

Pre-Convention Bulletin #1

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Inside This Bulletin

This is the first pre-convention bulletin to be published in preparation for the ISO's 2013 National Convention, which will be held in Chicago on February 16-18. (Please note that these dates are the Saturday, Sunday and Monday of Presidents' Day weekend – which will hopefully make it easier for delegates who have a day off on that Monday from school or work.)

The national convention is the organization's highest decision-making body. It is our main opportunity to generalize the experience of local branches across the whole organization, review and assess the ISO's work over the past year and map out our tasks for the coming year. The convention also elects the ISO's national leadership bodies.

Convention delegates are elected by local branches at a ratio of one delegate for the first five dues-paying members, and one delegate for every eight dues-paying members thereafter.

The convention is open only to delegates and invited guests, subject to approval by the steering committee. This is why the *pre-convention* discussion period is so important—it lays the basis for the discussion at the convention and gives all members an opportunity to contribute to it.

Every member should be involved in the pre-convention discussions that will take place in the coming weeks in order to ensure the fullest and

most democratic debate possible. Branches should begin discussions of documents and debates beginning with this first bulletin. We will produce as many bulletins as needed as other documents are received.

All members who are in good standing are invited to contribute documents and/or resolutions to the pre-convention discussion bulletins. We will produce as many bulletins as necessary. Please try to keep your contribution to 1,000 words or less. We can make exceptions to this rule for documents on major political issues, but experience has shown that comrades are far less likely to read a longer document than a shorter one on most subjects. So the shorter your document is – and the sooner it arrives – the more likely it will be read and considered by the largest number of members.

Your branch can choose to hold pre-convention discussions at branch meetings or as events separate from branch meetings. **Please be sure, however, to limit all pre-convention discussions (and documents) ONLY TO DUES-PAYING MEMBERS OF THE ISO.** If you believe that close contacts will benefit from the pre-convention discussion, then encourage them to join the ISO and take part!

Please notify Sharon at the national office (sharon@internationalsocialist.org) if you plan to submit a document and/or resolution, so we can plan bulletin production. Thanks.

The state of U.S. Politics

1. The results of the 2012 national election revealed a much more liberal and diverse U.S. electorate than the U.S. political establishment recognizes. Despite this, the U.S. ruling class's single-minded commitment to austerity remains unchanged. The future of U.S. politics will depend on how "our side," broadly defined, confronts the challenge of austerity in the next period.
2. The victory of President Obama and the Democrats in 2012 was unambiguous and decisive. Obama beat Republican challenger Romney by more than 4.5 million votes nationwide, while Democrats tallied more votes than Republicans in both the Senate and House races. Romney ended up with about 47 percent of the national vote—an ironic result, given his earlier disparagement of the "47 percent" living on government handouts. This produced a net gain of two Senate seats and eight House seats for Democrats. Although Democrats won more than 1 million votes in House races nationwide, GOP-led gerrymandering allowed Republicans to hold onto the House. The radical historian Van Gosse described the Democratic Party's victory—its fifth popular vote victory in the six presidential elections held since 1992—as evidence of "realignment towards a socially progressive, center-right, post-Fordist party, with one foot in neoliberal orthodoxy (think Summers and Geithner), and the other in what's left of the "functionally social-democratic" base (think Ohio and Michigan, where nationalizing the auto industry in 2009 secured national victory in 2012)."¹
3. More importantly, the election revealed a liberal trend among the electorate that was younger, more female and more non-white than most mainstream commentators predicted. Referenda results showed victories for marriage equality, immigration rights, abortion rights, union political rights and marijuana legalization. Exit polls showed the electorate overwhelmingly supporting Obama's repeated calls for increased taxes on the rich. Indeed, it largely opposed Romney because it associated him with supporting policies favoring the rich. Even though the groups that were decisive in reelecting Obama were those most likely to have suffered in the Great Recession and its subsequent weak recovery, they stuck with Obama because they concluded that Romney and the GOP would only have made things worse.
4. At the same time, the election results left the national GOP in a shambles, as leading Republicans from the Romney campaign to pundits, indicated shock and surprise. Whether the Romney camp was truly as clueless as its post-election apologies suggested is debatable. But the fact remains that "Team Red" outspent "Team Blue" (\$1.23 billion to \$1.1 billion) and, despite economic malaise and a widespread sense of disappointment in Obama, still lost handily. GOP apparatchiks attributed Romney's loss to a list of technical and tactical failures, eliding the core reason: its agenda is unpopular. *National Review* writer Ramesh Ponnuru, put it, in one of the more honest conservative election post-mortems:

The perception that the Republican Party serves the interests only of the rich underlies all the demographic weaknesses that get discussed in narrower terms. Hispanics do not vote for the Democrats solely because of immigration. Many of them are poor and lack health insurance, and they hear nothing from the Republicans but a lot from the Democrats about bettering their situation. Young people, too, are economically insecure, especially these days. If Republicans found a way to apply conservative principles in ways that offered tangible benefits to most voters and then talked about this agenda in those terms, they would improve their standing among all of these groups while also increasing their appeal to white working-class voters. For that matter, higher-income voters would prefer candidates who seem practical and solution-oriented. Better "communications skills," that perennial item on the wish list of losing parties, will achieve little if the party does not have an appealing agenda to communicate.

Despair has led many Republicans to question their earlier confidence that America is a "center-right country." It is certainly a country that has strong conservative impulses: skepticism of government, respect for religion, concern for the family. What the country does not have is a

center-right party that explains how to act on these impulses to improve the national condition. Until it does, it won't have a center-right political majority either.ⁱⁱ

Liberal economist Paul Krugman went further, declaring “So Republicans have suffered more than an election defeat, they’ve seen the collapse of a decades-long project” of trying to repeal the New Deal and Great Society.ⁱⁱⁱ

Even if the GOP’s generations’-long political project has run its course, that does not mean it is planning to reevaluate or to change course in any meaningful way. The Michigan GOP’s forcing through “right to work” legislation on a day’s notice in December should end that speculation. Even though Democrats swept the board on all national-level elections, the Republicans remain in control of 30 state governorships and hold one-party control in “blue” states like Pennsylvania, Florida and Wisconsin. As a result, conservatives and Republican apparatchiks have evidence that allows them to convince themselves that the U.S. public did not repudiate them or their policies. In positioning themselves for presidential runs in 2016, figures like Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI) and Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) have retooled GOP rhetoric without changing any of the hard-right substance with which they are identified. George W. Bush’s and Karl Rove’s “compassionate conservatism,” the last attempt to repackage conservatism for a broader audience, fit with a period (the early 2000s) of relative economic boom. In an epoch of austerity, the most zealous advocates for slashing and burning the welfare state will want to maintain a hard-right GOP as one of their political instruments. And if Democrats act as the “responsible” party of austerity, the GOP can opportunistically win support in opposition. The GOP may even be able to come back behind a slate of candidates who “look more like America”: Rubio, Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal, or South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley.

5. Judging from exit and opinion polls, President Obama and the Democrats emerged with a popular “mandate” centered on several main planks: focus on jobs and the economy, rather than the deficit; increase taxes on the rich; and protect “entitlements” (i.e. Social Security, Medicare or Medicaid).^{iv} In the subsequent White House-GOP negotiations on largely contrived “fiscal cliff,” the White House is wedded (we think!) only to the tax-raising plank of that program. It is more than willing to seek a deal that cuts entitlements in some way. The tradeoff of tax increases for entitlement cuts as a means to resolve the “fiscal cliff” has become the conventional Washington wisdom. Moreover, the White House has also signaled its willingness to allow the payroll tax holiday—the highly stimulative tax cut targeted to working people—to expire, raising the taxes of a median-salary worker by \$1,000 or more.
 - a. Obama has solicited help from leading CEOs, such as Honeywell’s David Cote and GE’s Jeffrey Immelt, to press the GOP to accept higher income taxes. Cote and Immelt are among the CEOs who bankrolled the corporate “Fix the Debt” campaign that declares “Any realistic solution to our budget problems must cut out wasteful and low priority spending, must slow the growth of unsustainable entitlement costs, and must simplify the tax code and eliminate loopholes through pro-growth and revenue-positive tax reform. The recommendations of the Simpson-Bowles National Commission On Fiscal Responsibility and Reform and other recent bipartisan efforts can serve as an effective framework for a plan to reduce the federal debt by more than \$4 trillion over ten years.”^v
6. Official Washington concedes that Obama has the “leverage” to win increased taxes on the rich. But Obama is also seeking to rationalize entitlements and even to rewrite the corporate tax code. The White House may sell this rotten compromise as the price that had to be paid to avoid a Republican attempt to hold hostage the raising of the federal debt ceiling in 2013. But it’s clear that Obama has long sought a “grand bargain” along the lines of the 2010 Simpson-Bowles commission proposal. Whatever the outcome of the negotiations around the “fiscal cliff,” it’s clear that the White House and congressional Democrats have “locked in” austerity measures for at least the next decade. This was the outcome of the Congress-White House deal over the debt ceiling in 2011, which established annual “caps” on domestic non-defense discretionary spending. A deal with the GOP in early 2013 will only reinforce the path of austerity.

