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The Long New Deal

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ABSTRACT

Calls for a Green New Deal in the United States represent an opportunity to learn from, and avoid the mistakes of, the last New Deal. We outline not the suite of Franklin Delano Roosevelt-era policies that fell under the umbrella of New Deal, but the conditions of their possibility, and what the aftermath of the New Deal means for the United States and beyond. The success of a Green New Deal rests both on the mobilization of a counter-movement to backlash caused by, and a commitment to avoid the injustices furthered through, the original compact after which it is named.

KEYWORDS

Green New Deal; hegemony;
United States; militancy

I

Although an idea that has fermented for nearly two decades (Hertsgaard 2000; Elliott et al. 2008; Barbier 2010), the Green New Deal has recently burst into the public eye as a transformative project, one able to deal with the scale of the climate emergency (Aronoff et al. 2019; Klein 2019; Pettifor 2019; Rifkin 2019; Varoufakis and Adler 2019; Cox 2020; OSAE 2020). A version was proposed in the United States in 2019, let by Congressional Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Ed Markey (Ocasio-Cortez et al. 2019). Those concerned with the food system will have noted within that proposal the call for ‘a more sustainable food system that ensures universal access to healthy food’ (Ocasio-Cortez et al. 2019, 9). Further, the U.S. Green New Deal proposed to work ‘collaboratively with farmers and ranchers in the United States to remove pollution and greenhouse gas emissions from the agricultural sector’ (Ocasio-Cortez et al. 2019). It had the makings of a bonanza for rural America. Healthy food costs more than processed food (Jetter et al. 2019). Under a Green New Deal that helps Americans eat more healthy food, higher spending on meals might lead to greater rewards for its producers. And if the federal government were directing spending toward better food, and understood that well-managed soil can sequester carbon, sustainable farming might be a way to end America’s endemic rural poverty (Tickamyer, Sherman, and Warlick 2017).

Yet almost as soon as the Green New Deal was unveiled, the criticism piled on from agricultural quarters. Predictably, members of the American Farm Bureau criticized the proposal as ‘totally unrealistic’ (Nebraska Farm Bureau 2019). Perhaps more surprising, the National Farmers Union – one of the more left-leaning of the large farm

organizations – snubbed the Green New Deal for not recognizing ‘the essential contribution of rural America’ (Hagstrom and Clayton 2019). In the words of one rural political organizer, who requested anonymity because of their ongoing work with political campaigns, ‘the Green New Deal is fucking toxic in rural America’ (Anonymous, Personal Communication, 2019).

So why the haters in farm country? Some of the reaction to the announcement was procedural: the policy appeared to have been written without widespread consultation. Absent that involvement, it became easier for farmers to feel characteristically alienated from national politics. In the silence from a food movement that has demonstrated a bias towards urban consumers about their ongoing work around climate and sustainability, rural Americans could insert a familiar refrain: that farmers – particularly those involved with livestock – are agents of ecological destruction and, as such, the enemy of a sustainable future (Guthman and Brown 2016; Monbiot 2020).

Not all in farm country are of one mind. Farmers and others active in America’s rural social movements have written enthusiastically about the Green New Deal and its possibilities for family farms, about how it might spur things like rural repopulation, parity pricing models, and climate-friendly agriculture (Cullen 2019; Dugger 2019; Goodman 2019; Henderson 2019; Lutz and Jensen 2019). Were these writings to be presented in meetings and discussions around the Green New Deal in rural America, it may well be the case that an increasing number of farmers might see their interests aligned with the policy. But that such a recognition can only be imagined *after* organizing, *after* not simply writing but organizing around a different vision of farm country in the United States, is one piece of evidence for the Green New Deal’s being written against the hegemony of the state-industrial food system complex.

Rather than parse the variety of interpretations of hegemony (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Cox 1983; Laclau and Mouffe 1994; Kurtz 1996; Brown 2003), we offer a reading of Gramsci (1971) that emphasizes the concept of the historic bloc, a coalition that licenses and polices a dominant social order. The power within that bloc extends beyond brute force – it tries to establish dominance at the level of ‘common sense,’ styling ideas of what’s socially acceptable and what’s unthinkable. The dominant historic bloc in the United States today is an assembly of property owners, fossil fuel corporations, war-makers, tech giants, media outlets, health care management firms, industrialists, monopolists, state functionaries and, most importantly, *financiers* (Russi 2013; Clapp 2019), with cultural leadership from some workers and farmers. The reflexive criticism of the Green New Deal, before its details have even been hashed out, is an indicator of the dominant bloc’s hegemony.

The Green New Deal’s success depends on its organizers’ ability to refashion this common sense. That there was so little conversation, private or public, with movements in the food system before the release of the Green New Deal suggests that the projects’ authors might be guided by a theory of change that fails to prioritize the importance of counter-hegemonic organizing. To rewrite common sense is to unpick the alliances that the current bloc works to maintain, to find the fault lines that can pry that bloc apart, and to develop the organizational links that can build a counter-hegemonic bloc.

To further that project, we trace the origins of some of the most important alliances in the current configuration of forces in America’s food system, the first New Deal. We do not pretend to present a general history of the New Deal, nor a theoretical engagement

with food regimes literature over a world-ecology, both of which are projects for another time. We hope, instead, to contribute to an analysis that has, until recently (Berlet and Sunshine 2019; Edelman 2019; Montenegro de Wit et al. 2019), been lacking, to develop a perspective that might matter both to scholars of the ongoing struggles, and to activists in food and agriculture looking for substantive analysis. And to understand that it's worth at least gesturing at the world-ecology in which the New Deal's agricultural features emerged. 'Gesture' is the operative term here. Although we would, in a longer treatment, spend more time looking at the ways that US and British agricultural hegemony were achieved beyond the boundaries of the US (see, e.g. Winders 2009), our interests lie in highlighting some of the key processes at work prior to the New Deal, and in its aftermath.

The New Deal today appears as a miracle, an incredible moment in which the nation stood united behind Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his Keynesian policies to accomplish Big Things. Such a reading is only possible because the New Deal's working-class intellectual labor, and the history of class conflict throughout the 1930s, has been muted. The New Deal's victories were achieved not because the nation united behind them, but because the nation was profoundly divided (Collins and Goldberg 2014). The New Deal sat at the juncture of global financial and ecological crisis, and class struggle, and is most helpfully understood as a series of victories and defeats in the management of that struggle by an anxious bourgeoisie, across rural and urban America.

The resurgence of interest in a Green New Deal offers a chance to revisit the history of the original New Deal, and in particular the tactics and strategies around counter-hegemonic militancy. Today, labor militancy in the US is on the upswing. In 2018, there were twenty major strikes involving 485,000 workers (a little more than 0.1 percent of the US population), led by an inspirational series of education worker walkouts (BLS 2019b). Such struggles pale, however, next to the unrest that produced the original New Deal.

In the 1910s and 1920s, strikes and labor activism in America reached a zenith. These strikes were a symptom of sustained rural and urban militant organizing (Stock 2017). In 1918, H1N1 influenza killed 50 million people worldwide in the deadliest pandemic of the twentieth century, with the working class in the front line of the disease (Mamelund 2018) and, Esyllt Wynne Jones suggests, organizing for better conditions in its wake (2003). In 1919, the US saw 3,630 strikes involving 4,160,000 workers – about 4 percent of the country's total population (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1975, A1-8). As a reminder: 1920 was the year in which two immigrants from Italy, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, were arrested for armed robbery in a trial that saw tensions around immigration, race (for the Italians were not yet considered white [Berwick 2015]) and the role of anarchists in American political life achieve the level of a moral panic.

A thorough history of the New Deal would set north American worker militancy in the long history of rebellion and resistance to colonial contact, and the imperatives of capitalist expansion through frontiers. The history would certainly trace this militancy to the racial compromises at the end of the Civil War, and the tensions between white settler farmer militancy and predominantly black farmworker organizing, the rise of agricultural monopoly power centered in Chicago, the political ecology of Indigenous activism, the resentments around deflationary monetary policy and the rise of Bellamy's Nationalist Clubs (Bellamy 1888; Franklin 1938; Auerbach 1968; Cronon 1991).

