

#1619 A Guide to Protests Against Injustice from the Peaceful to the Deadly

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [00:00:00] Welcome to this episode of the award winning *Best of the Left* podcast in which we look at the fact that we are living through a sort of age of protest, from the opposition to the Iraq War, the Arab Spring uprisings, Occupy Wall Street, all the way through to marches against Trump and now the war in Gaza. So, we thought we should take a look at the art and science of protest itself. Sources today include *Novara Media*, *Chapo Trap House*, *Second Thought*, *The Majority Report*, and *Democracy Now!*, with additional members-only clips from *Outrage and Optimism* and *Millennials Are Killing Capitalism*.

The Missing Revolutions of The 2010s | Ash Sarkar Meets Vincent Bevins Part 1 - Novara Media - Air Date 10-29-23

ASH SARKAR - HOST, NOVARA MEDIA: There's a conventional understanding of why left wing protest movements fail, and I think that if you asked somebody who worked for the Times or the BBC, they'd say, well, the problem is is that they're too left wing.

They're too left wing, they're too disconnected from where the majority of people are at, and that means there's a kind of right wing backlash, which operates as [00:01:00] a sort of course correction. It's because these people are too disconnected from where the median citizen is at.

Don't really feel that that's your thesis in the book, but yours is something else.

VINCENT BEVINS: Well, that, I think, is what happened very often throughout history. I protested the Iraq War in 2003. And what happened at that

point, it was this huge outpouring of opposition to the invasion of and destruction of that country. But what you can do as a government is simply ignore it. And that's what happened, I think, in 2003, and I think very often in history, we are not surprised to see that the people in power choose to see whatever outpouring of sentiment on the streets as a minority that we already knew about, we're going to ignore them. What is very strange about what I call the mass protest decade, the period of 2010 to 2020, just to summarize, I try to write a history of the world in that decade built around mass protests, treating the history of the world in that period as if the most important thing that happened was unexpected mass [00:02:00] protests and their unintended consequences.

What happens in that decade is not that their fringe elements that are ignored by elites is that in many, many cases, they become so big that they actually unseat or fundamentally destabilize existing elites or existing governments. So many "normal people" -- and this becomes important because everyone, every person is a concrete person, which group of individuals you get in the streets always matters -- but you got so many "normal people" that actually this worked sometimes much, much better than anybody expected, and worked to an extent that opportunities were generated that other people took advantage of.

So the strange thing in the 2010s is not, oh, nothing happened, because that's normal. It's normal if they say, well, we already knew that 1 percent of the population feels this way and they're going to be very noisy. We're going to ignore them. What happened very, very often in 2010s, and I build the story the protests that get big enough to do this, is that people join the streets in large enough numbers that they either dislodge or fundamentally destabilize governments around the world.

ASH SARKAR - HOST, NOVARA MEDIA: So in [00:03:00] 2003, I attended my very first protest. I was 11 years old and I went on the protest against the Iraq war. And for that period of my childhood, I was going on pretty regular anti-war protests and they were very formulaic. They went from A to B, you marched, you did some chanting and nobody gave a solitary flying fuck. We used to bunk school en masse to go on these protests and nobody cared.

And then my first experience of going to protests where people *cared* about these protests and they made it into the news, it was from 2010 onwards. It was the student movement, it was the anti-austerity movement, and the Arab Spring happens slap bang in the middle of all of that.

And I saw firsthand that our political vocabulary for what we were doing changed. So when Milbank got smashed up, when the protests at Parliament

Square got violent, very violent with the [00:04:00] police, there was some sort of experimental terminology being thrown around, like, Oh, are we doing a civic swarm? Are we doing something else? And then Tahrir Square happens. We go, this is what we're trying to emulate. We're trying to create this space in which we're making a revolution amongst ourselves, and then it might spread out to other things. So how did the Arab Spring become this blueprint for leftists all over the world?

VINCENT BEVINS: And indeed, all kinds of movements, indeed, movements that you would not consider left wing at all. I think that the way that Hong Kong -- well, Hong Kong is an explicit copy of Occupy Wall Street, which is a copy of Tahrir Square, which is inspired by Tunisia. And Hong Kong, I don't think that you would call led by leftists, Maidan in Ukraine also is interpreted in such a way, interpreted with the lens of Tahrir Square in ways which are ultimately important, I think, without that being a movement that is primarily leftist.

You're absolutely right, that this moment, the inspiring -- and I think it's easy to recognize why it was so [00:05:00] inspiring -- scene of Tahrir Square really defines a lot of the rest of the decade. A lot of the rest of the decade is about either movements intentionally trying to reproduce that, or being interpreted as if they are that by the media.

ASH SARKAR - HOST, NOVARA MEDIA: So what was going on in Tahrir Square that was so exciting?

VINCENT BEVINS: Absolutely. So it really starts in Tunisia at the end of 2010. And in Tunisia, you have an uprising which begins in the interior of the country with the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, but you get a revolution which proceeds in more or less normal terms in North African history, you do get a set of concrete actors. You have a very radical left wing party. You have the union, UGTT, which ends up acting in a way which is very important. You have professional associations which end up putting pressure on the dictator who flees. And then there is a process to create a new government.

Now in Egypt, which is not far away, but politically different enough that the original organizers of protests on January 25th in Cairo, which [00:06:00] was initially a protest against police brutality, like so many others in the 2010s. This was held on Police Day. Even though that they knew that Tunisia would be inspiring to some extent for Egyptians, they did not expect to take Tahrir Square. They did not expect to even make the call for Mubarak to be overthrown. They expected, hopefully, to get some people together to protest police brutality. They knew that the inspiration of what was happening in Tunisia would be important, but they did not expect to take Tahrir Square,

which they do on January 25th. And they certainly don't expect what happens on January 28th, which is that essentially that night, there is a battle with the police and the police lose. So the people that have swarmed into the streets behind the original organizers of January 25th and 28th are so massive in numbers that the police rip off their uniforms and run away. And at this point, the Egyptian revolutionaries --

ASH SARKAR - HOST, NOVARA MEDIA: That must have been so exhilarating to be a part of.

