigns against anti-racism might look ridiculous on Fox News, but they have real

¹² Parenti, 12.

¹³ Parenti, 20.

¹⁴ Marcuse, *Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) 22 as quoted by Parenti.

¹⁵ Parenti, 14-15.

¹⁶ <https://nonsite.org/the-surprising-geography-of-police-killings-back-of-the-napkin-calculations-on-race-region-and-violence/>

¹⁷ <https://thefederalist.com/2021/12/01/if-you-dont-know-what-time-it-is-get-out-of-politics-now/>

consequences in legislatures and statehouses across the country, where Republican politicians are using the bogeyman of critical race theory and identity politics to ram reactionary rhetoric into law. Coast to coast, Republican lawmakers have unleashed the most profound attack on democracy that this country has seen in decades. Leftists and liberals must recognize that the true enemy of both the working class and free society is on the right, and that its threat is still at least as serious as it was in 2016.”¹⁸

Sectarianism Masquerading as Class Politics

Parenti’s sectarian insistence on the sole legitimacy of class politics, the basis for his attack on the Marcuses, is a fetishization of the proletariat based on unproven myths and his belief that he speaks for the working class. His choice to disrespect Erica Sherover-Marcuse—as well as anyone and everyone who does not subscribe to his notion of “class politics”—is based upon a self-righteous sectarianism tied to what Marcuse named the “labor metaphysic.” Once 20th century revolutions in Europe failed to consolidate in the core of the capitalist system, the working class won integration into the capitalist system. Today, some 70% of Americans identify as “middle class.”¹⁹ Nonetheless, some Leftists have been unable to rethink the historical situation and instead lapsed into a dogmatic reading of Marx (or anarchist theorists of their choosing). The US working class is increasingly women and minorities, with the result that many class struggles take on the appearance of being racial or gender based.

Parenti’s emotional diatribe illustrates how blind he is to even the most basic outline of recent history. The New Left was world-historical, meaning it provides outlines for successive waves of insurgencies.²⁰ Since 1968, waves of insurgencies have continually emerged with New Left characteristics: spontaneously erupting, globally self-organized in synchronicity with other emergent struggles, involving diverse constituencies with activists attempting to create free human beings capable of living cooperatively. New Left forms of organization and action emerged in the Gwangju Peoples’ Uprising of 1980, and more recently in the Sudan and Algeria. Contemporary movements are built on a grammar of direct-democracy, autonomy, international solidarity and loving solidarity. Although they had very different politics, New Left theorists Murray Bookchin (an anarchist) and Huey Newton (a Marxist-Leninist) nevertheless formulated very similar dreams: “Libertarian Municipalism” and “Revolutionary Intercommunalism.” The movement demanded “All Power to the People” not the dictatorship of the proletariat. Black Panther George Jackson called for the “99%” to overthrow the 1%.²¹

Generations X and Z are concerned with “micro-aggressions” and “abuse.” Their concerns ring hollow to Old Left partisans. Their “life-style radicalism” may not be directed by conventional political concerns, but both macro and micro levels incredibly important to each other. New Left ideas from Che’s “new socialist man” to MLK’s “New Negro” and Steve Biko’s Black Consciousness Movement, illustrated that revolutionaries around the world realized 50 years ago that we MUST change ourselves to change the world.

¹⁸ ‘Critical race theory’ is the right’s new bogeyman. The left must not fall for it”

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jun/25/critical-race-theory-rightwing-bogeyman-left-wing>

¹⁹ <https://www.cnn.com/2017/06/30/70-percent-of-americans-consider-themselves-middle-class-but-only-50-percent-are.html>

²⁰ See my book, *The Global Imagination of 1968* (PM Press, 2019).

²¹ <https://publicautonomy.org/2013/12/20/george-jackson-on-the-1-and-the-99/>

For that half century, “workerisms” based upon Old Left notions of class struggle have undermined protest movements and mass organizations. Students for a Democratic Society, a self-described revolutionary organization with as many as 100,000 members in 1969, was largely destroyed by “class-conscious” activists who insisted workers or Third World countries, not students, were the base of the revolution. After its 1969 convention, few activists discussed how to continue the movement’s history of successful organizing on campuses. Whether to go into factories or the armed underground were the only “legitimate” options. Proletarian dogmatism and Third World idolatry tore the organization apart. Students became defined as “petit-bourgeois” and an alphabet soup of dogmatic cadre groups emerged: OL, RU, RYM 1, 2, and 3, PL. Campus organizers were castigated as “petit-bourgeois” and “non-serious.” Few people continued to organize in the universities and colleges even though such efforts met with enormous success as witnessed in the anti-apartheid movement at UC Berkeley and the Anti-CIA Coalition at UCSD, which grew to include more than five other UC campuses, and countless other examples.

