

INTRODUCTION

NINE YEARS AGO, PLATYPUS PUBLISHED *The Platypus Review Reader*. At that time, we were still a relatively new organization and were obliged, therefore, to explain ourselves. I began my introduction to that volume, therefore, by explicating our slogan—"The Left is Dead, Long Live the Left!"—together with something of the "Left-centric" and negative dialectical conception of history that it presupposed, and I included as appendices to that volume Platypus's founding documents: "What is a Platypus? On Surviving the Extinction of the Left," "A Short History of the Left," and "Statement of Purpose of the Platypus Affiliated Society." Readers unfamiliar with Platypus but interested in our organization are referred to those documents, to our website, and to our various local chapters. But these volumes, the *Platypus Review* issues upon which they are based, and our project generally are not solely for members.

Readers should, naturally, begin with the first volume. For it was on the basis of our experience of 2006–2013, the years covered in that first volume, that we sought to track the changing circumstances prevailing during the period covered in this one, 2013–18—from the aftermath of Occupy, through SYRIZA's 2015 electoral victory, Jeremy Corbyn's rise to leadership of the Labour Party, the Brexit referendum, and the Sanders campaign for the Democrat Party nomination, on into the election of Donald Trump (as the clearest expression of the crisis of neoliberalism) and the early Trump years, which saw the election of candidates to the US Congress backed by the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). This second volume thus rounds off the first decade of Platypus and a certain arc of the Millennial Left—from its inception in the antiwar movement to its collapse and reabsorption into capitalist politics. A forthcoming third volume of the *Reader* will cover the period 2018–24, i.e. the years immediately following the death of the Millennial Left.

In addition to these volumes of the *Reader*, students of Platypus and of our moment in history are referred to *Marxism in the Age of Trump: Articles from the Platypus Review, 2013–17* (2018) from Platypus Publishing, and to Chris Cutrone's two titles from Sublation Press, *The Death of the Millennial Left: Interventions, 2006–22* (2023) and the two-volume *Marxism and Politics: Essays on Critical Theory and Party 2006–23* (2024). Cutrone's Sublation publications are indispensable supplements to, especially, volumes 2 and 3 of the *Reader*, as his stand-alone articles are not replicated in them. Taken together, these six books—*The Platypus Review Reader* volumes 1–3, *Marxism in the Age of Trump*, and Cutrone's Sublation books—form the curated documentation of the first seventeen years of Platypus. They constitute the hidden transcripts of the history of the Millennial Left.

An object of both attraction and aversion, even contempt, but, perhaps most often, of ambivalence, few leftists today have never heard of or encountered

Platypus. We are now a large group, relatively speaking, and have established a track record of hosting the conversation on the Left internationally. We have built chapters to this end on university campuses across North America, Europe, Australia, and Asia. True, our purpose in engaging in this activity can be opaque, sometimes even to ourselves, and its full import often appears only in retrospect. Those who write for our publication or speak on our panels have, of course, their own purposes, which we acknowledge, even welcome. This introduction shows how in the period under review the conversation we hosted went. In that time, the Left confronted the task of working through the party question as a fraught legacy inherited from the twentieth century. In a crucial sense, that task was the end—both goal and terminus—of the Millennial Left. Once recognized, that task's deferral and repression could not but prove historically decisive.

In outlining how Platypus attempted to engender a consciousness of our time as history, I have relied here chiefly on fora transcripts, on what leftists said on our panels. This is not to diminish the importance of the many important articles and interviews in this volume, but to celebrate here the central activity of our far-flung chapters, the holding of public fora. The reading of these transcripts demonstrates, moreover, how to approach even *Platypus Review* articles and interviews, namely, as contributions to our "forum in print." Every piece in this book, of whatever genre, constitutes a contribution to an ongoing and curated debate and dialogue with and within the Left—yes, necessarily, with the living, but, via the living, with the dead who speak through them. For, as Cutrone wrote in an early issue of the *Platypus Review*, in Platypus "we have sought the reopening of historical issues on the Left with the intention of their fundamental reconsideration, taking nothing for granted, so that we could definitely close the books on stale 'debates' in which the 'Left' has remained stuck for more than a generation."¹ Or, as the *Platypus Review* "Statement of Purpose" puts it, "We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique."

The Millennial Left inherits Marxism

Platypus arrived after the future. What we faced was no simple tactical defeat, no mere decline in numbers or strength. For what seemed time out of mind, the Left had evaded (generally, by celebrating) its own history and, thereby, evaded its own *raison d'être*. Stretching back through the New Left of the 1960s and 70s (and their post-political aftermath) back to the Old Left of the 1930s—ultimately, to the crisis of proletarian socialism in 1917 and its aftermath—, a long history conditioned from birth the Millennial Left, of which Platypus formed a part. Most immediately, however, we emerged from the movementism, sectarianism, academicism, and anarchoid lifestyle-ism of the 80s and 90s. That was the postmodernist, antiracist, feminist, environmentalist, and anti-globalizationist

INTRODUCTION

left that we termed in our founding documents “the post-political Left.” But longer histories were being transmitted, and their legacy, a new generation had come to feel, had somehow to be confronted. Indeed, the older, Generation X members of Platypus (“Gen Zero” in Platypus parlance), had experienced firsthand the attempt to repeat and reproduce the New Left and had, through that experience, sensed its exhaustion. That attempt at repetition/reproduction was itself being repeated, under new circumstances.

The 2000s antiwar movement saw the return from seeming oblivion of Marxism and the Marxist sects. Through the Answer Coalition and Not in Our Name they were instrumental in bringing off the mass rallies against the war where a new generation of young people gained their first experience of the Left. This return of Marxism came not through the experience of economic crisis but via the politics of anti-imperialism.