VINCENT BEVINS: I'm speaking with some of the people that organized January 25th and January 28th, and now in the context of what's happening, the way that Tahrir Square has been taken again for the first time in a [00:07:00] very long time because of pro-Palestine solidarity, and it was, I think it's worth mentioning, pro-Palestine solidarity that led to the creation of many of these groups in the first place. It was often support for the Second Intifada that really created the tactic of taking Tahrir Square.

But to go back to January 28th, at the moment when the police flee, and as you say, the people that I'm speaking to now that I was spoke to for this book, they say that day was so beautiful that I could relive it for the rest of my life. Even knowing how badly it turns out two years later, I could relive every moment for the rest of my life. It was the most alive I've ever felt. We were making history. We were pushing across the bridge and with every push of our bodies, we were pushing history forward.

The Uncommitted Movement feat. Layla Elabed & Waleed Shahid - Chapo Trap House - Air Date 3-8-24

WILL MENAKER - HOST, CHAPO TRAP HOUSE: I think it's unquestionable that the campaign has made an impact because the reactions in the media that now have to talk about this and deal with this have been quite irate. So, starting with you, what do you say to the criticism that the Uncommitted campaign is either unwittingly helping Donald Trump or just simply being useful idiots to secure his reelection.

WALEED SHAHID: Well, this is a big tent campaign from like loyal Democrats, even liberal Zionists, all the way [00:08:00] to anarchists and socialists who have been protesting in the streets. This is a way to bring people together who are pissed off about the war and want to make their voices heard

at the ballot box. And so there are definitely some people who are voting uncommitted who are not going to vote for President Biden and probably vote third party or sit out come November.

But I think the vast majority of people who are voting uncommitted would - and the polls I've seen show this - if Biden was to end funding toward Israel's war in Gaza, if Biden was to call for a permanent ceasefire, if Biden was to end funding for the occupation, these voters would come around, obviously. You know, it is a big stretch for Biden to go from here to there. But every poll I've seen is that voters who are uncommitted right now would come around if Biden were to change his position dramatically.

I think this is a warning. Everything I heard from the political establishment and like media and journalists I talked to was that Biden doesn't take these Arabs, these young people, these Palestinians, Muslims, seriously. He thinks by [00:09:00] October, when Biden reminds Muslims and Arabs and young people about the Muslim ban, they will come around and vote for him. I personally wanted to send the media and political establishment a message that these voters are serious about their uncommitment to Biden and then it's a warning sign for Democrats that if they're going to put Netanyahu above defeating Trump, if they're going to put Netanyahu above American democracy, then the bill will come due for disregarding Palestinian lives. And so, I think the Biden campaign is starting to understand that these voters are serious. So, either they will continue what they're doing, which is to rebrand themselves as, Oh, we're nice to the Palestinians. We have nice messaging about Muslims. Or they'll abandon Muslims and Arabs and young people and go for Nikki Haley voters, or they'll change their position and try to earn the support of the voters who care about human rights for everybody. And so we're waiting to see a policy change. But you know, right now it's not good enough.

WILL MENAKER - HOST, CHAPO TRAP HOUSE: And, Layla, when you campaign on this issue, do you encounter a Democratic voters who maybe feel [00:10:00] upset by Biden's support for the war on Palestine, but sort of, I guess, ultimately think that's over there, there's nothing I can really do about it, and I just can't bear the thought of Trump being president? What do you say to these voters or is this sort of a voice from nowhere? Do you not encounter people like that?

LAYLA ELABED: Well, I think that Michigan voters showed the Democratic Party exactly how they felt. In Michigan, we had 73 out of 83 counties vote at 10 percent or over for uncommitted. And so, I think that's a good example of how broad this campaign was.

WILL MENAKER - HOST, CHAPO TRAP HOUSE: In terms of the reaction of the Democratic Party and its leadership, do you think that they were maybe caught a little off guard that this movement is not just a movement of Arab and Muslim Democratic voters, but has sort of crossed demographic lines in a way that can't be sort of easily cordoned off or jettisoned as a small sort of ethnic voting group?

WALEED SHAHID: Yeah, I [00:11:00] think they're definitely caught off guard. In Minnesota, there was *The New York Times* did a graph showing that the largest size of the vote for uncommitted came from voters under 35, and that multiracial, multifaith, multiethnic. And so we have statistics showing that this is not just an Arab and Muslim issue, but this is particularly a generational issue.

It was definitely intentional that Kamala Harris made her rebrand on ceasefire in Selma, of all places. She was speaking to an older, Black, Christian audience and for people who've been paying attention, several, like, a thousand Black pastors wrote to the White House saying that they were against the funding of the war. The AMU church for Biden.

WILL MENAKER - HOST, CHAPO TRAP HOUSE: That's surprising to me as well, if I could interject here, that's surprising to me because I remember when protesters disrupted Biden's comments at that famous Black church. I was assured that this would turn off the entire sort of African-American faith community. But that doesn't appear to have a...

WALEED SHAHID: You must watch a lot of [00:12:00] MSNBC. So that church, that church where Biden was disrupted and the entire Democratic establishment said like, How rude, these protesters, this is a historic black church. So, that was the African Methodist Episcopal Church, one of the largest Black congregations in the country. That denomination put out a statement a few weeks after that disruption saying they could no longer support funding of Israel's occupation or war. And so, you know, maybe people have their feathers ruffled for a couple of hours, but I think those protesters got their voice across because literally that denomination is now against the war and calling on Biden to end his support of it.

WILL MENAKER - HOST, CHAPO TRAP HOUSE: And so like in this process, the Uncommitted campaign has picked up a number of delegates. Well, will you be sending those delegates to the convention? And what does that practically look like? I mean, it's not going to be enough numbers to deny Joe Biden the nomination, but do you plan to send delegates to the convention, and what does that practically look like?

