

The Political Economy of Social Movements: Popular Media Access, Power, and Cultural Hegemony

In the last 15 years, countries in Latin America had elected politically progressive governments. Beginning with the election of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela in 1998, an unprecedented succession of other populist presidents were elected, including Socialist Ricardo Lagos in Chile (2000), Worker's Party (PT) labor leader Lula da Silva in Brazil (2002), left-leaning Peronist Néstor Kirchner in Argentina (2003), Broad Front (FA) candidate Tabaré Vázquez in Uruguay (2004), indigenous union and Movement for Socialism (MAS) leader Evo Morales in Bolivia (2005), FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front) Daniel Ortega was re-elected in Nicaragua (2006), left liberal Manuel Zelaya in Honduras (2006), Citizen's Alliance candidate Rafael Correa in Ecuador (2006), radical priest Fernando Lugo with the Alliance for Change in Paraguay (2008), and former FMLN (Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front) guerrilla-fighter Mauricio Funes in El Salvador (2009), and Ollana Humala in Peru (2011). Citizens in several countries proceeded to re-elect such progressive candidates several times, most consistently in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Uruguay, and Brazil. Seven coups, a combination of military and parliamentary (Telesur 2016), as well as orchestrated disruption campaigns by elite opposition in most countries, continue to challenge the radical upsurges. In several countries, where social movements faltered—Argentina, Chile, Honduras, Peru, and Brazil—rightist forces have won national elections and regained control of the government.

In the midst of continent wide turmoil and conflict, the sudden increase in the number of governments espousing varieties of socialism and social democracy and enacting programs to benefit labor, the urban poor, and indigenous groups (with an occasional veneer of anti-US intervention rhetoric) became widely known as the “pink tide.” Pink Tide (“Onda Rosa” in Spanish) seems to concisely, albeit insufficiently, characterize the appearance of a generally left political trajectory in Latin American. This was “pink” rather than “red,” as Larry Rohter of the *New York Times* first opined. Pink indicating a lighter tone—not the “red” of communism, not socialism, but a softer shade of progressive, even radical politics, with considerable variation across nations. While “Pink Tide” cogently labels the leftward trend, more is needed to understand the complexity of what's really taking place in each country and the region as a whole. What is considered “left”? How do progressive governments relate to social movements and vice versa? And what do these changes mean on a regional level?” Only a closer look at the social relations and political conditions in each nation can answer these questions, because while all have considerable interconnections, each must work out relations of power within their own polities. Still, while several of the candidates, and their successors, proclaimed socialist platforms, with the exception of Venezuela and Bolivia, most of these new governments did not explicitly advocate socialism, rather their commitment to “equality, social justice, and popular participation” contribute to openings for radical social transformation (Levitsky and Roberts 2011, 3).

Although three fourths of Latin American countries have democratically elected progressive left-leaning presidents and legislatures since 1998, the rise of new social democratic and left-populist governments was poorly reported in the world's commercial media. Presenting disconnected and recurring exposés of one or another populist leader,

commercial mass media obscured and misrepresented the remarkable historic changes that have occurred in Latin America in the last fifteen years. Criticisms by liberal academics, non-government organizations, and more radical Left organizations have further discouraged appreciation of the momentous changes occurring.

Undeterred by such dismissals, this writing offers a perspective to help analyze and evaluate the “the extent to which the actors on the left today offer alternatives to neoliberalism” of “determining to what extent parallelism,” mass mobilizations, and political initiatives by governments and movements “go in the direction of... decreasing inequality between the classes and countries, economic democracy and environmental sustainability” (Rodriguez-Garavito, Barret, and Chavez 2008, 23). The impulse for democracy, social justice, and social change embedded within social movement actions against privatizations and deregulation of public interest highlight several interrelated conflicts, including 1) the conditions and operations of power, 2) the meaning and practice of democracy, and 3) the interaction of social relations of power that are instrumental in civil society, the government, and the market. As the primary means of communication, media are implicated in power, democracy, and social movements. Thus, public access to media addresses each of these questions of power—and provides a measure of democracy within each society.