With such a history in place, it would become clearer that one way to understand the present US (and international) imperial capitalist project is a long battle over placing the right kinds of people in control of the right kinds of nature to produce the most profit and order. Such an understanding would make clear both the ambition of the Green New Deal, the resistance to it, and the class tensions involved in organizing around it. When we examine the New Deal itself, we remark on the class dynamics of the process, and the conflicted position of smallholder farmers before tracing the undoing of the era, specifically through cultural, financial and agricultural policies aimed at erasing the history of class struggle through which the New Deal was founded. We conclude with some thoughts about the possibilities of food-system organizing around the Green New Deal. We begin, though, with an event that will have to serve as a metonymy for the political ecology of struggles over the food system in the Gilded Age, one that anticipates many of the salient elements of the New Deal: the Great Cowboy Strike of 1883 (Lopez 1977; Lause 2017).

II

Of the many tributaries that flowed into the original New Deal, we pick the Texas Cowboy Strike because of its surprising character and location (at least one prominent contemporary labor historian with whom we workshoped this paper had never heard of it) and because, as we suggest in the conclusion, it may be in the frontier of industrial meat production that the greatest opportunities for transformation in the Green New Deal might be found. The Cowboy Strike allows us to begin to weave, in miniature, a broader political-ecological approach that a larger historical project would require. The strike also takes place in a pivotal moment in the formation of the US industrial food- and political system, and is linked to the strategic resistance against it in the Populist movement. As vignettes go linking strategy and tactics, militancy and counter-hegemonic organizing, and the formation of the modern food system, this serves our purposes well.

In an admirable recent history, Specht (2019b) argues that between the Civil War's end in 1865 and the publication of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906), the United States became recognizable to twenty-first century observers as a republic. In the middle of this transformation from fissile settler state to capitalist imperium sits the Great Cowboy Strike of 1883. The myth of the cowboy, sitting proud, alone, and high in the saddle, is at odds with the reality of a wage worker conscious of the distinction between a class *für sich* and a class *an sich* (Fantasia 1995). Yet the facts are clear: cowboys organized around, and understood very well, the conditions of their exploitation on the 'open range' (Specht 2019b, 23).

The 'open range' is, as Hämmäläinen has argued (2010, 2008), the result of a complex world-ecology. The Comanche Empire, stretching from what is now Chihuahua, Mexico through the southern Great Plains was a nation in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries without an attendant liberal state. The Empire projected power, traded and flourished between New Spain and the United States in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, through a complex political ecology of grass; grass inside a horse ridden by a warrior is a way of transforming sunlight into martial power, just as grass in a bison is a way of turning sunlight and territory into food and hides and, then, under the right series of exchanges, into gold. The greatest threat to the Empire came not

from the disintegrating Spanish colony and the rise of Mexico so much as the colonial expansion of the United States. Although the Civil War had slowed the process of settler expansion, postbellum southerners saw in Comanche territory a different political ecology of grass, and the possibility of wealth not in the trade of bison, but of cattle.

Securing Comanche territory and its grass for cattle rather than bison required ideology and force. Cattle-ranching offered itself not merely as an opportunity to profit, but as an educational moment, a permanent fix to 'the Indian question.' Ranching was a demonstration by example of the civilizing disciplines of the United States most sacred covenant: private property.

Property is dead without its participation in networks of capitalist exchange, though, and cattle were a way of turning gold and silver into bovine flesh into more gold and silver – a circuit of Money-Cattle-Money'. The cattle-herding industry circulated capital, from Chicago, from the gold rush in the West, and from European bourses, through the frontiers between the United States and the Comanche Empire. From the 1870s, British investment in the US West shifted from speculation in gold and silver into what appeared to be the next sure thing: beef. A rancher need only buy a Longhorn – well adapted to the Texas trail – and drive it north to slaughter. 'Nature and a generous government provided the rest' observed Brayer (1949, 88). With profit margins between 400-700%, the returns to capital created an investment boom, and bubble. Just one company, American Pastoral, owned a 284,618 acre Texas ranch, with a capital base of \$1.5 m – over \$35 m in 2019 dollars (Brayer 1949, 92). Readers of William Cronon's magnificent *Nature's Metropolis* (1991) might understand the importance of capital markets in the creation of meat markets, but too rarely observe that the capital circulating from Chicago was often international, and that the effects of that capital's movements amplified the world ecological crises in extractive metal industries in the western states and Mexico, and projected certain kinds of power and imperatives to the United States' frontiers with Native Americans (Tutino 2013). As Sayre notes in a fine analysis, the boom in the frontier cattle industry, and then the subsequent bust, were signs not of the cyclic failure of ranching, but rather the birth pains of the industry we currently know by that name (1999). Property rights were invented and asserted at the frontier, and to police them, ranchers were able to summon the US Army, the Texas Rangers, and spawn the economic conditions that catapulted Samuel Colt to riches through his invention of a weapon suited to war with the Comanche, the six-shooter Empire (Jennings 2018).

In this changing political ecology, capitalists found resistance not only from those Native Americans, but from the workers deployed to drive the cattle over the 'cheap nature' that Texas appeared increasingly to enjoy in abundance (Mead 2017). As one Texas rancher put it, uniting the tropes of military power, the ecology of grass, and returns to capital, 'The six-shooter and free grass go in hand ... To monopolise the free grass a man must have a tough set of hands, whom he has to keep around him all the time, and they eat up the profits' (Perkins 1994, 326). 'The hands' were understood to be a necessary and always-too-expensive part of this circulation. Cowboy wages were low and seasonal, with long stretches of the year either spent in unemployment, surviving on alternative work away from the saddle, or – for a few 'top hands', the possibility of year-round employment on ranches. Competition for permanent work found Mexican, Native American, black and older cowboys systematically less likely to secure 'top hand' status than younger, white cowboys (Lopez 1977). The biological rhythms of bovine growth

and slaughter brought cowboys together only rarely, and it was during the spring ‘harvest’ drive that major labor actions occurred – at the moment at which investors were about to receive the return on their investment and therefore most vulnerable to strike activity. At the moment before harvest, Hutchinson notes that cowboys felt free to ask for almost anything, including three different kinds of pie a day, better coffee, and ‘one first-class knife to play Mumble-peg with’ (Hutchinson 1972, 325). Lause’s more sensitive reporting (2017) shows that leadership from the ranks of the LIT, LX and LS ranches met in the spring of 1883 to demand more substantive and thoughtful concessions from their bosses, including a minimum salary of \$50 per month and the recognition that good cooks should earn the same amount as those actively on the trail. In the ‘wall-to-wall’ character of this organizing demand – recognizing care work as work – and in its transcendence of racial division and discrimination by age, cowboys reflected the ‘intersectional’ priorities that mattered in their everyday lives (Yuval-Davis 2011).

Texas cowboys’ victory in 1883 led to strikes spreading in subsequent years from Texas to Wyoming (in 1886) but just as cowboys resisted their exploitation, capital fought back. Newspapers were overwhelmingly sympathetic to ranchers, from London – where *The Economist* monitored the cattle business and castigated the operations’ inefficiencies and the vicissitudes of weather (Specht 2019b) – to Chicago, where the media under-reported strike victories and participation. From the public broadcast of the strikers’ pariah status, to the organizing by ranch owners to blacklist troublesome workers, a sprawling domestic and international network helped to knit together a common-sense in which striking cowboys were outliers, troublemakers and, ultimately, unthinkable (Lause 2017). By 1888, a bursting of the beef investment bubble, strategic concessions, successful counter-mobilizing tactics by ranchers, a demonization of worker militancy, and a particularly brutal El Niño winter dealt the bloc of financiers, landowners, the militarized state, and their accompanying media a victory. So successful has been the amnesia around the strike wave that even among contemporary labor activists, it is rarely celebrated, much less understood as continuous with a history of southern resistance to racial capitalism and the circulation of capital through rural soil (Hild 2007).