WALEED SHAHID: So, Listen to Michigan is figuring out a plan to coordinate and organize these delegates. Each Democratic Party in these states has a [00:13:00] little bit of a different process to make sure the delegates are the delegates from the Uncommitted campaigns. But I imagine they will go to the convention to hold whoever the nominee is accountable to their anti-war agenda, to use the process of the convention to put forward their vision of what the Democratic Party should stand for. And some of it is bureaucratic and arcane, but I imagine they will, you know, this is a core part of the Democratic Party. Like, half of the people who voted for Biden in 2020 believe Israel has committed a genocide. And so I think there'll be carrying the voices of Democratic voters, who elected them in these primaries, to the convention in Chicago.

WILL MENAKER - HOST, CHAPO TRAP HOUSE: All right. Waleed, I know you have to go in a second, but I guess just like to conclude with you, you said Wisconsin and Washington are the primaries, the big ones where uncommitted is on the ballot line. When are those primaries? And what do you want people to know, both in those states and the country at large, going into this, into these primaries?

WALEED SHAHID: Yeah. So, Washington's primary is this coming Tuesday on March 12th. [00:14:00] There is an amazing effort underway there that's humble and low budget, but that is on Tuesday, March 12th. I don't know when this episode is coming out, but hopefully people can plug in. You can go to ListenToMichigan.com to get plugged in, donate, volunteer, phone bank for that effort. And then the other one is Wisconsin, which is in April. That's also looking like a pretty significant organizing push and an organized one. That election is April 2nd. And so if you miss the Washington one and can't plug in to the phone banks or can't donate it to it, you still have a month to get involved in the April Wisconsin Democratic primary.

WILL MENAKER - HOST, CHAPO TRAP HOUSE: Okay, great. Layla, I'm sorry we lost you there, but I just wanted to follow up, to finish the question I was going to ask you about: When you campaign on this issue, do you encounter voters that are angry at Biden's policies supporting the war on Palestine, but, like, just can't bear the thought of Trump being president. Like, how do you talk to those voters? Or, is this even an opinion that you encounter?

LAYLA ELABED: Well, [00:15:00] yeah, it's definitely an opinion that we encounter, but what I can say about the Arab-American and Muslim-American community is that, you know, this runs deep, this betrayal that we felt from the Biden administration and from the president runs really deep. Because we are directly affected by what is happening now in the Gaza and in that region, in the

South of Lebanon, in Syria, in Yemen. And so we are watching our loved ones, our friends, our family members, be murdered through our American taxpayer dollars. And so, yes, I do think that, on one hand, you have folks that say, you know, I don't support the genocide. I don't support our complicity in this war, but I cannot have another four years of Donald Trump. And what we say to that is that this is a primary, this is our chance to use our vote as our voice to hopefully get Joe Biden and his [00:16:00] administration to change course and reevaluate their policies when it comes to this unchecked and unconditional military funding that we provide.

And so, these votes don't carry over into November and everyone is going to have to vote their conscience and hopefully that we see some change on behalf of the Biden administration.

Why Peaceful Protest Won't Solve Anything - Second Thought - Air Date 8-12-22

JT CHAPMAN - HOST, SECOND THOUGHT: The principled debates in the assembly. The decisions made by the Supreme Court. The enforcement of laws by judges and overly militarized police forces. These are all just procedures. It's civil. It's well organized. It's legitimate. And therefore, even when the consequences are brutal, it's not even really violence.

Kavanaugh doesn't deserve all this violence on his doorstep. He deserves to live a normal, peaceful life. All he did was vote in a way that you didn't like. And there's nothing violent about voting. It's easy to see how the contrast between angry people yelling and people in suits talking quietly reflects this idea.

And that's the image politicians like to invoke when they're talking about [00:17:00] civility. But the state has never been a non-violent institution, the American government especially. For starters, the liberal regimes most of you watching this video live under are entirely the product of bloody, violent revolutions, like those in France and the US.

Nobody voted the king away or acted all that civilly. But that's just the tip of the iceberg. Thousands of early Americans participated in the genocide of Native Americans that is still going on. Today, the state relies on the tremendous violence of the police, the carceral system, and the military, with the US accounting for nearly 25 percent of the world's prison population, and spending more money than the next 10 countries combined on its armed forces.

There's more. Every day, the governments we live under choose not to end homelessness, poverty, and malnutrition, despite these measures being well within our means, and in so doing, subject millions of people to a more structural form of violence.

Governments allow, and often encourage, [00:18:00] fossil fuel companies to destroy local environments, and rip through reservations with oil pipelines that have a historic record of failure. That's more violence. Without needing to go back very far, we can see that the liberal government we live under survived for generations by capturing and enslaving human beings.

These same liberal governments also colonized entire continents, crushing their native populations without remorse. And once colonialism was formally ended in many parts of the world, former colonies were kept under the imperial boot in a series of neo-colonial, neo-liberal market reforms. At times, governments even carry out direct, very targeted violence against their own people in horrific acts like the MOVE bombings that wiped out an entire bloc. Or the, uh, "removal" of Fred Hampton in his sleep.

Government, and specifically the kind of government that you most likely live under, is tremendously violent. It's not civil at all, it's just very efficient and formal with the way it [00:19:00] conducts its violence. When politicians are confronted with this evidence, which frankly doesn't happen very often, their last resort is to rely on the idea that this violence is legitimate.

The violence may exist, and it may be deplorable, but it is ultimately publicly sanctioned. The way this violence gains its legitimacy in the 21st Century is by claiming that all this awful stuff is just what the people want. At the end of the day, in liberal democracies, the government acts as nothing more than a mouthpiece for the will of the public.

So, if something bad happens, it's just because the people wanted it to. Or they just didn't vote hard enough. This is how Obama recently explained it in an interview for a show that he produced. In this clip, Obama was just asked why the massive desire for change and an end to much of the state's violence in 2008 never materialized.

Obama responds by saying,

BARACK OBAMA: Except it turns out Mitch McConnell was elected, too. Right? Precisely because the country is a big, diverse, complicated place. Look, here's the [00:20:00] thing...