Here public access does not refer to an anonymous audience to be serviced by media as with Britain’s BBC or other public service broadcasters, but asserts the democratic right of the public to produce and disseminate content. Public access media affirms the democratic right to communication, including the right to have access to production and distribution technologies without restriction by commercial interests. Public understood in all its complexities, as a sum of the multiple constituencies of each country, including among others, diverse sections of the working class from industrial, service, agricultural, and informal workers, to those unemployed and underemployed, indigenous nations, ethnic groups, women, youth, community-based organizations, religious, environmental, cooperative, and other social, cultural, and political collectivities. In other words, the claim is that public access to media serves as both an indicator of the democratic commitment by a political leadership and a means for organizing the powers necessary to resist neoliberalism and transform the capitalist order. A primary measure of democracy and social justice must be the extent to which those popular forces have direct access and control of the means of communication.

The Pink Tide and More

Referring to the election of new left, socialist-leaning, and radical popular governments as the Pink Tide delivers an initial definition that should not short circuit its historical significance. A more robust description necessarily includes recognition of the entrance of powerful radical social movements of indigenous and working classes organizing beyond industrial worksites—portending rising labor conflicts in China, India, and across Europe. (Worker protests in China reached record proportions in 2015; in 2016, tens of millions protested neoliberal reforms in India, while labor resistance to austerity has spread across Europe: China 2016, Khan 2016, Schmidt 2015).

The political dynamics of these several Latin America countries are globally important because Latin America is no longer part of the periphery in global production or global politics. Latin America is part of the global South, but the entire global South

from BRICS (Brazil, Russian, India, China, and South Africa) to Mexico, Korea, Nigeria, and Eastern Europe can no longer be easily dismissed economically or politically. Industrial, agricultural, and financial corporations in Latin America are fully integrated into an emerging transnational capitalist economic and political order. The extraction and production of energy, agriculture, and finished industrial and consumer goods in Latin America, as well as the enormous consumer market that Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, and the rest of the nations provide, are an integral part of the global economy (Robinson 2008).

For decades, Latin American played a prominent role in world history and the development of capitalism as supplier of agricultural products and raw materials, as a consumer market and a source of cheap labor. “The continent where neoliberalism was first applied—in Chile and Bolivia”—it was also “the site of the greatest resistance to that same neoliberalism, and of the most developed alternatives to it” (Sader 2011, 2).

Unsurprisingly Latin American alternatives to neoliberal privatization directly challenge the transnational capitalist system, raising real life examples that might be emulated and advanced elsewhere. In each case the capitalist state and its social relations survived the elections, but a change in governmental power brought new social programs—to the exact extent that the new government relied on and organized mass organization and political mobilization. Those “left” governments that blocked mass participation and substituted their own political bureaucracies (as in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile) shied away from dedicated social change and instead accommodated the capitalist order, in a vain attempt to compromise and avoid social confrontation.

The Pink Tide is not a coordinated, intentional political project, rather it is the unfolding outcome of uneven successes of social movements resisting similar material and social conditions within specific and fairly unique national and cultural contexts. The initial actions by the new governments in each country varied widely: from modest reforms raising the minimum wage and protecting pensions to more radical structural adjustments that redistributed wealth, introduced land reform, and nationalized industries and natural resources. Moreover, the diverse social programs of each government reflect the wide range of political agendas for equality, social justice, and multiculturalism by the various “left” politicians. Neither Kirchner nor Lula opened doors to power for the working class, but “after the Movement for Socialism (MAS) took national office in 2006, Bolivian national sovereignty took a decidedly egalitarian turn: hydrocarbon resources were nationalized and participatory democracy moved beyond electoral politics to collective self-management of public services” (Tapia 2008, 224-225).

One of the clearest indications of each government’s commitment to equality are the changes to media practices, the new laws, regulations, and in some cases constitutional guarantees, affording citizens the democratic right to communication, including access to media production, largely correspond to each “left” governments’ orientation and commitment to full democracy.

