

# **Marxing America Great Again: Marxist Discourse in Right-Wing Populism and the Future of Geopolitics**

by

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Conservative intellectuals loosely associated with Donald Trump’s “Make America Great Again” (MAGA) movement have come to articulate a broad theory of what has gone wrong with American politics – and indeed *global* politics – over the last two generations. It revolves around a narrative of institutional capture in which a generation of educated elites associated with 1960s New Left political progressivism – that is, “liberalism” in the U.S. political sense rather than that of the classical Liberalism (with a capital “L”) traditionally associated with protecting personal liberties and free markets – managed to burrow their way into, and eventually seize control of, a range of U.S. corporations, banks, universities, political parties, national media institutions, and indeed government itself. This has, in the view of the MAGA movement, created “an all-encompassing, monolithic ‘regime’ of elite oppression (which they often refer to as the ‘enemy’)”<sup>1</sup> and which it is felt to be the responsibility of MAGA leaders to undo.

This narrative of elite capture of modern society is a compelling narrative for many thinkers on the Right, and it has become an important piece of the MAGA-era agenda. In the Western democracies, it has now become commonplace on the political Right to describe the ails besetting modern society as stemming from what effectively amounts to a conspiracy by educated elites in the professional, managerial, cultural, and academic spheres to secure and

perpetuate advantages for themselves at the expense of ordinary, working- and middle-class citizens who adhere to traditional social mores and religious values. Such analyses tend to see society as being pervaded by dynamics of contestation between (1) a cosmopolitan and highly educated elite determined to remake the socio-political environment (or, once in control, to perpetuate it) according to the dictates of its own ideological platform and in ways that tend to support its interests, and (2) other elements of society (e.g., “the people”) whose own interests lead them to resist such hegemony and hence oppose those elites.

According to Florida governor Ron DeSantis, institutions captured by the forces of political progressivism now make up an “anointed” regime of elite political ideological dominance that threatens American values and the country’s future as [“these institutions ... continue their unimpeded march through society.”](#) Similarly, Senator Josh Hawley has described a conspiracy by the country’s [“cosmopolitan class”](#) to oppress ordinary Americans. But this is not merely a narrative advanced by Right-wing politicians. It is one that draws support from a diverse ecosystem of Right-wing theorists, professors, writers, think tank scholars, and sometimes very colorful online personalities who may differ on the details of this analysis, but who fundamentally share this account of pernicious elite capture.

Indeed, these ideas have been quite extensively developed on the American political Right. As described by [Nathan Levine](#), a [former Visiting Fellow at the Heritage Foundation](#) and [at the conservative Hungarian think tank the Danube Institute](#),

much of what is commonly called “populist” politics can be more accurately described as part of an anti-managerial revolution attempting to roll back the expansion of overbearing bureaucratic control into more and more areas of life. ... [This understanding represents] the culmination of a once marginalized, now transformative strand of political thought about who really holds power in the

modern American system. Namely, that our democracy has been usurped by a permanent ruling class of wholly unaccountable managers and bureaucrats.

According to Right-wing<sup>2</sup> activists such as Christopher Rufo, Left-wing intellectuals and militants engaged over several decades in a “long march” through American institutions,<sup>3</sup> slowly and methodically subverting them from within, and ultimately emerging triumphant and in control. The success of this march left those liberal elites – in the words of Julius Krein – “permanently occupying the commanding heights of culture, the economy, and politics,” creating what Curtis Yarvin contemptuously refers to as “the Cathedral”: the complex of institutions in the media, government, academia, and the corporate world that exert hegemonic control over modern minds. For thinkers such as Patrick Deneen, the result is a unique American form of corrupt oligarchy, “one of the worst of its kind produced in history.”<sup>4</sup>

(In a similar vein, former Trump Administration official Michael Anton has suggested that America’s current liberal elite should be considered the moral equivalent of the pre-Civil War “slave power” in the American South. More on the fringes of the modern Right wing, Constin Alamiru – who writes as “Bronze Age Pervert” – casts this elite hegemony in sexualized terms, referring to Yarvin’s “Cathedral” as a communal “longhouse” of oppressive, feminizing “gynocracy” which has locked society in an “iron prison” of “Iron Age” socialism and feminism that aims to degrade and delegitimize heroic and manly “Bronze Age” virtues.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, the Internet personality known as “Raw Egg Nationalist” terms this collective cultural enemy “soy globalism.”<sup>6</sup>)

To right these perceived wrongs, Right-wing activists have mounted what Rufo terms a “propaganda war against public institutions” in order to “lay siege to elite institutions” and “smash” the bureaucracy<sup>7</sup> by “recruit[ing], recaptur[ing], and replac[ing] existing leadership.” Thus can they, Rufo says, “win back the language, recapture institutions and reorient the state towards rightful

ends.” (For his part, Yarvin simply refers to the need to “[uninstall the Cathedral](#),” though he has also tried to popularize the acronym RAGE, standing for “[retire all government employees](#).”)

The American religious Right has also developed a version of this narrative of elite capture and its associated counter-revolutionary agenda that feeds into these political currents. What has become known as “Seven Mountain Mandate (7M)” thinking within [Dominion Theology](#), for example, revolves around an agenda of capturing society back from godless secularism. As the American University scholar Laura Field describes it, 7M is

a Charismatic, Pentecostal variation on Dominion Theology that delineates the seven distinctive ‘mountains’ that are ripe for Christian takeover and control: family, religion, education, media, entertainment, business, and government.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, some Rightist scholars such as [Patrick Deneen](#) of the University of Notre Dame speak of the need to [empower a new Right-wing counter-elite](#) – what Deneen says would be a more virtuous aristocracy: a “genuine *aristoi*” at the helm of a new system of “Aristopopulism”<sup>9</sup> – to [capture, control, and run the state instead](#). For his part, Curtis Yarvin goes characteristically further in his provocation, simply calling for the replacement of democracy by rule of a strongman, a sort of “CEO-monarch”<sup>10</sup> with sweeping powers over society. (He describes himself as a “[royalist](#),” and hypothesizes a “neocameralist state” inspired by “cameralism, the governing philosophy of Frederick the Great,” in which “[there is no political freedom because there is no politics](#).”) Only by such extreme methods, such thinkers tend to assume, can the influence of the hegemonic Leftist ruling elite be extirpated. As [Kevin Slack of Hillsdale College has put it](#), the Leftist elite conspiracy is seen as creating the need for “a Red Caesar ... a leader whose post-Constitutional rule will restore the strength of his people.”

The need to push back against elite capture features prominently in the agenda of the Heritage Foundation, which produced the “[Project 2025” report](#) upon which President Trump appears to have based many of the early initiatives of his second term in office. In fact, the head of that think tank, Kevin Roberts, specifically described that effort as a reaction to the “long march of cultural Marxism through our institutions” that had produced the flowering of progressive political hegemony he termed “The Great Awakening,”<sup>11</sup> and which Project 2025 was devoted to dismantling.

Since Trump’s return to power after the 2024 U.S. presidential elections, Trump and his MAGA movement have embarked on a [broad effort to challenge centers of what they regard as liberal power](#), including universities, the courts, the federal bureaucracy, and the media. The new task of the political Right, therefore, is seen as being that of [using government power to strike back](#) against hegemonic Leftist elites and recapture the commanding heights of political, economic, judicial power – as well as the centers of culture- and knowledge-production – on behalf of the American people. MAGA thinkers such as Steve Bannon and Russell Voight thus stress the need to “[deconstruct the administrative state](#),” “[bend or break the bureaucracy to the presidential will](#),” and destroy “[the woke and weaponized bureaucracy](#)” of the hated “[Deep State](#)” that emerged as the Left colonized the federal bureaucracy.

These political narratives and their importance in shaping the U.S. political struggles of the mid-2020s are now increasingly understood. Less appreciated, however, is the degree to which – despite the fact that it has become commonplace on the U.S. political Right to describe one’s political opponents to the Left as “[Marxists](#)” or “[communists](#),” and for modern Rightist intellectuals to decry “woke Neo-Marxism” as the regnant ideology of the “Deep State”<sup>12</sup> – such elite-capture narratives actually represent a powerful point of *agreement* between the modern MAGA Right and a generation of American *Leftist* critical theorists in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Even less well understood today is the potential for this agreement about

pernicious elite capture to reshape not merely domestic politics but 21<sup>st</sup> Century international affairs as well.

The surprisingly widespread acceptance of such narratives by both Right and Left wing intellectuals – as well as the growing political power of rightist groups associated with similar or analogous narratives in countries such as [France](#), [Germany](#), and the [United Kingdom](#), their degree of political power in [Poland](#), and their deep institutional entrenchment in [Hungary](#) – suggests the possibility that a new front of global political contestation between “populists versus cosmopolitans” may be emerging that is quite different from the North-versus-South, Capitalist-versus-Communist, or democratic-versus-authoritarian dichotomies into which observers have in the past often divided the international arena. This article examines these dynamics, exploring how the convergence of critical discourse between the new MAGA-era “Right-Marxism” and a more traditional “Left-Marxism” may reshape international politics in significant ways. In the final pages, it also speculates about how we might find a philosophically sound pathway out of the snake-pit politics into which the fanatically counterpoised certainties of modern Leftist and Rightist critical discourse threaten to plunge us.

### Theories of Managerial Class Oppression

Such framings about elite capture and the need for ordinary Americans to push back against the Leftist intellectuals responsible are by no means entirely new in the United States. One can, for instance, see presagings of Vice President J.D. Vance’s declaration that “[the universities are the enemy](#)” – not to mention [Donald Trump’s war upon elite academic institutions such as Harvard](#) and upon the [ecosystem of policy community experts in Washington, D.C.](#), and the MAGA movement’s hostility to “fake news” in the traditional mainstream media – in [Richard Nixon’s bitter pronouncement](#) to Henry Kissinger to “[n]ever forget the press is the enemy. The press is the enemy. The establishment is the enemy. The professors are the enemy.” Even longer ago, as [Alan Brinkley has chronicled](#), Huey Long and Father Charles Coughlin wove “issues of privilege, wealth,

centralized power, and of the failure of political institutions to deal with them” into their Depression-era populist demagoguery, contending that the community life of everyday Americans was being destroyed by centralized wealth and power.

More recently and more clearly, however, much of the intellectual basis for specific critiques prominent in the modern American Right’s anti-elite discourse can be found in the work of Samuel Francis – an advisor to the U.S. “paleoconservative” [MAGA-avant-la-lettre](#) politician and former Nixon aide Patrick Buchanan – who himself [drew heavily upon writings](#) of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century scholar James Burnham. In a 1941 book, [The Managerial Revolution](#), Burnham had argued that in the countries of the developed Western world, modern society had been essentially hijacked and coopted by a self-interested professional class of “managerial” elites. As the modern Right-wing thinker [Julius Krein has summarized](#),

... [i]n managerial society, according to Burnham, a technocratic elite of credentialed managers, exercising power through enlarged corporate and government bureaucracies, would occupy the commanding heights of the economy, politics, and culture. Private property would not disappear, but the state nonetheless would exercise a dominant role in the economy, and social and political arrangements would be radically altered. The managerial economy would be categorically distinct from previous forms of entrepreneurial capitalism, and the managerial regime would not be democratic or classically liberal in its essential characteristics.

Francis drew heavily upon Burnham’s construct in offering his own theory of modern America’s failures, just as Krein and other thinkers in the MAGA ecosystem have in turn [drawn upon Francis](#), often [explicitly](#).

Samuel Francis is certainly a controversial figure, often being [described today as having been a white supremacist](#) on account of his

warnings about threats to the “biological survival” of “white civilization,” and his advocacy for “a white reconquest of the United States” to restore “the supremacy of whites in a cultural sense.” Yet beyond simply such racism, his influence upon modern far-Right American political theories of elitist conspiracies against the working class seems profound.

In his book *Beautiful Losers*, Francis argued that traditional conservatism had repeatedly failed to achieve its objectives in the United States because of

its inability to attach itself to any significant social and political force after the managerial elite described by Burnham had displaced the bourgeois elite as the dominant force in American society. The new managerial elite, lodged in the large corporations and unions, the national bureaucratic state, and the bureaucratized educational, media, and cultural organizations, possessed radically different and antibourgeois interests and found in liberalism a useful formula for their expression and rationalization.<sup>13</sup>

Such Burnhamite analysis was a critical ingredient of Francis’ thinking. According to an essay he published in 1996,

... [t]he significant polarization within American society is between the elites, increasingly unified as a ruling class that relies on the national state as its principal instrument of power, and Middle America itself, which lacks the technocratic and managerial skills that yield control of the machinery of power. ... [T]he elites themselves are the real enemy ... [and modern America’s] cultural and moral destruction is in large part driven by the swollen state and the powers of social management it has usurped in education, the arts, and the imperial federal judiciary. ... The sooner we hear that message loudly and clearly ... the sooner Middle America will be able to speak with an

authentic and United Voice, and the sooner we can get on with conserving the nation from the powers that are destroying it.

This, in turn, was the basis for Francis' conclusion that some kind of upheaval was needed in order to break the power of the managerial elite. As [he put it](#),

sooner or later, as the globalist elites seek to drag the country into conflicts and global commitments, preside over the economic pastoralization of the United States, manage the delegitimization of our own culture, and the dispossession of our people, and disregard or diminish our national interests and national sovereignty, a nationalist reaction is almost inevitable and will probably assume populist form when it arrives. The sooner it comes, the better.

It is increasingly [well understood today](#) that there is a clear connection between Samuel Francis' theories and both the MAGA movement's claims of Leftist elite capture of American society and its approaches to mounting an ideological counteroffensive – what Francis termed a “[cultural and intellectual reconquest](#)” – against such elites. One can also see parallels between [Francis' call](#) for “[c]ontrol of the state by a social force or elite different from the forces that now control it” so that this new elite “could shape the state to support Middle American interests and values rather than crush them” and similar exhortations in recent years by Rightist thinkers such as Deneen. Meanwhile, Francis' call for “[dismantling the present state as the Ruling Class has constructed it](#)” also clearly presages the campaign against the “Deep State” urged by Bannon, Voight, and others.

## A Conceptual Convergence

Yet one of the striking things today about this kind of broad critique of modern politics as having been captured in iniquitous ways by a self-interested technocratic elite is that this is not merely a Right-

wing obsession. To the contrary, such conclusions now seem to be widely echoed by broad swathes of the American political community. Where once they tended to be heard primarily on the far Left from politicians such as [Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders](#), today such critiques are remarkably common.

To begin with, such thinking has been increasingly “mainstreamed” on the political Right, including among conservatives much more restrained and less controversial (and less racist) than Samuel Francis. The commentator Thomas Sowell, for example, argues that an elite group of intellectual “producers of ideas and those whose role is the use and dissemination of those ideas” has seized a powerful position in society, arrogating for itself a role as the privileged custodian of truth. This elite of intellectuals, Sowell believes, aims to reconstruct the world on the basis of a vision in which society consists of a series of “problems” to be “solved” by the application of this group’s ideas.<sup>14</sup> These intellectuals, he argues, act in their own class interest, seeking to legitimate their agenda by using control over societal idea-production (e.g., in universities and the media) to depict things that are in their own self-interest as a common good.<sup>15</sup>

Another contemporary conservative, the political scientist [Charles Murray](#), seems to agree. Citing observers as diverse as Robert Reich, David Brooks, and Richard Florida, Murray describes the emergence by the end of the 1990s of a new subset of the American upper class that consists of “the people who run the nation’s economic, political, and cultural institutions.” This new class, Murray says, is an affluent and comfortable one, basing its economic power in “the market value of brains.” This success, however, has produced a “new kind of segregation,” [termed by Robert Reich “the segregation of the successful,”](#) which has led to that class being almost entirely cut off – geographically, culturally, politically, and psychologically – from a new and increasingly troubled and challenged *lower* class of left-behinds.<sup>16</sup>

In his own take on such issues, [Julius Krein has claimed](#) that a new “class war” has emerged, not between stereotypical blocks of “capitalists and proletarians,” but rather *within* the West’s ruling elite itself. As he describes it, the “professional managerial class” – bristling with educational credentials and meritocratic self-regard, and yet also wracked by status anxiety as the financial costs of its own social reproduction have outstripped even its considerable incomes – has become increasingly radicalized and oppositional in its political demands (far more so than the *actual* working class) as it has lost ground within the overall ranks of the elite to a tiny, hyper-plutocratic subgroup that lives primarily off capital gains rather than professional labor. As with the others, Krein’s account leaves the door wide open to the possibility of populist electoral backlash by those in the lower-middle or working class who have reason to feel even more disrespected and left behind in such an age of inequality, and who may be *further* alienated by the increasing political radicalism of the intellectuals and intelligentsia that he describes – not to mention by these elites’ contempt and disdain for the less educated.