JT CHAPMAN - HOST, SECOND THOUGHT: The idea here is that because people are just so different in this big country, putting an end to this violence is too difficult. We need to compromise. Except Obama's time in office was full of moments where he led the charge on increasing the state's violence without facing any resistance.

For a long time, Obama was called the "Deporter in Chief". Because of how aggressively he pursued the deportation of, at the conservative end, 2.5 million people. His legacy is also one of over 540 drone strikes and hundreds of civilian deaths, also unopposed by the Republicans he's trying to pin the blame on. Obama also imposed, once again without staunch opposition, the brutal austerity politics that made the 2008 crash so violent for millions of Americans.

The banks were bailed out, but many Americans were just left out to dry in sudden, brutal poverty. And it wasn't because Americans disagreed with one another, it's because their voice didn't matter as much as those of business interests. This is because, unlike what Obama is trying [00:21:00] to convey, the government is not an impartial institution.

The state is not a perfect expression of democratic will. It is the crystallization of class dynamics. When they act, our capitalist governments do not exclusively consider the public's demands. Every decision, whether small or large, gets filtered through the long term preservation of capitalist interests.

While some decisions the public supports make it through, many do not. And imposing that corporate filter is precisely what the appeal to civility is trying to do. By calling for civility, by insisting that the only legitimate channels for political change are those of the government, liberals and conservatives alike are intent on submitting every desire for change to the approval of the ruling class.

If that sounds a bit far fetched to you, consider this. Researchers have found that in over 20 years of congressional voting records, the preferences of the bottom 90 percent of the population have, "a minuscule, near zero, statistically non significant impact upon public policy". [00:22:00] Near zero. Almost nothing.

That begs the question of who does have influence, if not the public. And helpfully, the same study goes on to say, "When a majority of citizens disagrees with economic elites or with organized interests, they generally lose". Our elected leaders can act in our interests, they just don't if it conflicts with those of capitalists.

This is because, at the end of the day, our elected leaders run on campaigns that need to be funded by billionaires. They are personally invested in the stock market to the tune of millions of dollars, and they are consistently and overwhelmingly lobbied by business interests. The US government, like many all over the world, was founded by liberal thinkers, who sanctified the private ownership of productive resources and, in so doing, created government institutions that would always protect this right, even when it conflicts with the well being of the population.

The American government is not neutral. By constructing it as the only [00:23:00] civil way to do politics, those critical of protesters are intent on keeping politics in favor of some over others, and shutting up those who speak out.

If all that wasn't enough, it's important to remember what's being asked of protesters here, in real terms. Protests never begin as violent. Almost every protest movement that's had any element of violence or generic uncivility has come after decades of by the books peaceful protesting being casually ignored. Decades of state sanctioned, pre-approved protests that do not produce even the mildest discomfort. People protested to enshrine abortion for decades before showing up in front of Kavanaugh's house. The movement for Black Lives was not only overwhelmingly peaceful, the few instances of violence only appeared after generations of Black suffering being systematically ignored.

People asking protesters to remain peaceful at all costs are doing so knowing full well that they have had their chance to hear them out. Think of it like this: if the purpose of a protest is to [00:24:00] force the government to act on something, and the government is the one telling you what is an acceptable protest, do you really believe they'd allow a protest that would actually make them uncomfortable or force their hand in any way? Of course not. The people calling for civility in a society with this power distribution recognized that the outcome of their proposed civility would be the maintenance of the status quo, the status quo that benefits them, those at the levers of power, and the violent state apparatus they wield.

As much as we can wish that asking nicely for things will solve all our problems, history has shown us that simply won't be the case. In every era, it has been the actions of countless ordinary people working together to force the change they want to see. Throughout history, protests, demonstrations, and mass movements have always been the main drivers of real change.

Gaza Protesters SHUT DOWN Schiff's Victory Speech - The Majority Report - Air Date 3-6-24

SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: Perhaps what was most impressive was the relentlessness of, if not now, activists confronting Adam Schiff on his support for the massacre that's happening in Gaza. This is really [00:25:00] important. The more pressure that you know, they see in the White House on other Democrats in other places, the more they will feel it, et cetera, et cetera. And they dogged Adam Schiff yesterday, and, uh, good for them. Takes a lot of guts to do stuff like this.

PROTESTORS: This man is sending your tax dollars to kill children in Gaza. How do you work your tax dollars? By sending our tax dollars to Gaza. Free Palestine! Free Palestine! He is killing children with our tax dollars. Where do you find money?

EMMA VIGELAND - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: That was earlier on, right?

SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: What happened? Why did they, can you let it play out a little more? That is 20 seconds. It's just 20 seconds. Oh, okay. But I think we just went 16 seconds there, but that's okay. Nevertheless I'll tell you why I think this is effective. As opposed to even like maybe when you're in a big crowd like this, it is disturbing what they're trying to do in a way that is different than like pursuing them individually. Like, when you go and you disrupt a [00:26:00] fundraiser or when you go and you disrupt a party when you go and disrupt, uh, you know, as we've seen with Biden has canceled a lot of his college tours, uh, they're feeling it. It is causing them... there is a political price that is associated with this.

EMMA VIGELAND - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: And it's also just really brave. It's, if not now, it's Jewish Voice for Peace and other groups, we should say, that are organizing this in California. Like, I saw, at the NBA All Star Game, there was a Let Gaza Live banner unfurled. People are going to get beers dumped on them. People, I mean, Joe Biden was getting interrupted by someone, Jill Biden, criticizing Biden's policies in Gaza and she must have been a, she was a young woman and you see these older people just grabbing at her and being kind of violent. So, it takes bravery on a number of levels.

SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: So that was a campaign event earlier in the day. And here is Schiff with his victory speech.

EMMA VIGELAND - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: He didn't get to finish it.

SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: Check it out. I

PROTESTORS: [00:27:00] want to thank, I,

I want to thank you all.