In short, the political expression embodied in the Pink Tide is a powerful but unexplored marker of the culmination of mass mobilizations that have achieved some semblance of political power through populist and socialist electoral successes and fairly progressive reforms in policies and programs of governments of the “left.”

Left is a broadly descriptive term indicating a general commitment to social equality, some redistribution of wealth, social welfare, an expansion of democratic rights, labor rights, civil rights, and the protection of disenfranchised groups. The “right” defends market capitalism and its political order, the “left” advocates radical democracy and social justice (Bobbio 1995; Levitsky and Roberts 2011). The Left includes socialists, communists, anarchists, new social movements of resistance to neoliberalism, radical indigenous, labor, environmental groups, among others. The left also encompasses the traditional social democratic parties, what Jorge Lanzaro (2011) calls “institutionalized parties, with socialist leanings and kinship to the labor movement, which have replaced their revolutionary ideologies with moderate reformism” (349). Some call the Pink Tide a “new” left to describe its disconnection from the traditional social democratic parties in Latin America, its distance from armed resistance, and its willingness to electorally vie for government power (Barrett, Chavez, and Rodriguez-Garavita 2008). The Pink Tide designation thus includes avowed reformists like Michelle Bachelet in Chile, Frente Amplio’s Tabaré Vázquez in Uruguay, Liberal Party President Manuel Zelaya in Honduras, Ecuador’s radical progressive Rafael Correa, the Workers’ Party (PT) in Brazil as well as those more explicitly socialist, like Hugo Chavez, Nicolás Maduro, and Evo Morales. The range of political strategies and policies from neoliberal reform to calls for 21st Century Socialism is as specific and varied as each new “left” government.

The fall of the Soviet system and electoral defeat of the Sandinistas has been recognized as the end of one era for the left and the beginning of a new one—in the most favorable light as the appearance of movements for 21st Century Socialism and socialist democracy based on broad participation of indigenous and subordinate classes. At the same moment that transnational capitalism celebrated the fall of the Berlin Wall, the severe structural adjustment program meted out in Venezuela in 1989 released a massive popular reaction against neoliberalism and privatization in Caracas, Venezuela. Known as the “caracazo,” the popular classes put international capitalism on notice that resistance was mounting against the accumulation of wealth by dispossession and theft of public resources. In Argentina, the monetary stabilization plan exploded as privatizations brutalized the working classes and poor: “one of the most advanced systems of economic and social integration, which linked economic growth to the extension of the domestic consumer market, was torn apart,” disrupting mass support for Peronism and a “wide range of groups with doctrinaire politics and limited mass support. It was left to the organizations of the unemployed, known as the piqueteros, and of factory occupations to take the lead in resisting neoliberalism – a situation that was repeated in almost all of Latin America” (Sader 2011, 13).

Previously in Latin America, communist, social democratic, and nationalist movements organized political parties, while guerrilla groups and a social left of trade unions, peasant groups, and even Christian based communities led mass protest movements. Each of these projects declined or were reconfigured by the “combined effects of rising unemployment, privatizations, the ‘flexibilization’ of labor regulations, rural bankruptcies and mass migrations to the cities, the growth of the informal economy, and financial crises that undermined the social bases of trade unionism” and social democratic reformist parties (Frederico Schuster in Rodriguez-Garavita 2008, 7). “In place of the formal work positions that were lost in the public and private sectors,

enormous populations of chronically unemployed, informal and migrant workers emerged forming a dispersed working class distinct from the organized proletariat that had sustained trade unionism in earlier periods (Portes 2003, 7). At the end of the 20th Century, the material conditions for the left had shifted.