This vignette about cowboy strikes offers a glimpse of the complex terrain on which resistance to capital was organized. That terrain was characterized by

- (1) Complex global financial arrangements
- (2) embedded within the web of life,
- (3) over a sedimented history of colonial genocide, and in the aftermath of a war over racialized slavery
- (4) with a working class that understood the answers to the questions of agrarian capitalism, and resisted through alliances and other organized operations
- (5) which recognized the importance of care work, and
- (6) found itself up against representations and knowledge in culture and media that prejudged a reasonable understanding of their history

No matter how fervently the Chicago press asserted to the contrary, the defeat of cowboy unionism didn’t signal the end of working-class agrarian resistance to capital’s circulation through land, commodities and labor. Indeed, the cowboy strike resonated with a broader understanding between workers and farmers of a common enmity against capital,

which itself informed a more complex and sophisticated counter-hegemonic bloc: the Populists. By the time the Texas cowboy strike was crushed, one of the largest social movements in US history was well underway. As Grattan summarizes, ‘by 1890, the National Farmers’ Alliance had organized some forty thousand local alliances across forty-three states and territories’ (Grattan 2016, 53). The Populist formation was able to straddle complex differences in race and class. Parsing these differences, Woodman suggests that ‘if large-scale planters became the agrarian New South’s big businessmen, the former yeomen by becoming commercial farmers—either as owners or renters of the land they worked—became the agrarian New South’s small businessmen. And if some former slaves also became commercial farmers, most became part of a new working class’ (Woodman 2001, 808). Despite these differences, there was a range of interests that a stratum of small-business farmers shared with workers. As Hild helpfully summarizes ‘[t]hey all stood to benefit from regulation of railroads, grain elevators, and warehouses, higher prices for cash crops, and, as debtors (a label that applied even to many southern planters of that era), inflated currency’ (Hild 2007, 5).

That bloc has been subject to a spectrum of political interpretations and a shifting historiography. The Populists have been represented as a mob of anti-Semites and racists (Hofstadter 1955), working class heroes (Goodwyn 1976), enemies of the working class (West 1986), canny small-business owners (Postel 2007) and, today, an inspiration for rural organizing in the twenty-first century (Grattan 2016; Stock 2017). Recent scholarship is helpful in framing the Populists as a counter-hegemonic force betrayed by Republican and Democratic party alike, not least for the contemporary lessons that it offers organizers for the Green New Deal.

Today’s scholarship has found features of Populism that have been overlooked in previous histories. For instance, strands within late nineteenth century rural American organizing understood gender equality (Strauss 1989), black power and racial solidarity (Gaither 1977; Ali 2006, 2010), and even monetary sovereignty. Populists developed sophisticated visions for cooperative credit services that could replace the power that East coast financiers were able to project through their control of the gold-backed money supply. Mooney points to the proposal of a ‘sub treasury’ in which farmers could deposit their harvest, to sell later in the year when prices recovered from the post-harvest lull and, in the meantime, use their stored grain as collateral on an automatic loan at low interest (Mooney and Majka 1995).

It is hard to underestimate the extent to which discussions of monetary policy mattered in nineteenth century working-class and agrarian political discussions. US deflation, from the 1860s to the 1879 return to the gold standard, led to economic stagnation and then depression after the Panic of 1893. The macroeconomic environment helped focus worker and farmer concerns over East coast power over the money supply. Family farmers were particularly worried about the deflationary effect of metallic currency. One of the earliest family farm organizations, The Grange – more formally The National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry – was founded in 1873 with, among other priorities, a firm eye to combatting railroad monopolies. Among the many organizations that emerged from it, from consumer to insurance cooperatives, was the Greenback Party, which from 1874 to 1889 campaigned on a unifying message of inflationary money-printing by the federal government (Naftalin 1956; McCabe 1969; Schneiberg, King, and Smith 2008; Wainwright 2012; DeCanio and Smidt 2013). Although short-lived, the Party had a long tail, at

least in terms of its trace in popular culture. Such was the discussion of monetary ideas that L. Frank Baum was able to synthesize them into *The Wizard of Oz*, a story which begins with a tornado – patterned on Mary Elizabeth Lease, whose Populist rallying cry of ‘raise less corn and more hell’ earned her the nicknames Mary Ellen, Yellin Ellen, and The Kansas Tornado – and in which the magical power of an ounce ‘Oz’ of gold holds great sway in the East, among other allusions (Rockoff 1990).

Although we don’t fall into the trap of seeing Populists as woke modern monetary theorists *avant la lettre* (Wray 2015), we do want to observe the process through which farmers came to theorize, and build alliances, through the praxis of organizing. Monetary policy, racial solidarity, patriarchy, debt and finance are not natural topics of dinner-table conversation. But they can become less alien when part of the movement project is basic economic and political literacy. As Charles Macune, head of the Southern Farmers Alliance from 1886–1889 put it, ‘[t]o induce the people to read is the first step. When people will read they will think, and whenever they begin to think the battle is more than half won’ (Postel 2007, 62). Libraries in which everything from Adam Smith to science fiction was shared and debated, and in which publications authored by American peasants circulated, pointed to a vibrant intellectual life among American farmers. Again, while celebrating its achievements, and the durability of the range of institutions it spawned, we don’t romanticize the Populist moment. We’re aware of its moments of bigotry and chauvinism. Indeed, one of the most important aporias lies in the self-constitution of the group as in the interest of ‘American farmers’ – a nativism and amnesia about the ongoing American colonial project (Singh 2017; Denvir 2020).

To summarize: the process through which late nineteenth century agricultural capitalism was resisted – and formed – came to include both an understanding of, and concrete political action against, finance, through an understanding of race, ecology, sexism and the power of media and knowledge. Then as now, the differences between Democratic and Republican Party appeared vast, but there was a great deal about the functioning of capitalism on which they agreed. The proposal for black and white yeoman farmers and workers to control their own monetary policy was a frontal attack on federal sovereignty. Through print, police, policy, Pinkertons and party political perfidy, the Populist movement was destroyed, and its signifier used to besmirch any proposal that appears without the blessing of authority. American farmers’ fortunes improved through the 1890s, in part because European crop failures drove US prices higher (Rockoff 1990). But the continuity of labor struggles, and the insults of US capitalism against workers and farmers became, once again, acute in the decade before the New Deal (Bissett 1999).

III

There are speculators all about, you know,
 Who are sure to help each other roll the ball,
 As the people they can fleece, and then take so much apiece,
 While the farmer is the man that feeds them all

Grange Melodies, 1891 (Lurie 1974, 118)

If the bases of capitalist agriculture were established in the nineteenth century, America’s twentieth-century battles were over the security of those underpinnings, with the militant

farmer and farm workers pitted against the owners and operators of agricultural industry. Class struggles in the early 1900s incubated the idea among the ruling class that part of the American agricultural project lay in cultivating the right kind of farmer, one who approximated their own self-image: white, conservative, and above all, a self-sufficient man of business. That farmer could be given the right kind of education to become the right kind of American entrepreneur invested in the normal functioning of markets and governments.

Agricultural extension services, which date to the foundation of land grant universities in the early 1860s, were key to producing both commodity crops and conservative farmers (Rogers 1988). Agricultural extension services were supported by the Chambers of Commerce and the General Education Board, funded by John D Rockefeller, before achieving government support under the 1914 Smith-Lever Act (Fiske 1989). Extension classes turned into national lobbying organizations for farmers who saw farming neither as a front line in class struggle, as some farmers unions did, nor as a keystone to broader community transformation and freedom from monopoly, as the Grange Movement did, but rather as a bulwark against rural insurrection (Mooney and Majka 1995; McCabe 1969). These conservative farmers had their own organizational form: the American Farm Bureau, the spawn of the Chamber of Commerce, alongside the Chamber's Roads and Alleys Bureau and Protection Bureau (Rogers 1988, 496).

George Naylor, a farmer and member of Family Farm Defenders, described to us the New Deal's prehistory like this: 'The big push to organize Farm Bureaus in the teens and twenties from Kansas on up through Iowa and north was intended to blunt the progress of the Socialist Party, Non-Partisan League, and Farmer-Labor organizing in the Dakotas and Minnesota' (Naylor 2019). Those organizations, which the Bureau was explicitly opposed, offered an alternative reading to a farm crisis that had begun at the end of World War I (Finegold 1982). The early 1920s saw American farmers suffer. European farmers were back in production after the First World War. Output rose, and prices fell (Shideler 1953). Farmers blamed speculators for depressing prices even further. A few toothless laws in 1921 and 1922 curbed some of the speculation, and the 1922 Capper-Volstead act allowed farmers' groups an exemption from monopoly laws in order to band together to drive up prices. Political activism among farmers generated the farmer-labor politics of the Conference for Progressive Political Action (CPPA) in 1922, whose candidate for the United States presidency, Robert La Follette, won Wisconsin in 1924 with socialist support.