7. The condition of the U.S. economy over the next period will also shape the contours of U.S. politics. In October, International Monetary Fund analysts predicted a 1 in 6 chance of the global economy growing at a rate of less than 2 percent, “which would be consistent with a recession in advanced economies and low growth in emerging market and developing economies.” Without acknowledging its own role in enforcing an austerity regime on the Euro zone, it labeled the Euro crisis the “most obvious threat to the global outlook.” At the same time, it warned the U.S. government that a failure to address the “fiscal cliff” and to raise the federal debt ceiling could cause the U.S. to “fall back into a recession.”^{vi} Even the IMF’s rather guarded prediction puts the chance of recession at 1 in 6. Most mainstream economists predict the U.S. will continue its slow recovery from the depths of the recession, with a possibility that the U.S. economy will accelerate in the second half to 2013 and into 2014.^{vii} The depression in the housing and construction industry bottomed in 2012, and state and local government cuts also appear to have stopped. As a result, two major factors that have contributed to economic decline over the last six years may have finally reversed their slide, and may now add to economic growth.^{viii}
 - a. But even if the economy continues its slow recovery, unemployment declines, and public opinion credits Obama and the Democrats with ending the “Great Recession,” the resulting economy will leave the U.S. working class worse off than its forebears of only a generation ago. Unemployment will likely remain above 7 percent, and record numbers of American workers will have remained out of work for years. Median U.S. family incomes, after almost four years of economic recovery, stand at 1996 levels.^{ix} The widely touted manufacturing renaissance under Obama has returned only about one-tenth of the 5 million manufacturing jobs lost in the first decade of the 2000s, and it is based on the reduction of U.S. unit production costs by 11 percent between 2002 and 2010.^x The U.S. is well on its way to becoming the low-wage neoliberal economy that Corporate America has desired for decades. The Obama economic strategy envisions an economy, built to compete with China, resting on these foundations: reindustrialization based on low wages; weak or nonexistent unions; cheap energy from tar sands and oil shale (obtained via fracking); and a substantial cut in the social wage. This will be the complement to a still-immense Pentagon budget built to contain China militarily.
8. Although the electorate emphatically rejected the plutocratic austerity-driven politics of Romney, Obama looks set to deliver them austerity nonetheless. The wide gap between popular aspirations, electoral “voice” and actual government results underscores what might be called a “crisis of representation.” Public opinion lies far to the left of the political establishment, and distrust of big business and politicians is high, but the organizations that are supposed to represent working people are weak or captive to the Democratic Party. In the wake of the success of anti-labor attacks in Michigan and Wisconsin, organized labor is approaching a tipping point beyond which it will cease to have a meaningful role in the national political economy.
9. Since at least early 2011, “our side” of the class divide has demonstrated its desire to challenge the dominant politics of austerity. From the Wisconsin uprising, through Occupy, through the fall 2012 Chicago teachers’ strike, it’s clear that large numbers of workers and young people (and young workers) are fed up with an economy and government that delivers the majority of its benefits to the corporations and richest 1 percent. Yet, with the important exception of the Chicago teachers’ strike, all of these movements against austerity did not succeed in pushing back the austerity drive. Wisconsin’s promise was squandered through electoralism. The government pushed Occupy off the streets while liberals co-opted its atmospherics (rather than its substance) for the 2012 election. Organized labor’s pathetic response to the existential attack in Michigan—essentially conceding the fight in 2012 while promising to wage an electoral campaign in 2014— underscored how singular the Chicago teachers’ victory was. Michigan illustrated that the main leadership of U.S. labor has no strategy to defend its members outside of Democratic Party electoralism. It is merely committed to managing the decline of its organizations. But in retreating to avoid a complete rout, it is actually bringing itself closer to the “union-free” environment that labor haters want.