The rise of the rabid right under Pinochet, Reagan, and Thatcher was so startling and overwhelming that for a short while it appeared that there was no alternative. Negative growth and rising unemployment, inequality and poverty brought on by neoliberal shock therapy and structural adjustment programs drove millions to resist in diverse ways, from the Zapatista autonomous zones and the Brazilian landless workers movement to the indigenous uprisings in Ecuador and Bolivia, the Bolivarian socialism project in Venezuela, and the resurgence of the Broad Front in Uruguay, while neoliberalism sputtered with the economic collapse of Argentina. Ironically, the return of the repressed working class in rising social protests movements and the tide of left-infused electoral victories caught the Latin American elite, leading transnational politicians, and commercial media off guard.

This “new” Pink Tide left signals neither the end of class contradictions, nor the reduction of the political centrality of the working class for social change. Rather, the contours of resistance indicate the political, economic, and structural changes wrought by the imposition of neoliberalism by national and transnational forces. Three effects of neoliberal privatizations on social class relations are manifest in Latin America: 1) the restructuring of global production; 2) the restructuring of the Latin American working class; and 3) and the subsequent weakening of the power and legitimacy of existing political parties.

Neoliberal structural adjustment programs privatized public services and national resources, gutted economic security, and reinvigorated the accumulation of wealth by dispossession of the majority. The new economic order provided modest benefits to some middle class sectors, but sliced away at social security and living standards of the majority across the continent. Privatization of public utilities, transportation, energy resources, along with deregulation of labor rights and reduced corporate taxation, directly decimated public revenues, ending possibilities and resources for social welfare, security, and programs that might alleviate the worst of poverty and inequality. Unsurprisingly, such neoliberal programs triggered mass resistance.

Second, the extensive attacks on labor and labor rights combined with the global integration of industrial production and introduction of new technologies led to a dramatic decline in the industrial workforce and its reformist trade unions. Organized resistance to neoliberalism was subsequently marked by indigenous uprisings, peasant and agricultural worker upsurges, and social movements of unemployed, landless workers, and others displaced from their jobs, homes, and land by privatization.

Additionally, a third change occurred: conservative political parties lost credibility, and as a corollary, the legitimacy of reformist parties disintegrated with the displacement of mass industrial production and destruction of public programs. The negotiating power of social democracy disappeared with the privatization of public resources and social welfare. As vocal champions and enforcers of neoliberal privatization, the traditional parties had no policies to meet social needs. Thus, social movements of resistance circumvented, ignored, or directly rejected the traditional reformist parties. But the God that failed was not democracy or socialism: market

development failed, neoliberalism failed, reformism failed, ultraleft guerrilla war failed, radical nationalism failed (Sader 2011). The upsurge in social movements of the popular classes across the continent not only challenged neoliberal capitalism, it raised the possibility for a new social order based on a direct, participatory democracy led by popular working classes in all their diversity.

Importantly, the most successful social movements transcended the tired acceptance of grass roots, local actions and rose to the level of national and regional forces. Their ability to apply the power of collective mass action to realize fundamental political change was followed by national electoral inflections of indigenous and class power. Although in Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and Chile the mass movements were often muted and diverted from political power, the Venezuelan, Bolivian, and Ecuadoran instances arguably have initiated new forms of democratic control based on direct citizen participation and decision-making through social missions, community and labor groups, and other independent organizations that both demand and enforce new social relations on behalf of the democratic majority—with or without government approval.

As neoliberalism brought all into the global capitalist economic and political order, political elites and transnational interests realized significant benefits, but a parallel consequence was the disruption of existing relations of production and their accompanying social organizations. After their initial shock and demoralization, the affected majority regrouped and responded. While the trade unions and reformist social democracy in general offered no political leadership (with the limited exception of Frente Amplio in Uruguay), in each country, diverse social groups, indigenous, women, students, environmentalists, African descendants, landless rural workers, unemployed, and others stepped forward to organize and mobilize mass resistance, in many cases, providing crucial leadership for programs and actions that have won democratic rights and corporate and government concessions. New coalitions of diverse organizations forged leaderships for independent, autonomous, local, and community struggles that grew into national movements challenging privatization and austerity and at times toppling existing governments, as in Argentina, Ecuador, Bolivia, and most recently in Guatemala, where protests forced the resignation of Otto Molino in 2015.