The economic crises of the 1920s weren't restricted to farmers, nor to the United States (Arrighi 1994; Hobsbawm 1994; Wolf 1999). Runaway inflation in Europe led to a policy that decisively precipitated the Great Depression – the international commitment to the gold standard led by the US (Eichengreen and Temin 2000). The deflationary impact of that policy, and the accompanying austerity under the Hoover administration, created a signal moment in the history of global capitalism. It was hard in 1932 for any capitalist to point to a country in which liberal capitalism offered anything approaching a coherent vision for the future. The rise of fascism in Europe and Asia offered alternatives to the capitalist order in which many US financiers were invested (Migone 2015), but against which the broad coalition that swept Roosevelt to power was able to organize. Among the demands made of Roosevelt's administration by farmers was one that dated from the Populist era – that of 'parity'. The policy called for an income that provided 'parity' with the costs of industrial goods that farmers needed to survive. As Shideler notes,

A full ten years before [the Agricultural Adjustment Act of] 1933, the parity concept was established in the farmers' consciousness. It was a product of the severe crisis which hit agriculture in 1920 and 1921, and its antecedents reach back fifty years or more before that. Fundamental to the idea of parity is the conviction of inequality in economic affairs, a grievance that was aired in the literature of agrarian protest after the Civil War. (Shideler 1953, 77)

Rural and urban militancy continued through the 1930s, with a particular focus on the injustices suffered by working class laborers and farmers at the hands of capital. The scene in *The Grapes of Wrath*, in which an agent of repossession explains a Dust-Bowl era Oklahoma sharecropper's eviction to him is perhaps the most powerful example of this (Steinbeck 1939). What Steinbeck neglected was that there was widespread resistance to foreclosure – indeed, it was through the resistance to banks' takeover of farm land that the US Supreme Court ultimately came to accept the New Deal (Fliter and Hoff 2012). Farmer-agitators in the 1920s and 1930s knew well that the fattest of the fat cats were to be found in finance. The Farmer's Holiday Movement, which shared leadership with the Iowa Farmers Union, knew their enemies to be the Chicago grain traders, Wall Street financiers, and railroad monopolies (Shover 1965). In their 1932 Union Farmer newspaper, they called for a strike against those interests:

We can't continue longer now
 Upon our weary way
 We're forced to halt upon life's trail
 And call a 'holiday.'
 Let's call a Farmer's Holiday
 A Holiday let's hold
 We'll eat our wheat and ham and eggs,
 And let them eat their gold.

Iowa Union Farmer, Feb. 27, 1932 (Stevens 2014, 109)

After all, the logic ran, if banks could have a holiday, why couldn't farmers take a day off, withhold their output from the market, and see what the city swells would eat if they couldn't eat greenbacks? It was tactics like these, deployed by militants in the Iowa Farmers Union, that articulated with strategies to force radical policies into the New Deal. Again, it doesn't make sense to see the New Deal as the permanent triumph of a particular group, but a moment in the making of a bloc, one that was itself the result of a process of struggle. The bloc was even given a name by a correspondent to one of FDR's advisors: 'there are no parties left. Farmers are members of the Roosevelt party' (Fite 1962, 660). One way that the Roosevelt party made itself felt, in rural and urban politics, was through the technology of the strike. Through the New Deal Era, the number of strike actions *increased* year-on-year from 1930–1937 as [Figure 1](#) shows.

There's evidence that it worked for some members of that bloc. Absent this militancy, the Federal Government raised prices for farmers through a Federal Farm Board, created in 1929. But it was only after protest and political engagement under the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 and again in 1938 that the government expanded its programs to store and distribute that food (Sumner, Alston, and Glauber 2010). In a June 6, 1934 radio address, Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace announced the need for 'an ever-normal granary, such as had been used in ancient China and again in Bible times, to

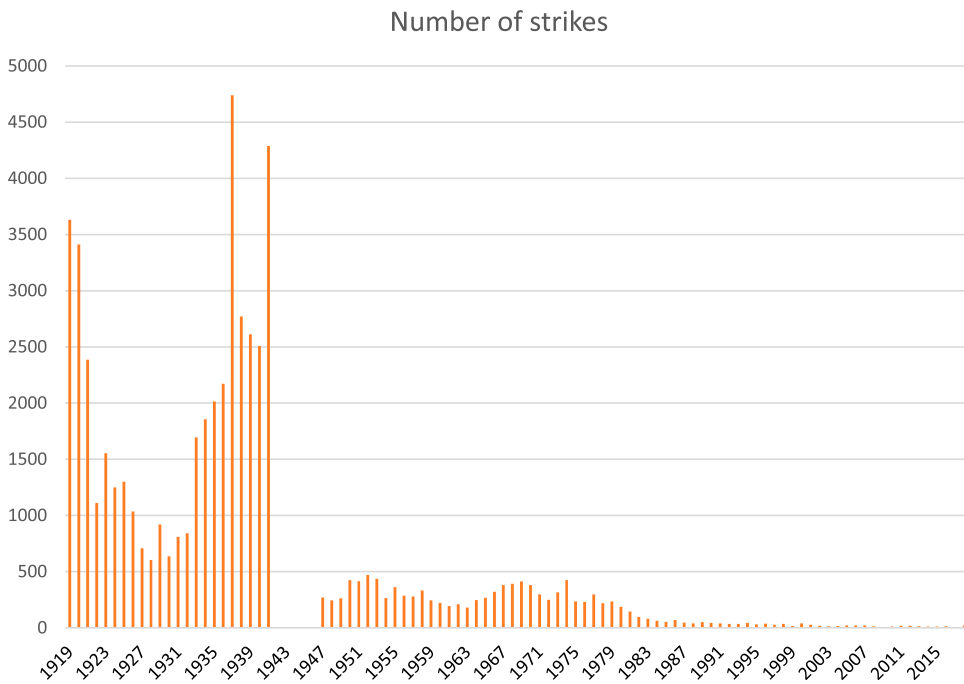


Figure 1. Strikes in the United States since 1919. Sources: USDL (1942); Bureau of Labor Statistics Work Stoppages data program.

carry over the fat yield of good years and provision the people more evenly in times such as these' (Bodde 1946, 418).

The Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA), the first agricultural arm of the New Deal, was aimed at paying farmers higher prices in exchange for reducing the market's over-production crisis (Graddy-Lovelace and Diamond 2017). The Act signaled the triumph of a new coalition, in which the Farm Bureau's president, Ed O'Neal, earned special thanks from Agriculture Secretary Henry A. Wallace for his work 'so unceasingly to heal the ancient breach between the Democratic farmers of the South and the Republican farmers of the Middle West' (Soth 1983, 207). Note, though, that the coalition that Wallace celebrated wasn't between farmers and workers across the bloody wounds of class and race, but between farmers and farmers across the scars of the Civil War.

For many, the AAA was a victory. As Naylor points out, 'the early New Deal efforts saved many family farms from bankruptcy. My dad who came to this farm one hundred years ago, age thirteen, and farmed until 1962, would be emotional when recounting his neighbors losing their farms. He would tell you that the recovery of prices helped bring that to a halt. Even though the seeds of good policy were sown in the New Deal, the balance of political power at the time always limited the best provisions and implementation' (Personal Communication 2019).

But the effects of the New Deal were never homogenous, and not all were members of the Roosevelt party. There were stark divisions along lines of race, citizenship, and gender. By delegating certain disbursements from federal to the state level, the New Deal furthered a notion of citizenship segregated by gender (Mettler 1998). As Ruth Wilson

Gilmore put it, 'men received automatically what women had to apply for individually' (Gilmore 2002, 18).

The Great Depression licensed the creation and policing of a workforce segregated by citizenship and race. The federal government responded to soaring unemployment with the deportation of 30,000 Mexican workers in what Balderrama and Rodriguez have called 'the Decade of Betrayal' (1995). One of the most important counter-actions to these deportations came in Texas through the Pecan Shellers' Strike in 1938 in San Antonio, when 6000 shellers walked off the job. Forty percent of US pecan production came from Texas, and in San Antonio, home to the largest Latinx population in the US, the Southern Pecan Company was a significant player. The industry had secured the status of 'agricultural enterprise' under the AAA, exempting it from higher wage-rates, and leaving its 90% female workforce with few options. Resistance came through the Mexican and US communist parties and local organizing structures. Workers struck, and ultimately won a national wage increase despite the predations of the industry, the media, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (Dinwoodie 1977; Vargas 1997; Cannon and Cannon 2019).