From the outset, then, the Millennial Left felt the weight of history upon them. Marx, Engels, and the revolutionary Marxists of the Second International had understood socialism as a response to, as well as an attempt at actively provoking and prosecuting, the self-contradiction of modern freedom. In the era of the industrial revolution, history’s very unfolding—the unfolding of what passes for historical progress—propelled disintegration and regression. That is, in capitalism progress itself demands the liquidation of both socialism and the Enlightenment legacy that socialism alone can advance. Marxism was the self-consciousness, the immanent dialectical critique, of socialism and thus of the “progress” in capitalism that it inevitably provoked. Marxism once bore the historical aspirations of mankind. As Richard Rubin remarked in a panel on “Program and Utopia” held in June 2013,

[A] fundamental idea that emerged from the Enlightenment. . . is the conviction that people can consciously transform society. That idea was taken up by the socialist movement of the nineteenth century. At the heart of the Marxist project is the idea that humanity can liberate itself and consciously restructure society. The fate of humanity and the fate of the Marxist project both depend upon the extent to which people—and not just a few people, but billions of people—can be convinced this is true. The problem is not strictly economic. People may struggle when there is austerity, but people can also struggle, and have done so, under conditions of greater job security. For the Left, it is ultimately a question of human freedom, not only of social struggle. [21]

The present might yet be tasked by the Third Estate’s freedom project, even as it was conditioned by that project’s failure as inherited, reconstituted, and, ultimately, liquidated in the 20th century. Socialism thus lay in ruins with nothing having credibly replaced it. Yet already from the outset of Occupy, with its emphasis on direct democracy, the Millennial Left seemed resigned to abdication. As Cutrone wrote at the time, “what is meant by anti-capitalism, socialism, and hence Marxism might suffer another round of superficial banalization and

degradation ("We are the 99%!") in response to the present crisis."² But there would be one last reflection.

In the post-Occupy period, Platypus, for its part, again faced the task of denaturalizing the inherited and habitual oblivion-practices of the Left. Through our strategy of "hosting the conversation on the Left," we sought, in a second period of downturn, to render palpable the ongoing failure, now reproducing itself in a new generation. For, as in the antiwar movement, its aftermath, and Occupy, the downturn of activity occasioned by Occupy's collapse made the Left's history reveal itself in new lights, to, in Walter Benjamin's phrase, "flash up" in new constellations. To quote Benjamin *in extenso*,

The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. . . . To articulate the past . . . means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes.³

Each phase of the Millennial Left's experience possessed its own specificity, even as, taken together, they traced a distinct, if non-linear, trajectory. Each conditioned what came after, albeit according to no mere arithmetical operation.

The very notion of a Millennial Left is contentious, as is its history. Indeed, the Millennials themselves now seem intent upon disavowing it. This takes two main forms: They were just the latest in a perennial struggle, in which case all there is to say, humbly, is that "they did their best"; or, the Millennials are a heroic generation that, like the New Left, arrested, even reversed, a long slide into conservatism and, in the process, registered certain "gains." Perhaps, these gains were the overcoming of "white supremacy" and "heteronormativity." As the *New York Times* reported approvingly of the new Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) back in 2008, "some chapters have distanced themselves from the '60s generation. To [Rachel Haut] at Queens College, it is not 'productive' to work with 'a lot of old white guys arguing about what they should have done.' As it is, the new group devotes a good deal of intellectual energy to self-analysis."⁴ In other words, the justifications were ready to hand at the dawn of the Millennial Left. Indeed, they were hand-me-downs from "a lot of old guys." But, perhaps, if the Millennial Left has accomplished anything, it is the supposed renewal of social democracy—putting "socialism" back on the agenda. At any event, its history is assimilated into the ongoing struggle: The Millennials emerged from what came before, the post-political Left of the 1980s and 1990s, and now the Zoomers have come along. The Millennials were just, so to speak, biologically next. Events precipitated by the actions of elites politicized them: There was war and a financial crash, then Sanders and Corbyn threw their hats in the ring. The notion of a Millennial Left is rendered in this way a mere manner of speaking,

INTRODUCTION

one that indicates a more or less arbitrarily conceived “generation” coming of age at a time that coincides with renewed activity on the Left.

To the extent that the Millennial Left is thought to possess a distinctly historical character, it is isolated from the flow of history altogether. Within the ongoing flow of time and generations, the Millennial arrives with a kind of biological shock, a proverbial inability to breathe. It arrives with a heroic but naïve “great refusal” (as with Occupy), swiftly perceives the limitations of its idealism, and, after some soul-searching, recognizes and achieves, however partially, its destiny. It is a tale that has been told. Excluded from the outset is the possibility that the Millennial Left was, so to speak, a historically determinate confrontation with (and, ultimately, evasion of) a task.

Celebrating as “gains” the changes wrought by the new social movements, the New Left had retroactively monumentalized as progress its own failure to regenerate socialism after the catastrophes of fascism, Stalinism, and the New Deal. That narrative was mistrusted by the Millennials in a way that it had not been by the generation that came of age in the 1980s and 90s. However semi-conscious it might be, the new political generation’s promise hinged on the sense that they could not simply proceed, that, indeed, they had to extricate themselves from the accumulated wreckage of the past. After Obama’s election the Millennial Left reemerged with the anti-austerity protests broke out in Greece, the UK, and elsewhere in 2010, and, then, more decidedly, in 2011, with the Arab Spring, the Wisconsin State Capitol protests, the Indignados Movement in Spain, and Occupy. By 2013, where this volume picks up, that moment, too, had passed, and the question was again posed of grasping failure—of preserving the aspiration of the attempt, of trying again to learn how to learn from defeat, to be defeated in a way that might prove instructive.

Behind the immediate obstacles facing the Millennials loomed the history of the twentieth century. That history seemed anything but “short”; it seemed interminable. Hence the felt need, however inchoate, to confront, break with, and, thereby, potentially transform history, a need that stamped the Millennial Left with promise. Not for half a century had the burden of history been so unmistakably registered. This now meant, most immediately, confrontation with the history of the New Left. As I wrote in the introduction to volume 1, *Platypus*, as the immanent critics of the Left, posed the question, “What would it mean to put the New Left project behind us precisely in order to take up its original (and unrealized) aspiration of reconstituting the Left?”⁵

Marxism had attempted to take up the legacy of the Enlightenment in its 19th century form, that is, as socialism. To that end, it attempted to subsume within itself, to sublimate, the legacy of, among others, the utopian socialists, Proudhonian and Bakuninian anarchism, Chartism, Blanquism, and the Lassalleans’ party political orientation. Marx and Engels had taken up and attempted to work through what emerged over the course of the 19th century—the Revolution of 1848, the First International, the Paris Commune, the formation of mass social democratic parties, and the foundation of the Second International. The working class had, through the experiences of the 19th century, set itself the task of

fulfilling and sublating the proletarianization of the bourgeois revolution, of pursuing to its end, through its contradictions, the bourgeois revolution's crisis in capital—until conditions themselves cried out "hic Rhodus, hic salta!"—to seize state power, institute the dictatorship of the proletariat, and to open thereby the prospect of identifying and prosecuting the task of the democracy. As Marx had written as early as 1843, "To be radical is to grasp the root of the matter. But for man the root is man himself."