Other recent conservative accounts also seem to support the idea that the ostensibly meritocratic and rationalistic but ultimately self-interested neoliberal optimism of the West’s professional and managerial class during the last generation has run into problems, and into opposition, as rising inequality has been coupled with displays of ideological arrogance and social condescension by the ruling elite toward those they feel to be their educational and social inferiors. [Christopher Caldwell wrote in 2020](#), for example, that during the 1980s “a new social class was coming into being that had at its disposal both capitalism’s means and progressivism’s sense of righteousness,” and which has been conspicuous in its willingness to overlook the plight of the *rest* of society as socio-economic inequality has increased.

Similarly, according to a book published in 2020 by Joel Kotkin, wealth in the economies of the post-industrial West had become increasingly concentrated in the hands of a small “oligarchy,” often associated with the major technology firms. This plutocratic elite dominated the system in close conjunction with a supporting class of

thought leaders and opinion makers, which he calls the “clerisy” and which serve as “legitimizers” and “provide intellectual support for the emerging hierarchy.”<sup>17</sup>

This clerisy, whose role Kotkin likened to that of the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages, was described as an influential cognitive elite that sometimes acts as a check upon, but more commonly lends support and legitimacy to, the power and privilege of the oligarchy. It consists of “the people who dominate the global web of cultural creators, academia, the media, and even much of what remains of traditional religious institutions.” As Kotkin described it, membership in this neo-clerical class is in theory meritocratic, being based upon educational attainment and treating academic credentials as the key to status and authority. Nevertheless, in practice, the clerisy was becoming a hereditary one – what the American sociologist [Daniel Bell](#) called an “enclaved class” – with elite-schooled persons marrying persons of their own kind and retreating increasingly into self-perpetuating socio-economic bubbles sealed off from the rest of society.<sup>18</sup>

Such views have become increasingly commonplace, and not merely on the Right. As noted, of course, critiques of oligopolistic wealth and privilege have long been heard from those on the Left such as Sanders, who fulminates that “[people are tired of being ignored while the rich get richer](#).” Contemporary critiques more from the political Center, however, have not merely become more frequent, but have also expanded beyond the mere invocation of traditional Leftist stereotypes about rich bankers and impoverished proletarians. Today, Center-Left critiques exhibit pronounced echoes of the anti-managerialism of Burnham and Francis.

As early as 1991, in fact, the abovementioned Robert Reich – who served as U.S. Secretary of Labor for President Bill Clinton – [decried](#) the degree that the “the fortunate fifth” of American society was essentially “seceding” from engagement with and concern with their less fortunate fellow citizens in the lower four-fifths.

The secession of the fortunate fifth has been most apparent in how and where they have chosen to work and live. In effect, most of America's large urban centers have splintered into two separate cities. One is composed of those whose symbolic and analytic services are linked to the world economy. The other consists of local service workers – custodians, security guards, taxi drivers, clerical aides, parking attendants, sales people, restaurant employees – whose jobs are dependent on the symbolic analysts. Few blue-collar manufacturing workers remain in American cities.

More than two decades later, the social critic [Thomas Frank](#) [similarly described](#) the rise of “a ‘professional-managerial class’ consisting of lawyers, doctors, professors, scientists, programmers, [and] even investment bankers.” These elites, he wrote, are mostly affluent and educationally-credentialed urbanites and suburbanites, who believe in meritocracy, but who “shun the kind of social policies that once gave a real leg up to the working class.”

All in all, according to the conservative commentator [David Brooks](#), “[t]he chief accomplishment of the current educated elite is that it has produced a bipartisan revolt against itself.” With such dire warnings of what is said to be state capture, it is hardly surprising that many such commentators – both on the Left and the Right – have warned that such dynamics would lead to a populist backlash.

As the writer [George Packer suggested](#) even before Donald Trump's first election, in a time of inequality and economic dislocation, such dynamics have led to pushback against elite agendas by those below those elites on the totem pole who have come to think “the game is rigged against them” and who feel “a sense of violated [societal] ownership ... that has come under threat.” Also writing in 2015, Thomas Frank warned of the [social conflict that he said will ensue as self-aggrandizement by this knowledge class provokes backlash from populists, from both the Left and the Right](#), against elites' power and

pretensions. If all this is the case, what could be more natural than for such people – at least eventually – to come to resist?

For his part, Joel Kotkin put the point more sharply, arguing that these dynamics might produce the modern equivalent of Medieval “peasant revolts” against injustice, as popular movements from both ends of the political spectrum rise against the globalized elites and the mass migration associated therewith this elite capture. “Even as a new feudalism appears to be setting in,” he wrote, “it is stirring up counter forces that promise turbulent times.” As a result, Kotkin said, “[t]oday there is a turning away from democratic liberalism around the world.”<sup>19</sup>

Significantly, moreover, the various examples above of the mainstreaming of such elite-capture critiques *predate* the Second Trump Administration that is now in power with its pronounced anti-managerial agenda, and indeed predate even the years in which the Republican Party under Donald Trump radicalized further during its period in exile after Joe Biden’s victory in the 2020 presidential election. Since then, the abovementioned trends seem to have accelerated. Today, while prescriptions differ sharply about what exactly to *do* about the problem of overall societal mismanagement by a self-interested and highly educated meritocratic professional-managerial elite, there seems to be broader agreement than ever that such a problem exists.

### **The Marxian Influence**

For present purposes, I will take no position on the *merits* of such theories, which may – or may not – accurately describe the ways in which Western political economy has evolved over the last generation. Nor, except for some tentative philosophizing at the end of this article, will I here endorse any specific set of prescriptions for addressing the problems said to have been created by capture of the state and socio-cultural institutions by the aforesaid managerial-professional elite. Nonetheless, it is hard for the observer not to be struck by the fact that three decades after the collapse of the USSR helped dispel

longstanding Cold War assumptions that the capitalist democracies existed in an oppositional counterpoise with countries whose political legitimacy narratives lay in Marxist theory, the rise of such elite-capture theories in Western political discourse suggests that Marxian discourse has circled back to the fore and reconstituted itself as a competitive organizing framework for both domestic and – as we will see – international politics.

### **Marx, Gramsci, Burnham, and Francis**

For one thing, it is impossible to overlook the fact that in many respects, these seemingly ascendant theories are indeed all quite *Marxist*. I do not mean merely that, as a matter of historical record, James Burnham – the author, as we have seen, of the 1941 book that proved so inspirational to Samuel Francis – was himself a Marxist during the 1930s. As [Julius Krein has recounted](#), from 1934 to 1940, Burnham was “a prominent member of the Trotskyite faction of the international Communist movement and an occasional contributor to leftist publications.”

It is true, as Krein also notes, that Burnham later developed some “deep disagreements with Marxist theory.” Whether or not Burnham was “officially” a Marxist when he published *The Managerial Revolution* in 1941, however, Marxian notions of class conflict clearly strongly influenced his theories about how a managerial elite had captured and bent the state to serve its own class interest.

These ideas in turn also thus strongly colored the ideas of Samuel Francis, who added to them notions of ideological conflict that drew upon the work of the early-20<sup>th</sup> Century Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci on the role of hegemonic ideology as form of social control that assists a dominant class in manufacturing social “consent” for its domination.<sup>20</sup> As [Michael Brendan Dougherty has observed](#),

Francis’ political analysis always had a residue of Burnham’s Marxist sociology about it. He argued that the political right needed to stop playing defense – the

globalist left won the political and cultural war a long time ago — and should instead adopt the insurgent strategy of communist intellectual Antonio Gramsci.

Gramsci believed it was an essential part of the project of the Marxist revolutionary to create a countervailing ideology and work to make it hegemonic instead.<sup>21</sup> He also emphasized the need to understand and thereafter to counter “how the ideological structure of a dominant class is actually organized” by exerting the revolutionary’s *own* countering influence upon the press, civil groups and associations, and libraries – and indeed upon anything *else* that could help shape opinion and ideas, including even such things as “architecture and the layout and names of streets.”<sup>22</sup> And so, too, Samuel Francis “argued that the political right needed to stop playing defense” and should instead adopt an insurgent strategy of ideological revolution.

Francis himself, in fact, was quite open about Gramsci’s influence upon his thought, at one point approvingly noting how right-wing political movements in Europe in the 1990s had begun to draw upon the Italian Marxist’s theories in their own campaigns against the center-Left governments of the period. In Francis’ own words as he advocated for an ideological counteroffensive against Leftist elite culture, the strategy by which his longed-for “new-American revolution” could take place “may well come from what was cooked up in the brain of a dying communist theoretician in a Fascist jail cell 60 years ago.” And today, it is not uncommon to hear Right-wing Americans such as the White supremacist Richard Spencer call for a “right-wing Gramscianism.”<sup>23</sup>

### Themes from American Leftist Social Analysis in the 1970s

There is also a considerable amount of Leftist scholarship in the 1970s that reached diagnostic conclusions that are remarkably similar to those offered today in *Right-wing* critiques of modern society in which a technocratic and cultural elite is described as having colonized university faculties beginning in the late 1960s and used them as a beachhead from which to hijack a much broader range of social

[institutions](#) in ways deeply inimical to the interests of ordinary, working-class people. This is presumably no coincidence, moreover, given the important ways in which such present-day critiques on the Right draw upon the work of Francis, who was not only (as we have seen) influenced by Gramsci and by Burnham, the former Trotskyite, but who also did his [Master's and doctoral degrees in modern history](#) at precisely the time that such Marxist theorizing was emerging.

### The Ehrenreichs and “PMC” Theory

One of the clearest analytical parallels between modern-day Right-wing critical discourse and Left-wing critical discourse from the 1970s can be seen in the analysis of the rise of the “Professional-Managerial Class (PMC)” offered by Barbara and John Ehrenreich. These ideas – which they advanced in [an article published in 1977](#)<sup>24</sup> in [Radical America](#), a left-wing American magazine founded by two members of [Students for a Democratic Society](#) (SDS), and in a second, [follow-up article they wrote later that year](#)<sup>25</sup> – seem to have been quite influential. (Ideas about the emergence and dominance of a “professional managerial class,” for instance, show up not just in the work of [Thomas Frank](#) quoted above, but also in a sweep of generally Left-leaning scholarship and critique that explores the PMC’s role and influence in areas ranging from [contemporary art](#) to [the dynamics of gentrification in major urban areas](#), and from [the development of 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Broadway plays and audiences](#) to [the politics of climate change](#).)

In pointing to the existence of this PMC, the Ehrenreichs claimed to have identified the existence of a new class of “technical workers, ‘culture’ producers, etc.” who “must be understood as comprising a distinct class in monopoly capitalist society.”<sup>26</sup> This group, they said, had first emerged – in the United States, at least – during the huge expansion of professional and managerial occupations of the Progressive Era of 1890-1920.<sup>27</sup> They defined this PMC as

consisting of salaried mental workers who do not own the means of production and whose major function in the

social division of labor may be described broadly as the reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist class relations.<sup>28</sup>

This class was not a monolith. Some members of the PMC, they argued, were “directly concerned with social control or with the propagation of ideology (e.g., teachers, social workers, psychologists, entertainers, writers of advertising copy and TV scripts, etc.).”<sup>29</sup> Others were “hidden within with process of production, as is the case with the middle-level administrators and managers, and other technical workers” whose functions were “essentially determined by the need to reproduce capitalist relations of production.” Nevertheless, “these occupational groups – cultural workers, managers, engineers[,] and scientists, etc. – share a common function in the broad social division of labor and a common relation to the economic foundations of society.”<sup>30</sup>

In the Ehrenreichs’ telling, through the lens of Marxist class struggle theory, the interests and objectives of the PMC were fundamentally at odds with those both of the working class and of the capitalist class. The members of the PMC tended to have “anti-capitalist outlooks”<sup>31</sup> – and hence gravitated toward socialist political radicalism – because they represented a technocratic managerial elite. As this class saw things, “[p]rogress demanded that the capitalists be swept away to make room – not for the working class – but for the rising class of experts.”<sup>32</sup> Such conclusions made this rising class of experts fundamentally *anti-capitalist*. (Notably, moreover, to legitimize their own efforts at elite capture of American institutions in sweeping those capitalists out of power, the rising intellectuals of the 1960s Left propounded narratives of *resistance* to prior elite capture by the “military-industrial complex.”)

At the same time, however, their interests were also “objectively antagonistic” and “mutually contradictory”<sup>33</sup> to those of the laboring class on account of the PMC’s role in the reproduction of the economic and social structures that kept workers in *subjugation to the PMC* as it

“extend[ed] its cultural and technological hegemony over the working class.”<sup>34</sup> Hence this group was also hostile to working class.

As noted, the Ehrenreichs believed that some divisions existed *within* the PMC. Specifically, it was internally divided between “managers, administrators[,] and engineers on the one hand, and those in the liberal arts and service professions on the other.” (The latter tended to be more anti-capitalist in their outlook.) Nevertheless, the Ehrenreichs still considered the PMC to be “a single, coherent class,”<sup>35</sup> and asserted that all of its members displayed a “proclivity for a technocratic vision of socialism in which the PMC would be the dominant class.”<sup>36</sup>

Before moving to explore *another* example of such parallels and connections between Leftist social critiques of the 1970s and Right-wing discourse in the present day, it is worth making some further observations about the Ehrenreichs’ conceptualization of the PMC. Specifically, it is striking how their theory contains additional elements powerfully resonant with modern conservative stories of how highly-educated Leftist intellectuals captured and weaponized universities, the media, cultural institutions, and the bureaucratic machinery of the technocratic “Deep State.”

As Barbara and John Ehrenreich put it in 1977, the rise of the PMC was closely connected to “the evolving role of the university” in American society.<sup>37</sup> For one thing, this stemmed from the PMC’s reliance upon education in the reproduction of itself *as* an elite – and it’s not hard to see why. Unlike those in the pre-capitalist landowning aristocracy or the capital-owning bourgeois elite of traditional Marxist theory, positions in the PMC did not descend by genealogical “blood” birthright or the inheritance of family wealth: they required professional credentials. The PMC was thus inherently a meritocratic class in the sense that its self-reproduction required *training* young people to succeed to positions of power in that class.

After all, management and administrative skills sufficient to run complex enterprises, advance scientific knowledge, produce elite

cultural forms, employ legal principles and precedents, and run engineering projects aren't things that just *happen*. They require long periods of training, typically mediated by elite institutional gatekeepers who demand some form of professional credentialling before the neophyte can be admitted to the ranks of the elect. Such training is essential, but it is also difficult, and success in such developmental pipelines of elite self-reproduction is never entirely guaranteed even for those who have the advantages of money and educational preparation that can come from being born into families *already* in the PMC.

Accordingly, the “common ‘culture’ or lifestyle” of the PMC was one suffused by deep status anxiety and an obsessive focus upon the value of – and the imperative of obtaining – professionalized education and training.<sup>38</sup> Educational credentialing was thus essential both to the PMC's continued survival as a class and critical to the PMC's ability to ensure its own dominance. Indeed, one might think it could scarcely have been otherwise. With the PMC devoted the self-aggrandizing ideological ideal of what the Ehrenreichs described as “a technocratic transformation of society in which all aspects of life would be ‘rationalized’ according to expert knowledge,”<sup>39</sup> it was vital for members of that class to secure enduring access to the fountainheads of that power-conveying knowledge.

And this meant the universities. Not for nothing was it the case, therefore, the Ehrenreichs made clear in their “case study” of the New Left of the 1960s, that “the first wave of student activists” on American campuses “typically came from secure PMC backgrounds, and were, compared to other students, especially well-imbued with the traditional PMC values of intellectual autonomy and public service.”<sup>40</sup> Nor was it a coincidence that U.S. universities thereafter became strongholds of PMC influence, for in the Ehrenreichs' critique the PMC was both the class that benefitted most from university credentialling and the one best suited to *staff* those universities in ways that would ensure its own future class self-reproduction.