Often ranted about but seldom discussed, divisions in the movement are an important topic. All too many people today reject “identity politics” out of hand while dogmatically embracing “class politics.” This artificial division, a line in the sand merits re-examination. Parenti’s type of binary thinking is precisely the form of attacks that tore apart SDS and took the movement out of the one institution where it had won a foothold. Failure to unite has been the bane of global revolutionary movements for more than a century. To see it being reproduced today, even if on such a ridiculous level, is a sad commentary on our future.

Every form of identity politics has a universal relevance.²² Black music is universal music; gender liberation frees all of us; psychological counseling can be of great importance in helping individuals move ahead with their lives. Class politics is contained within identity politics. The League of Revolutionary Black Workers in Detroit, the Black Panther Party, the Brown Berets, and the Young Lords all explicitly denounced and opposed capitalism. The national liberation struggle in Vietnam helped to spark a worldwide revolutionary upsurge in more than 80 countries. The Black Panther Party became leadership of a global revolutionary movement.²³

My studies of Asian uprisings²⁴ reveals that the working class engaged in massive struggles after larger movements had broken the repressive holds of dictatorships. Only after massive and often student-led movements had won democratic rights in South Korea, Bangladesh, and Nepal, did workers begin to protest for improved wages and working conditions. In South Korea, China, Taiwan, Thailand, and Indonesia, students played decisive roles in detonating enormous class struggles. In Burma, students and monks jointly coordinated a network of insurrectionary local governments.

²² See my “The Latent Universal Within Identity Politics” *New Political Science* Numbers 38-9, Winter/Spring 1997 <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ebdbc8bbc7d4955c7859db2/t/61a930cf46c3050a48554560/1638478384536/1atent+id+universal.pdf>

²³ See Charles Jones and Michael Clemons, *The Black Panther Reconsidered* (Black Classic Press) and Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, *Liberation, Imagination and the Black Panther Party* (Routledge).

²⁴ *Asia’s Unknown Uprisings* (2 vols) PM Press, 2012.

Parenti admits that industrial action and social democratic politics delivered remarkable victories to working people in the decades before 1968. What about now? With half-a century of working class organizing since 1968 to review, what has been accomplished? Union membership in the US is at an all-time low. Real wages have fallen dramatically. In 2011, an important labor struggle resulted in occupation of the Wisconsin State Capitol. Tens of thousands of people held the building for nearly a month in defense of public workers' collective bargaining rights. Satellite events occurred at many campuses and in other cities. Across the country tens of thousands more rallied in support.²⁵ Sadly the bill was defeated in court, and the movement subsided. In 2017, immigrant workers more than anyone else mobilized on Mayday by the hundreds of thousands. Border patrol and ICE attacks have massively repressed this part of the labor movement.

Why Marcuse?

Two important questions: Why is Marcuse being blamed for whatever ails our society, whether it be QAnon, critical race theory, or Scientology? What makes Marcuse such a unifying target for reactions? As I pondered this phenomenon, Herbert suddenly spoke up in my memory of a similar situation: "It's the anal-sadistic character of self-hating intellectuals," he began. Continuing without raising his voice and with a slight smile of ironic satisfaction, he asked, "Once the NEP men went on to righteously stamp out their mistaken elders, how many of the old Bolsheviks survived?"

Not well known until late in his life, Herbert Marcuse became the beloved philosopher of tens of thousands of frontline activists, most famously Angela Davis. Precisely because Marcuse was the one radical theorist to tie together organizations like the Black Panther Party, the Vietnamese revolution, feminism, and Che Guevara, he has become the symbol for the potential revolution which seems even further away today than during his lifetime. With the eruption we know as BLM, Marcuse is once again becoming a notorious figure.

Herbert Marcuse called for a cultural revolution, one requiring us to change even our instincts in order to become human beings capable of living together in freedom and peace. Rejecting the Old Left model of base and superstructure, he asked where does psychology fit. If anywhere, he insisted, below the base! Capitalism has taken an enormous toll on our psyches, embedding competition, hierarchy and cash connections, causing us to fetishize commodities in consumer society where "debilitating comforts" weaken us physically. Observing that the superego of Freud's early model of the personality has become so large, simultaneously with the shrinkage of the ego, Marcuse insisted "surplus repression" ruled our lives, preventing us from living instead of making a living.

Socrates was not the first philosopher to fall victim to political power. Those who advocate peace rather than war, love over hate, are commonly vilified and ostracized, or bloodied and killed. If there is hope to deliver the US from the capitalist death spiral taking down the planet and all forms of life with it, our only possibility is to build a unified movement that finds space for all to make even modest contributions. We require diversity amid unity, mutual self-understanding,

²⁵ In Boston, I marched with my AFT colleagues on the State House. Speaker after speaker denounced the disappearance of the middle-class. Holding up my union card (which I had earned for 26 years) I screamed at the top of my lungs: "What about the working class?" Dozens of people laughed but none on the platform.

empathy, dialectical understanding of structure and personality. How can we come together so long as patriarchal misogyny, nationalist fanaticism, racial hatred, and sectarian thinking keep us divided?