COMMENTATOR: Someone came up and said to Adam Schiff, who was reading off a prompter, who was trying to stick to the prompter, to wrap it up. He went and finished it up. These were people who came in, about five or six to start with that said, ceasefire now, ceasefire now. Security ushered them out. And then another couple popped up. Let Gaza live. Let Gaza live. And then some more came in the middle. Security could not get them out. They were scattered through the room here at the Avalon Theater and the nightclub. Go down there and pull down in the crowd for me, please. And you see that, you know, there's just a lot of arguing, a lot of disagreement. Again, they were chanting, Free Gaza now. Let Gaza [00:28:00] live. Cease fire now. Let Gaza live. And the protesters remain here in the center of this floor. So what was supposed to be a victory celebration and a scripted speech that Adam Schiff was reading off prompter when no doubt he had carefully crafted a long time ago was cut dramatically short and he was now taken off the stage.

EMMA VIGELAND - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: Whew. Great stuff. Also, this has been a hallmark of these demonstrations too, how they stagger their disruptions. It's so effective because like they can't get you all out at once and they don't know when one member of the crowd is going to start chanting. This has been done, I think at one of Biden speeches, with the one in Virginia?

BRADLEY ALSOP: The Biden speech at the one in Virginia is the one that I think precipitated his staff doing their best to not allow that type of disruption to happen again at any event. And also it happened in one of Tony Blinken's House committee [00:29:00] hearings.

EMMA VIGELAND - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: Right. The Virginia speech, Biden was interrupted 17 times.

BRADLEY ALSOP: Yeah, it was like constant.

EMMA VIGELAND - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: Yep. So, good job guys.

SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: Yeah, really important. I mean, that is there's no way that the White House isn't aware of this and realizes that this is going to be a problem. You see press reports that they're creeping ever so slightly to pressuring Israel. Benny Gantz was in town, and supposedly they gave him an earful. All of which is, you know, irrelevant until they actually start to put some muscle behind this.

But we had Ken Klippenstein reporting on a leaked diplomatic cable, I mentioned that, that was basically coming from the the American embassy in Israel saying, and these are not people who are not sympathetic to Israel, I can tell you, in the Diplomatic Corps. They're basically saying like if they go into Rafa, it is going to be an unmitigated, in many [00:30:00] respects, incomprehensible disaster.

You have, literally, hundreds of thousands of people, hundreds of hundreds of thousands of people living in tents there. Just horrible. So, good for those folks who are out there protesting in what was really probably the most high profile speech of the night, I mean outside of maybe, I don't know, if Trump gave one or not.

EMMA VIGELAND - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT: And he's going to be the senator from California, Schiff. Like, that was why he spent, I think, over half of his money that he spent on advertisements, advertising for Garvey. So, this is like the moment to say, we are your constituents too, buddy, and this is the future here in California.

The Missing Revolutions of The 2010s | Ash Sarkar Meets Vincent Bevins Part 2 - Novara Media - Air Date 10-29-23

ASH SARKAR - HOST, NOVARA MEDIA: I want to talk about strategy, because really that is what this book is about. As much as it's also about these moments of huge, quite romantic moments of confrontation. It's about the kinds of strategies and lack of strategies that were going on at these particular times. There's an account [00:31:00] of the ways in which horizontalism fails to be

organized enough to take advantage of the moments that it produces. So what are the kinds of alternatives that are available for people?

VINCENT BEVINS: Yeah, and it's really about a very specific package of tactics that comes together historically and ideologically that is often divorced from strategy. Sometimes it works great when inserted into a larger strategic vision. Sometimes it is divorced from that strategic vision, and this often becomes tragically clear to the participants at the moment when, Oh my God, we've disrupted this power center. We've created a power vacuum, but we cannot fill it, because we don't have the kind of movement that could fill a power vacuum who's filling it is now our enemies, right?

So this particular set of tactics like this repertoire of contention, to use the sociological language, would be the apparently spontaneous, apparently leaderless, digitally-coordinated mass protest in public squares and public spaces.

So all of those elements [00:32:00] come from somewhere. They don't need to go together, but they really seemed like they were supposed to all the time in the 2010s. So you can do protests that are different, or you can do things that are not protests. So strikes and boycotts are often proven historically to be very effective at putting pressure on elites, often more so than protests. Protests, I think, are fundamentally communicative acts. That doesn't mean that that's not a problem, but I think understanding that helps us to understand that they work best when in dialogue with or when supported by other types of actions or by organizations that can put pressure on existing elites on the state. An answer that comes out of many of the interviews at the end of the book is the creation of organizations to do what you can, in accordance with your vision of the future you want to build in accordance with where your actual goals are, to build organizations when it seems like nothing is happening, to build the kind of collective capacities for action -- to build the kind of collective capacities for [00:33:00] action that can respond to changing circumstances, that can act in the long term. And these often work really well in concert with protests when they do happen, because I don't think the mass protest is going away. Social media has made it quite easy to bring lots of people together around a particular cause or often like a particular post, like a viral image, very quickly.

So one of the answers, and this is something that I really do try to really give to other voices at the end, Rodrigo Nunes, he's a Brazilian philosopher, he's now here, he talks about an ecology of organizations, organizations that are not necessarily permanent vanguards, but can act in a vanguard manner in relationship to other movements.

And then not a lot of people get back into labor organizing. This is something that never went away in the UK, but in the US, this is something that a lot of people in the Bernie generation have gotten into for the first time.

ASH SARKAR - HOST, NOVARA MEDIA: So let's talk about labor organizing, because something which I've been thinking about a lot is about what kind of labor organizing people are doing. And it seems that you've got a generation left scenario here in the UK. You've got lots of people who are politically active during the Corbyn movement and are [00:34:00] now looking for something to do. And it seems to me that there are lots of people who go, okay, well, my job is to unionize wherever I am, but often that's not in strategic sectors. So it's like NGOs and charities or left wing organizations. And then there's a smaller group of people who are saying, okay, well, actually what we should try and do is identify choke points in capitalism and all, almost do the Alliance for Workers Liberty thing of taking up jobs in strategic sectors so we could do labor organizing there.

In terms of your sense of what's strategically useful and what's worked in other contexts, what should you do? Should you organize what's close or organize what feels like it could be most disruptive to capitalism?