Marxists took a dialectical approach to politics. That is, they attempted to be self-consciousness of the dialectics of theory and practice. At its best, the New Left attempted, however falteringly, to recover, to find a path back to, that approach. A range of intellectuals associated with sectarian Leftism or with academia obscurely confronted the question of petty bourgeois democracy in their opposition to both Stalinism and Social Democracy, both of which, in their antipathy to a political party for socialism, had abdicated the task of working through and mastering mass democracy. Marxism as a dialectical-emancipatory politics, a politics of emancipation under conditions of alienation, had died with Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky, though the Frankfurt School tried to preserve it as a "message in a bottle." This was a true in a different way of, especially, Trotskyism. But these were regarded suspiciously and never fully taken up by the New Left. This is why, from its inception, Platypus sought to recover the internal critiques of—and, in that sense, the alternatives to—the seemingly settled trajectory of the New Left.

The Millennials, as already noted, did not spontaneously follow the New Left, and that imparted a certain poignancy to the repetition that ensued. The question was nevertheless intimated, how might we fruitfully embrace the repetition of history such that it might itself be converted into an opportunity—if not for socialism then for something that might legitimately appropriate its legacy? The dialogue respecting this between political generations, between the New Left and the Millennial Left, persisted after Occupy.

Intergenerational transmission: The new New Left

Recall that the Millennials' defining experiences embodied ambivalence. Doubtless, it helped that, for instance, at the New SDS's founding conference, old SDS veterans showed up to caution the students not to follow in their footsteps and to make their own mistakes instead. Those older leftists acknowledged that "the history of SDS is a troubled story, and inheriting that legacy means resuscitating old challenges." The question of intergenerational transmission raised all the old painful history, though attempts were made to evade that. After the reelection of Bush and given the "fact of imperial overreach," there was an attempt to recuperate a supposedly uncontaminated New Left message to the new generation. That was distilled by one sixties veteran as follows: "To do anything good at all, the Democrats needed a fire to be set under them. And a larger vision to be set out independently, something vastly beyond their compromised and bureaucratic grasp."⁶ For their part, with the innocence of youth

INTRODUCTION

the Millennials declared "One of our strengths is having a clear understanding of what went wrong [with the New Left]." ⁷ Matters would not rest there.

Then forming themselves into the "Movement for a Democratic Society," the old SDS veterans proclaimed themselves "officially done with the 60s." ⁸ And this came not only from New Left rad-libs but from veterans of the 1970s turn to Marxism. Supposedly, they had "[had no] access to elders who made mistakes," so that they were splendidly isolated in history. Yet, they were going to "[be] careful not to finger wag but only to advise." ⁹ The aging New Left, "intentionally ignored the challenge to debate the issue of [how the New Left failed] and who was right when." ¹⁰ Perhaps, "[the Millennials] should be very wary of listening to or taking on much from us, and [aging New Leftists] should steer clear of offering any advice." ¹¹ As was plainly recognized, the intergenerational transmission was "riven by divisions rooted deep in [New Left] history." ¹² This ambivalent intergenerational transmission of what passed for the Left was itself a repetition. As "Gen Zero" Platypus members could testify, the repetition/reproduction of the New Left in the 1980s and 90s already felt unconvinced and unconvincing. Here again could be seen, as many said echoing Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*, "something like a costume drama," a matter of "dressing up in other people's clothes." ¹³ This time it was, however, decidedly more palpable. The promise of the Millennial moment lay precisely in the deliberateness of historical repetition.

Seven years later, after Occupy, the need to break with the past (in order to appropriate it as history) was reposed. Between the antiwar movement, Occupy, and the downturns that accompanied Obama's two presidential campaigns, the Millennials had already rung the Marxist and anarchist changes on the New Left. So, during a Platypus forum in the summer of 2013 New Left veteran Stephen Bronner reiterated the challenge to the young the Movement for a Democratic Society issued back in 2006. Already, at the dawn of the Millennial Left, Maurice Isserman had remarked, "it's time for radical student activists to start writing their own poetry" ¹⁴; in 2013, Stephen Bronner made the same point:

This generation now has to do to the 1960s what the 1960s did to the 1930s. You have to develop your own idea of what revolution entails. You have to develop your own style. One of the things that struck me about Occupy was that everyone was talking about imagining a different, new, and better world, yet I couldn't help but notice that the People's Park was exactly the same as Berkeley back in the 1960s. The look was the same, the music was the same, the slogans were the same. Everything was the same! If I can say so, there has been a great deal of pandering to the youth by leftists, who are always saying, "It is so great we have young people." Well, young people, do something! Figure out what it is that would make your movement real. If you want a revolution, make it. [15]

There was no single legacy of the New Left (apart the reconstitution of capitalism in neoliberalism). There was no formula to pass on, but neither was it a mere matter, as one new SDS member put it, of proceeding "without nostalgia for the past." ¹⁵ If only.

The Millennials had to make a break, to accomplish what the sixties did in relation to the thirties or, perhaps, to achieve more than that, more than just a change in style. That is, in the ambivalence of Bronner's challenge could also be read the Millennial Left's potential "out"—they could simply make a change, could opt for progress. After all, like the thirties Old Left before them, the New Left had abandoned the project of reconstituting the struggle for socialism. That abandonment had been no mere response, as they apologetically maintained, to the emergence of new circumstances—whether understood as industrial/managerial, postindustrial, or postmodern. In the end, in the 70s, the New Left—chiefly, in the US, through the New Communist Movement and the McGovern coalition—revived the old Stalinism and social democracy that it once sought to overcome. As one questioner observed in response to a panel,

Looking back over the last hundred years, I do not think you could consider the postwar period, even the 1960s and 70s, as . . . a radical moment. Civil rights, while obviously a progressive movement, did not hold the potential to threaten the global capitalist order in the sense that the New Left thought at the time. So, too, with decolonization. The New Left profoundly misjudged its own moment and could in many respects be considered a disaster for the Left. It seems to me that the memory of 1968 is, in some way, an obstacle to the memory of 1917. [135]

The Millennials had to confront, to render conscious, their own impulse to nostalgia and self-monumentalization, which had already begun to appear post-Occupy. From their very generational awareness arose the temptation to reenact the New Left's self-liquidation by updating the narrative of "the gains of the sixties." Indeed, the New Left learned the trick from the Old Left, which portrayed the 1930s, the era of fascism's ascendancy, as the heyday of organized labor. As the resolution of the post-Occupy doldrums would reveal, such an impulse was complemented by a growing appetite for "relevance."