There are obviously very close parallels here to present-day conservative critiques of universities, or at least the elite ones, as bastions of Leftist privilege and power that work to the detriment of “ordinary” citizens unlucky enough to lack the meritocratic credentials that the PMC prizes. In 1951, after all – more than two decades before the Ehrenreichs’ arrival on the intellectual scene – the conservative intellectual William F. Buckley published his famous book [\*God and Man at Yale\*](#), in which he complained that professors there were trying to indoctrinate young people into atheism and collectivism.

Yet the Leftist indoctrination to which Buckley objected in 1951 was then still mainly the province of the occasional wayward Left-leaning professor, acting individually, and his prescription in response to their activism was simply to urge that professors hew more closely to the then-generally *conservative* institutional views of the University as a whole. As others have [more recently asserted](#), however, Buckley’s critique did not foresee the degree to which the PMC would succeed in establishing its *own* values as the dominant institutional norms of the modern university – after which it could begin undertaking such indoctrination systematically, and at scale. Present-day Right-wing critiques [claim that this is precisely what happened](#), and Donald Trump’s war upon elite institutions of higher education in the United States is one consequence.

One can also see in the Ehrenreichs’ arguments about the rise of the PMC echoes of an earlier social critique offered by the British sociologist, social activist, and Left-wing politician Michael Young, who published a book entitled [\*The Rise of Meritocracy\*](#) in 1948. In that book, as [David Civil and Joseph Himsworth](#) summarize,

Young’s fictional vision of a meritocratic society explores the consequences of a society where each citizen is judged according to the formula “I.Q. + Effort = Merit.” The successful meritocrats hoard ever-greater rewards for themselves, crystallising into a rigid and repressive elite

who rule over an increasingly powerless and depressed underclass.

In what Young himself later described as having been a “warning ... against what might happen to Britain,” his book offered a fictional and satirical – but fundamentally serious – admonition against “rule by an elite who have determined exactly the educational qualities necessary to promote economic growth and who are then selected [on the basis of] and rewarded for those special skills.” It was intended as a cautionary tale about how such a meritocratic ruling class could become a parasitic aristocracy, concentrating upon reproducing itself and ruling in its own self-interest at the expense of those who were less well-off. And Young, too, warned that such developments might ultimately produce a populist backlash – specifically, in the form of a “final revolt against the meritocracy” that his satire described as occurring in the year 2033.

This speculative warning by a Left-wing British Labour Party politician who in 1981 defected to the Social Democratic Party (SDP) accords well with the Ehrenreichs’ arguments in 1977 about the rise of the PMC. It also has clear parallels with arguments by today’s conservative intellectuals – among them David Brooks – about the contemporary hegemony of an ideology of meritocracy that valorizes intelligence and training at the expense of civic virtue and of engagement with and concern for one’s fellow citizens. Here too, therefore, the Left-analytical roots of modern Right-analytical discourse seem clear.

### **Alvin Gouldner, the “Marxist Outlaw”**

An even richer example of the Marxist themes that resonate in modern-day *Right-wing* social complaints about Leftist elite-capture can be found in the writings of Alvin Gouldner, a radical American sociologist in New York and self-described “Marxist outlaw”<sup>41</sup> who published an important trilogy of Marxist theoretical works – The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology, The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class, and The Two Marxisms: Contradictions and Anomalies in

*the Development of Theory (The Dark Side of the Dialectic)* – between 1967 and his death in 1980.<sup>42</sup> As the reader will see, there are strong parallels in his work both to the Ehrenreichs' analysis and to current MAGA-era narratives about the tyranny of progressive political elites and the "Deep State."

Much of Gouldner's career seems to have been devoted to the somewhat heretical task of turning the lens of his Marxist historical analysis upon the development of Marxism itself. More specifically, he was fascinated by the emergence of the class of intellectuals who developed Marxist theory in the first place – no toiling proletarian manual laborers they, after all! – and who have been its most enthusiastic proponents ever since, asking of them "how do they account for *themselves*?"<sup>43</sup> As he put it,

... [t]he Marxist scenario of class struggle was never able to account for itself, for those who produced the scenario, for Marx and Engels themselves. Where did the *theorists* of this class struggle fit into the supposed cleavage between proletariat and capitalist class?<sup>44</sup>

As a Marxist student of the phenomenon of *Marxists*, as it were, Gouldner saw the origins of the leftist intelligentsia in the dialectics of class conflict.

By his account, "[i]n all countries that have in the twentieth century become part of the emerging world socio-economic order, a New Class composed of intellectuals and technical intelligentsia" has emerged.<sup>45</sup> Of these two sub-groups, the *intelligentsia* consisted of those "whose intellectual interests are fundamentally 'technical,'" while he termed *intellectuals* those "whose interests are primarily critical, emancipatory, hermeneutic[,] and hence often political."

Both of these groups within the New Class employed "elaborated linguistic codes" in their political and moral discourse, signifying their move from what the British sociologist Basil Bernstein called "restricted" codes into "a culture of discourse in which claims

and assertions may *not* be justified by reference to the speaker's social status," and in which any such "*authority-referring* claims [are hence] potentially problematic."<sup>46</sup> Both were also committed to what Gouldner termed the "Culture of Critical Discourse" (CCD).<sup>47</sup>

This idea of the CCD was for him a foundational concept. As Gouldner saw it,

... [t]he culture of critical discourse (CCD) is an historically evolved set of rules, a grammar of discourse, which (1) is concerned to *justify* its assertions, but (2) whose *mode* of justification does not proceed by invoking authorities, and (3) prefers to elicit the *voluntary* consent of those addressed solely on the basis of arguments adduced. ... *The shared ideology of the intellectuals and intelligentsia is thus an ideology about discourse.*<sup>48</sup>

These groups' commitment to the CCD, in turn, was the key to the political radicalism of this New Class, for by its nature critical discourse "presses to undermine all societal distinctions."<sup>49</sup>

The grammar of critical discourse claims the right to sit in judgment over the actions and claims of any social class and all power elites. From the standpoint of the culture of critical discourse, all claims to truth, however different in social origin, are to be judged in the same way. Truth is democratized and all truth claims are now equal *under* the scrutiny of the CCD. The claims and self-understanding of even the most power group are to be judged no differently than the lowliest and most illiterate. Traditional authority is stripped of its ability to define social reality and, with this, to authorize its own legitimacy. The "credit" normally given to the claims of the rich and powerful now becomes a form of deviant, illicit behavior that needs to be hidden if not withdrawn. ... To participate in the culture of critical discourse, then, is to be emancipated *at once* from lowness in the conventional social hierarchy, and is thus a

subversion of that hierarchy. To participate in the culture of critical discourse, then, is a political act.<sup>50</sup>

As with the Ehrenreichs' distinction between "managers, administrators[,] and engineers" and "those in the liberal arts and service professions,"<sup>51</sup> Gouldner admitted that there were some tensions within the New Class between the "technical intelligentsia" and "intellectuals."<sup>52</sup> And just as the Ehrenreichs felt that the liberal arts and service sector members of the PMC were more Leftist in their views than the managers and administrators,<sup>53</sup> so too did Gouldner see the "intellectuals" within his New Class as having a more "clear party preference in the United States" in that "[t]hey are united in their distaste for the Republican Party and by their preference for the Democrats."<sup>54</sup> Yet as also did the Ehrenreichs with their PMC, Gouldner saw the New Class as being fundamentally united in its self-interest vis-à-vis all other classes in society.

Writing as a Marxist sociologist, Gouldner offered a complex account of the historical origins of this New Class. In his view, its emergence as a social force in Western society – as well as the peculiarities of its internal differentiation, its political radicalism, and its influence in undermining traditional values, identities, and institutions – was the result of a number of factors:

- 1) Secularization, which "de-sacralizes authority-claims and facilitates challenges to definitions of social reality made by traditional authorities linked to the church";
- 2) The rise of diverse vernacular languages;<sup>55</sup>
- 3) The "breakdown of the feudal and old regime system of personalized *patronage* relations between the old hegemonic elite and individual members of the New Class as cultural producers";

- 4) The growth of “an anonymous *market* for the products and services of the New Class, thus allowing them to make an independent living apart from close supervision and *personalized controls by patrons*”;
- 5) The multi-national character of European society and a “European-wide communication network” in which “their often extensive travel led many intellectuals to share a cosmopolitan identity transcending national units and enhancing their autonomy from local elites”;
- 6) The waning of extended family system and its replacement by a smaller nuclear family construct in which “hostility and rebellion against paternal authority can become more overt” and “increasing difficulty [is] experienced by paternal authority in imposing and reproducing social values and political ideologies in their children”;
- 7) The emergence of higher education as “the institutional basis for the *mass* production of the New Class of intelligentsia and intellectuals,” and the increasing availability of jobs for educators, with the result that “[a]s teachers, intellectuals come to be defined, and to define themselves, as responsible for and ‘representative’ of society as a *whole*, rather than as having allegiance of the class interests of their students or their parents”;
- 8) “The new structurally differentiated educational system [becoming] increasingly insulated from the family system, becoming an important source of values among students divergent from those of their families,” so that “[t]he socialization of the young by

their families is now mediated by a *semi*-autonomous group of teachers”;

- 9) The development of the public educational system into “a major *cosmopolitanizing* influence on its students, with a corresponding distancing from *localistic* interests and values”;
- 10) The shift of this new school system to a value system that revolves around the claims and assumptions of the CCD;
- 11) The eagerness of “[t]his new culture of discourse” to question and challenge traditional “assumptions fundamental to everyday life, tending to put them into question even when they are linked to the upper classes”;
- 12) The spread of literacy, as a result of which “humanistic intellectuals lose their exclusiveness and privileged market position, and now experience a status disparity between their ‘high’ culture, as they see it, and their lower deference, repute, income[,] and social power. The social position of humanistic intellectuals, *particularly in a technocratic and industrial society*, becomes more marginal and alienated than that of the technical intelligentsia. The New Class becomes internally differentiated”; and
- 13) “Revolution itself becomes a technology to be pursued with ‘instrumental rationality.’ The revolutionary organization evolves from a ritualistic, oath-bound secret society into the modern ‘vanguard’ party. ... The [new type of] vanguard organization ... de-ritualizes participation and entails elements of both the ‘secret society’ and of the public political party. In the vanguard organization,

public refers to the public availability of the *doctrine* rather than the availability of the organization or its membership to public scrutiny. Here, to be ‘public’ entails the organization’s rejection of ‘secret doctrines’ known only to an elite in the organization .... The ‘vanguard’ party expresses the *modernizing* and elite ambitions of the New Class as well as an effort to overcome its political limitations. Lenin’s call for the development of ‘professional’ revolutionaries, as the core of the vanguard, is a rhetoric carrying the tacit promise of a *career*-like life which invites young members of the New Class to ‘normalize’ the revolutionary existence.”<sup>56</sup>

For Gouldner, the New Class was structurally antagonistic both toward the Old Class of the moneyed bourgeoisie and toward the working class. As for the workers, while the New Class – in its Leftism – *claimed* to support the interest of proletarians, its Leninist ideas of revolutionary advance led by a vanguard party represented merely the cloaked self-interest of the intelligentsia and intellectuals who made up that party. Marxism pretended that the working class would set itself free, Gouldner wrote, but this wasn’t actually the case: “the class *to be set free* [by such Leftism] ... in fact ... is the cultural bourgeoisie” – that is, the New Class, which would thereby take over from the bourgeoisie and run things itself. The Leninist idea of the vanguard party, and its variants, was thus designed “to protect the purity of the *teoretiki from the working class*.”<sup>57</sup>

As for the Old Class, Gouldner wrote that the New Class began as the ally and servant of the capitalist bourgeoisie against the old aristocracy.<sup>58</sup> After their joint triumph in that campaign, however, the New Class soon arrayed itself against the old bourgeoisie as well, with which it engaged in “a *contest* for control over the machinery of production and administration.” This battle pitted “the class which has *legal ownership* of the mode of production” against the New Class, “whose technical knowledge increasingly gives it effective *possession*

of the mode of production.”<sup>59</sup> And, over time, power thus accreted to the New Class.<sup>60</sup>

The influence of the New Class spreads over the *investment of capital* as well as to the management of production. The old investing class is slowly transformed into a privileged but functionless status group, into a ‘nobility’ without a function in production and administration ... [and those who] manage the new means of production and administration ... acquire at-hand control over the new means of communication and of *violence*. [As a result,] the functional autonomy of the old class wanes.<sup>61</sup>

Before long, the members of the New Class came to assert a hegemonic role within what was now an essentially technocratic society, “arrogating to themselves not only administrative decisional competence but, finally, even the role of judges and regulators of the normative structures of contemporary societies.”<sup>62</sup>

Significantly, it is critical to the power and role of the New Class – in Gouldner’s account – that it is as much a *cultural* and *intellectual* elite as a traditionally “economic” one, and it seeks to build and maintain its hegemony in fundamentally ideological and discursive ways. In what Gouldner terms the “political economy of culture,” the New Class is “a new *cultural* bourgeoisie whose capital is not its money but its control over valuable cultures.”<sup>63</sup> Its members’ “special privileges ... are grounded in their *individual* control of special cultures, languages, techniques, and of the skills resulting from these.”<sup>64</sup>

The central *mode of influence* used by and characteristic of the New Class is *communication* – writing and talking. Unlike the old class, they do not *buy* conformity with their interests but seek to *persuade* it. Unlike politicians, they normally do not have *force* available to impose their goals. The New Class gets what it wants, then, primarily by rhetoric, by persuasion[,] and argument through

publishing and speaking. ... [This makes their power] uniquely dependent on their continuing access to media, particularly mass media, and upon institutional freedoms protecting their right to publish and speak.<sup>65</sup>

As to *what* the New Class spoke *about*, Gouldner saw the promulgation of a distinctive ideology of “professionalism” to be an important part of the group’s hegemony:

The more that the New Class’s reproduction derives from specialized systems of public education, the more the New Class develops an ideology that stresses its [own] *autonomy*, its separation from and presumable independence of “business” or political interests. This autonomy is said to be grounded in the specialized knowledge or cultural capital transmitted by the educational system, along with an emphasis on the obligation of educated persons to attend to the welfare of the collectivity. In other words, the *ideology* of “professionalism” emerges. ... While not overtly a critique of the old class, professionalism is a tacit claim by the New Class to *technical and moral superiority* over the old class, implying that the latter lack technical credentials and are guided by motives of commercial venality. Professionalism silently installs the New Class as the paradigm of virtuous and legitimate authority, performing with technical skill and with dedicated concern for society-at-large.<sup>66</sup>

The monopolization of such special, intellectualized knowledge and presumed wisdom was central not just to the power but also to the arrogance of the New Class, which claimed – Gouldner asserted – “that it can solve the fundamental requisites of the universal grammar of societal rationality: *to reunite both power and goodness*.”<sup>67</sup> The culture of discourse of the New Class thus

seeks to *control* everything, its topic and itself, believing that such domination is the only road to truth. The New Class begins by monopolizing truth and by making itself its guardian. ... The New Class sets itself above others, holding that its speech is better than theirs; that the examined life (*their* examination) is better than the unexamined life which, it says, is sleep and no better than death.<sup>68</sup>

According to Gouldner, these conceits create a surpassing arrogance:

The New Class believes its high culture represents the greatest achievement of the human race, the deepest ancient wisdom[,] and the most advanced scientific knowledge. It believes that these contribute to the welfare and wealth of the race, and that they should receive correspondingly greater rewards. The New Class believes that the world should be governed by those possessing superior competence, wisdom[,] and science – that is, themselves. The Platonic Complex, the dream of the philosopher king with which Western philosophy begins, is the deepest wish-fulfilling fantasy of the New Class.<sup>69</sup>

In the service of its own self-interest, the political agenda of the New Class revolves around the creation of “[a] ‘welfare’ state and a ‘socialist’ state” – ideally the latter, since “in a socialist state, the hegemony of the New Class is fuller, its control over the working class is greater.”<sup>70</sup> The members of the New Class are particularly attracted to socialist politics because socialism represents “the final removal of ... limit[s]” on their own societal advancement, and socialism’s “inevitable consequent ... is to pave the way for cultural capital; *i.e.*, the New Class.”