VINCENT BEVINS: So recognizing this is now outside of the scope of the book, but this came up a lot because I understood this in the US and a lot of people have read the book and they brought their own experiences, either what they have done after Bernie, what they'd have to do after the George Floyd uprisings. I would say that some of the most important victories in this very incipient rebirth of a labor movement in the United States had to do with the second thing that you said, going to [00:35:00] Amazon or going to form a reform caucus within the UAW, which changes the leadership, which allows for one of the most important strikes in a very long time in the United States, going to strategic sectors.

But I would also say that not everybody is a full-time dedicated professional revolutionary and doing what you can around you is better than not doing anything. I think that, again, you can have both. I think that being very strategic has been proven to be effective in the US context, but not everybody has to do that.

And I think that, again, the kind of lessons that come out of a lot of the conversations at the end of the book revolve around some kind of message that says, just join an organization, whatever it is that you care about. It doesn't have to be a dedicated fully a revolutionary party, if that's not what you want to do with your life. But something where that gets you together with other human

beings that you can work collectively on building something that can act locally, nationally, internationally -- whatever you think is best is better than what we're all doing now, [00:36:00] including myself, sitting at home alone on the computer, getting mad at the computer.

The Life & Death of Aaron Bushnell: U.S. Airman Self-Immolates Protesting U.S. Support for Israel - Democracy Now! - Air Date 2-28-24

JUAN GONZÁLEZ - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: This issue of self-immolation, we've already had two now in protest of the war in Gaza. But you noted that during the Vietnam War, as many as five Americans self-immolated themselves in protest against the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. I'm wondering if you could talk about that? You wrote about that recently for Common Dreams.

ANN WRIGHT: Yes. It's a sad situation, for sure. Our hearts go out to Aaron's family and Aaron's friends.

And the same back in — 60 years ago almost now, in 1965, as the U.S. War on Vietnam was starting up, first we had an 82-year-old Quaker woman, Alice Herz, committed suicide by self-immolation, and then followed about six months later by another Quaker, Norman Morrison, from Baltimore, who went to the [00:37:00] Pentagon and set himself on fire, little knowing the place that he had picked at the Pentagon was right below where Secretary of Defense McNamara had his office. And apparently, his self-immolation had a strong effect on McNamara, although he didn't stop the war initially, but it did have an effect on him personally and on his family. And then followed by a young man in New York at the U.N. Plaza. So, yes, there were five people that burned themselves to death over a political decision of the United States to go to war.

And so, now we have — 60 years later, we have two people in less than three months who have done the same, I would say, courageous act of taking their own lives to bring the attention of the American public and the world to what the United States is complicit [00:38:00] in, which is the Israeli genocide and U.S. genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza.

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: I just wanted to go through a few more of those examples in history, that sent shockwaves through

multiple conflicts. You had Thich Quang Duc, a monk who drew attention to the treatment of Vietnamese Buddhists by the government; and then Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia, who sparked the Arab Spring when he set himself on fire — this was before Egypt, and that sparked the uprising in Tunisia; Malachi Ritscher, a musician who called for an end to the U.S. invasion of Iraq. A pro-Palestine protester also self-immolated outside the Israeli Consulate in Atlanta in December, but we don't know her name. It hardly got any attention.

And there's been a whole debate in the media right now, those who talk [00:39:00] about it as — don't even want to talk. I think as it started, papers like The New York Times didn't even say he said, "Free Palestine," and other outlets, as well. But then, as time went on, they did talk about what happened. But the whole issue of going into a debate about mental illness and not wanting to encourage something like this, versus you hear someone like Ali Abunimah talking about Aaron's incredible bravery. Your thoughts?

ANN WRIGHT: Well, it is incredibly brave. And a person — well, there's no evidence at all that Aaron had any sort of mental illness. He was a very conscientious person who saw what the U.S. was doing in his position in the U.S. military. And one might say, he's not the first person to have committed suicide over what the United States has been doing. If you look, 22 veterans a day commit suicide over what they've done in the U.S. [00:40:00] military. What Aaron did was very, very courageous. I can't imagine taking that step. It was an act of courage, an act of bravery, to call attention to U.S. policies.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: Levi Pierpont, I wanted to ask you — you grew up as an evangelical Christian. Aaron Bushnell attended Catholic religious services while at basic training. How do you think his religious views informed his beliefs and, ultimately, his action?

LEVI PIERPONT: I think, ultimately, by the time that he did what he did, he didn't identify with any particular religion. But I know that for me, even though I'm more agnostic than I grew up, my evangelical roots still influence me. They influence my sense of justice. And they told me since I was a young child [00:41:00] that you have to stand up for what you believe in. And I can imagine that it was the same way for Aaron. And so, even though I don't believe that he still believed in the Catholic faith by the time that he died, I know that that upbringing had a profound impact on him, and I'm sure that it influenced his sense of justice.

AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: Levi Pierpont, Aaron was living in San Antonio, where Lackland base is. He was doing a lot of mutual aid work with people who were unsheltered there, very well known in

those encampments. What do you want us to remember him by, as you think about him in these last few days, what you're talking about in the vigils and with your friends?

LEVI PIERPONT: I want people to remember [00:42:00] that his death is not in vain, that he died to spotlight this message. I don't want anybody else to die this way. If he had asked me about this, I would have begged him not to. I would have done anything I could to stop him.

But, obviously, we can't get him back. And we have to honor the message that he left. I would have told him that this wasn't necessary to get the message out. I would have told him that there were other ways. But seeing the way that the media responds now, now that this has happened, it's hard not to feel like he was right, that this was exactly what was necessary to get people's attention about the genocide that's happening in Palestine. And so, I want people to remember his message.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!: And, Ann Wright, your sense of how the movement here in [00:43:00] this country to stop this genocidal war in Gaza has been building, and what Aaron Bushnell's sacrifice may contribute to that?

ANN WRIGHT: Well, it's a huge, huge movement. And the Biden administration must recognize it, as your previous guest said. The voters are telling them a message. This is a massive, massive movement of youth, of people of all religions, that are saying, by any religious teachings, this killing is wrong. It has to end.