For sharecroppers, the story was different from those of farmers in the north. By design, the AAA reduced crop production. That meant less land under production for tenant farmers. The payments made to Southern plantation owners were supposed to trickle down to the tenant farmers who actually did the work. Yet when the law required payments to renter-farmers, landlords downgraded their status from tenant to worker, thus evading the need to share their federal pay-out. As Moreno notes, an excise tax on commodity producers under the 1933 Agricultural Adjustment Act was supposed to be distributed in such a way that sharecroppers received

one-half of such payment, share tenants two-thirds, and cash tenants all of it ... In 1934, Congress replaced plow-up payments with 'rental' and 'parity' payments, and gave sharecroppers one-ninth of the latter. After the Supreme struck down the first AAA in 1936, that law's successor, the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act of 1936, raised the sharecropper's share to one-fourth ... The number of black tenants fell by one-third, black sharecroppers by one-fourth, and white sharecroppers by 37 percent, whereas the number of white tenants rose. Yet Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace, intensely fearful of alienating southern white support for the Roosevelt administration, worried that the New Deal might be doing *too much* to help blacks. [emphasis in original] (Moreno 2002, 515–6)

In response, socialist organizers worked in Arkansas with white and black sharecroppers to form the first local of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union with the vision 'to establish a cooperative order of society by legal and peaceable methods' (Auerbach 1968, 118). Using their own media networks – including their own newspaper, *the Sharecropper's Voice* – they shared news and analysis that offered a counter-hegemonic corrective to their opponents. The analysis, and the organizing, offered praxis in building and maintaining leadership across the terrain of resistance (Figure 2).

Such public and prolonged militancy pitched the sharecroppers against Arkansas planters and 'public officials who [were] firmly convinced that unless they [took] drastic steps, white supremacy, Christianity, the American flag and the sanctity of home and family will be overthrown by agents of the Soviet Union' (Daniell 1935, 6). It is possible for the AAA both to be the savior of a certain variety of family farming, and also the inauguration of a process of state-endorsed land consolidation away from the hands of those who work that



Figure 2. An unidentified woman and Sylvia Lawrence read the ‘Sharecroppers’ Voice’ during an outdoor STFJ meeting, Parkin, Arkansas, 1937, Louise Boyle, Kheel Center. Source: Kheel Center at Cornell University <https://www.flickr.com/photos/kheelcenter/5279909248>.

land. Thus Howard Kester, an organizer with the STFJ, was able to parse the Agricultural Adjustment Act as ‘that economic monstrosity and bastard child of a decadent capitalism and a youthful fascism’ (Kester 1936, 26). The STFJ was a critic of federal relief for landowners, but its members also fought the government for wage increases – which they achieved. We cannot here trace the eventual undoing of the STFJ, by the increasing number of conservatives at USDA, and their subsumption under the CIO (McCartin 1998), or the betrayal of the Third wave of New Deal organizing in the late 1930s (Gilbert 2015). But we can suggest that the STFJ offers a lesson for what a leading working class member of a counter-hegemonic bloc might face in the future, as other parts of the bloc win concessions while workers of color still struggle for theirs.

The New Deal, then, can be understood as emerging from a coalition navigating complex foreign financial arrangements embedded within the web of life – most acutely those farmers in areas in and around the Dust Bowl – over a sedimented history of colonial genocide, and in the aftermath of a war over racialized slavery. The importance of care work might best be thought of as being recognized by the creation of regimes of social security, albeit racially segregated (Quadagno 1994). The STFJ’s critique of the New Deal matters today. They were correct that the benefits of the Agricultural Adjustment Act favored landowners over laborers (Fishback, Horrace, and Kantor 2005). And they were right to see the shortcomings of the New Deal that grew out of the Democrats’ dependence on southern white supremacist legislators. Indeed, the long arc of that structural racism is one that continues to be fought. From the racist policies around agricultural labor to the operations and priorities of the United States Department of Agriculture – characterized by Kristol Bradley Ginapp as ‘Jim USDA Crow’ – the struggles of farmers and farmworkers of color today can be traced to failures seeded in the New Deal (Ginapp 2003; Perea 2011). In one of the largest lawsuits in US history, *Pigford v. Glickman*, a class of black farmers who had been systematically excluded from the federal government’s agricultural largesse successfully sued the USDA (Cowan and

Feder 2013). But the settlement, in excess of \$1 billion, has still failed to address the deeper structural problems of USDA policy. The Green New Deal is an opportunity to organize through these social histories, histories that inform today's understandings of what's common sense and what's absurd, in rural America.

IV

If there is a turning point for the New Deal, a moment when the counter-hegemonic bloc can be said to have begun a slide towards defeat in the war over common sense, it comes not at the beginning of World War II but near its close, with the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act. As Lichtenstein notes, Taft-Hartley's provisions against closed-shop organizing and the weakening of labor's power in 1947 'stands like a fulcrum upon which the entire New Deal order teetered. Before 1947 it was possible to imagine a continuing expansion and vitalization of the New Deal impulse. After that date, however, labor and the left were forced into an increasingly defensive posture' (Lichtenstein 1997, 765). Just as strike activity rose under the New Deal, signifying rising levels of worker power, the level of strikes in post-war America declined, while the persecution of its organizers increased under McCarthyism and, later, Reaganism and neoliberalism.

For a piece entitled 'The Long New Deal', we're conscious of spending precious little time on its aftermath. In part, that's because the long decline in workers' rights after the zenith of the New Deal and WWII, and the ascendance of financial capital has been catalogued already in the course of the Long Twentieth Century (Arrighi 1994). The international agricultural articulations of class conflict have been explored in discussions of the Green Revolution elsewhere (Patel 2013). Closer to the US, similar patterns of agrarian crossings, of rural militancy and repression, have been well documented at the US/Mexico border by Olsson (2017). The complex history of farm labor migrations and nativist policy have been recently documented by Denvir (2020) and classically by Walker (2004). The arc of the farm subsidy complex from the 1940s through the 2010s has recently been deeply analyzed by Murphy and Hansen-Kuhn (2019).

The war on worker militancy and the rightward shift in farming members of 'the Roosevelt party' were articulated in the shifts in membership of US farmer organizations (Figure 3). In the late 1940s, Naylor told us, 'the Farm Bureau took a hard turn to the right and joined in the mantra that the government should get out of agriculture. But Americans were fighting the fascists at home before we fought them in Europe and Asia.' This is true: fascism romanticizes and transforms the heartland. European fascists spun stories of blood and soil, while simultaneously breeding crops and animals to reflect their visions of national purity (Saraiva 2016). In rural America, the state and private sector had laid the basis for a kindred approach, that the right kinds of commodities, and the right kinds of people to bring them to market, might build the nation. Before the New Deal, the Farm Bureau represented a particular, racialized vision of what the right kind of farmer might look like. But the Farm Bureau's lurch to the right was part of a far longer struggle over land, labor – both productive and reproductive – and capital in agriculture. (Indeed, it's possible to read back through the history of the world food system and identify moments in which the hegemonic forces within this struggle achieved

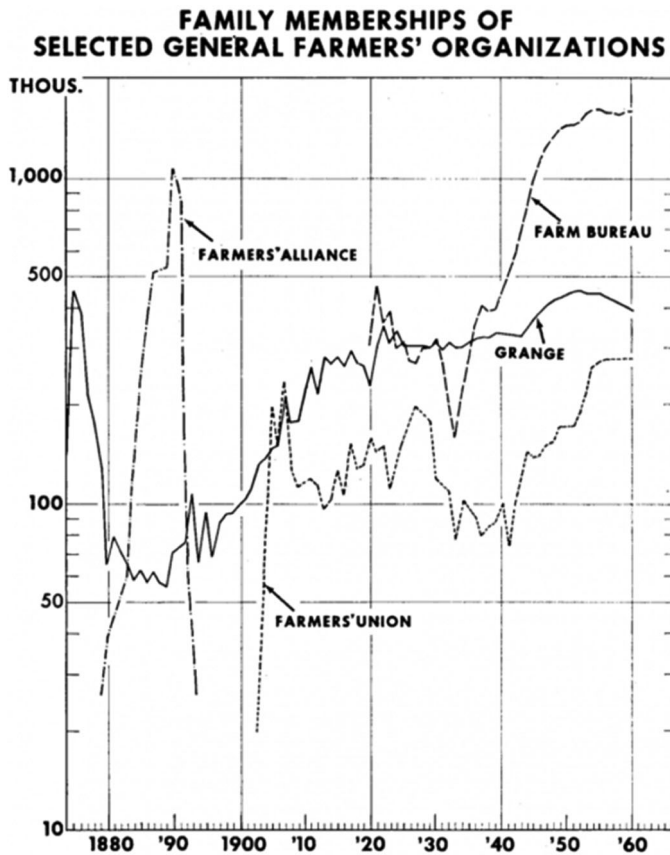


Figure 3. Family Memberships of Selected General Farmers' Organizations. Source: Tontz (1964, 146).

continued stretches of stability. One way of reading those moments is as food regimes [McMichael 2009, 2020]).