In collectivizing the means of production[,] the power of the moneyed old class is destroyed. In transferring the means of production to *state* control, thus swelling the bureaucratic apparatus of the state, socialism extends the

domain within which the New Class' cultural capital holds sway.<sup>71</sup>

Gouldner thus claimed to offer a Marxist historical sociology of the emergence of Marxism itself. In his telling, the emergence of Marxist discourse is the result of the emergence and socio-political hegemony of this New Class of intellectuals and technical intelligentsia. In a summarization that also stresses how closely he feels the New Class to be associated with the influence and control of social institutions such as universities and the media, Gouldner observed that

the top ranks of the Old Bolsheviks consisted overwhelmingly of intellectuals, who were middle class in origin, well travelled and who read broadly and wrote extensively. ... Marx and Marxism are the creations of a library-haunting, book-store-browsing, museum-loving – and hence leisure-possessing – academic intelligentsia. They are unthinkable without the entire panoply of libraries, bookstores, journals, newspapers, publishing houses, even party schools, whose cadre and culture constitute a dense infra-structure at whose center there is the Western university.<sup>72</sup>

And universities *were*, in Gouldner's account, absolutely critical to the emergence and the power of the New Class. Whereas the Old Class of the moneyed bourgeoisie had been "grounded in property," the New Class was "grounded in education,"<sup>73</sup> and its emergence became possible as "as the public school and university system was reformed and expanded, and as it became a substantial labor market for intellectuals' services." The educational system thereupon

became a mechanism through which part of the unattached intelligentsia was slowly transformed into a new kind of corporate intelligentsia, more deeply integrated with the state and indirectly with the dominant social classes.<sup>74</sup>

Indeed, this made the modern university into a *particularly* potent mechanism for self-reproduction by the New Class, as it was the central mechanism by which credentialed intellectuals were “mass produced.”<sup>75</sup>

The university today is the key modern institution for the training of ideologues: it is also that single institution from which most modern ideologues derive their livings. Indeed, the university today is the single largest producer both of technocrats and ideologues, of *both* science and ideology.<sup>76</sup>

Control of the universities would therefore be, for the New Class, “a means to a larger societal reconstruction.”<sup>77</sup> Writing in 1967, at a time when a rising cadre of radicalized students and junior professors was actively working to ensconce itself into the American academic and intellectual establishment in the United States, Gouldner observed that

... [t]he current contest for the control of educational facilities is radically new and consequential. Colleges and universities are no longer, as they once were, merely peripheral spheres of political mobilization or of incidental ideological embellishment. They may well be a holding ground of the public sphere and the main rallying ground of a new political power.<sup>78</sup>

Gouldner the Marxist – perhaps feeling himself to be more faithful to the CCD than the members of the New Class among whom that discourse originated<sup>79</sup> – obviously finds much to dislike about the hegemony of the New Class. Despite its pretensions and ambitions to social justice, it had in his view become a hegemonic and exploitative class in its own right: just another “elite concerned to monopolize [its own] incomes and privileges.”<sup>80</sup>

Despite its commitment to the CCD,<sup>81</sup> the New Class “believ[es] its own culture best” and “wishes to advantage those who most fulfil and embody it.”<sup>82</sup> But it is not the case, Gouldner believed, that the values and practices of the New Class really *are* ideals deserving such status. “Marxism,” he wrote, “is the false consciousness of cultural bourgeoisie who have been radicalized.”<sup>83</sup>

Their commitment to the primacy of ideas and to “doing things in the right way and for the right reason” encourages members of the New Class to “value doctrinal conformity for its own sake,” giving them “a native tendency toward ritualism and *sectarianism*.”<sup>84</sup> This makes them consummate *ideologists*,<sup>85</sup> and at the same time engenders dogmatism.<sup>86</sup> In its obsessive commitment to ideas and their rectitude, the New Class displays both an “inflexibility and insensitivity to the force of differing contexts,” and an “inclination to impose one set of rules on different cases.” This implies

a certain insensitivity to *persons*, to their feelings and reactions, and open[s] the way to the disruption of human solidarity. Political brutality, then, finds a grounding in the culture of critical discourse; the new rationality may paradoxically allow a new darkness at noon.<sup>87</sup>

Accordingly, “the New Class is hardly the end of domination.” While its emergence produces an end to “the old moneyed class’s domination, the New Class is also the nucleus of a *new* hierarchy and the elite of a new form of cultural capital.”<sup>88</sup> And this, for Alvin Gouldner, was far from a good thing. (Acidly, he quoted [Mikhail Bakunin](#) that “the rule by socialist savants ‘is the worst of all despotic governments.’”<sup>89</sup>)

According to Gouldner, the tension between New Class’s culture of critical discourse, which “presses to undermine all societal distinctions,” and its desire to privilege and advantage itself “contains the New Class’s ‘seeds of its own destruction,’”<sup>90</sup> for it creates the need for a sort of *further* revolution *against* this revolutionary class. This would not, however, merely be a revolt of the oppressed against their

oppressors. More intriguingly, and in a notably Marxist fashion, Gouldner believed that the very ideology of the New Class – its commitment to the CCD and to the ideal of rationally ordering society around the set of ideas and ideals developed and articulated *by* that New Class – contained internal contradictions that would over time lead it to undermine itself.

Rationality is here construed as the capacity to make problematic what had hitherto been treated as given; to bring into reflection what before had only been used; to transform resource into topic; to examine critically the life we lead. This view of rationality situates it in the capacity to think *about* our thinking. Rationality as reflexivity about our own groundings premises an ability to speak about our speech and the factors that ground it. Rationality is thus located in metacommunication. But the critique of a set of assumptions depends, in its turn, on using a set of assumptions; and these, in turn, must also be susceptible to critique *ad infinitum*.<sup>91</sup>

The commitment of the New Class to the CCD and the ideal of rationality, he felt, therefore conduced to “potential revolution in permanence, the ‘permanent revolution.’” The critical discourse of the New Class, in other words, *could not* create a stable hegemony in part precisely because it *was* grounded in critical discourse. “It is the drive toward unending perfection, that unceasing restlessness and lawlessness, that was first called *anomos* and later, *anomie*.”<sup>92</sup>

The ideology of the New Class rooted itself and its adherents in claims of objective merit, one might say, even as the *critical* aspects of its critical discourse undermined the very possibility of such enduring objectivity. This self-undermining posture – akin, perhaps, to the famous “[liar’s paradox](#)” of Epimenides,<sup>93</sup> a self-deconstructing deconstructionism – could hardly be anything other than unstable, for its very criticality denied it the ability to generate trust in the legitimacy and enduring value of its ends.

As Gouldner noted, the vaunted technical expertise and educational attainments of the New Class were not really, in themselves, enough to justify its rule, since mere skill at managing a system does not necessarily translate into wisdom about the *ends* toward which that system is steered.

Technical expertise is not sufficient to generate legitimacy, when this expertise is *not* exercised on behalf of the values, goals, or interests of those others who are expected to bestow or withhold that legitimacy.<sup>94</sup>

This, Gouldner perceived, confronted the New Class with an echo of Kurt Gödel's famous incompleteness theorem in mathematics, which Gouldner said was "of epochal importance" because it demonstrated "that formal systems are unavoidably lacking in self-sufficiency and must rest on assumptions *outside* their own stipulations."<sup>95</sup>

Yet the ideology of the New Class, though its critical discourse had been hugely successful as a solvent for the political power and legitimacy of *other* social classes, had no real ability to lean upon such exogenous value-groundings itself – that is, to provide a secure ideological foundation for its own hegemony – precisely because that solvent worked equally well when applied to the New Class. "Critique and Critical Marxism, then, require a value grounding for choice and for the criticism of what is," Gouldner observed, "*but they do not actually have one.*"<sup>96</sup>

As a group unprecedentedly committed to the power of rationality and symbolic discourse, and to bringing about the unity of theory and practice by ensuring that real-world systems conformed as closely as possible to the ideal, the New Class *as an elite of theoreticians* was perhaps uniquely vulnerable to this. (As Gouldner put it, "[a] theory ... is expected and permitted to be at war with other theories but not with itself."<sup>97</sup>) Yet that is precisely the conundrum in which the New Class found itself, and why its domination also contained the seeds of its ruination.

In his final book, *The Two Marxisms*, Gouldner contrasted what he described as the two main strains of Marxist theory: “Scientific Marxism” and “Critical Marxism.” The first, he wrote, embodies a rationalistic ambition to discern and hew to the underlying laws of history, and it valorized the technocratic skills associated with understanding and manipulating such laws. The second places more emphasis upon subjectivity, voluntarism, and the transformative power of ideas. Elements of each of these “Marxisms” can be seen in Gouldner’s account of the rise, activities, and ideology of New Class – including in the internal differentiation he described between the technical intelligentsia and intellectuals.

Both forms of Marxism had long intellectual lineages, but Gouldner felt that each of them also contained the possibility of pathology – giving rise, in turn, to two potential “nightmares” for Marxist theory. Loosely speaking, one might say that these two nightmares correspond, respectively, to Joseph Stalin’s systematic terror and oppression and to the endless upheavals and self-immolating anarchic madness of Mao Zedong’s Cultural Revolution.

For Scientific Marxism, the potential (Stalinist) pathology lay in slippage into “ritualism and revisionism.”<sup>98</sup>

... Scientific Marxism stresses the importance of technical skills rather than will or motivation; in holding that expertise is more important than “redness,” it ultimately delivers the economy to the control of specialists, alienating the proletariat from the revolution. ... [I]n the nightmare, socialism does not mean that the proletariat becomes the ruling class, but that the state becomes the dominant force – the infrastructure – and its bureaucracy the new ruling class; in the nightmare this new collectivist state brings a new stagnation to the economy, rather than a new productivity; in the nightmare the expropriation of the bourgeoisie is not the basis of a new emancipation but of a new, many times worse, domination.<sup>99</sup>

For its part, the potential (Maoist) pathology of Critical Marxism was “adventurism.”<sup>100</sup> This was “a negation-grounded Marxism,” which “continually exhibited its own grounding in the negating dialectic by repeatedly emphasizing, as Mao himself did, that ‘It is *always* right to rebel.’”<sup>101</sup> For Critical Marxism, the nightmare was thus

the lurking fear that it is not really a truly “scientific socialism,” not a theory about society or of the objective conditions that will change it, but only another disguise of the political will, an old utopian project masquerading as a new science. In other words[,] [this] nightmare of Marxism is that it is [just] another religion of the oppressed – a revolutionary messianism, as Georg Lukás once described his own Marxism. This nightmare broke into the theorizing of Critical Marxism, which is nucleated with utopianism, and, at the political level, emerged openly in Maoism.<sup>102</sup>

Gouldner does not clearly suggest a way out of this labyrinth, either toward a more genuinely emancipatory answer faithful to the ideals of the CCD – of which, of course, he showed himself a skilled practitioner as he turned its harsh light upon the CCD’s evangelists in the New Class themselves – or to something that is at least stable and avoids self-erosion. Perhaps, for a committed critical dialectician like Gouldner, no such “solution” to the problem was really possible. (We shall return to this question, however, in the concluding portion of this essay.)

### **Left-Right Congruence**

The reader can hardly fail to miss, however, the remarkable parallels between Gouldner’s Marxist analytics of Marxism in the 1970s and what modern-day Right-wing pundits claim about today’s progressive technocratic elites. Indeed, setting aside some fairly superficial differentiations in jargon, these two critiques – the *Left-Marxism* that Gouldner both described and applied, and the *Right-Marxism* of the modern Euro-Atlantic Right – are clearly the closest of

familial relations. (If not perhaps identical twins, they are at least fraternal ones.) And, if anything, it is noteworthy how deeply *unoriginal* modern-day Right-wing intellectuals are in their social critique.

Both accounts make sharply parallel claims about the self-interested and exploitative nature of modern ruling elites, about the hegemonic status of the meritocratic and technocratic ideology such elites propound, and about the various bureaucratic and other institutions – universities, the mainstream media, and the apparatus of the “Deep State” – that these elites are said to have colonized and warped into instruments of socio-cultural and economic domination. Both see the idealistic pretensions of these elites as tending, in practice, toward some combination of bureaucratic tyranny and culturally relativistic *anomie* and social degradation, and both envision the potential that this elite hegemony will itself face revolutionary upheaval fueled both by the anger of those left behind in a world of elitist technocracy and by the internal contradictions and relativistic intellectual bankruptcy of elite ideology itself.

To be sure, Left-Marxism is arguably more securely committed to the CCD than Right-Marxism, which not only invokes abstract ideals of justice against oppression, but also often tries to appeal to supposedly timeless verities of culture, nation, religion, human nature, and socio-cultural “place” as it pushes back against what it feels to be the deracinated, rootless, and godless elite cosmopolitanism of the New Class. This is indeed an important point of distinction from Left-Marxist discourse, which is more unvaryingly committed, at least in its rhetoric, to emancipatory narratives *against* inherited systems of control and oppression.

Nevertheless, contemporary American Right-Marxism still distinguishes itself to some extent from traditional reaction in that – with its fulminations against progressive “cancel culture” and the stultifying weight of “woke” ideological conformity, its claims to defend free speech and expression, and its warnings about how elite institutional capture works against the interests of the Common Man

– it *does* claim to pursue emancipatory relief from oppressive socio-political power structures in ways that are strikingly reminiscent of Left-Marxism.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, even those supposedly timeless verities to which Right-wingers often appeal are at least to some degree ideological constructions and ahistorically “imagined communities”<sup>104</sup> of just the sort that New Class intellectuals excel at invoking and manipulating – and that, as a matter of historical fact, New Class intellectuals played a central role in “imagining” in the first place as Euro-Atlantic polities transitioned from modalities of merely dynastic loyalty to the narratives of the modern nation-state.

Moreover, the intellectual project of trying to demarcate and appeal to such supposed timeless verities as the conceptual grounding for a political project is also just the sort of thing that New Class intellectuals – in contrast to all other historical social classes – characteristically *do*. Since Gouldner believed that “Marxism is the false consciousness of cultural bourgeoisie who have been radicalized,”<sup>105</sup> after all, it is not hard to imagine him concluding that whereas *traditional* Marxism is the false consciousness of the Left-Marxist, *Gott-und-Volk* nationalism is the false consciousness of the Right-Marxist.

At any rate, the very Right-Marxist thinkers who offer such narratives today are themselves no less typical *products* and *examples* of Gouldner’s New Class than the middle class intellectuals and intelligentsia he described as making up “the top ranks of the Old Bolsheviks.”<sup>106</sup> Indeed, such modern-day *anti-New Class* members of the New Class, often themselves the product of elite Ivy League educations, now all but openly follow Lenin’s “Vanguard Party” theory as they seek to build and deploy “an ‘anti-elite’ elite against the ‘Deep State.’” (And there are no small number of them. In her book on the intellectuals of the MAGA movement, Laura Field generally restricts her examination to “individuals who have received PhDs from prestigious institutions of higher education,”<sup>107</sup> but nonetheless finds enough material for an entire volume.)

As noted earlier, in fact, thinkers such as [Patrick Deneen](#) today openly envision, as Ross Douthat put it in 2023,

the rise of a new elite, meaning more people who agree with Patrick Deneen in government and industry and academia ... [leading to] the replacement of America's present elite caste, its post-Protestant Ivy League-educated liberal mandarins, with a ruling class that's religious rather than secular, oriented toward conservation and tradition rather than a dream of constant progress, connected to the common good of ordinary Americans rather than imagining itself as a cosmopolitan and post-American elite.

Deneen – who has [described himself as formerly being a man of the Left](#) – might even seem to agree with Gouldner's critique of the pathologies of Critical Marxism, for he sees liberal political discourse as being the victim of its own success as its very openness and critical thinking leads it to topple into a relativism that demolishes human sociality, convention, and community.<sup>108</sup>

In other words, as these Rightist elites seek to defeat and supplant the Leftist ruling cadres whose own prior "revolt of the elites" – a phrase coined by the "[left-conservative](#)" writer [Christopher Lasch](#) in a book that MAGA luminary [Steve Bannon has called one of his favorite books](#) – put in place an exploitative system that has abandoned the middle class and the poor, the new Right-Marxists might seem to Gouldner merely to be partisans in a civil war *within* the New Class over *which faction* within that New Class elite is to rule.<sup>109</sup> Alvin Gouldner's critical analysis, then, can perhaps speak not only to the origins and characteristics of Marxists and Marxism, but also to those of the thinkers and movements on the Right today who claim to array themselves *against* those Marxists' inheritors but nonetheless express fundamentally Marxian thoughts in their own understanding of the world, its problems, and the requisite solutions.