"A weakness on the level of society": The decadence of neoliberalism

So, by the post-Occupy moment the specter of regression through repetition was grown palpable. Greek intellectual Nikos Malliaris grappled with this, remarking on a 2014 panel on the subject of revolutionary politics and thought, "We must deal [today] with more than the problem of exploitation or oppression: the deeper problem of social and cultural decadence" [85]. Recalling the recent past and similarly confronting the sense of "decadence," a questioner at a Platypus forum remarked, "There is a theme I keep hearing at leftist events: 'We need to think of new strategies, to do something different.' But I have become cynical about this, as I feel that all the ideas on the Left are quite old. . . . What we see is the recirculation and retrying of ideas that were better articulated in an earlier period" [501]. One might convince oneself that there had been no failure in the past, that conditions then were simply unripe. And, one might imagine

INTRODUCTION

that perhaps they were no less so now. But the suspicion pressed that the Left's alibis themselves were constitutive of that unripeness, then as now.

Occupy had felt like a deliberate reboot. After that, the way forward, or even what "forward" meant, was unclear. As DSA intellectual Joseph M. Schwarz cautioned,

There is tremendous democratic energy, but many of these movements are what Frances Fox Piven calls "flash movements": they appear in a flash, like the Indignados, the Piqueteros, the Occupy movement, etc. The Left is weak because class power has been decimated. The common sense of ordinary people, in the Gramscian sense, is neoliberal: "There is no alternative." The Left has no governing program. . . [It just] moves to the center. [348]

Speaking on the same 2014 panel on which Malliaris spoke of the "decadence" afflicting the present, Cutrone identified the Left as its source:

Neoliberalism is the "new normal" throughout the world. Margaret Thatcher was right, "There is no alternative." Furthermore, it is under neoliberal leadership that the world is currently being revolutionized. We might say that the neoliberals have fought in the vanguard, and the neoconservatives in the rearguard, of the continuing bourgeois revolution over the course of the past generation, the last forty years. A one-sided and confused "anti-capitalism" has replaced the struggle for socialism. Worse, the "Left" has internalized not only cynicism about the bourgeois revolution but even the conservative-reactionary rejection of it. . . The "Left" has thus become a new Right. [97-98]

Neoliberalism had arisen democratically out of the prolonged crisis of the global New Deal. By the time a new generation faced war and economic crisis, the Left's instinct was to defend the neoliberalism that its own discontent had erected. As Thomas Seibert remarked in a panel in Frankfurt, "Those who set out to oppose the SDS have themselves been corrupted and gotten stuck. . . [W]e need to ask how an entire generation could become saturated with questions of better child daycare and changed gender relations, which have all changed so dramatically. And, once again, we must re-pose the question of the political subject who arises to fight in the name of all" [321]. What passed for the Left was attached to the status quo. As an audience questioner put it in 2015, when discussing the Left's failure, it had first to be acknowledged that "there is a weakness on the level of society" [404].

Marxist-led anti-imperialism fed into the election of Obama, whose Wall Street bailout, in turn, provoked Occupy. And when the dismantling of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq by the American invasion provoked in turn the Arab Spring, that experiment in popular democracy proved, like Occupy, incapable of doing more than registering an impotent cry of protest before the inevitable—Obama's reelection (and thus the democratic sanctioning of Wall Street bailouts

and permawar) and the reconsolidation of military dictatorship in Egypt and across the Middle East. The assimilative force of history was palpable. The post-Occupy moment was, thus, the Millennial Left's moment of truth. By that point, the task before it had grown unmistakable: socialism.

But what did that mean under the circumstances? On a panel on "The Black Question and the Left" activist Toby Chow ventured that "the Left currently faces the task of resolving the crisis of neoliberalism, of overcoming neoliberalism," adding that, "there is currently no chance that we will overcome capitalism in that process. We face the task of bringing about a post-neoliberal society and, if we do this right, then we could achieve a much more egalitarian global society with a more inclusive economy, both in the US and across the world. But it will still be a capitalist society" [360]. Chow was raising a prospect that Cutrone brought up in the *Platypus Review* in the immediate wake of the subprime mortgage crisis of 2008: "The changes that take place [now] will matter to the extent that they lay the groundwork for the next period of history under capital, structuring the conditions under which any future struggle against capitalism will take place—just as contemporary social forms are the accumulated effects of prior attempts to master the dynamic of capital in modern history."¹⁶ And even the notion of the crisis of neoliberalism—indeed, the very concept of "regimes of accumulation"—was misleading. As Adolph Reed remarked, "There is no such thing as an objective crisis. . . [C]risis is a political category. Crisis exists only to the extent that people make a crisis, politically. Since the crash, there have been leftists all over the world claiming. . . [that] these are the final paroxysms of neoliberalism, it is on the respirator. But who is going to pull the plug?" [367] Regression propelled by progress, change masked as the eternal return of the same—the Left in the twentieth century had been committed to simply participating in the process. That might continue.

The end of the sectarian left

It was also becoming clear by 2013 that the Millennials' recruitment to sectarian organizations would not take. Such recruits as the sectarians had managed to gain during and before Occupy now began to reject their recruitment. This arguably found its most acute expression in the post-Occupy crack-up of the Cliffite Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in the UK. There the occasion was a rape scandal that proved irresolvable without precipitating the loss of hundreds of members, mostly new recruits. And something similar happened around the same time inside the International Socialist Organization (ISO), the SWP-UK's (estranged) counterpart in the United States. It had been prominent in the antiwar movement and was, generally speaking, the largest Marxist sect in the US at that time (though not as large as the SWP). It had been particularly strong in Chicago, where Platypus first formed. But now the ISO began to hemorrhage membership to, even as it grew indistinguishable from, the DSA, leading ultimately to the ISO's formal dissolution in 2019. The split that preceded that outcome opened up in the autumn of the previous year, at the time of the

INTRODUCTION

election of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and other DSA-supported Democrats to the US Congress.