And I would say to Levi, we have Veterans for Peace, and we have About Face, veterans organizations that would like to offer you support, because this is tough, really tough. But it's for the people of Gaza, the people of Palestine, that we do this, to stop these horrible, horrible policies that our country has right [00:44:00] now. The killing of innocent people for the United States and for Israel, it has to end. And ceasefire now.

BONUS Farmer Protests - Outrage + Optimism - Air Date 2-2-24

TOM RIVNETT-CARNAC - HOST, OUTRAGE + OPTIMISM: So I Live in a rural area of Devon, and I have a very good friend who farms a few hundred acres nearby, and I actually invited him to come on the podcast and talk

to us. And he didn't want to do that for reasons that will be clear in a minute. But he had a really interesting perspective. He said, look, I'm a fifth generation farmer, and what is being asked of me by government is shifting. However, I see that weather patterns are changing. I see that we're in an emergency. So I'm engaging with it and I'm struggling with all these online systems. And when I do that, and I try to listen to what's being told to me, I shift partially away from food production, I shift towards nature restoration alongside food production. And actually financially, this is just the UK, he told me that he can do very well as a result of that. [00:45:00]

And so his analysis of this situation, and this is why he didn't want to come on the podcast, is that much of this protest is about a nostalgic, harkening back to a imagined status quo in the past, when everything was great and a refusal to change for lots of reasons that many of us can understand, but that what is being presented to farmers is an opportunity for transformation that many of them are being unable to grasp because they are unable to deal with the bureaucracy of transformation. But if they were able to grasp it, some governments, and I can't say this for everyone where there are riots taking place, are providing a pathway where that is feasible to do both.

I don't know that I can come down that harshly. I think your neighbour is incredibly enlightened and perhaps quite unique, because it seems to me that [00:46:00] farmers in Europe, but anywhere else, speaking from Costa Rica, very agricultural country, are actually unfairly squeezed, in my sense.

CHRISTIANA FIGURES - HOST, OUTRAGE + OPTIMISM: Because, as your friend has just told you, he inherited agricultural practices from his grandparents, their grandparents, way up the line, and most farmers, be they men or women—most farmers in the world are women, by the way—are still practicing agricultural practices that they have inherited from many generations in hundreds of years.

They're also trying to operate within financial, political, economic paradigm that operated well in the past. [00:47:00] So their practices are the ones of the past and the paradigms that surround them, be they the policies, the subsidies, the trade agreements, operated more or less well in the past. The challenge that they face, consciously or not, is not, I would call it nostalgia, I would call it, just complete paralysis, because that world that they inherited and that they operated in and that their parents and grandparents operated in is no more, because we're now hit by climate change, invariably, which is the most deeply disruptive factor to agriculture for sure, as well as to everything else. It is completely predictable that we will not return to what used to be the norm. That is no longer the norm.

So [00:48:00] how can you blame them for operating in a reality that no longer exists? And for that reality that is emerging, we frankly do not have the policies, the subsidies, the trade agreements, all of the paradigm that would truly help them to shift from where they were to where they need to go, which is high resilience, regenerative agricultural practices, restoration of nature, a completely different paradigm. But they're not being helped by that. They're not being helped by that, because governments are themselves still struggling to figure out what are the new policies, what are the new subsidies, what are the new agreements. They don't really have a clear idea.

All of this, frankly, is they're all in unknown space, trying [00:49:00] to figure out together or individually. And so the farmers are frankly very squeezed here. They're very squeezed. I don't think it's about romantic nostalgia. I think it's frustration. And I'm closer to where Paul mentioned. This is a true threat for them. It's a threat for their livelihood because they're operating according to one paradigm. Nobody's really giving them the support to shift to another paradigm, and the difference between those two is a direct threat to my livelihood. So I'm more in paralysis, frankly, and anger than nostalgia.

BONUS “They’re Inside for Us, We’re Outside for Them” - Uprising Support on Anti-repression, Building Memory, Care, and Resilience - Millennials Are Killing Capitalism - Air Date 8-30-23

JARED WARE - HOST, MILLENNIALS ARE KILLING CAPITALISM:

Can you say a little bit about the scale of state repression that took place in response to the George Floyd uprisings? You mentioned earlier on in this discussion about one of the things that drew you to it is just starting to see, wow, there's a lot of federal charges that are pretty significant that are coming down early on. I know it's sort of an impossible question, but I'd love to hear what you think. I know [00:50:00] you all probably pay paid more attention to trying to answer that than a lot of folks have.

CAPPY: Yeah, I think there's a lot of different ways to answer this and talk about the scale. If we're just reducing it to numbers, we know that, probably over 350 people received some type of federal charges, and the nationwide, I think the last biggest number I saw was like over 14, 000 people across the country that got arrested for something during the uprising. But I don't think that really tells the story very well, and I think there's also a implication of

finality when putting a number on it. So thinking about the ways that the repression against the uprising is ongoing, and also how the impacts of the uprising and, maybe, in some ways, the uprising itself is also ongoing.

If you're trying to quantify the uprising itself, you can do that in terms of number of buildings set on [00:51:00] fire, cop cars that were broken, or city budgets that were changed because of that, or police departments that got defunded or something, but it doesn't tell you the story about people's consciousness that were transformed, and the skills that people learned and the connections, and the growth that people experienced through participating in that or through watching that.

So thinking about how the the uprising and the repression against it are this dialectic of one another that sort of moved forward. And I think one space to look at that is in Atlanta and the struggle against Cop City, and how the impetus for cop city grew out of the uprisings in Atlanta, the U. S., but especially Atlanta that summer after the murder of George Floyd and then the subsequent murder of Rashard Brooks, and how, because of that, they're like, oh, we need this like police paramilitary training facility. But then also how the uprising [00:52:00] informed the movement against Cop City and how this focus on resisting the expansion of policing and militarization of policing morphed into the movement against Cop City, and how wild the repression against Cop City has been over the past couple of years.