Today, the Farm Bureau has around 6 million members (AFB 2019). The number of farms in the US is around 2 million (USDA 2019a). The claim to be 'the voice of the American farmer' rings hollow when most Farm Bureau members don't actually farm. The membership numbers are goosed up by the bureau's main revenue streams: insurance. This isn't crop insurance for farmers, but auto, home, health, and life insurance for anyone who becomes a 'member.' In order to benefit from discounts, you have to join. As Graddy-Lovelace has analyzed, the Farm Bureau is a complex and contradictory force, but one that has over the years of its existence increasingly prioritized the needs of a certain class of farmers over others (2019). That instinct was present from the founding of the organization, its first president James Howard (1920-22) reassuring its membership and the government that, 'I stand as a rock against radicalism' (Graddy-Lovelace 2019, 400).

The Farm Bureau's membership is also swelled by the interests that make up the large-scale industrial agricultural supply chain, like industrial hog farms – interests deeply opposed to the Green New Deal. The Farm Bureau has opposed unions and Medicare – indeed, the Medicare fight in the early 1960s saw the Farm Bureau side with the insurance

industry and Chambers of Commerce against the Farmers Union and Socialist Party (Marmor 2000). More recently, the Farm Bureau has been at the front lines of opposition to the Waxman-Markey climate change bill (Meng and Rode 2019). If the Markey-Ocasio Cortez plan wants to avoid another defeat, it'll have to outsmart them.

The firm link between the Farm Bureau and financial interests – it is, after all, an insurance broker – points to a deeper continuity between the flow of finance capital and climate change in the twenty-first century. Climate change is speared into the heartland through climate catastrophe. The effects of those disasters will be mitigated for some through the partisan politics of federal crop insurance (Crane-Droesch et al. 2019). Farmers wouldn't risk planting thousands of acres of monoculture crops in a market where prices are driven down by overproduction without the knowledge that – on average – they might turn a profit. Climate change reduces the average rate profit. Subsidized crop insurance moves the average back up so that farming practices that promote climate change are, in effect, encouraged. To put this slightly differently, federal crop insurance is a means through which cheap money is used to keep nature and food cheap (Moore 2010). It is no surprise to find the Farm Bureau profiting off this exchange.

Finance capital is, however, interested in more than insuring risk. It has increasingly found profit in farm land itself, and has been since the New Deal. Figure 4, showing the trend in farm size and number from 1850–2017, is one with which most farmers are intimately familiar: the number of farms has declined and their size has increased. It's possible to trace this not to the era of Earl Butz, but to the New Deal itself (Rosenberg and Stucki 2017).

More farmers, large and small, are renters, their landlords being either other farmers or, increasingly, out-of-state rentiers who have found in farmland an asset class 'like gold with yield' (Duffy 2011; Fairbairn 2014; Gunnoe 2014; Zhang 2015). Despite these trends, it would be misleading to paint the entire post-World War II period as the untrammelled triumph of capital over an increasingly supine labor movement. Even as the forces of

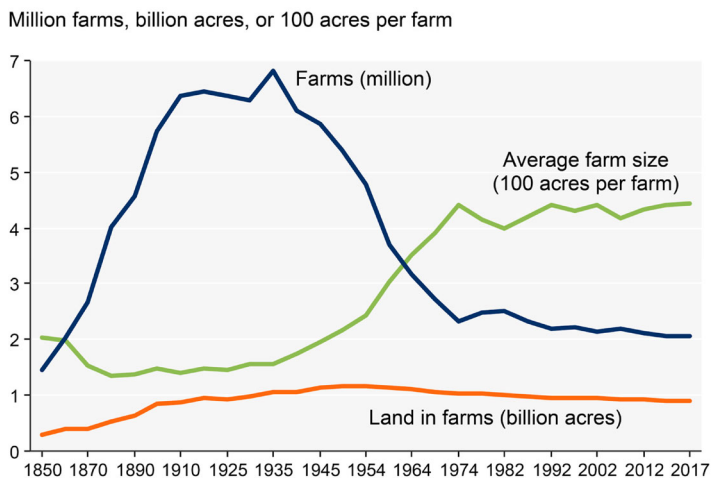


Figure 4. Famers, land in farms, and average acres per farm, 1850-2017. Source: USDA

the state and capital militated against large-scale counter-hegemonic organizing, there were moments of resistance. Two such moments in the early 1980s – two years after Ronald Reagan fired over 10,000 striking air traffic controllers (McCartin 2011) – are worth returning to Kansas for. As Montenegro de Wit et al. (2019) note, drawing on Scoones et al. (2018), the American Agriculture Movement was conceived in the late 1970s as a response to debt, low farm prices and a demand for parity. It was, however, also a movement that split when understandings of monetary power melded with antisemitism, leading some to support the white supremacist Posse Comitatus. This commitment to racist policy was compatible with membership of a counter-hegemonic bloc led by a black man. By 1983 some members of the American Agriculture Movement exhorted unity with Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition, so that 'two oppressed minorities, blacks and farmers, [might coalesce] to overthrow the moneyed interests' (Leiker 2019, 266). That coalition's defeat by the Democratic Party represents a significant loss, yet from its ashes comes an insight: the Rainbow Coalition was able to unite through a shared oppression by finance capital (Rogers 1990). That white supremacists might find deep common interest with a progressive black leader points not just to the complexities of organizing counter-hegemonic blocs, but to the importance of a firm set of prior political commitments and philosophy to guide the bloc and define the terms of political enmity (Pierce 1988; Harle 2000).

V

With financial capitalism's increasing control over supply chains in late capitalism (Isakson 2014), farmers are increasingly becoming substitutable factors of production along with their land. In a commercial ecology geared towards commodity production favored by the state, larger farms have more of everything: credit, capital, insurance, relief, government favor, and, at the end of the day, profit. The market share of sales by the largest 5 percent of producers steadily increased from 38.3 percent in 1939 to 54.5 percent by 1987 (Lobao and Meyer 2001). America's largest farms – with a gross sales value of over \$1 million, representing 4 percent of all farms – made a net average of \$515,000 in 2018. The poorest, with gross sales less than \$100,000, representing 80 percent of all farms, made -\$1,300 in 2018 (USDA 2019a).

The riches of US industrial agriculture are unevenly distributed. Might this be fixed by a redistribution of its industrial machinery? As Ocasio-Cortez has also noted, there may be nothing wrong with automation – in agriculture or anywhere else – if it reduces drudgery and promotes freedom (Robertson 2019). It's certainly true that capitalist technology has always driven peasants out of agriculture. The number of self-employed and family farm workers on US farms went from 7.60 million in 1950 to 2.06 million in 2000, but since then has remained relatively stable (USDA 2019b). Outside the heavy mechanization of commodity crops of corn, wheat, rice, and soy, the US continues to rely on farm workers for 'specialty crops,' and usually pays those workers poorly (BLS 2019a). In 2015–16, two-thirds of all farm workers were from Mexico, and 49 percent of all farm workers were undocumented (Hernandez and Gabbard 2018). Those workers were often driven by the displacement caused by the devastation of NAFTA and, more recently, CAFTA (Morley and Piñero 2008; Otero 2011). Robots may soon pick fruit from fields that have more or less completed their transformation into factories, a final twist of the knife for those who

were once peasants in the Global South, displaced by US economic policy and trade agreements that rendered their lives as campesinos impossible to sustain.