The prevailing anti-Trumpism during the period of the DSA's rapid expansion represented a kind of mainstreaming of the ISO's "fight the right" orientation, but already in 2013 the so-called Renewal Faction manifested the mounting discontent:

The international revolutionary Left is in the throes of a serious crisis. This crisis has manifested itself most clearly in organizational terms in the debacle of the Socialist Workers Party in the UK, in the splits in the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste in France, and in the attack on the revolutionary Left within SYRIZA. In practical terms, it has manifested in the inability of the Left to steer major events: the stalemate in the struggle against austerity in Greece and the growth of fascism, the twists and turns of the Egyptian revolution, and the reversals suffered by the defeat of the Wisconsin Uprising, the dramatic repression of Occupy, and even the setbacks in spring 2013 after the heroic Chicago Teachers' Union strike testify to this fact. And, on the theoretical plane, there remain large questions about the character of neoliberalism and the current crisis, the shape of the international working class at the end of the neoliberal period, and the strategies and methods for the Left to organize a real struggle against a system in crisis. It is a crisis that requires a deep re-examination of all previous assumptions on the part of the entire international Left.¹⁷

The eventual liquidation, via the DSA, into the Democrats was justified as an escalation of struggle. As one long-time leader of the ISO, Todd Chretien, maintained, his sect had been "built for a period of defeats," and with the emergence of the Sanders movement that time had passed. Now was time for "a new sort of movement."¹⁸

The dynamics were mutually reinforcing: As the sectarian crisis deepened in the wake of Occupy, the Millennial Left increasingly embraced sensibilities that justified bidding goodbye to all that.¹⁹ The sectarian Left had long sought to distinguish itself from the capitalist politics with which they nevertheless maintained a tacit division of labor. They were more militant in their attitudes regarding women, gender, race, Islamophobia, etc. So, the question was begged, why not simply "radicalize" capitalist politics itself?

At the same time, aging New Leftists began to withdraw; the *soixante-huitards* were beginning to take their leave. Yet, Historical Materialism, the new publisher of choice for aging leftist intellectuals, published more than ever before. If the ISO would not, Haymarket Books—which was connected with the ISO and served as Historical Materialism's American publishing partner—would endure, as Verso once had done. Historical Materialism would serve as a quasi-sectarian, quasi-academic outlet for the intellectual endeavors of the New Left, whether original or retread. But in the aftermath of Occupy the audience for even the most acute expressions of New Left Marxism was beginning to dissolve. The Millennials were descending into internet subculture, where Marxism was

pursued with more of the zeal of fandom or memorabilia collection than that of political and intellectual passion. Innumerable pdf-s of leftist academics' books accumulated unread on thousands of cloud drives. If the Millennials could not let go of their Marxism, they could not sustain it either. At any event, they declined to become sectarians.

As the old sectarian and academic lefts inherited from the 1960s and 70s entered terminal decline, *Jacobin Magazine* emerged. Founded in 2010 in the post-antiwar-movement downturn, here, unmistakably, was the voice of a new political generation, one that proudly proclaimed the Millennials' consciousness of their own arrival. One can point to no comparable expression of political-generational self-awareness for Generation X. And, after Occupy, history (or what passes for it) acknowledged the Millennials' arrival. In January of 2013, the *New York Times* ran a profile of editor Bhaskar Sunkara, and, in November, Max Strasser of the *New Statesman* spoke of "[the] new kind of well-educated, middle-class twentysomething who rails against the prison-industrial complex, who talks about wages for housework, who throws around words like 'imperialism' and 'exploitation' with a growing sense of comfort."²⁰ In a piece written for the *Daily Beast*, Peter Beinart remarked upon what had become unmistakable—that, unlike Generation X, the Millennials represented a new "political generation."²¹ In the pages of *Jacobin* itself, this acknowledgement was granted by New Left stalwart Frances Fox Piven herself.²²

The generational sensibility of the Millennial Left, given its fraught, even agonistic, relationship with the New Left, always carried with it the danger of a preoccupation with youth. While *Jacobin* dutifully solicited articles from older leftists, objectification of the legacy of the Left was too often set aside in favor of a kind of "OG" treatment. The staff writers were, most of them, Millennials, threatening at least a tendency towards generational narcissism. So, while the Millennials looked for guidance and affirmation to the New Left generation, the organizational landscape built by the New Left liquidated itself, as if in gratitude, into *Jacobin's* political-organizational counterpart, the DSA. The Millennial Left provided aging New Left sect addicts with an off-ramp in the form of a macrosect. Dozens of organizations, from relatively small to relatively large—sects, regroupment networks, and unity projects, with or without any sort of electoral focus—dissolved.

The party question

Richard Rubin of Platypus observed in the June 2013 "Utopia and program" panel quoted above, "[Occupy's utopianism] arose precisely from the feeling that it was not even going to bring about limited reforms." Given the palpable inadequacy of Occupy's refusal of politics, the necessity of "getting serious" was urged on all sides. And what Rubin observed could not be gainsaid, "What is needed for humanity to survive is a world socialist revolution that takes power in advanced capitalist countries like the United States." At the same time, the Left could not but wonder with Rubin, "is that a possibility? Is that something one is going to put on the agenda?" Just as it could not but anticipate with

INTRODUCTION

him the possible response: "most people say, 'No, that is not a realistic goal, and to struggle for it is hopeless.' What one ends up with. . . is some variety of social democracy" [12]. But was this inevitable? The crisis of neoliberalism would not be an opportunity for socialism. The Left might not pull the plug on neoliberalism, but might it not advance the reconstitution of the Left even through the reconstitution of capitalism?