10. The struggles against oppression and exploitation of the last two years are important, even if they have not attained the scale that they would need to really shift the austerity drive. Struggles like those listed above, and others (e.g. the campaigns against Wal-Mart, local struggles against racism and police violence, environmental struggles around climate change) have helped a new generation of fighters to identify and solidarize with each other. They are laying the groundwork for future (hopefully) larger struggles to come. And they are occasioning debates among activists about what is really necessary to change society.
11. For the younger, more radical immediate periphery of the ISO, the election period had a dampening impact on struggle, even for those who lived in the “non-swing-state” areas of the country that the election bypassed. The election didn’t prevent all struggles (the CTU strike in Chicago being a prime example), but election period still weighed on activism. With the election over, its dampening impact has also been lifted. The ISO can, and should, take the lead in pushing for activism. Obama and the Democrats made (or implied) a number of promises to the “emerging electorate,” for example, promises on immigration reform and marriage equality. Take the example of immigration reform. We know from experience that if the White House advances an immigration reform bill, it’s likely to follow the outlines of the Schumer-Graham bill that emphasizes “enforcement” and falls far short of the demands of immigrant rights activists. For many “DREAMers,” whose activism helped put immigration reform back on the White House agenda, this sort of a compromise will amount to a sell-out. Many will be open to an argument about the need for more action from below, as well as for the need to build a political alternative to two parties of big business.
12. The final point—about the possibility of the emergence of a political alternative—will bear watching over the next period. In 2012, support for third party alternatives to the left of the Democrats was low, and the campaigns for Jill Stein, Rosanne Barr, et al., were weak. Nevertheless, compared to 2008, when millions held “hope” in Obama, sympathy for an argument in favor of challenging the Democrats from the left increased. The “Occupy” milieu demonstrated this skepticism to the two big business parties, even if most of its members may have voted (grudgingly) for Obama and the Democrats. If the experience of the last neoliberal two-term Democratic administration provides guidance, the emergence of a substantial third party or electoral alternative can’t be ruled out. The 2000 Nader Green Party campaign provided a political vehicle for a layer of activists, fed up with eight years of Clintonism, to break to the Democratic Party’s left. While our emphasis will continue to be on building organizations that can mount a struggle against Washington’s austerity agenda, the struggles themselves will have a political echo whose sentiment we will want to encourage.
13. The struggle against the bosses’ austerity agenda will be a permanent feature of U.S. politics over the next period. The ISO will be involved in a long-term defense of working-class living standards against the austerity drive, whether this expresses itself in local or national politics. As assumptions held for a lifetime (e.g. that Social Security is the “third rail” of U.S. politics or that a college education is a ticket to the middle class) are shattered, a growing minority of people will draw radical conclusions about the means and ends of the struggle. For example, labor will have to engage in risky struggles, like the CTU strike, simply to survive, let alone lead the working class forward. The shock from austerity may not be as dramatic as is being felt in southern Europe today, but it will present a serious challenge to today’s (and future) social movements. But it will be on this terrain of struggle that a new generation of revolutionaries will be formed.

Lance S., for the ISO steering committee

ⁱ Van Gosse, “The Realignment of American Politics: Towards a Mass Party of the Center,” Portside, December 19, 2012.

ⁱⁱ Ramesh Ponnuru, “The Party’s Problem,” National Review Online, November 14, 2012, <http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/333344/party-s-problem-ramesh-ponnuru?pg=3>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Paul Krugman, “The GOP’s Existential Crisis,” *New York Times*, December 13, 2012.

^{iv} Christian E. Weller, “Continuing Our Resilient Economic Recovery,” December 11, 2012, Center for American Progress Action Fund, cites a number of surveys emphasizing these points.

^v The “Fix the Debt” campaign has enlisted hundreds of leading CEOs to press members of Congress to support the plan of “Fix the Debt’s” founders, former Sen. Alan Simpson and former White House chief of staff Erskine Bowles. Its co-chairs are former GOP Sen. Judd Gregg and former DNC chair and Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell. In other words, it is a thoroughly bipartisan operation.

^{vi} Quotes from International Monetary Fund, “Executive Summary,” World Economic Outlook 2013 (October 2012). Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 2012, xvii – xix.

^{vii} See “NABE Outlook December 2012: NABE Panel Expects Modest But Accelerating Growth in 2013,” National Association of Business Economists, December 2012 at http://nabe.com/outlook/Dec_2012_NABE_Outlook.

^{viii} One well-known early critic of the housing bubble, Bill McBride of www.calculatedrisk.org, cited the bottoming housing market and local government job cuts as reasons to be optimistic about the future U.S. economy, in Joe Weisenthal, “The Genius Who Invented Economics Blogging Reveals How He Got Everything Right And What’s Coming Next,” *Business Insider*, November 21, 2012, at <http://www.businessinsider.com/bill-mcbride-of-calculated-risk-2012-11>.