Populism and Democracy

Populism is another confusing and contested concept that frequently appears as a simplistic pejorative descriptor of many of the newly elected Pink Tide presidents, who are accused of offering free goods and services for electoral goals and personal political gain. Populism is never really explained by media or many academic treatments, but its associative placement suggests charismatic, strong leaders manipulating poor citizens to consolidate political power. One Open Democracy essay defined populism as “soft political authoritarianism given democratic legitimacy by elections” (Long 2015). Steven Levitsky and Kenneth Roberts (2011) understand populism as the “top down mobilization of mass constituencies by charismatic leaders who challenge established elites on behalf of the ‘people’” (6). This malleable definition associates populism with a lack of democracy and the promotion of a politician’s self-interest through mass propaganda with benefits only for supporters. Populism is marked by direct appeals to a population by an individual leader without much organizational or political development. Accordingly, Fujimoro in Peru and Uribe in Colombia can be classified populist because

they both appealed to urban masses against corrupt elites, but the definition does not fit Lula or Kirchner because they have political parties. In contrast, Levitsky and Roberts would cast Correa and Chavez as populist, despite mass participation in social programs benefitting the middle class, working class, and indigenous. Critics of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela derogatorily labeled him a “crass populist” for his social programs for the poor and mass appeals broadcast on public TV. Commercial media now frame the current Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro as a “strong man” running a “police state” (Washington 2016)

Obviously, by using populism as an epithet, or an evaluative marker, any programs advanced by the so-called populist leader can be dismissed as manipulative, partial measures with little lasting substance. “A populist leader, in the pejorative sense of the word, does not consult the people. Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Uruguay provide ample evidence of democratic participation in public discussions, debates, and independent political actions by radical critics and supporters of government initiatives, advocating new relations, new values, and new actions to achieve and defend political and social power to benefit the majority” (Ellner 2014). Characterizing Chavez, Morales, Correa, or Maduro as populists or demagogues ignores the rich internal discussion in their mass organizations, and implicitly or explicitly writes off the millions of social movement members, as well as the broader public as ignorant and easily manipulated and misled.

Programs that “stimulate the empowerment of members of the popular classes, or that represent learning experiences for them, cannot be denigrated or delegitimated, as populism” (Ellner 2014). Any objective appraisal of the social missions in Venezuela, the indigenous assemblies in Ecuador and Bolivia, and the constitutional amendments and federally funded programs in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador demonstrate meaningful and widespread social benefits, robust participation, and activities that transcend the self-interest of Chavez, Morales, or Correa—discrediting the politically-charged shorthand label populist stuck on those mass leaders by commercial media and capitalist political elites.

Dismissal of such substantial social programs as nothing more than populism does more to delegitimize democracy than the elected leaders it attempts to tarnish. Venezuela has held some two dozen elections or referenda in the 18 years of the Bolivarian Revolution; Ecuador has held 10 general elections in 9 years; Bolivia’s Evo Morales, won 61% of the vote for president in 2014. Elections of left-leaning governments are not crude exercises to legitimize populist leaders, but are an expression of the politicization of the population, the mobilization of organized social movements, and the broad citizen participation in decision making—in marked contrast to the authoritarian and brutal regimes that ran Latin America with US-support for decades, or the corrupt Temer regime that followed the 2016 impeachment of Brazilian Dilma Rouseff in what many say was a parliamentary coup (Romero 2016). It’s doubly-ironic when Latin American studies scholars denigrate “populist” leaders even as citizen participation and social welfare has dramatically improved for the first time in the dozen countries grouped among the Pink Tide. Importantly, Chavez, Morales, and Correa have called for participatory democracy, communal councils, autonomous labor unions, and popular constituent assemblies as the means for transitioning to a socialist democracy. The best rebuttal are the views of the population: findings of 2015 Latinobarometro survey list

Uruguay, Ecuador, Bolivia, Argentina, and Venezuela as the top five countries where support for democracy is strongest, political participation is the highest, and the majority continue to elect radical left candidates (although Mauricio Macri was elected in 2015 by a disillusioned and demobilized Argentine population).