Keynesian social democracy, neoliberalism, and post-neoliberalism were and are, after all, just so many forms of state capitalism, so many forms of post-socialist society. As Cutrone stated on a Platypus panel in May 2017 included in *Marxism in the Age of Trump*,

Capitalism has continued and will continue through political revolutions of a more or less drastic character. Avowed "Marxists" have failed to explain the past several transformations of capitalism. Neither the Great Depression, nor the crisis of the New Deal coalition leading to the New Left of the 1960s–70s, nor the crisis of Fordist capital that led to neoliberalism, have been adequately grasped. Instead, each change was met with panic and frantic denunciation. . . . By the time the "Left" began to try to make sense of the changes, this was done apologetically—justifying and thus legitimizing in retrospect the change that had already happened.²³

And, he added, "In the absence of meeting the political necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat, we will have more or less hard or soft, more or less irresponsible, capitalist state dictatorship. We will have political irresponsibility." And,

Marx's concept of bonapartism resonates today because it depicts politics and society absent the working-class struggle for socialism. The masses remain, but the working class and its political party for socialism are missing. The "specter" not of proletarian socialism but of the petite bourgeoisie's and lumpenproletariat's bonapartism is what haunts the world today. . . [133]

Not just temporarily unavailable, no "revolutionary situation" could ever arise apart from the Left's own reconstitution. The dictatorship of the proletariat was the political goal of Marxism (to enable the prosecution of the task of democracy, the sublation of the self-contradiction of social freedom), but that goal (and the historical consciousness it implied) was buried by the Left's century-long affirmation of self-defeat. This affirmative character of the Left was itself a fact that the Millennial Left had to contend with. While there were, undoubtedly, many practical tasks that needed doing, would-be leftists were also faced with the self-liquidation of socialism as itself a material condition.

The post-Occupy Left's conversation thus consistently returned to the point Alan Akrivos made on a Platypus panel in New York in February 2014, "working-class people need to do what the workers did in Germany in the 1800s: build a mass party of the working class." This even as the opposite view pressed

its claims. As Jens Wissel put it in a panel discussion on the European Union held in Frankfurt in 2015:

So, what is the right way [forward]? I do not know, but certainly it must be generated from below, because the revolution must be democratic. It is impossible to make a blueprint for how we should organize and where we should go. A new movement must organize in new ways and must find its own language. We cannot look back a hundred years for solutions to our problems. Society has changed, and we must change if we want to transform it. [403–4]

Behind the return of Marxism at the dawn of the Millennial Left loomed the specter of mass political parties for socialism. That specter had somehow to be exorcised, and that demanded engagement with a radically altered capitalist reality. The necessity was as poignant as it was intractable. As Sam Gindin remarked, "transformative politics is not open to us. . . As it stands, [movements and unions] are not the answer. Since the defeat of the Left has been so great, we also lack a party that focuses on the state and transforming society. That is blocked as well" [3–4].

Millennial Marxism confronted the party question. There was some recognition that that carried with it the question of the historical consciousness, the *sine qua non* of socialist revolution. That crucial aspect of the party was precisely what had been liquidated with the Stalinization of Communist parties internationally. That was the historical malaise of which the sects were symptoms. For Joseph Schwarz, a political heir of Michael Harrington serving as vice-chair of the DSA and a member of that organization's National Political Committee, it was necessary to entertain the possibility that Trotsky's worst fears respecting fascism's triumph had long since come to pass (albeit unrecognizably, through fascism's defeat).²⁴

I have Trotsky's view—wherever there is fascism, socialists fight for the rights of slaves. There is no fascism now, and we don't have slavery, but we do have a low-wage, near-enslaved labor force, student debt peonage, and immigrants who do a major amount of care work. . . And we have a public education system shot through by class and racial inequalities that is being privatized in the city as we speak. . . [As Trotsky recognized, in such circumstances socialists] must be involved in any struggle for the rights of the demos against the rights of the oligarchs. [93]

In other words, even conceding the world we inherit to be post-fascist, the issue remained that of restoring the movement for socialism that once had been:

There are flash eruptions against neoliberalism occurring across the world. There is a role for Marxism or socialism as a form of political organization to help cohere this social unrest and protest into some kind of governing emancipatory project. We are in a period of crisis, where a

INTRODUCTION

lot of people know that something is profoundly wrong and that human well-being is threatened. But what to do with these openings is what we must sort out by actually doing politics. [102]

When the party question arose for the Millennial Left, in other words, it did not appear as an analytic proposition. Political parties, ostensibly socialist political parties already existed. Schwartz, like so many speakers on our panels, was a member of one. And, as I noted in the introduction to volume 1, “[these] sectarians. . . preserved a critical revolutionary legacy, even as they potentially obstructed that legacy’s historical reappropriation.”²⁵ But the Millennial Left refused to reproduce the sectarian left as passed down from the New Left, or, in as much as the Millennial Left reproduced sectarianism (most obviously with the DSA in the US at the end of the period covered here), it emerged from its own anti-sectarianism. The history of the Left weighed on the brains of the living more heavily than any mere waking reality.

And class independence

The inadequacy of Marxist propaganda sects to the task of reconstituting socialism in the core capitalist countries was plainly evident. Whatever vitality those groups may once have possessed was spent. They represented an ossified subcultural and movementist left, precisely what the Millennials sought to break free of. Still, who could gainsay the old Marxism voiced by Christoph Lichtenberg of the International Bolshevik Tendency?

Objectively speaking. . . society is pointing towards socialism. We have examples of what happens if the transformation towards socialism is delayed. Two world wars and the possible destruction of our planet are good reasons to think that socialism is necessary. So, what is missing? . . . the subjective factor, the party of the proletariat. That has been missing for a long, long time, and, because it has been missing for so long, we are largely looking at a history of defeat for the working class, which breeds pessimism and a fear of trying what did not succeed before. . . [Still, the fact remains that] the only question that we need to solve is how to lead the working class. . . That alone offers a way toward socialist revolution. [507]

The question of the socialist leadership of the working class—whether by a single party, multiple parties, or some type of post-party formation—would not disappear, even as the ostensible revolutionary organizations served only as historical placeholders. William Pelz expressed the dilemma this way in a 2016 panel on the death of social democracy,

Technologically, economically, and historically, socialism is certainly on the agenda. So, then, it comes to the subjective question: the party. We need a party, but not one that tries to represent everyone. We do not

need a party of the whole class but rather, to quote Lenin, a party of a new type. That does not necessarily mean that we need a so-called "Leninist" party, of which several hundred probably exist in the US alone. We need a party that can overcome this gulf between trying to represent everyone, trying to be all things to all people, and parties that are so narrow they cannot draw in the masses needed to form a vanguard. We need a party that leads the working class to emancipation. I have no clear answer on how this would be done, but we cannot keep putting old wine in new bottles. We have to find a party that suits the circumstances and the culture of our times. . . This will not be achieved by a mass electoral social democratic party, nor by the sectarians who say, "We have all the answers! Read this brochure on the genesis of Pabloism!" [507-8]

Acutely aware of the impasse, as Leo Panitch suggested postponing the party question to rebuild the working class as, so to speak, a constituency for a future Left. For, as Adolph Reed pointed out on a panel on "The American Left and the 'Black Question'" held in Chicago earlier in 2015,