Read more: <http://www.businessinsider.com/bill-mcbride-of-calculated-risk-2012-11#ixzz2FN53sPYX>

^{ix} See U.S. Census Bureau, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2011* (Washington, DC: Census Bureau, 2012), 5.

^x Gene Sperling, “Remarks at the Conference on the Renaissance of American Manufacturing,” March 27, 2012, available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/administration-official/sperling_-_renaissance_of_american_manufacturing_-_03_27_12.pdf.

Through which period are we passing?

Summary

1. The organization’s characterization of the political period stretching from the early 1990s until (ostensibly) the present moment as a “transition period” is wrong. In particular, the downturn in the class struggle in the US, which the “transition period” analysis holds was basically contained in the 1980s, in fact extended through the 2000s.

2. Maintaining the “transition period” analysis is dangerous because it encourages comrades to incorrectly expect “the upturn” is upon us, given that we have (correctly) identified the period since late 2008 as a “new era.”

Stuck in transition

This document will primarily critique the line developed in the Steering Committee’s “Organizational Perspectives, Part I: Why is the ‘transition period’ taking so long?” which appeared in *Pre-Convention Bulletin #1* of the 2007 Convention series.^x In that document the “transition period” is defined as “the phase after the end of the ‘downturn’ in class struggle that characterized the 1980s and before the onset of a future upturn in struggle.”

This is a perfectly legitimate definition as far as it goes. But as the very title of that document suggests, it is also legitimate to wonder at the usefulness of thinking about a “transition” that had been, at that time, going on for some dozen-odd years. At this time, we have undergone roughly *twenty years* of the “transition.” We seem to be, as it were, stuck in transition.

Now the Steering Committee does state clearly that “the transition period was intended to define a particular phase of the class struggle, *not* to summarize every aspect of U.S. politics since the early 1990s” [original emphasis]; the document goes on to concretely describe a number of moments within the period. It is always essential to “fill out” any generalization, as social reality is always complex and contradictory--but no amount of “complicating” the analysis can elide the fact that we seem to be passing through a distinctly untransitioning transition.

At some level, the “transition period” perspective is saying something totally uncontroversial for Marxists: that class struggle cannot be permanently suppressed under capitalism; if it declines at one point in history, it will inevitably rise again. But this insight, while of course fundamental, is not in itself sufficient to generate a perspective, since it operates at the highest level of abstraction. (It is a statement about the capitalist mode of social production in general.)

Even more damaging to the “transition period” argument as we have formulated it is the fact that the downturn in class struggle, alleged to have ended along with the 1980s, actually extended through the 2000s. This can be seen very clearly through an examination of strike statistics. The Bureau of Labor Statistics maintains records on every major work stoppage (ie, strike or lockout involving at least 1000 workers lasting at least one shift) in the US; the series data goes back to 1947, but we need only concern ourselves here with data from, say, 1970. In the table below I show the total number of stoppages in each of the four full decades since 1970, along with the total number of workers involved.^x

	1970-79	1980-89	1990-99	2000-09
Number of stoppages	2,888	831	347	201
Workers involved (thousands)^x	14,878	5,066	2,709	1,283

The trend is unmistakable: an *exponential decline in the level of class struggle throughout the entire neoliberal period*, inasmuch as this level is measured by stoppage statistics. Although the rate of decline is certainly largest during the 1980s, the evidence gives no reason to think that the downturn was finished by the early 1990s.

There are a few objections that might be raised at this point. First, it could be argued that the data is not complete, since it omits small stoppages. This is true, but I only claim that the data is evidence of the trajectory of class struggle, not the full picture. It is not necessary--nor is it usually possible--to obtain absolutely complete data before drawing conclusions about the development of social phenomena.

More subtly, it could be claimed that the data structurally overlooks much of the working class because workplaces have become much smaller on average. But this is a misconception: in 2006, a US worker had about 700 coworkers on average, only 11% less than in 1975. In fact, a service worker in 2006 had 970 coworkers on average.^x The average manufacturing worker does labor in a much smaller shop--about half the size of the 1975 shop--but this is itself a result of the decline in class struggle: bosses have been able to squeeze more out of fewer workers, plus labor quiescence has allowed capital to stretch supply lines without fear of interruptions in production.^x In short, there is not much case to be made that the decline in large workplace confrontations is being made up for by a flowering of smaller conflicts.