The push towards robots in the fields and in livestock facilities highlights one of the biggest conceptual challenges for a Green New Deal. The financial arithmetic of a modern food system – from land ownership to insurance to the futures market – depends on a permanent exploitation of soil, atmosphere, and labor. At the moment, those who want to farm with dignity in the web of life plead a case for which there is no business logic.

To pay workers well, to grow a polyculture of crops that can help sequester carbon and battle the sixth extinction (Barnosky et al. 2011), to farm without chemicals that poison workers, air, and water – all are militated against by the arrangements of payments that currently prevail. It's rarely profitable to farm agroecologically when the rules of the game reward ecological devastation, worker exploitation, and monoculture.

Corroborating evidence that the food industry is premised on destruction comes from an unlikely source. A 2012 report by the management consultancy group KPMG singled out the food industry as the most environmentally damaging of any sector, with conservatively calculated externalities equaling 224 percent of the food industry's revenues (KPMG 2012). This is the kind of result that ought to give defenders of the current food system pause. If this data is correct – and at a conference of donors in 2015 a senior Nestlé executive suggested that these ratios accurately reflected the findings of an internal audit at his corporation – then there's only one conclusion: there's no such thing as a sustainable food industry. Either the industry is profitable by dint of its externalities, or it stops making food and money.

What, then, might be the alternative to industrial agriculture? Smaller-scale farms (fewer than twenty hectares) produce more than 75 percent of most food commodities in sub-Saharan Africa, southeast Asia, south Asia, and China, with comparatively high yields on smaller farms reflecting the return to the skill and work of the farmers managing that land (Herrero et al. 2017; Gollin 2018). One landmark report, the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development, suggested that for a sustainable future, the world would need more urban and peri-urban farming with sustainable farming systems (IAASTD 2008). In the United States, large farms dominate, but the latest agricultural census points to growth in farms with fewer than ten acres (USDA 2019c).

The twenty-five to thirty-four-year-old farming demographic grew from 2007 to 2012. And although some farmers under forty-five are conservative, there are reasons for qualified optimism. A survey by the National Young Farmers Coalition suggests that there's a generation of young people who want to farm sustainably, organically, and as a part of a robust local food system (Ackoff, Bahrenburg, and Shute 2017). Their main concerns are an inability to afford land, student debt, poor health care, and a shortfall of skilled farm labor. Readers in urban areas may recognize some of these concerns as their own. And it offers an opportunity for the Green New Deal to build a bloc that might counter the dominant one.

When we think about how a Green New Deal might transform the food system, we have no answers, but we do have a process. For years, the international peasant movement La Via Campesina has advocated the idea of food sovereignty, a demand that everyone have the right to have a say in what their food system looks like (Patel 2009; Martínez-Torres and

Rosset 2010). Although this might sound like a milquetoast call for participation, food sovereignty takes questions of power and inequality seriously: one practical consequence emerging from the subsequent discussions around what food sovereignty might be has been an active battle against patriarchy.

La Via Campesina's process – of discussion, research, teaching, and organizing – takes time, and struggles with complex politics across class and gender (Patel 2012). But that's what building a bloc involves. No Green New Deal can emerge perfectly formed from the head of a single individual or organization. If it works, it'll work because the process of articulating it will also be the process of building the alliances it needs to succeed as a counter-hegemonic policy. And if it works, we submit that the Green New Deal will have managed to answer questions around financial capital, embedded within the web of life, that are driven by an analysis of class, colonialism, race and patriarchy.

In imagining who might be in the bloc of a Green New Deal, we find it hard to conceive of a movement that doesn't involve labor, movements fighting for gender and racial justice and decolonization (Aronoff et al. 2019), and the span of groups pushing for social control over finance (Figart and Majd 2016). Following Carlisle et al, we add to the literature with a consideration of some elements that will matter for a counter-hegemonic bloc to succeed in refashioning the food system – in particular, a challenging of monopolies, food habits, farming payments, public risk management, land reform, international reparation, and a just transition for agricultural workers (Carlisle et al. 2019).

Monopoly: Of the issues that might bind a front of farmers, farm workers, and others to win a Green New Deal, the loathing of monopolies – and banking in particular – is a potent force. From the Populists to the present, concentrated market power has been a complaint for a majority of Americans – and sometimes one that has been overcome. When the Federal Trade Commission was tasked during World War I with breaking the market collusion between meatpackers and railroads, it saw no way to achieve 'fundamental improvements' without the federal government making a public service out of the rail distribution networks (FTC 1919, 76–7).

Unfortunately, the government didn't follow its commission's advice. The 1921 Packers and Stockyards Act was the compromise. Designed to police food monopolies and stockyards, the Act has been the target of industry attack ever since. Although the early Obama administration promised to use its power to regulate food monopolies, little came of it. Under Sonny Purdue, the Trump administration's USDA has made regulators accountable to those whom they regulate, and the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration offers dwindling protection for farmers against corporate power (Liliston 2019).

Today, monopoly-finance capital is able to project its power globally, as Foster argues persuasively (2015), and there are few better examples of this than the meat industry (Sexton and Xia 2018). There have been successful rebellions against some of America's monopolies, and the demands they make on the social purse. What might it look like if urban campaigns against subsidies to Amazon/Whole Foods were linked to resistance against the order promoted by Tyson and Purdue? Better yet, since the original Populist moment and New Deal agitation rested on a supple and sophisticated understanding of finance capital, might it be necessary for these campaigns in turn to be linked to efforts against JP Morgan Chase or TIAA Cref, as farmers in North Dakota did to create their public bank in 1919 (Brown 2013)?

Food habits: Another issue that binds rural and urban constituencies is cheap food. It's easy to satirize the coastal elite preoccupation with organic food as bourgeois and hugely out-of-touch with working America. Although we know through our own work that working poor families would love to eat organic food, but it's too expensive (Riffkin 2019; Lentz and Patel 2016). Cheap food is the corollary of low-wage cheap work (Moore 2010).

There is potential for farmer-labor organizing that builds on the lessons of the last New Deal, and the reconfigurations of power through the 1960s and 1970s that allowed food stamps to enter the Farm Bill in 1977 (Rosenfeld 2010). For a Green New Deal to work in the twenty-first century, everyone's incomes need to increase. Growing food justly and sustainably is expensive. Instead of driving down the costs of farming to make food cheap enough for urban workers to buy on stagnating wages, all workers must make enough to afford food that's produced sustainably. Consumers must be able to pay for the knowledge embedded in, and carbon sequestered through, sustainable agriculture: through low-input, sophisticated agroecological farming, renewable energy, unprocessed fresh food, and farms run by all those who want to work the land. And of course, farmers and farm workers, too, must be paid fairly and appreciated for their work. The care work involved in this can be socialized and democratized with public infrastructure – such as school canteens – that eliminate the patriarchal and bourgeois demands of reproductive labor (Bowen, Brenton, and Elliott 2019).

Farming payments: Perhaps the most vexed question in considering a Green New Deal is how farmers might be paid, and the regime of family farming. The New Deal offered the makings of a system that allowed farmers to survive, and the Texas Farmers Union has recently been asking what a parity payment system might look like in the twenty-first century (Schaffer and Ray 2017). Variants of this parity pricing system provide farmers a fair price for their crop, one that can be adjusted to include the costs of good ecological management (Wilson 2012). In other words, parity pricing can pay farmers to do right by the ecology on which they depend. An investigation into the assumptions behind parity pricing, and the alternatives presented to it, is a project for further inquiry.

Risk Management: Climate change brings uncertainty, one that is transmitted globally through tightly integrated commodity markets and just-in-time supply. Public grain storage is a way to smooth the fluctuations in basic crop availability caused by extreme weather fluctuations and the speculative frenzy on the global commodity markets that can accompany them (Kalkuhl, Von Braun, and Cullen 2016). With more extreme weather on the way, a public grain storage system can short circuit the wild fluctuations that might otherwise drive food prices sky high after a harvest failure.