There is no Left in America today. A lot of people embrace left politics and a left social vision, but there is no Left, if what you mean by that is a social force that has the capacity to intervene in political debate. If we start from that presumption—what the Left is and what it needs to do and be—then the first task is to try to figure out how to build a Left. However pessimistic or undesirable that may sound, it would help us if we took a little of our collective effort to think about it. [364]

And, again, "we need to think about is the project of building the Left. Then we can talk about what institutional expressions that should take." Still, Reed did not fail to add, as it were, *sotto voce*, "I am inclined to think that at some point you've got to have a disciplined party" [265]. Disciplined to what end? As Mike Macnair, who served as an inspiration to many Millennials (not least those gathered around *Jacobin* magazine), explained, "The question of working-class political action, the question of the party, is a question of a politically independent party of the working class. This is foundational: . . . [a party] that is not just organizationally and economically independent, but politically independent" [263]. This meant overcoming the past, as Leo Panitch conceded,

[It is necessary] to point out the limitations of the political New Left, in particular the various Trotskyist groups, that tried to found new Leninist parties. At the same time, those who came out of 1968 and moved into social democratic parties were also engaged in a futile and limited project. In both cases, they attempted to sink roots into the class. It was as true of Benn and Corbyn as it was of the Trotskyist industrial organizers. In neither case did that succeed. Our generation of socialists, in that sense, failed. [135]

INTRODUCTION

Nor was it a mere matter of replacing division with unity. As Martin Suchanek observed in a panel discussion on the European Union in Frankfurt, "the groups that claim to be revolutionary today are far from being parties. The problem will not be overcome by a fusion of them all, because that would just mean combining confusion and ignoring differences" [403]. And yet, as Lichtenberg's comrade, Tom Riley, insisted, "The object must be the creation of a single world party" [267]. He quoted Trotsky to the effect that, "The [working] class taken by itself is only material for exploitation. The proletariat assumes an independent role only at that moment when, from a social class in itself, it becomes a political class for itself. This cannot take place otherwise than through the medium of a party. The party is that historical organ by means of which the class becomes class conscious" [266-67].

Cutrone noted, for his part, that, "The banner of socialism needs to be raised as a goal" [269], arguing that socialism itself historically facilitated workers' self-organization. For the reconstitution of the Left, he suggested, something other than an organizational effort was required. Because, as Manuel Kellner observed in Frankfurt, "There is now a deep credibility crisis of the socialist idea. . . [I]t is fruitful and correct that together we should grapple with it" [341]. Somehow the practical rebuilding of that Left had to be combined with the reconstitution of socialism as an ideology, which itself demanded working through the ideological obstacles to such a reconstitution. As Cutrone put it, "we have accumulated historical baggage that we must work through. There is obvious inhibition about doing *any* of the things that are being proposed, let alone all of them, because in fact all of them would have to be done" [272]. We in *Platypus* were clear that our organization could not ourselves undertake all that needed doing, or really even advise respecting much of it.

Re-disintegration: The arrival of the Millennial Left

Rather than sifting through the intractable historical legacy of socialism, the Millennial Left in the name socialism eschewed its task. Marxism, with which socialism was inextricably bound, would again be mothballed. In the new days between, it would again assume its place as a theory respecting which one might be more or less clever and initiated. Capitalist politics beckoned as "non-sectarian," and any doubts respecting this were drowned in the pseudo-activity of electoral campaigning and the "proletarianizing" of a new generation of student leftists. Movementism was recombined with electoralism—anything, in short, but the impossible necessity, a mass political party for socialism. The debates of the past were discretely shuffled out of sight and history again scrambled.

In September 2010, I met Bhaskar Sunkara at George Washington University. I had been the editor for a piece he submitted to the *Platypus Review* the previous spring,²⁶ and he was curious about *Platypus*. We met and talked. The following spring (of 2011), Sunkara identified the establishment of a political party for socialism as crucial for "revolutionary strategy." The *Platypus* influence was discernible in his disillusionment with the state of the Left. As he stated in an interview published shortly after the appearance of the first issue

of *Jacobin* in the winter of 2011, “the existence of these bat-shit crazy sects are living monuments to the failure of the Left in the 20th century,” adding that

I think we're creative enough to deal with our political problems and recreate a Left that doesn't recall the drabness of the past or represent some sort of apolitical, nihilistic revolt. Hell, we're radicals, we're supposed to be the avant-garde, not positioning ourselves as the conservative opponents of a constantly revolutionizing capitalism. . .

Crucial to Sunkara's optimism was the project of reconstituting a political party for socialism. As he said,

I'm glad the new social movements exist, but they can't replicate [*sic*] a revolutionary party. So, I guess I'm an “egg” man. Whereas a lot of people in the Left argue that by supporting struggles from below we'll reach a point where a party will emerge naturally from a new political environment, I think it might be necessary to talk seriously about a re-foundation of the Left today. There's no reason why the members of the Left broadly subscribing to the same politics shouldn't be in the same political formation.²⁷

Clearly, prior to Occupy Sunkara agreed with Mike Macnair that, “We are in a situation where the people who have forces, who have potential to launch initiatives which could take off, are launching initiatives that are more or less guaranteed to end in tears” [273]. For Sunkara as for Macnair, this meant reconstituting something resembling the Second International's associated mass parties for socialism in the core capitalist countries, a world party for socialism.

The tension and confusion respecting the party question resolved itself in the Corbyn-Sanders moment: In early 2017 Leo Panitch remarked, “in the resent conjuncture. . . we see a remarkable development, from protest to politics,” adding, “the emphasis [with the turn to Corbyn and Sanders] appears to have moved away from anti-neoliberal protest and returned to the question of political parties and the importance of entering the state. With Occupy, we had protests that were class-focused—as seen in the slogan of the ‘99%’ against the ‘1%’—but not class-rooted.” He further elaborated,

The shift since [Occupy] from protest to politics has taken different forms, from the Indignados and Podemos to the occupations in Syntagma Square in Athens and the solidarity networks of SYRIZA. However, even with this new emphasis on class-focused politics, these formations still are not class-rooted, in the sense that the social democratic and communist parties once were, with deep roots, organizationally and culturally, in the working class. Those roots are absent, including in recent developments in the old parties, such as the Corbyn and Momentum insurrection inside the Labour Party or the Bernie Sanders phenomenon. [126]

INTRODUCTION

By turning to capitalist politics, perhaps, the working class could be organized. But such a class focus demanded giving up on class independence, as "socialist" organization had to be undertaken in conjunction with entering the state. In what was increasingly treated as a historical state of emergency, the call of capitalist politics proved irresistible. The will to break with the past itself propelled blind historical repetition.