Perhaps for this reason, many on the modern American Right seem increasingly to be adopting approaches not nearly as different as one might expect from what Alvin Gouldner described as the traditionally Leftist policies of the New Class. The reader will recall, for instance, that Gouldner felt the New Class to be particularly focused upon ideological “ritualism and sectarianism,” and hence committed to ensuring “doctrinal conformity for its own sake.”<sup>110</sup> He also saw it as being drawn to “transferring the means of production to state control” because “socialism extends the domain [of government power] within which the New Class’ cultural capital holds sway.”<sup>111</sup> Now that the MAGA movement itself holds government power in the United States, however, parallels between modern Right-Marxist politics and the policies of Gouldner’s New Class seem to be accumulating.

As it turns out, for instance, despite their earlier fulminations about Leftist “cancel culture” as “[the very definition of totalitarianism](#)” and criticism of [Biden Administration efforts to chill disfavored speech](#) – not to mention [Vice President J.D. Vance’s own more recent criticisms of European governments for restricting free expression](#) – it now appears that modern Right-Marxists do not *really* loathe the enforcement of ideological conformity and suppression of disfavored speech after all; they apparently merely want to ensure it is done by the right people (*i.e.*, by the Right). As made clear by [Attorney General Pam Bondi](#) and [Vice President Vance](#) in the wake of the assassination of Rightist activist Charlie Kirk in September 2025 – and by President Trump’s repeated [threats to cancel the broadcast licenses of television stations that give him unfavorable coverage](#) – America’s MAGA Right seems comfortable with the suppression of disfavored speech as long as they get to pick the targets.

As for free markets – which one might ordinarily expect to be especially prized by a political movement led by a man who calls his domestic opponents “[communists](#)” and “[radical-left lunatics](#)” – MAGA policies have come to include measures that [look not entirely unlike socialist economic statism](#). The U.S. Government, for example, has now taken a “golden share” in the U.S. Steel Corporation that

President Trump describes as giving him “[total control](#)” over major business decisions; it has [acquired a nearly 10 percent equity share](#) in the U.S. semiconductor manufacturing company Intel; it has taken over as the [largest investor in the rare earth minerals mining company MP Materials](#); it has demanded and been given a [15 percent cut of the profit from two major producers’ semiconductors sales to China](#) and a [25 percent cut of sales to China of high-end Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) chips](#); and it has steered the Congressionally-mandated sale of the social media app TikTok [at fire-sale rates](#) to a consortium of investors made up of [wealthy political supporters of the president, some of whom also happened recently to have invested \\$2 billion in a cryptocurrency firm controlled by the Trump family](#). President Trump has also [told the Coca-Cola company what sweetener to use in its iconic soft-drink](#), directed the software company Microsoft to [fire its newly-appointed head of global affairs](#), demanded that the semiconductor firm Nvidia [fire its chief executive officer](#) and that [several private broadcasters sack television hosts](#), demanded that U.S. universities [screen academic hires on the basis of political viewpoint](#), [pressured major American law firms into providing free legal services to the government](#), and used government approval of corporate mergers to [pressure CBS News into revamping its programming to become more conservative](#), paying Trump a [multimillion-dollar settlement in a lawsuit](#), and [spiking unfavorable coverage](#).

Despite some continuing differences in phrasing and nuance between Left and Right, there would thus appear to be a considerable degree of convergence not just in the master narrative of revolutionary uprising against invidious elite capture – which is now deployed against the current *status quo* just as the New Left tried to deploy it against the “military-industrial complex” two generations ago – but also even in the types of measures each elite end of the political spectrum now thinks are needed in order to solve America’s problems by feathering their own political, ideological, and economic nest. It looks a bit, one might say, like vanguard party elites and New Class CCD policies all the way down. With apologies to [Richard Nixon’s famous 1971 comment about the economist John Maynard Keynes](#), it might seem that *we are all Marxist critical theorists now*.

## Hints of a New Geopolitics?

Even assuming, *arguendo*, that this analysis of the convergence between – and indeed consanguinity of – Left-Marxist and Right-Marxist critical discourse is sound, the reader may well still be wondering why this is being published in a journal of defense and strategic studies. In the pages below, however, I outline the impact that these ideas may be having on international relations and global security relationships by virtue of their effect upon United States foreign policy, as well as their growing significance in a number of additional countries. I will also offer some speculations about what their *further* impact might be – in the event that present day trends were to continue – in at least partially (and potentially very significantly) reordering the terrain of geopolitical contestation in the mid-21<sup>st</sup>-Century security environment.

### U.S. Dynamics

At the time of writing, the Second Trump Administration has still only been in office less than a year, so it would be unwise to generalize too much about the overall thrust and direction of its notoriously volatile policy choices. Nevertheless, it is already possible to discern some themes suggesting that Right-Marxist discourse is indeed an important factor in the formulation not merely of that administration's domestic policy, but also of its approach to international relations.

Specifically, the Right-Marxist belief in a conspiracy by a class of highly educated intellectuals and technocrats – a cabal dedicated to colonizing and controlling society's universities, mainstream media organizations, prestige culture-producing organs, and government bureaucracies, to warping these institutions to its will and using them to advance the interests of that class, and to the imposition of progressive “woke” ideology upon ordinary middle-class and working-class citizens – is one that seems to resonate powerfully as the MAGA looks at the international environment. In particular, this

Right-Marxist discourse seems to have powerfully colored the Second Trump Administration's approach to relations with Europe, or at least with the populist Right's *idea* of "Europe" and the countries that U.S. officials associate with that idea.

The modern American populist Right appears to approach international relations in large part through the prism of U.S. domestic politics. Through this lens, the countries of "Europe" are *de facto* extensions of the domestic political opposition to President Trump. The "Europe" I mean here, however, is not really a geographic entity, but rather a sort of socio-cultural archetype. It is a *figurative* continent – one that is modern and highly developed, but also typified by post-industrial economies, elaborate social welfare state institutions, intrusive regulatory bureaucracies, and politically-progressive politics and social values. (This "Europe," in other words, *excludes* European countries such as Hungary and Italy where right-wing parties have managed to win power, and *includes* even geographically distant Canada.) It is a "Europe," in other words, of the things Right-Marxists tend to hate.

Notably, too, this "Europe" of Right-Marxist imaginings is not merely politically progressive in terms of the domestic political order and value-systems of its constituent countries: it is also *transnationally* progressive. It is the Europe of the European Union – with that institution's continuing dreams of subsuming individual national identities into some broader unity administered by unelected technocrats. For these reasons, this figurative Europe represents something of a socio-political "worst case scenario" for Right-Marxist thinkers. It is, to them, a dangerous cesspool of progressive political and cultural mores, one that is toxic and hostile to traditional social values, religious norms, and national sovereignties alike. This "Europe," in other words, feels to them like the ideological epicenter of godless, "woke," and degraded cosmopolitanism, and the great political redoubt of the global Leftist New Class hegemony that the MAGA movement sees as its mortal enemy. It was not for nothing, therefore, that President Trump as early as 2018 said that "I think the European Union is a foe, ... they're a foe."

Such attitudes seem to have hardened and sharpened during the MAGA movement's period of radicalization after Trump's election loss in 2020, and during its preparations for a return to power. Today, they represent a powerful strain in the Second Trump Administration's foreign policy thinking.

As [I have pointed out elsewhere](#), this shift can be seen in things such as Vice President J.D. Vance's speech to the Munich Security Conference in 2025, in which he decried the role of European governments and EU "commissars" in suppressing disfavored speech, comparing them explicitly to what he said were the policies of the Biden Administration in the United States. According to Vance, the biggest threat in Europe was not Russia, China, or "any external actor," but rather "[the threat from within](#)" he said was posed by those seeking to enforce progressive political norms upon the European population. (It should perhaps not have been surprising, then, that on that same trip, Vance [chose not to meet with German Chancellor Olaf Shultz but did meet with the leader of Germany's far-right Alternative für Deutschland \(\[AfD\] party](#). In fact, then-Trump senior official Elon Musk publicly [urged Germans to vote for the AfD](#). Similarly, on holiday in the United Kingdom in August 2025, Vance [met with Right-wing Reform Party leader Nigel Farage but avoided Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch](#).)

Additionally, the U.S. Department of State under Marco Rubio [published a paper](#) – written by someone named [Samuel Samson](#), who was described as a "Senior Advisor for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor" – that emphasized the importance of building and maintaining relationships with "civilizational allies" in Europe. Who these allies are and what civilization is referenced were not precisely specified in Samson's paper, but that same document defended the AfD and far-right French politician Marine LePen as being victims of progressive Leftist suppression. It also defended "[Christian nations like Hungary](#)" against charges that their politics have turned authoritarian and self-avowedly "[illiberal](#)" under rulers such as [Viktor Orbán](#). And indeed, Darren Beattie – a former Right-

wing activist known for his criticism of the “Global American Empire”<sup>112</sup> – now serves as the acting [U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs](#).

Such perspectives may also help explain not just the Second Trump Administration’s ambivalence about – and even hostility to – Western Europe, but also the sympathies that some in the MAGA ecosystem seem to show toward Vladimir Putin and his vastly *more* illiberal and authoritarian regime in Russia. Putin, after all, has embraced narratives that outdo many MAGA partisans in their hostility to modern Western progressivism. To hear Putin tell it, for instance, the values of the modern West represent nothing short of “[Satanism](#).” He says he believes the West to be a hotbed of “[paedophilia](#),” and his regime gleefully [persecutes the Russian LGBTQ community under sweeping laws that criminalize “extremism.”](#) All this is quite congenial to some on the modern American Right.

Accordingly, if a figurative “Europe” is America’s *foe* due to its commitment to progressive political values, it’s not too hard to imagine [Right-wing Americans assuming that Russia must therefore be something not unlike our friend](#) on account of its detestation for modern “woke” value-structures. And indeed, President Trump has already opted to [trust Putin’s assessment of Russian election interference over that of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) (FBI), adopted Putin’s talking points that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is a “[dictator](#)” responsible for [starting the Ukraine war](#), and [endorsed Russia’s negotiating position in early efforts to start peace talks between the two](#). (His Secretary of Defense, Pete Hegseth, also [preemptively conceded Russia’s minimum negotiating positions at Ukraine’s expense](#) before any negotiations had begun, and Trump himself seems to have modeled the 28-point “peace plan” he tried to pressure Ukraine to accept in late 2025 [upon Russia’s negotiating position](#).)

Such thinking may also help explain why then-Trump senior advisor Elon Musk could [call one U.S. Senator a “traitor” merely for](#)

[having visited Ukraine](#). Since [the U.S. Code specifies](#) that the crime of treason consists of levying war against the United States or adhering to its enemies, for an American to be a “traitor” for supporting Ukraine, it must therefore be the case that Ukraine is our enemy – making *us*, one might infer, Russia’s *ally*. To be fair, it may be that Musk’s particular comment was intended more for purposes of social media trolling than as a serious philosophical statement. Nevertheless, such talk is at least suggestive of an attitude infused with Right-Marxist antipathies, and it is certainly quite far removed from traditional U.S. views of the Putin regime.

At the very least, the Second Trump Administration has shown a notable lack of any feeling of *threat* from Russia, and an equally notable unwillingness to criticize Putin and his government. To be sure, President Trump – apparently surprised by the Russian dictator’s entirely unsurprising refusal to stop [attacking Ukrainian civilians](#) and refusal to bolster [President Trump’s campaign for a Nobel Peace Prize](#) by negotiating an end to the war in Ukraine – did once call Putin “[CRAZY](#)” (and in all-caps), has [speculated about imposing more sanctions on Russia](#), and reportedly [released new U.S. military intelligence information in 2025 to help Ukraine target its missiles](#). His administration, however, has also [sided with Russia against Europe at the United Nations](#) on matters related to the Ukraine war, and the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State at one point accused NATO of being essentially needless: “[a solution in search of a problem](#).”

All this clearly seems to signal that Right-Marxist discourse has helped fuel a significant reinterpretation of U.S. foreign policy priorities. These new narratives may not yet be entirely *dominant* in the Second Trump Administration, but they have clearly been growing, and are today quite powerful. As Aaron MacLean [summarized things recently in The Free Press](#),

... [t]he tent of Trump’s political support is large enough to include numerous attitudes toward Ukraine, ranging from traditional Republican antipathy toward Russia and support for invaded American partners, to “realists” who

have long called for warmer relations with Moscow in deference to a rational calculus of power politics, to those who enthusiastically wish for Ukraine's outright defeat. The latter two groups form their own operational coalition on the question of Ukraine.

Why would some Americans enthusiastically seek Ukraine's defeat? Because (in the view of this third group) America's liberal grand strategy since 1945, and especially since the end of the Cold War, has propped up a world system inimical to its values. Ukraine is an outpost of an essentially unjust and oppressive liberal imperium; Russia, meanwhile, is a potential partner in an anti-liberal concert that could maintain world order, perhaps even in coalition with China itself. The hostility to liberalism is the overarching idea, and Ukraine is but one question in a broader exam for humanity.

Many of these strands seem to have come together in the Second Trump Administration's [2025 National Security Strategy](#) issued in November 2025, which nowhere describes Russia as being in any way a threat to the United States but does complain about "elite-driven, anti-democratic" policies in the European Union and among America's allies in Europe. "Our goal," proclaims the strategy, "should be to help Europe correct its current trajectory," and it expresses "great optimism" about "the growing influence of patriotic European parties" pushing back against "unstable minority governments" there. The United States, in fact, quite clearly *sides* with those "patriotic European parties" *against* their governments, as Washington seeks to "restor[e] Europe's civilizational self-confidence and Western identity."

If media reports are to be believed, an [earlier or internal version of the 2025 National Security Strategy](#) was reportedly even more specific, declaring that the United States' objective is to "Make Europe Great Again" – in part by working with Rightist governments in Austria, Hungary, Italy, and Poland "with the goal of pulling them

away” from the European Union. Moreover, it added, “we should support parties, movements, and intellectual and cultural figures who seek sovereignty and preservation/restoration of traditional European ways of life.”

Such thinking has close and clear parallels in the views of MAGA intellectuals who for years have decried what former Trump Administration official Michael Anton – in a reference to the World Economic Forum meetings held at a Davos – has called “[the Davoisie oligarchy](#),” and who have voiced support for insurgent Right-wing political movements in Europe. Christopher DeMuth, for instance, has written approvingly of European Rightist parties who fight the “[international elite with its own self-serving agenda](#),” while delegations from such groups (as well as from Narendra Modi’s Hindu nationalist India) are frequent guests at “National Conservatism” conferences in the United States.<sup>113</sup> Right-wing scholars such as Patrick Deneen, and Gladden Pappin, and Harvard Law School’s Adrian Vermeule “have consistently hyped the leaders of Europe’s far-right” in Hungary, and Poland.<sup>114</sup> (Vermeule, in fact, has also rather generously described British Reform Party leader Nigel Farage as “[the defining mind of our era](#).”) Nor is the Second Trump Administration alone on the Right in loathing the cosmopolitan internationalism of the European Union, which Israeli nationalist theoretician Yoram Hazony has labeled a “[messianic cult](#).”

The Right-Marxist discourse of the MAGA movement thus seems already to be having important implications for U.S. foreign relations. It may be no exaggeration to see here the early stages of what Laura Field has called an “international nationalist imagination”<sup>115</sup> of global Right-wing solidarity against what President Trump’s Department of Defense (now colorfully relabeled the “[Department of War](#)”) calls “[the evil of globalism](#).”

The internationalization of the polarities and hyperbolic vehemence of modern U.S. domestic political discourse, moreover, is not just a phenomenon of the Right. Just as the Right sees itself as being in a desperate, existentially-fraught battle against inveterate

value-enemies, so also are such framings reflected in the rhetorical pitch and emotional intensity with which *Left*-leaning leaders have approached international relations.

It is impossible not to think, for instance, that the remarkable degree to which U.S. President Joe Biden made progressive, cosmopolitan identity-political issues into important planks of his national security agenda did not color the fervor with which he responded to the notoriously illiberal, gay-bashing, transgender-persecuting, and religiously chauvinist Vladimir Putin. With the Biden Administration's [2022 National Security Strategy](#) expressly declaring things such as being “responsive to the voices and focus on the needs of the most marginalized, including the LGBTQI+ community” [as among its “national security” priorities](#), how could things have been otherwise?

On the Left as well as on the Right, then, the international behavior of American leaders seems to be increasingly affected – and the emotional fervor of that behavior accentuated – by valences of conflict between what one might call “cosmopolitan” and “populist” or “traditionalist” values. This, I think, could have very important implications, especially if such attitudes become more widely prevalent.