But it has a downside for the existing agricultural order. The abundance of cut-price feedcrops like corn and soy make Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO) economical. CAFOs exist because of the subsidies they receive through low commodity prices, prices that are abundantly unfair, manipulated downward by monopolies far larger than the waste-lagoons into which CAFO shit drains. A parity price system would make CAFOs uneconomical. This will thrill neither CAFO owners nor lovers of cheap meat, but it's absolutely in line with the dietary changes that need to be made for a net-zero carbon future (Willett et al. 2019). As well as bringing lower health care costs due to a healthier public, moving animals out of CAFO's and back onto the land is compatible with

returning to a 'different political ecology of grass', one that replaces grain fed cattle with cattle that form part of a rich and diversified agroecological production system (Henderson et al. 2015; Pierrehumbert and Eshel 2015). Parity pricing will mean an end to 'cheap food,' and that's only thinkable in tandem with the end of cheap work. A front that brings unions and the urban anti-hunger lobby together with the right parts of the farming community could make this happen. But it's hard to imagine CAFOs being a part of that bloc. The impossibility of CAFOs in a green economy begs a deeper question: what does an economic system that values labor, life, and carbon look like?

American corn farmers know what it's like to transition towards renewable energy, but their experience has happened in ways that maintain the hegemony of the dominant bloc. Because of deals between the fossil fuel, industrial agricultural, and farm lobbies, and the selling of such deals as a patriotic alternative to buying foreign oil, more US corn goes towards ethanol than any other use (Lehrer 2010). But renewable isn't the same thing as sustainable, and ethanol production in the US is far from a winning ecological strategy. Any Green New Deal would need to embrace a far more comprehensive accounting for energy, biodiversity, land, water, and carbon flows than ethanol's political calculus allows (Magdoff 2008).

We know the outlines of what an energy future might look like (Sica 2019), and even one for housing (Cohen et al. 2019), we know what it might look like to supplant industrial agriculture to more sustainable food systems (IPES-Food 2018). We even know what it might be like to have a unified food and agriculture policy that's mindful of climate change (De Schutter et al. 2019). But plenty of work remains around the process that gets us there, and in particular what the new financial and credit systems we use in order to invest in that transformed future.

International linkages: Greenhouse gasses don't care where they're emitted. The Green New Deal has to involve international engagement. American industrial agriculture has been justified by the claim that 'America is feeding the world.' But the world can feed itself, if America lets it. The US has for decades used its power in the Global North and South to make markets for its agricultural surpluses, dumping cheap grain and undermining local agriculture (Bello 1994; Rosset 2006). US power has operated through the world food system, rewarding and punishing states through investment, market access, and technology for cooperation with the US national interest.

More broadly, the fossil fuel economy from which the Global North has profited for centuries leaves agriculture in the Global South far more vulnerable to the ecosystem state-shifts ahead (Samson et al. 2011). Large parts of the Global South were eviscerated in the nineteenth century through the militarized operations of a liberal food system (Davis 2001). One calculation puts the bill for Britain's 173-year colonization of India at £9 trillion (Patnaik 2017). Part of a Green New Deal has to be reparative, both domestically and globally (Aronoff et al. 2019).

Land Reform: There are within the US, vigorous debates over land reform (Williams and Holt-Giménez 2017). Suzan Erem, a former SEIU organizer and now executive director at the Sustainable Iowa Land Trust, asks: 'Do we have the courage to face the original sin on which this country was premised: land theft' (Personal Communication)? It's barely been 150 years since the Plains Wars and the conversion of bison rangeland to cattle territory. The United States is a settler colony, and when that land was enclosed, capital was always at the frontier, paying for arms and the cheap nature they secured. There is a reckoning long overdue that recognizes how the US was colonized, the claims of the descendants of those

indigenous whom the United States wanted to exterminate, and the role of capitalism in settling the 'heartland.' A Red Deal, recently proposed by Estes (2019), articulates well with the tenets of Green New Deal, particularly in terms of a care economy and land restoration.

As we conclude this piece, Donald Trump has been celebrated at an American Farm Bureau meeting in Texas. Chief among the celebrants was the President himself, who announced 'the farmers are sticking with Trump' (Sparber 2020). He is correct that his trade agreements have been met with national zeal by many commodity export farmers, who believe the unlikely scale of new agricultural trade arrangements with China (Magnier and Delaney 2019) and with border partners under the United States Mexico Canada Agreement.

Just as during the New Deal, we live in a time of incipient fascism, racism, and class divide (Patel and McMichael 2004). Characteristics of that project include an evisceration of worker supports under color of the national interest. Such policies present themselves from Bolsonaro (Crivelli 2019) to Modi (Gopalan 2016) to Trump's evisceration of labor and monopoly law (Shubber 2020). The burden of work requirements in order to access nutritional support will fall particularly hard on rural communities in the United States, given that rural households are 25% more likely to access the Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program, the program derived from the New Deal's Food Stamps (Williams and Pruitt 2019).

At the same time, the world of finance is attempting to address the climate catastrophe in which it is implicated. The world's largest asset manager, BlackRock, manages \$7 trillion in assets. Early in 2020, it joined a New York based group Climate Action 100+, which claims \$35 trillion, and offers itself, at least as far as its website as 'an investor initiative to ensure the world's largest corporate greenhouse gas emitters take necessary action on climate change' (ClimateAction.org 2020; Henderson 2020). It is unlikely, however, that it will be this movement of finance through the web of life that successfully convenes the counter-hegemonic bloc necessary to tackle the climate emergency.

The Green New Deal can learn from its antecedent's successes and failures, which provided a dramatic economic shift in rural America – not as dramatic as we might have wished for, nor as long-lasting as we would have liked, nor as egalitarian as it should have been. Yet the New Deal did make the case that environmental protection and paying people fairly for their work might go a long way towards limiting the power of corporations and creating a fair society for everyone.

Hindsight should inform the Green New Deal. This time, sustainable farmers need not be forced to choose between responsibility to the land and the communities of which they are part. Better living through farming can't happen without canny political alliance-building, stitching together a bloc that addresses hunger, poverty, malnutrition, and inequities in wealth and wages, both in the countryside and city.

Just Transition: One group offering a vision of what a racially equitable transition to the future looks like are among the most disposable food-system workers: meatpackers. At a recent conference of food workers, Dennis Olson, a senior analyst with the United Food and Commercial Workers Union, observed the need for a long-term solution to the systematic exploitation of slaughter-house workers and the unsustainability of the industrial meat industry (Olson 2019). One proposal lay in the transformation of the food system, using a union cooperative model to have cooperatively worker-owned farms supplying co-operatively owned grocery stores in ways that might be part of a carbon-sequestering

food system (Witherell, Cooper, and Peck 2012). Such a system would require new approaches to land and farming, a shift in power away from monopoly capital, and offers a tangible vision for which a counter-hegemonic movement might aspire. It's a fitting coda to the cowboy strikes that began at the other end of that food chain over a century before.

A counter-hegemonic bloc demands both a militant rural and urban resistance to monopoly-finance, and strategy for achieving a radical transformation of the food system. Not everyone will buy in, but there are farmers and farm workers who are ready to be leading members of a counter-hegemonic bloc, to make a net-zero-carbon world a new kind of common sense. That leadership will recognize the need for transitions across the United States, away from carbon intensive to carbon negative work, from healthcare denial to healthcare provision (Faust 2019), from exploitation in food service to liberation (Gaddis 2019), from fossil-fuel extraction to energy infrastructure-building (Aronoff et al. 2019), one that understands reparation and most importantly the need for a net increase in the number of workers on farmland as part of an agroecological transition (Cadieux et al. 2019). As we imagine these transitions, we're aware of the failures of such attempts elsewhere. We have seen bourgeois attempts to make the working class suffer a disproportionate burden of the costs of transition – fomenting reaction such as in the case of the *gilet jaunes* (Noiriel 2018), or fueling the rise of ecofacisms (Ajl 2019). One of the most widely circulated critiques of the Green New Deal will be that it's anti-American (Specht 2019a). True – such a movement ranges itself against American capital and a white supremacist tradition of colonial expansion. But, as we've suggested, there has been little that unites this part of the planet more – in art, action, organizing, lived experience and thought – than a deep and sustained resistance to the destruction wrought by US settler colonial capitalism. The fate of the planet hinges on the triumph of this resistance.

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