Still, the old questions died hard. As the Bookchinite anarchist, Brian Tokar, remarked on a 2016 panel on the legacy of social democracy,

To understand the Sanders campaign today, we can look at the legacy of Jesse Jackson's campaigns, which aroused tremendous hope on the Left in the 1980s; or to the Nader campaigns in the 90s. Neither campaign contributed anything tangible to the Left in this country. In organizational terms, certainly, those campaigns did not strengthen the Left. Even in terms of mobilization they did not help. The Jackson campaign raised hopes of a "Rainbow Coalition" bringing together a variety of progressive social forces. Instead, the Rainbow Coalition came to an end as soon as Jackson dropped out. . . [T]he same thing will happen this election cycle. . . If we want an independent left, it is really going to be up to us to make that happen. [500-501]

On a panel on *the American Left and the Black Question* held just six weeks before Sanders announced his candidacy for US president, August Nimtz similarly lamented the coming liquidation into capitalist politics:

The biggest obstacle that workers in black skin face is the same challenge that workers in white skin and brown skin face, the stranglehold of bourgeois lesser-evilism, the belief that we can resolve this crisis through the electoral process. To think that the electoral and parliamentary arenas are an end in themselves is to be afflicted with what Marx, Engels, and Lenin called "parliamentary cretinism." [363]

In time, discontent with the new progressivism into which so many ostensibly revolutionary organizations were in the process of liquidating themselves took the predictable form of disillusioned young people embracing a memefied Marxist-Leninism. Here, too, the Millennials (and now Gen Z), as a new Left, committed itself to recapitulating the old, both Old and New. History reasserted itself in and through its own crisis. The dual dead end of Communism and Social Democracy was to be, at the end of the road for the sixties veterans, reproduced through reconfiguration.

At the dawn of the Millennial Left, young people entered into dialogue and contestation with the Boomers over the legacy of the Left, the emptying of which seemed otherwise dictated by fate, as exemplified by the post-political Left. Taking Gen X-er Naomi Klein as his example, Bhaskar Sunkara articulated his generation's mistrust when in early 2011 he lamented,

The Left shouldn't cede the language of "freedom" and "emancipation" to the right. Naomi Klein at a panel hosted by the Platypus Affiliated Society critiqued Milton Friedman (author of *Capitalism and Freedom*) on the grounds that he was a "utopian ideologue," mentioning that she didn't think that there was any great need for "grand projects of human freedom." If someone holding these views—however commendable her work—is at the forefront of radical politics today, we have problems. It's a weird brand of "radical liberalism." If she doesn't want anything more than a re-heated Keynesianism, what separates her from the left-wing of the Congressional Progressive Caucus besides a tactical affinity towards Zapatistas and militant street protests? How far has our political imagination shrunk?²⁸

Yet, after the Sanders campaign and Trump's victory, the project seemed precisely the perpetuation for a new generation of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. A new update of the old progress narrative would, of course, have to be supplied, and none other than Naomi Klein did the needful when she congratulated the Millennials on their maturation in the pages of *The Nation*, over which Bhaskar Sunkara then presided:

The good news is that [since the 1990s] the Left has changed too. It is no longer a ragtag crew of anachronistic die-hards. Its analysis is becoming more mainstream and its numbers are vast. Left leadership is finally as diverse as it always should have been, with a new vision and boldness flowing from hard-won experience at the front lines of capitalism's many barbarities.²⁹

The Millennial Left had arrived. When the old sects liquidated into the DSA and the Corbyn campaign, that represented, admittedly, no great sellout, no break with historical socialism. (That dated back to the crisis of 1914–19, whose centenaries were then being observed.) But it did represent a will to historical oblivion masked as a successful negotiation of the traumas of birth and maturation. The experience of historical helplessness that had originally galvanized the Millennial Left was again reinforced. The Millennial Left that arose from geopolitical crisis swiftly compounded by the 2008 economic crisis, was now "no longer a ragtag crew" but a respectable (and "diverse") staff of capitalist politicians, operatives, and pundits. The crisis conditions with which the Millennials had had to contend never were a political opportunity, even if things might have been otherwise. As Cutrone remarked in 2017, "what is needed—indeed required—is seeing how a crisis and change might point beyond itself. . . Unfortunately, the only way the 'Left' might be posing the question now is in order to advise the Democrats."³⁰

For Platypus, the Sanders-Corbyn "resolution" of the political impasse marked a new, fifth and final phase of the Millennial Left, one that required us to again bring, through our engagements with the Left, the present into critical relation to history. In pursuing our strategy of "hosting the conversation on the

INTRODUCTION

Left," we sought to shed light on the multiply compounded defeats accumulating in our time. As the DSA dedicated itself to the election of Democrats, confirmed by its efforts on behalf of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, we watched the Millennial Left come to a close. As the president of Platypus, Erin Hagood, reflected later, in 2023,

The sundered halves—theory and practice—may not simply be put back together again, but the critical distance of theory from practice must be taken as a task for the recovery of what was liquidated by history—the party.

[The New Left] recognized this historical condition, if perhaps accidentally and ambivalently, through its various attempts to return to Marx which ultimately tore [it] apart. . . . But that moment feels very far from us today. The harsh invective to shut up and act is, in the context of weakness and disarray on the Left, stronger than ever. The difficult labor of working through past political failures has been suppressed for another generation.³¹

Platypus's aim, for which some cannot forgive us, was never simply to rebuild. Rather, we dedicated ourselves, as the contents of this volume attest, to attempting to transform time's passage into history, into something susceptible to experience (if only, impossibly, contemplatively), even if that experience was of an ongoing (if nonlinear) process of regression. We sought, yes, to disrupt the reproduction of the Left in its "new generational" guise, as a means for facilitating its actual reconstitution. But, failing that, we documented how the Millennial Left, in order to "advance," forcibly suppressed the consciousness it once achieved and how it thereby betrayed itself as a Left, even as it struggled to be born.

Spencer A. Leonard
February 2024