Finally, one might argue that because the class struggle cannot be reduced to large strikes alone, there is no inconsistency in claiming that the downturn in class struggle *generally* ended in the 1980s, while the decline in big strikes *specifically* continued unabated. There is substantial truth in this argument: BLS statistics do not record the eruption of the global justice, antiwar, immigrant rights, or other movements, even though these were clearly manifestations of class struggle. Here we must recall, however, that the workplace is the fundamental locus of struggle for the working class; the power of the working class rests, in the final instance, *entirely* on its ability to stop the production (and turnover) of capital.

Thus the disorganization of the working class in the workplace cannot be “balanced out” by increased activity in the streets--this is like saying that a stalling engine is “balanced out” by nice tires. Of course the level of “political” class struggle (movements) may be, at any given moment, more or less independent of the level of “economic” class struggle (strikes)--but to assert that these levels have become delinked for

some twenty years strains the Marxist logic. (If such things were possible, it would not be clear why the anarchist arguments about the “autonomy” of each struggle from every other are not, after all, correct.) On the contrary, the weakness of the struggle at the point of production *underlies* the many problems encountered in the social movements, such as the difficulty of sustaining them.

The aspect of the “transitional period” perspective that has, in my view, been quite correct is the identification of a broadly leftward shift in mass consciousness accompanied by the development of a minority drawing distinctly radical conclusions. However, *general progress in the realm of ideas has been combined with general retrogression in the realm of activity*. This contradictory reality deserves further analysis--I believe it is crucial to understanding the dynamics of those struggles that have arisen--but a break with the “transitional period” perspective is required before the question can even be properly posed.

Legends of the rise

I am sure that I do not have to motivate the importance of perspectives generally, but some comrades may question the worth of initiating a controversy over a somewhat old analysis concerning years that many of our members regard as prehistorical. I would give two replies. First, the “transitional period” perspective spelled out in the 2007 Organizational Perspectives is “old” only in the sense that it was articulated a long time ago; it is still, to my knowledge, what the organization thinks is going on in the world.

More substantially, the organization’s prevailing understanding of the “transition period” predisposes us to serious perspectives errors in the *current* moment. Recall that the schema advanced in the 2007 Organizational Perspectives is essentially “downturn-transition-upturn.” Furthermore, US and world politics entered a “new era” in late 2008, as the organization has correctly recognized; see, for example, the 2010 Organizational Perspectives.^x Thus if one assumes that the Organizational Perspectives in 2007 and 2010 are talking about more or less the same things--which is rather suggested by the identical titles--the natural conclusion is that *we are out of the transition and entering the upturn*.

To be clear: the organization has not said that we’ve entered an upturn in class struggle. But I cannot see why we aren’t saying this, assuming that both the “transitional period” and the “new era” perspectives are correct. Indeed, this logical trap seems to underlie the perspectives errors we made in 2009; as the 2010 Organizational Perspectives conceded, “our expectation that the level of struggle would continue to rise after Obama took office turned out to be *very wrong*” [original emphasis].^x Obviously--and to our credit--we corrected the mistakes we made in 2009--but we have not, in my view, corrected the really foundational mistakes, which are embedded in the old perspective of the “transitional period.”

If we reject the perspective of the “transitional period,” what should replace it? My own view--which I can only present very schematically here--is that instead of the “downturn-transition-upturn” schema, we should periodize capitalism by using Trotsky’s concept of the *capitalist equilibrium*.^x Per this model, we observe a relatively stable capitalist equilibrium spanning from the early 1980s until 2008; ie, neoliberalism. Since the crash of 2008, equilibrium has been lost and not regained. It will be regained--there is, alas, no indication of the “death agony” of capitalism--but the parameters of the new equilibrium are not yet determined. This perspective has the advantage of being completely compatible with the “new era” perspective, without prefiguring the trajectory of class struggle.^x

In the history of the Marxist movement, perhaps nothing has caused groups to come to more grief than misunderstanding the political period. Our situation is not at all grievous, of course, but neither is there any magic that protects us from the pitfalls that have surprised organizations in the past. Our struggle is long and difficult, and we naturally want to see our labors bear fruit. Yet what we expect from the world is of no account to the world; we must be scientists of revolution, verifying or discarding our hypotheses with complete disinterestedness, seeking only the most accurate picture of the capitalist reality, so as all the more accurately to overthrow it.

Shaun J, Boston