### Broader Dynamics

Notably, the convergence of Right-Marxist and Left-Marxist critical discourse seems to be having important repercussions in other countries as well. There is today much speculation, for example – and at least some corroborating evidence from political polls and election results – about the [possibility that the rise of right-wing parties in various additional countries in Europe could lead to MAGA-analogous governments across the continent](#).

Tensions analogous to those that have emerged in U.S. politics can be seen in the [struggles between culturally-rooted, nationalist, and Euroskeptic conservatives in the United Kingdom and their politically](#)

liberal and Europhilic fellow citizens over immigration policy and BREXIT. They can also be seen in the strength in France of rightist political parties appealing to Catholic identity and anti-immigrant sentiment, and in ongoing debates even within government circles over what are claimed to be the dangers and excesses of American-style “woke” politics as even centrist intellectuals decry the “colonization of French universities by the American left.”

Nor are phenomena of socio-cultural polarization confined just to the trans-Atlantic world. In India, for example, the ethno-nationalist *Hindutva* politics of Narendra Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have increasingly sought to reengineer Indian democracy around the concept of India as a national-populist ethnic democracy by and for the Hindus of India. This vision – of an Indian people “united by blood ties, a culture, and community codes” as well as a political framework – combines “society, culture, and nation” in one, and is thus uncomfortable or even hostile to the latitudinarian social norms and political toleration of liberal democracy. Today, it has also been reported, both BJP-affiliated vigilante gangs and police increasingly target not only Muslims but also “secularists” and “liberals,” including intellectuals and journalists,” both “because of their ideas ... [and] on account of their lifestyle, which betrayed the Hindu orthopraxy.”<sup>116</sup>

Meanwhile, the state of Israel also seems to have become fiercely divided against itself, and was for a time all but paralyzed by controversy over efforts by the conservative coalition government of Benjamin Netanyahu to bring the country’s previously independent (and politically liberal) judiciary under control of the current (Rightist) parliamentary majority. Though political attention was for a time been distracted by security crises such as the atrocities of October 7, 2023, the ongoing Gaza war, and the campaign against Iran, Israel is today in the throes of a bitter division that some commentators have described as occurring between Israelis who have completely different (and incompatible) visions of their country’s essence: a contest between the ideal of “a liberal secular state” and that of “a more nationalist theocracy.”

In fact, in quite a few places around the world, including in Russia,<sup>117</sup> there is said to have developed an increasing divide between “ordinary” people and a new cosmopolitan elite – a new *type* of person, if you will, who may have his or her point of origin in some particular country but who is genuinely and fully rooted in none, and who is perfectly comfortable moving and living almost anywhere in the developed world where opportunity might knock. For such subjectively global citizens – whom David Goodhart labels “people from anywhere,” in contrast to those “people from somewhere” who have identities far more rooted in and tied to localized traditions and cultures<sup>118</sup> – borders and sovereignty might just as well already have disappeared. (If provided merely with a laptop, broadband Internet, and a decent coffee bar, perhaps, such “anywheres” could work, live, and be reasonably happy ... well, *anywhere*.)

It is just such people, of course, that Right-Marxists and Left-Marxists alike would tend to assign to the ranks of the hated New Class. It might therefore not be too much, on this admittedly anecdotal but proliferating evidence, to wonder whether all this is a trend – and whether “anti-cosmopolitan” discourse might represent a supra-national populist phenomenon that is in some sense as *global* as the alleged New Class conspiracy that Right-Marxist discourse decries.

Such a conclusion, at least, would certainly not surprise the Indian essayist [Pankaj Mishra](#). Indeed, though while most other commentators still tend to focus primarily upon the role of such populist discourse in the sociopolitics of the postindustrial West, Mishra generalizes these phenomena of elite neoliberal arrogance and populist rebellion into a truly global phenomenon.

As Mishra sees it, the post-Cold War era was characterized by elite agendas predicated upon expectations of “worldwide convergence on the Western model.”

It was simply assumed by the powerful and the influential among us that with socialism dead and buried, buoyant

entrepreneurs in free markets would guarantee swift economic growth and worldwide prosperity, and that Asian, Latin American[,] and African societies would become, like Europe and America, more secular and rational as economic growth accelerated.<sup>119</sup>

When things did not quite work out as congenially as those elites had planned, Mishra feels, the dislocations and inequalities of the resulting system – in which “formal equality between individuals coexist[ed] with massive differences in power, education, status[,] and property ownership” – have led to a widespread backlash, not just in Western democracies but also (manifesting itself in various forms) in the Middle East, South Asia, and beyond. Out of this backlash, he suggests, a populist global counter-culture has emerged, a radicalized cultural community has emerged that is dominated by the “ambitious lower-middle class,” and that has “*ressentiment* as [its] defining feature.”

Within this counter-movement, Mishra asserts, large numbers of people indulge “the suspicion, which was previously mostly found among paranoid conspiracy theorists, that their own political elite has become the enemy of freedom, not its protector.” In this “militant secession from a civilization premised on gradual progress under liberal-democrat trustees,” he writes, “[m]any people ... aim their rage against an allegedly cosmopolitan and rootless cultural elite.” These divisions, Mishra declares grimly – and in an unmistakable echo of Joel Kotkin’s warning about the modern equivalent of Medieval “peasant revolts” against entrenched elites and a general “turning away from democratic liberalism around the world”<sup>120</sup> – represent “today’s civil war.”<sup>121</sup> (Mishra was writing in 2017, but the year 2025 might seem to support his thesis, for it was characterized by widespread protests driven by “frustration over rising inequality, underemployment, corruption[,] and a deepening doubt among students and young workers that they’ll ever enjoy the kind of lives their parents had” that roiled politics in multiple countries around the world, even to the point of toppling leaders in Nepal, Madagascar, and Bulgaria.)

If indeed this is a kind of “civil war” – at least figuratively, anyway – it is thus not surprising to see some of its putative “combatants” trying to organize themselves into effective coalitions. Despite the oxymoronic nature of a transnational *global alliance of antiglobalists*, Right-wing intellectuals from various countries have increasingly made common cause, not merely coordinating and encouraging each other online – and rallying support for Rightist political candidates in places such as [Romania](#) and [Poland](#) – but also periodically meeting at conferences such as the “[Age of Patriots” event](#) organized in 2025 by the [Conservative Political Action Conference](#) (CPAC) in Viktor Orbán’s Hungary, a government [idolized by modern Right-populists](#) for its [resolute “illiberality.”](#) The American MAGA figure Steve Bannon, in fact, has [talked openly about trying to organize a trans-national alliance of national-populist conservatives](#) to stand up against what he feels to be the corrupting influence of globalist progressivism.

### **An Emergent “New Geopolitics” of Culture War?**

For the student of international relations, this would therefore seem to be a pregnant moment, raising fascinating questions about what would happen if such trends continued to the point of reordering traditional geopolitical divisions, affinities, and antipathies. What would the world look like, in other words, if this kind of “globalized anti-globalism” continues to grow, leading to the emergence of important collective geopolitical fault lines that are based not upon traditional dichotomies (e.g., East/West, North-versus-South, developed-versus-underdeveloped, capitalist-versus-communist, or democratic-versus-authoritarian) but instead upon a new frontier of socio-cultural contestation between “cosmopolitans” and “traditionalists”?

One can still only speculate about this, of course, but the possibility is certainly worth flagging. It is not impossible to imagine the emergence of what might even be termed a new geopolitical era – one in which ideational narratives of identity focused upon socio-cultural ontology are at least as important as issues related to the more

concrete resources over which nations have always struggled, and in which such identitarian disputes create a *new conflict axis* in the world. In such a new political geography of moralistic conflict, the main disputants would be, on the one hand, the identity structures and value constellations of post-Cold War neoliberal cosmopolitanism, and on the other, an array of regimes and populations claiming to represent traditional values and mores *against* that cosmopolitanism.<sup>122</sup>

The former (the cosmopolitans) would feel themselves to represent the highest and best fruits of modernity – liberal democracy, human rights, humanist secularism, and social tolerance – and see something backward, atavistic, repressive, and retrograde in their opponents. The latter (the traditionalists), meanwhile, would claim to have suffered identity-based affronts and grievances at the hands of this cosmopolitanism, which they regard as immoral and corrupting, and they would seek to push back against its normative hegemony with their own *counter-hegemonic* narratives of chauvinist and particularistic national or socio-cultural essence. Both would be highly moralistic, and each side would both despise and constantly seek to delegitimize and stigmatize the other.

### **Blurring of Geographic Frontiers**

In a world powerfully divided between partisans of such cosmopolitan and traditionalist camps, contestation would occur both *across* and *within* existing national frontiers. Because the vicissitudes of various countries' domestic political processes would determine "which side" prevailed in controlling each national government, the geopolitical fault lines between the two camps would to some extent fall along existing territorial frontiers. Individual states would therefore tend to fall into one or the other of the feuding camps depending upon which faction happened to have won in the most recent national elections, making deep engagement in *national-level* contestation critical to both sides.

At the same time, because socio-political fault lines would also exist within each domestic jurisdiction, struggles would also occur within countries. In this sense, therefore, the geopolitical terrain would be more complex than that of Europe during most of the Cold War, when Communist political parties were only infrequently competitive at the national level in Western democracies and Communist governments simply precluded the existence of domestic opposition groups at all. By contrast, in our hypothesized competition between “trads” and “cosmos,” *all* terrain would be in some sense “up for grabs.” As described earlier, we see some such polarized contestation already manifesting itself in U.S. foreign relations. American Right-populist antipathy to politically progressive governments and support for populist Right-wing opposition groups in Europe clearly – and now, with the 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy, *explicitly* – colors Washington’s relationship with its NATO alliance partners, even while engendering sympathies for regimes such as that of Viktor Orbán in Hungary or Vladimir Putin in Russia.

But there would also be no guarantee that countries would *stay* on “their” side of the factional dividing line in this future geopolitics of conflict, particularly in democratic polities subject to periodic elections and in which neither cosmopolitan nor traditionalist constituencies hold an enduringly dominant position. Indeed, some countries might be susceptible to periodic – and unpredictable – “flips,” oscillating between partisan positions on either side of the socio-political divide (*i.e.*, sometimes being cosmopolitan and at other times traditionalist) depending upon who happens to be in power at any given time. This would add considerably to the complexity and instability of the international security environment, particularly if one or more structurally important major countries – such as the United States – were among those subject to such oscillation.

Yet traditional national frontiers would also themselves be to some degree *contested*, too. For traditionalists, national frontiers would remain of huge inherent importance, for such thinkers tend to see national sovereignty as a central locus of political and personal identity, in contrast to cosmopolitan opponents who often prize such

affinities less, or may even be suspicious of them. Against the sovereigntist predilections of the traditionalists would be counterpoised the instincts of cosmopolitans, particularly in the context of European politics, where already proponents of the European Union have struggled for years not just against British secession but also against anti-liberal populist governments in [Poland](#) and [Hungary](#) which have at various points worked to undermine EU mechanisms and processes from within. (The European Commission, for instance, at one point [brought suit against Poland under EU law](#), while [withholding funding from Hungary](#).) In their specifics, such squabbles are about the details of specific national policies and EU requirements, but in broader terms they are contests over the primary locus of sovereignty between cosmopolitan ideals of constructively “pooled” identity and traditionalist ideals of absolutist nationality. Such debates and contestation seem unlikely to disappear anytime soon, and would surely be accentuated in a future “Cultural Cold War” between traditionalist and cosmopolitan camps.

Indeed, in some respects, a future world of contestation between cosmopolitans and traditionalists would also be one in which national frontiers were in some sense *porous*, for as noted, the axis of conflict between these socio-cultural camps would also run *within* existing territorial nation-states rather than just between them – that is, along cross-cutting demographic as well as just geographical lines. If there is an historical analogue to this, it might perhaps be found in the fraught domestic politics of Western European socialism in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, or in the contested confessional politics of European religious divisions after the Protestant Reformation. Such developments could powerfully complicate the “inter-state” dynamics of contemporary international relations.

To the extent, moreover, that *wars* were to occur in such a hypothetical future world pitting against each other countries that fall into opposite camps across the traditionalist/cosmopolitan divide, such conflicts might thus be notably “multifront” in nature – that is, waged as a complex mix of direct military conflict, proxy conflict within the policy communities of belligerent countries (and

elsewhere), and perhaps even domestic subversion, sabotage, and electoral interference. (At the very least, things would become more chaotic and unpredictable in time of conflict.) War would be more likely, as well as more likely to be *intractable* in this future world, even as wartime dynamics would be more prone to involve complex factionalisms and ally-of-convenience tradeoffs, further challenging effective coalition-building within and between nations. On the whole, an international environment of pervasive and to some degree cross-cutting ideational factionalism would likely exacerbate the challenges of modern conflict.

### Intractability of Conflicts

To the degree that such socio-cultural schisms became the focus of broad identity-political geopolitical divisions and contestation, moreover, it is possible that this would engender more *problematic* conflicts by evoking particularly strong emotional valences and by being unusually resistant to the negotiated compromises of diplomacy. At the very least, this hypothesized future world would not seem likely to be a calculatingly *realpolitikal* one, but rather an environment in which various charged and emotive identities competed for attention and levied compelling and incompatible demands for moralistic vindication.

The key to these challenges would lie in the extent to which geopolitical contestation between cosmopolitans and traditionalists would come to feel *personally existential* as a result of the close connection between such conflicts and questions of individual participants' personal identity. In principle, at least for a Marxist critical theorist, disputes between the New Class and those rising up against domination by such that technocratic elite might seem to be "only" about these groups' respective class interest. Nevertheless, things would surely be vastly more complicated in practice.

In Alvin Gouldner's telling, after all, the New Class is an *ideologized class par excellence*. ("The shared ideology of the intellectuals and intelligentsia is ... an ideology about discourse."<sup>123</sup>)

The members of the New Class, in fact, are specialists in and masters of the manipulation of symbolic systems, and the imposition and maintenance of ideological hegemony is central to their primacy. As Antonio Gramsci himself might have agreed, theirs is a domination less over the direct control of capital or labor than over that of *culture and thought*. Accordingly, there is essentially no way for contestation over their rule *not* to be a fundamentally ideological struggle over ideas and internalized identities.

This is certainly how Right-Marxists like Samuel Francis appear to have seen it, at least. And, as we have already seen with recent “culture war” politics in the United States, disputes between “liberal elites” and “ordinary Americans” are deeply entangled in fierce and intractable identity-existential questions – such as over religious imperatives or gender identity – that are not always amenable to compromise, even in theory. A *geopolitics* that came to be rooted in such culture conflicts might thus be a charged one indeed.

After all, where narratives of grievance become associated with socio-cultural issues of *identity* (*i.e.*, questions related to *who* one is, and the needs or demands that flow from contestation over or perceived challenges to that identity) – rather than being, say, over the division of resources (*i.e.*, questions of who gets what “things”) – disputes seem likely to become both particularly emotively and politically “hot” *and* particularly intractable. Identity-political “goods” are not always *divisible* ones in the way that material ones can be.

One might perhaps imagine resolving an international dispute over resources by sharing access to those resources, for example, and the same might be said of conflict over markets or territory. Disputes centered on questions related to *who one is*, however – or what one is *owed* as a result of such identity – are likely to be much more intractable, and less likely to be soluble through negotiated compromise.

Today’s ongoing war in Ukraine *might*, for instance, be conceptualized as a dispute over who controls things such as the agricultural land, coal, and territory of the Donbas, or the coastline of

the Black Sea. Yet it is not. Rather, the conflict is seen by its contestants as a contest over *whether or not Ukrainians are Russians*. This makes it an issue not of “what one has” but “who one is,” and on *that* there is presumably less ground for negotiation. The stakes for Ukrainians are thus existential almost by definition, and the rhetoric of the Putin regime suggests that even modern Russians may feel something viscerally and personally threatening here (*e.g.*, in the idea that the locus of the ancient kingdom and cultural fountainhead of Kievan Rus is not actually *Russian*).

To the degree that what is perceived to be at issue is fidelity to one’s national *self* or the fulfilment of one’s destiny, compromise can feel like national erasure, and moderation can feel like betrayal. A world riven by the politics of moralistic oppositionalism and grievance discourses tied to a supposedly identity-existential clash between cosmopolitan progressivism and traditionalist reaction might therefore be one with many international tensions or conflicts that are more intractable even than those we confront today.

None of this necessarily means that traditional international concepts such as deterrence or a balance of power could not possibly work in a geopolitics of contested identity. It may be, however, that tempers and rhetoric run would especially hot in such a world of *idealpolitik*, making compromise and bargaining more challenging.