I think the other part that I was talking about, on the previous question is like thinking about repression and the ways that it's sometimes less tangible in the ways that I think one big part of how repression works is through forgetting and through whitewashing things that happen and creating new narratives so that we forget what actually happened in the streets. And I think this is something that we've seen pretty heavy handedly from a lot of more liberal sources where they try to downplay the militancy and the revolutionary content of the uprisings and talk about how it was mostly all just peaceful compliant protests, [00:53:00] and people were protesting passively and there were some exceptions from some bad actors or something.

But this narrative that defies the reality of the people experienced in the streets and watched on national TV seems to have really taken a hold in a lot of more liberal Consciousness and narrative as the years have moved on. So I think in thinking about repression is forgetting one part of anti repression work is the work of memory and affirming what we all experienced and remembering that and the remembering the lessons of it.

So I think it's fairly straightforward and not controversial to say that the repression against the uprising was truly massive in large part because the uprising itself was truly massive. It was extremely decentralized. It was happening in cities and towns and other places, [00:54:00] all over the country, places that aren't known for its radicalism, places that aren't known for having uprisings or rebellions of this sort, so the repression took a lot of forms.

A lot of it was immediate. Extreme violence from law enforcement, mass arresting people on trumped up or bogus or completely fabricated charges, and then also this more specific targeting of people with federal charges for even more severe prosecution. At the time, who's the attorney general then Bill Barr, I think sent a memo to all the U. S. attorneys across the country being like, "focus your prosecution on these types of offenses from these type of people," and it's really centralized effort from federal law enforcement to target and prosecute people for federal charges from the uprising.

There's that stuff that was happening in the days and weeks around the uprising, but then the repressive game of forgetting and retelling [00:55:00] narratives and revisionism happening on an ongoing level. One question that I got a lot, especially after Biden got elected was, how is the new Biden administration going to change the repression that's happening against the uprising, and I can't say for absolute certain, but I think not much at all. I think there's possibly an argument that some people have maybe gotten better plea deals or less stringent sentences because of maybe less centralized pressure from the attorney general's office about it, but it's not like cases were getting dismissed, it's not like prosecutions were getting dropped or anything of that sort. So, yeah, I don't think that the changing of the guards changed the overall repressive apparatus in response to the uprising.

Final comments on the importance of building momentum over time with protest

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: We've just heard clips today, starting with *Novara Media*, discussing the importance of protest movements having a plan. *Chapo* [00:56:00] *Trap House* looked at the uncommitted voter movement against the US support for the war in Gaza. *Second Thought* examined the idea of violence in relation to power and protest. *The Majority Report* highlighted the birddogging campaign against Democratic politicians not opposing the war in Gaza forcefully enough. *Novara Media* dove deeper into the types of organized movements that are most successful. And *Democracy Now!* discussed the self-immolation death of Aaron Buschnell.

That's what everybody heard, but members also heard bonus clips from *Outrage + Optimism* discussing the causes of the current farmer protests in Europe. And *Millennials Are Killing Capitalism* looked at how the state often responds to uprising protests.

To hear that and have all of our bonus contents delivered seamlessly to the new members-only podcast feed that you'll receive, sign up to support the show at BestOfTheLeft.com/support, or shoot me an email requesting a financial hardship membership, because we don't let a [00:57:00] lack of funds stand in the way of hearing more information.

Now to wrap up, I just want to acknowledge that the vast majority of us won't be the ones actually guiding the tactics and strategies of protests. So today's episode could feel merely informational, but not necessarily actionable for most of us. But I think I can fill that gap a bit, because the success of movements depends on the willingness of people, average people like you and me, to stick with it over a period of time. And an essential element for being willing to stick with something over time is to have a deeper understanding of how movements work, and to have proper expectations about progress.

The most important and least understood element of politics and movements, I think, is the fourth dimension of time. People often casually talk about politicians playing four dimensional chess, but they mean it as a metaphor that doesn't really mean anything other than it's complicated. [00:58:00] But genuinely, I think it's a much better metaphor when describing time. Politics, movement building: it's all about managing time. People are impatient, and justifiably so when they're protesting against injustice. And impatience can energize a movement with a sense of urgency, which is great. But if expectations are set wrong, like with the idea that one big protest should be enough to get the results you want, then many can become disappointed and disillusioned and drop away, which actually weakens the movement.

So, although you may not be the one organizing the next protest, you can help maintain the momentum by always asking, What's next? And encouraging others to do the same.

Always make sure that organizers for causes that you believe in can reach you and encourage others to do the same, because every event, every march, every lobby day, every birddogging protest is an opportunity to build and [00:59:00] prepare for the next one.

People talk about going through the motions of protests and feeling like it's not making a difference, which is dispiriting. But you'll tend to have that feeling more the less connected you are to the movement. If you know that a protest is just one step along a path, and that the intention is to continue to build power by growing the ranks of the activists, the marchers, the protestors, then it feels like momentum, which is inspiring.

So stay connected, stay engaged, encourage others to do the same. And never stop asking what's next, because the fight for justice is never over. There is always something to do next.

That is going to be it for today. As always, keep the comments coming in. I would love to hear your thoughts or questions about this or anything else. You can leave a voicemail or send us a text at 202-999-3991, or simply email me to Jay@BestOfTheLeft.com.

[01:00:00] Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to our producers, Deon Clark and Erin Clayton. Thanks to our transcriptionist quartet, Ken, Brian, Ben, and Andrew. And thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work behind the scenes. And of course, thanks to those who support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships. You can join them by signing up today at BestOfTheLeft.com/support, through our Patreon page, or from right inside the Apple Podcast app. Membership is how you get instant access to our incredibly good and often funny bonus episodes, in addition to there being extra content, no ads and chapter markers in all of our regular episodes, all through your regular podcast player. You'll find that link in the show notes, along with a link to join our Discord community, where you can also continue the discussion.

So coming to from far outside the conventional wisdom of Washington DC, my name is Jay!, and this has been the *Best of the Left* podcast coming to twice weekly, thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show from BestOfTheLeft.com.