A system of *idealpolitik* might also be more idiosyncratic than today’s world even in terms of what is felt worthy of fighting *over*, compared to what one might expect under the traditional statesman’s *realpolitik* aspiration to coolly calculate the balance of objective interests. Identity-political wars, in fact, could perhaps occur even when there exists no actually *material* harm or basis for disagreement or affront at all. Through an *idealpolitik*al prism, fighting a war over “mere words” might not seem unreasonable. If discourse is the New Class’ currency of power and such words are in fact *constitutive* of socio-political reality, why would they *not* be worth fighting over? In an arena of zero-sum socio-cultural identity politics, adversarial language and ideas might seem to be “violence” no less aggrieving

than bombs or bullets – as indeed some in American politics have been suggesting for some time. Internationally, the addition of mere *disfavored speech* to the list of things deemed to constitute a legitimate *casus belli* between states would certainly be a recipe for additional danger and instability.<sup>124</sup>

### A More Unstable World

Rather than dividing into stark Cold War-style blocs, this posited future world would be characterized by competing *networks* that lack clear or stable frontiers, and in which members of the competing factions seek not simply to seize and maintain power against their value-enemies at home, but also to mobilize webs of like-minded partisans elsewhere – and everywhere – and in which those enemies themselves work hard to return the favor. Such competition dynamics would not end more traditional great power rivalries, but would constitute an *additional* layer of potential conflict which would not map cleanly onto traditional national or geopolitical divisions, dividing *some* countries to some extent geographically and *most* countries to some extent demographically.

As for the preservation of democracy itself as an organizational form for political life, it might even be that in this hypothesized future environment, democratic forms of governance would begin to lose their attraction for the participants in such identity-politicized contestation. Even in today's world, we have already seen the rulers of illiberal and more traditionalist regimes such as those in Turkey, Hungary, and India place increasing restrictions on domestic democratic contestation in order to reduce the chances of their more cosmopolitan domestic political opponents winning power. As described earlier, moreover, the MAGA intellectual ecosystem of the modern American Right-wing also contains some thinkers whose hatred and fear of their ideological enemies is such that authoritarian rule by a "Red Caesar" or a "CEO-Monarch" feels preferable to taking the chances involved in allowing leaders to be picked in free elections. Where the threat from the domestic "enemy within" is perceived as

being genuinely existential, it is perhaps only a short step from having an Orbán-style “illiberal” democracy to having no democracy at all.

For analogous reasons, moreover, even politically progressive cosmopolitans might come to sour on democratic governance if they felt it likely to lead to a radicalized Rightist hegemony imposed by the votes of benighted traditionalist masses. (Such a betrayal of the right to democratic political participation, for example, might be rationalized being necessary in order to prevent the loss of “all” the *other* rights prized by liberal cosmopolitans if radicalized traditionalists were to come to power.) As both sides demonized each other ever more fervently and successfully, it might thus be that the strongest partisans of *each* camp could come to see the democratic process *itself* as a threat, for it would be the ballot box that might allow the other side to take control. To the degree that values competition becomes ever more intense and polarized in the domestic and international arenas, therefore, *all* players could thus be driven toward illiberality, intolerance, and – ultimately – domestic repression of the hated “Other.” Once again, this would not be a pleasant or peaceful world.

### **A Taijitu of Reconciliation**

These are, of course, merely speculations about one possible future world out of many. Such a world would represent a metastatic projection of some of the dynamics already at play within Western democracies today, and one in which major themes of political contestation would draw heavily upon critical discourses advanced, in our own time, not just by Leftist dialecticians like Alvin Gouldner but also by Right-wing intellectuals like Samuel Francis. This essay is not, however, a *prediction* that such a world will come about, but rather only an effort to identify and describe the *possibility*, for better or for worse.

Nor is this essay in any way an endorsement of the political, sociological, or moral positions of either the Left-Marxist or the Right-Marxist camp. I take no position here on the actual merits of *either* of

those sibling critical discourses – nor on whether the fact of their discursive convergence around conspiracy narratives of malevolent elite capture suggests the accuracy of such conclusions as a sociological description of modern Western society. (It may, or it may not.)

My point in these pages is merely twofold. First, I believe it is both interesting and significant that these two critical discourses *are* so sharply convergent. Their parallels and apparent intellectual consanguinity are worth understanding as part of the history and genealogy of ideas, but also because they suggest a powerful and potentially very influential “mainstreaming” of critical discourse by both the political Left and the political Right. Despite the Left’s general abhorrence of Rightist thinking and the Right’s palpable disgust with “Marxist” intellectualizing, they both seem to agree on some important points, and both actually *sound* notably *Marxist* – at least in a somewhat 1970s-era vein. This odd process of reciprocal intellectual legitimation, moreover, may have significance in real-world decision-making as leaders and polities are influenced by such ideational structures.

Second, with respect to how such real-world developments may unfold, I submit that this Left-Right convergence in critical discourse is *already* helping shape the international environment of political and security relationships between the world’s major states. If such trends were to continue, moreover – though, of course, there is no guarantee of that – they have the potential to reorder the geopolitical environment in significant ways, conceivably even to the point of creating a new “axis of conflict” around a “Cultural Cold War” that is quite different than the contestational dichotomies to which statesmen and international relations scholars have hitherto been accustomed.

Whether or not such a speculative future conflict environment of generalized geopolitical competition between cosmopolitan and traditionalist camps ever actually emerges, however, I believe it is important to understand the intellectual dynamics of these critical discourses on their own terms and in their own voice. That is, I believe it is important to grasp the ways in which Left-Marxism and Right-

Marxism share a common view of society that seems likely to give their partisans a perceived stake in particular agendas and courses of action in the years ahead that could have notable consequences. I hope this essay will contribute to such understanding.

As for whether there may be some *escape* from the polarized politics of extremity pushing societies towards such reciprocally hyperbolic antagonisms, our collective way forward seems somewhat unclear. As noted earlier, Alvin Gouldner himself did not offer a clear solution to the problem of the self-undermining Epimeniden tendencies of New Class critical discourse. Nor did he identify a clear alternative to the professional-managerial primacy of the New Class. Short of simply concluding that these problems are unfixable and resigning ourselves to domination by that New Class – or perhaps, *selon* Patrick Deneen and others, a like domination by a Right-wing replacement elite, which Gouldnerian analysis would expect to be no less moralistically oppressive and self-aggrandizingly tyrannical than its “woke” predecessor – is there thus any hope?

Perhaps it is not too outlandish to imagine the tentative outlines of an answer. It seems possible, for instance, to envision an approach that tries to remain broadly faithful to the basic justice-seeking, exploitation-hating, society-improving, and rationality-valorizing ideals of the CCD, while yet leavening this discourse and preventing it spinning out of control into ideological pathologies by *also* embracing what Thomas Sowell has termed the “constrained vision” that “accepts tragedy as an unavoidable part of being human and seeks to make the best of things.”

This, in fact, is a dichotomy already envisioned by Gouldner, who contrasted the “ideologic vision” with the “tragic vision,” while describing the former as being particularly associated with the rise of the New Class:

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, th[e] ideologic vision succeed[ed] the tragic vision as the salient form of consciousness. It does not, however, replace or destroy,

but, rather, primarily *represses* the tragic. The ideologic vision is grounded in an optimistic estimate of man's power and, as such, reinforces man's confidence in himself and his ability to reconstruct society, as well as increases his sense of moral responsibility to do so. ... While the tragic vision is not at all incompatible with the existence of a public sphere and of political struggle, as in ancient Greece, still the tragic vision places firm limits on what politics can do.<sup>125</sup>

Would it be too much, then, to embrace a fundamentally, albeit guardedly, optimistic philosophy that *seeks* to improve the world but that still recognizes the inherent constraints placed upon this ameliorative project by human imperfection, the impossibility of exercising direct and predictably efficacious linear control over massive, open, complex adaptive systems, and indeed – at least for those of a Christian persuasion – the very *Fallenness* of Man? Is there room for an approach genuinely animated by ideas and ideals, but that thus avoids rigidity and dogmatism by remaining sensitive, in Gouldner's words, "to *persons*, to their feelings and reactions, and ... [to the richness of] human solidarity"<sup>126</sup> – not just because those things are intrinsically worthy, but also because achieving *perfect* outcomes is unavailable in this imperfect world and because *pursuing* such perfection can exact such a huge cost to those values?

In Laura Field's book-length study of the Right-wing intellectuals of the MAGA ecosystem, she returns repeatedly to the metaphor of Aeschylus' famous play, the three-part Oresteia, which won first prize at the Dionysia festival in ancient Greece in 458 B.C.E. In the final play of that series, *The Eumenides*, after a tragic sequence of events chronicled in the first two plays, the hero Orestes is fleeing the vengeful Furies, those fierce and implacable ancient deities of vengeance and retributive justice. However, through the intervention of Athena, the goddess of wisdom, Orestes is subject to a jury trial, which deadlocks before Athena herself casts the deciding vote in favor of his acquittal. This angers the Furies, who regard him as having

escaped justice, but Athena placates them by incorporating them into the justice system of the Athenian city-state.

For Field, the *Oresteia* suggests the need for a “magnanimous Athena” to prescribe for the toxicities of modern American politics a salutary agenda that will allow Wisdom to “vote ... down” the Furies of contemporary discourse, “offer peace, [and] bind up the nation’s wounds.” (Her suggested agenda, for instance, includes organizing an emphatically *moderate* liberal patriotic education program based not upon valorizing Manichean narratives but on debating and seeking the good in the context of political pluralism.)<sup>127</sup> But Field’s account leaves the reader with the impression that the Furies – to which she etymologically likens the “Furious Minds” of the Right-wing intellectuals she studies in her book – are *problems* that Athena’s wisdom must overcome: angry spirits the grim energies of which must be *defeated* in the interests of making possible civilized life in the *polis*.

Yet to my eye, that seems a bit too simple, Field’s own somewhat moralistic account perhaps betraying the political biases of her self-admitted liberalism, for she is plainly horrified by much of what she chronicles in MAGA intellectualism. A richer reading of the metaphor of the *Oresteia* in the context of modern American politics, however, might remind the reader that the secret to Athena’s solution is less in “voting down” the Furies than in reaching a deep sort of *accommodation* with them. That is, Athena’s answer is to *adopt* but *domesticate* their ferocious energies of righteous anger and retributive justice to serve the *polis* as a kind of “engine” to *drive* the quest for Justice, while yet keeping that search within boundaries set by the quasi-constitutional constraints of *process wisdom* so as to keep the *polis* from tearing itself apart in counterproductive spasms of vengeance and counter-vengeance.

The point for Aeschylus, then, is perhaps not that the Furies’ dark energies are *inappropriate* and must be *overcome*, but rather precisely that they are – like the caustic critical scrutinies of Gouldner’s CCD – both *justified* and yet also *dangerous* when unbounded because they are so prone to metastasize into systemic self-destruction if not

kept somehow in check. To return to a more Gouldnerian framing, the “ideologic vision” – which may come in both Leftist and Rightist modes, to the extent that those still differ at this point – is not *bad* but in fact *valuable*, while also being notably *incomplete* as a formula by which humans can live successfully in community, for it requires the “tragic vision” to temper its excesses and prevent the system from spiraling into self-defeating excess.

For its part, moreover, the tragic vision *also* requires a dynamic counterpoint from the ideologic vision, lest there be *no* force optimistically driving society toward the better. (Surely life cannot *all* be tragic, can it? Whereof love, beauty, and hope?) It is thus arguably in the juxtaposition of and dynamic tension between these two forces – their reciprocal domestication, if you will, in service of the *polis*, making civilization possible – that Aeschylus signals to us that the wisdom of Athena lies:

Yea, even from these, who, grim and stern,  
Glared anger upon you of old,  
O citizens, ye now shall earn  
A recompense right manifold. ...  
These alien Powers that thus are made  
Athenian evermore ...  
Lead onward, that these gracious powers of earth  
Henceforth be seen to bless the life of men.

Thus incorporated and made enduringly of constructive service, the Furies are no longer to be labeled *Furies*, at all, but rather now – as Aeschylus entitled his third and final play in this cycle – as the “Eumenides,” or “Gracious Ones.”

Such an ideological synthesis may also help provide us at least a partial response to the problem of the hegemony of the New Class. It may well be that the modern world cannot function without the technocratic expertise of the Ehrenreichs’ PMC. But as Gouldner himself understood,<sup>128</sup> such expertise can only be seen as legitimate when exercised on behalf of values that are themselves legitimate, and

the question of *values* is not a merely technocratic one. However much the New Class may assert the right to determine societal ends, it can thus claim no special prerogative in this respect. Hence it is necessary to look elsewhere – or at least, more specifically, beyond *just* the New Class, for it would seem inappropriate to *deny* them a voice in such questions – for how to determine the ends towards which socio-political activity is to be directed.

In that respect, I have suggested [elsewhere in the pages of this journal](#) with Nigel Biggar the need for an approach to the political constitution of the community that reconciles the rights of human citizens *as individuals* with those of human citizens together *as the polis* – and I think that this approach can perhaps help us answer the question of legitimate societal “ends definition” unanswered and unanswerable by the New Class as well. In our argument, Biggar and I contend that a “minimum package” of rights must be given to every adult individual in a society in order to protect those individuals’ right and ability, by choice, to constitute a sovereign community capable of governing itself, of asserting rights of sovereign separation and non-interference vis-à-vis other such entities, and of collectively deciding upon the ends toward which social life should be directed.<sup>129</sup>

This “Minimum Package of Rights” (MPR) need not necessarily be very extensive, and indeed probably *should not* be, for it is intended to *ground* rather than to *supplant* a human society’s choice of what to prize in its collective life and what ends to pursue. The MPR aims to leave *most* such decisions to the community that is constituted by its individual members. Nevertheless, protecting *their* ability to undertake such social constitution – through ensuring the elementary protections of voting rights, freedom of expression and association, and due process vis-à-vis power-holders – is essential if the resulting community is to have legitimacy in the first place, including the legitimacy needed to exert claims of sovereign prerogative against *other* communities, as well as that necessary to resist the relativistic solvents of New Class critical discourse.

Applied in the context of the problems examined in this essay, our MPR approach could help provide some institutional check upon the hegemony of the New Class without rejecting the value such elites can provide – and the relative degree of social privilege they can thereby legitimately *earn* – as skillful stewards of the technocratic processes upon which modern life depends. This approach would also be *democratic* and *individualist* in the most important of ways, yet without eroding the importance or value of human community, including the lifeways, mores, and traditions that develop and take root as communities act over time *as communities*. The MPR, in other words, aspires to provide a legitimating bridge – an Athenian accommodation, if you will – between individualism and sociality.

This is not really a radical vision; indeed it is a fundamentally conservative one, rooted in concepts of democratic self-governance in the classically Liberal (not “liberal”) tradition that have been around for generations. But it would represent a retreat both from the absolutist moralism and *rights-hostility* of modern Right-wing “Red Caesarism” and from the oddly relativistic *rights-credulity* of modern progressivism, which has gradually allowed an expanding array of mere policy preferences to adopt the mantle of inalienable “rights” that can be aggressively demanded of others, even while delegitimizing the idea that the collective can legitimately assert Truth claims against the individual. Yet the MPR would nonetheless give “ordinary people” enforceable claims against power in the best Liberal sense, enabling them to impose broad checks – if and to the degree that they wished – upon the policy choices of the New Class, which would be permitted to improvise on its own technocratic recognizance only *within* broad guidelines set by the democratically empowered population at large.

The dynamic tensions embedded within this approach, moreover – in which *nobody's* discourse would automatically be privileged, and rival claims would be forced to do what Gouldner reminds us that New Class discourse always *claimed* to do in prevailing by actually *persuading people*<sup>130</sup> rather than through the soft coercion of hegemonic *fiat* – could help us better balance the ambition of the

ideologic against the prudence of the tragic in our search for a genuinely livable political life. The idea of such an accommodation is perhaps not so novel, but we may yet have to reclaim it.

In the polarized politics of modern America, of course, such a Eumenidean vision of reconciliation – between the demands of the ideologic vision and the insights of the tragic, and between the demands of individual rights and the demands of collective sovereign ones – may not be entirely welcome to many partisans. As Gouldner would surely remind us, the ideologic vision is congenitally averse to compromise; it instinctively prefers to chase the perfect at any cost rather than to accept the acceptable. (As we have seen, to the ideologue, any compromise carries with it the whiff of betrayal, or even of “treason,” and must be resisted.<sup>131</sup> For such a one, as Senator Barry Goldwater might have put it, extremism in the defense of one’s values is no vice, and “moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue.”)

Yet if we *are* to live together and civilization is not to tear itself apart, Aeschylus seems to suggest, the dark energies of the Furies must be embraced for the righteousness of their anger while nonetheless being tempered (and hence limited) by Wisdom and the process-values of civilization. Surely there is a sort of divine virtue in that. In *The Eumenides*, Athena grasps that to be vibrant and enduring, a civilization must harness the value of *both* of these elements through some dynamic *taijitu* of interpenetrating reconciliation, even if such accommodation proves distasteful to the ideologues therein. If we are to learn these lessons and not see both American domestic society and international politics consumed by a new Cultural Cold War between ideologized factions of Alvin Gouldner’s New Class, perhaps the great Greek tragedian still has something important to teach us.

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## About the Author

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Laura K. Field, *Furious Minds: The Making of the MAGA New Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2025), 4.
- <sup>2</sup> A word on terminology is in order here. To this author, the term “Right-wing” seems more appropriate here than “conservative,” for as we shall see, many of these thinkers are only infrequently interested in *conserving* anything. Unlike traditional conservatives – who often do not oppose social progress *per se*, rather seeing the road to Hell being paved with good intentions and seeking to slow change and interpose limits and guardrails in order to prevent things precious to society from being thrown overboard amidst the blind haste of progressives’ march into the future – the modern Right-wing’s agenda more commonly runs to the revolutionary: to *breaking* institutions controlled by the elites who are seen as having commandeered society. The mantra of the modern Right-wing, is thus not to “conserve” but, as Rufo himself puts it, to “[revolt](#).”
- <sup>3</sup> This term apparently originates with the Marxist philosopher Herbert Marcuse, of the Frankfurt School, who first supported militant confrontational politics but then shifted to advocate “[United Front](#)” [politics and a “long march through the institutions”](#) whereby activists could capture and subvert the institutions of capitalist society by working within them. Contemporary Right-wingers now interpret this aspirational Marcusean agenda as an accomplished fact – [seeing the Left as having successfully adopted Antonio Gramsci’s idea of a “war of position” in which one makes gradual progress toward a fait accompli](#) – and have made the Left’s capture of such institutions into their [master narrative of contemporary politics](#).
- <sup>4</sup> Field, *Furious Minds*, 245-46 (quoting Patrick Deneen, *Regime Change* (Sentinel Press: 2023), 25).
- <sup>5</sup> Field, *Furious Minds*, 139-40 (quoting Bronze Age Pervert, *Bronze Age Mindset* (independently published, 2018).
- <sup>6</sup> Field, *Furious Minds*, 257 (quoting “Raw Egg Nationalist” that “[t]he globalists want you to be fat, sick, depressed[,] and isolated, the better to control you and to milk you for as much economic value as they can before they kill you. That’s soy globalism in a nutshell. Own nothing, live in the pod, eat the soy.”).
- <sup>7</sup> Christopher Rufo, *America’s Cultural Revolution: How the Radical Left Conquered Everything* (Broadside Books: 2023), 280.
- <sup>8</sup> Field, *Furious Minds*, 291.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 245-46 (quoting Deneen, *Regime Change*, 153-57 & 185).
- <sup>10</sup> See generally, e.g., Sarmast Bahram, “The Technocratic Monarchist Movement in America: Theoretical Dimensions and Political Impacts,” *Interdisciplinary Studies in Society, Law, and Politics*, vol. 3, no. 3 (2025), 3-5.

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- <sup>11</sup> The term “woke” has its origins in vernacular Black American English, but has in recent years become associated with hyper-zealous and highly moralistic political progressivism, and today functions mainly as a sort of a catch-all word for Leftist social justice-oriented politics of the sort loathed by the modern Right wing.
- <sup>12</sup> Field, *Furious Minds*, 118-19 (quoting Yoram Hazony).
- <sup>13</sup> Samuel Francis, *Beautiful Losers: Essays on the Failure of American Conservatism* (University of Missouri Press, 1993), 11-12.
- <sup>14</sup> Thomas Sowell, *Intellectuals and Society* (Basic Books, 2011), 7, 10, 95, 172-75, 191-202, & 500-13.
- <sup>15</sup> Sowell, *Intellectuals and Society*, 500 & 526.
- <sup>16</sup> Charles Murray, *Coming Apart* (Crown Forum, 2012), 16-19, 33, 46-61, 68-70, 100-01, 124-208.
- <sup>17</sup> Joel Kotkin, *The Coming of Neo-Feudalism: A Warning to the Global Middle Class* (Encounter Books, 2020), 1, 28-29, & 49.
- <sup>18</sup> Kotkin, *The Coming of Neo-Feudalism*, 12, 7, & 51-54.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 25, 9, 51, 113, & 120-25.
- <sup>20</sup> See, e.g., Antonio Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916-1935* (David Forgacs, ed.) (NYU Press, 2000), at 306-07.
- <sup>21</sup> Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, 249-50.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 380-81.
- <sup>23</sup> Field, *Furious Minds*, 129 (quoting Spencer as recounted by Tamir Bar-On, “Richard B. Spencer and the Alt Right,” in *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy* (Marck Sedgwick, ed.) (Oxford University Press: 2019), ch.14).
- <sup>24</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich & John Ehrenreich, “The Professional-Managerial Class,” *Radical America*, vol. 11, no. 2, March-April 1977, <https://library.brown.edu/pdfs/1125403552886481.pdf>.
- <sup>25</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich & John Ehrenreich, “The New Left: A Case Study in Professional-Managerial Class Radicalism,” *Radical America*, vol. 11, no. 3, May-June 1977, <https://files.libcom.org/files/Rad%20America%20V11%20I3.pdf>.
- <sup>26</sup> Ehrenreich & Ehrenreich, “The Professional-Managerial Class,” 13.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.
- <sup>34</sup> Ehrenreich & Ehrenreich, “The New Left: A Case Study,” 18.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-28.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.
- <sup>38</sup> Ehrenreich & Ehrenreich, “The Professional-Managerial Class,” 29.

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- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., 22.
- <sup>40</sup> Ehrenreich & Ehrenreich, "The New Left: A Case Study," 8-9/
- <sup>41</sup> Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology: The Origins, Grammar, and Future of Ideology* (Seabury Press, 1967), xii. As he put it, "most Marxists (like most academic sociologists) reject the idea that they and their theory are the bearers of contradiction, false consciousness, and mystification. The Marxist outlaw is characterized by the fact that he also speaks about Marxism; that he is reflexive about Marxism and that he does not simply view Marxism as a resource but also takes it as a topic. The Marxist outlaw is attempting to speak the rules by which Marxism lives; to discover and articulate the grammar to which it submits. The Marxist outlaw, then, holds that even Marxism must be subject to critique." Ibid., xiv.
- <sup>42</sup> Gouldner, *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology*; Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* (Seabury Press, 1979); and Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Two Marxisms: Contradictions and Anomalies in the Development of Theory* (Seabury Press, 1980).
- <sup>43</sup> Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*, 58. The emphasis is in the original; Gouldner, as the reader will see, was very fond of italics. (Hereafter, all italicized portions of quotations from Gouldner will simply replicate his own punctuation.)
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid., 9.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., 1.
- <sup>46</sup> See *ibid.*, 3.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid., 38.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid., 28.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., 86.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid., 59.
- <sup>51</sup> Ehrenreich & Ehrenreich, "The New Left: A Case Study," 27-28.
- <sup>52</sup> Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*, 48.
- <sup>53</sup> Ehrenreich & Ehrenreich, "The New Left: A Case Study," 27-28.
- <sup>54</sup> Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*, 8 & 16.
- <sup>55</sup> Gouldner felt that the rise of vernacular languages and the technology of printing democratized the culture of writing and strengthened rational discourse by decontextualizing argumentation in ways that separated it, to some degree, from the contingencies of the immediate or local environment. This had the result of helping empower a new class of persons who, as it were, *specialized* in linguistically sophisticated discourses centered on that rationality. See Gouldner, *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology*, 40-41. "Whatever their politics or their public project – whether reactionary or revolutionary – ideologies are regarded by their speakers as having their authoritative expression in writing." Ibid., 80. "The social movements of the modern world," Gouldner said, "are both ideology- and news-constructed." Ideologies became possible with the emergence of a mass printing culture because they are "symbol systems generated by, and intelligible to persons whose relationship to everyday life is mediated by their reading – of newspapers, journals, or books – and by the developing general concept of 'news,' as well as by the specific and concrete 'bits' of news now increasingly transmitted by the growing media, and is grounded in the experience of life as decontextualized events." Ibid., 100 & 105. There was therefore, he wrote, a "profound interconnection" between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century "Age of Ideologies" and "the 'communications revolution' grounded in the development of printing, printing technologies, and the growing production of printed products." The Age of Ideologies associated with the first emergence of the New Class was characterized by "that proliferating production of symbol systems that responded to the increased market for meaning; and, in particular, for *secularized* meanings ...." Ibid., 91 & 93.

- <sup>56</sup> Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*, 2-5.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid., 76.
- <sup>58</sup> The Old Class of capital-owners has the function of reproducing capital and profiting therefrom, but its members face pressure “to rationalize their productive and administrative efforts and unceasingly heighten efficiency.” This creates the basis for the bourgeoisie’s alliance with the New Class, for such rationalization “is dependent increasingly on the efforts of the New Class intelligentsia and its expert skills. It is inherent in its structural situation, then, that the old class must bring the New Class into existence.” Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*, 18.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid., 12.
- <sup>60</sup> Gouldner, *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology*, 128-33.
- <sup>61</sup> Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*, 17 & 49.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid., 14-15.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid., 21.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid., 19.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid., 64.
- <sup>66</sup> Ibid., 19.
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid., 86.
- <sup>68</sup> Ibid., 85.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid., 65.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid., 18.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid., 61.
- <sup>72</sup> Ibid., 54 & 57. According to Gouldner, “academic technicians” and Marxist vanguard party theorists such as Lenin and Karl Kautsky are alike in that “both define themselves as the repository of a superior knowledge that can and should be the basis of a social reconstruction. Both are elite conceptions that place other segments of society in a tutelary role, although one commonly serves to reform and integrate the *status quo* while the other seeks to revolutionize it.” Gouldner, *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology*, 36.
- <sup>73</sup> Gouldner, *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology*, 133.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid., 180.
- <sup>75</sup> Ibid., 63.
- <sup>76</sup> Ibid., 185.
- <sup>77</sup> Ibid., 186.
- <sup>78</sup> Ibid., 190.
- <sup>79</sup> One cannot imagine, of course, that Gouldner was not self-aware enough to see *himself* as a member of the New Class.
- <sup>80</sup> Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*, 81.
- <sup>81</sup> “The paradox of the New Class is that it is both emancipatory *and* elitist.” Ibid., 84.
- <sup>82</sup> Ibid., 86.
- <sup>83</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>85</sup> “Ideologists, in brief, believe in the power of the idea as vested in the word,” and are “oriented – either by inner conviction or outward circumstance – to a grammar of rationality.” Their ideology, in turn, both “permits the mobilization of power and, at the same time, allows its full and unrestrained discharge,” thus forming “a call to action – a ‘command’ grounded in a social theory – in a world-referencing discourse that presumably justifies that call.” Ideologists are thus committed to “the principle of the unity of theory and practice mediate by rational discourse.” Gouldner, *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology*, 27, 29, 30-31, & 39; see also Ibid., 79 (“it is characteristic of the grammar of ideology that it calls for the unity of theory and practice; that it seeks to change the world; that it is discourse on behalf of public projects of social reconstruction”).

<sup>86</sup> “We might say that ideology has a certain ‘overconfidence’ concerning its own empirical grounding. It takes this grounding as given rather than treating it as problematic and as susceptible to critical reexamination. In effect, ideology acts as if all relevant empirical issues have been resolved satisfactorily. For ideology, then, there no longer seems to be any question of fact or, more exactly, questions of fact that have policy relevance.” Ibid., 46.

<sup>87</sup> Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*, 84.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>90</sup> Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*, 86.

<sup>91</sup> Gouldner, *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology*, 49.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>93</sup> “All Cretans are liars,” said Epimenides, the Cretan.

<sup>94</sup> Gouldner, *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology*, 270.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>96</sup> Gouldner, *The Two Marxisms*, 55 (emphasis in original).

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 53 & 382.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 86-87.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 381.

<sup>103</sup> Not for nothing, perhaps, do many of America’s MAGA movement seem to imagine themselves kindred spirits with the romanticized revolutionaries of Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables* – at least as that 1862 novel was [interpreted through the Bowdlerizing pop-culture prism of a Broadway musical](#) –fighting for the common Man against cynical forces of repression.

<sup>104</sup> This famous phrase, of course, originates with the Marxist historian Benedict Anderson. In his account, the modern “nation” is “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet the, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. ... [And it is] imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them ... has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind.” In fact, he wrote, “all

communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined.” Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (Verso, 1991), 6-7.

105 Ibid., 75.

106 See, e.g., Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*, 54 & 57.

107 Field, *Furious Minds*, 123 & 126. These include men – and they *are* all men – who are currently professors at major universities such as Patrick Deneen and the “common good” theoretician Adrian Vermeule, but also Right-wingers such as Second Trump Administration official Darren Beattie (with a PhD from Duke University PhD), the Aleksandr Dugin popularizer Michael Miller (with one from the University of Toronto), and “Bronze Age Pervert” Costin Alamariu (a PhD from Yale).

108 Field, *Furious Minds*, 86-87 (discussing Deneen’s work).

109 [According to Curtis Yarvin](#), a “Coriolanus conservative is anyone with an upper-class background who, despairing at the utter bankruptcy of his class and the regime it staffs, defects to the barbarians.” Such “Coriolanus types,” he claims, are in many cases “already Marxists,” know “how to think in Marxist logic,” and are thus able to “use Marxist logic against the upper class.” “We are all Coriolanus,” says Yarvin.

110 Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*, 84.

111 Ibid., 61.

112 See Field, *Furious Minds*, 297.

113 See, e.g., Field, *Furious Minds*, 308.

114 See, e.g., Field, *Furious Minds*, 249.

115 See, e.g., Field, *Furious Minds*, 105.

116 Christophe Jaffrelot, *Modi’s India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy* (Princeton University Press, 2019), 234, 399, 405, & 451.

117 Andrei Soldatov & Irina Borogan, *The Compatriots: The Brutal and Chaotic History of Russia’s Exiles, Emigres, and Agents Abroad* (Public Affairs Press, 2019), 258-65 (describing the emergence of “Global Russians”).

118 David Goodhart, *The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics* (Hurst & Company, 2017); see also, e.g., Joel Kotkin, *The Coming of Neo-Feudalism: A Warning to the Global Middle Class* (Encounter Books, 2020), 122-23 (discussing Goodhart).

119 Pankaj Mishra, *Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2017), 14-15.

120 Kotkin, *The Coming of Neo-Feudalism*, 120-25.

121 Most of the previous two paragraphs draw upon Mishra, *Age of Anger*, 25, 31, 35, 76-80, 139-40, 271, 331-34, 339, & 341.

122 Alvin Gouldner would presumably remind us that the intellectuals, activists, and organizers of the anti-cosmopolitan axis are likely *themselves* members and products of the New Class – making the core of the fight in many ways a struggle for power *within* that globalized elite – but let’s leave that aside for the moment.

123 Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*, 28 (emphasis deleted).

124 Oddly, the leading proponent of such an approach in the world today would seem to be the People’s Republic of China, which has [proclaimed itself quite willing to go to war](#) if Taiwan does no more than officially to describe itself as “independent.”

125 Gouldner, *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology*, 71.

126 Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*, 84.

<sup>127</sup> Field, *Furious Minds*, 122, 310, & 315-23.

<sup>128</sup> Gouldner, *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology*, 270.

<sup>129</sup> Christopher Ford & Nigel Biggar, “Rebutting Sino-Russian Political Discourse and Getting Rights Right,” *Defense & Strategic Studies Online*, vol. 1, no. 2, Winter 2025, 17-24.

<sup>130</sup> Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*, 64.

<sup>131</sup> For the zealot, moderation on one’s own side is perhaps even more frightening even than a rival extremism; its very *reasonableness* must feel both deeply alien and dangerously seductive. For the fanatic, moderation is apostasy, and apostasy is a greater sin than mere nonbelief.