The Rain Before the Tide

As with any historical change, acute crises, disruptions, floods, or tides are always preceded by events and social forces that contribute to the dramatic moment of rupture. Significantly, the conditions and social forces in action that precede the Pink Tide elections are remarkably similar, albeit featuring discrete, specific moments of rupture in each country, including: 1) the shock therapy of neoliberal restructuring returned minimal advantages to the professional and middle classes; soon followed by 2) a thorough economic and ideological failure; while 3) the accompanying incompetence of traditional conservative parties and leaders that could neither avoid nor mitigate the social upheaval; and 4) the inability of traditional social democratic parties and trade unions to provide any reformist resolution to the crises; led to 5) the emergence of social movements encompassing a reconfigured working class, including a mass of unemployed, urban communities, indigenous nations, women, youth, and environmental groups, among others.

1. Shock without Awe: Neoliberalism Unleashed

Neoliberalism is not just an ideology touting the benefits of unfettered markets, it was and is a transnational capitalist class adjustment to the national limits of production and consumption, massive overproduction, and rising liberation movements around the world in the 1960s and 1970s. The transnational capitalist class, which includes corporate owners in Latin America, rewired and retooled its networks of production and distribution to further stimulate its accumulation of wealth by dispossessing the public of its resources and workers of their labor. The mantra for free market dominance calls for the privatization of everything, so first, corporate interests gorged on the ripe pickings of public utilities, services, and national resources. Privatized public goods immediately turned huge profits for corporate buyers. The privatization of public services like water, transportation, communication and the sale of publicly owned natural resources was appropriately termed "shock policy" by the leading free market economist Milton Friedman who advised the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile in the 1970s (Grandin 2006). Indeed, the sudden transfer of wealth stunned millions, knocking citizens to the ground of poverty and inequality. Deregulation of the foreign investment, worker's rights, and other public interests included the "sacking and pillaging of public finances" through bailouts, subsidies, and bond sales as seen in the crisis in Greece and the 2008 market crash in the US: public finance and public debt transferred even more wealth from workers to transnational capital and laid claim to the future income of workers" at the same time (Robinson 2016).

Following the violent introduction of neoliberalism in Chile and Argentina, in Latin America a well-organized attempt by most national governments to consolidate deregulation and privatization of public resources jumpstarted neoliberalism. "The combination of military dictatorships and neoliberal policies acted together to yield an extreme regression in the balance of power between social classes" (Sader 2011,18). To

sell off public assets and national resources, regimes needed to crush the people's ability to defend their interests, as occurred in Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina: "The most brutal repression they had ever known was needed to clear the way for neoliberal policies that privatized state functions" (Sader 2011, 21).

In short, neoliberalism provided a program, with policies and actions that more effectively engineered the accumulation of wealth taken from working people. By deregulating national protections for wages, working conditions, social security, pensions, and health care, transnational companies can speed up work, lower wages, and increase profits—absorbing even more as private firms replaced dismantled public services (Harvey 2016). Following the reduction in taxes on corporations and the wealthy, the increased interest payments to international lenders, shortfalls in national budgets were met with austerity measures—protecting bankers and investors while cutting education, health care, public infrastructure, and other public programs. (Additionally, under neoliberalism, money becomes free speech; corporations buy candidates and elections, while commercial media champion the market, consumerism, and individual responsibility at the expense of social justice and human dignity.)

2. Consequences

The process of accumulation by dispossession was particularly acute in Latin America, as national governments adhered to neoliberal tenets of deregulation and privatization, public resources were sold off and social welfare programs gutted, while protections for wages, working conditions, and social security disappeared with "flexible" labor reforms. Structural adjustment programs in every country drove millions of peasants off the land into urban areas, while enormous populations of chronically unemployed, informal and migrant workers replaced whole sections of unionized industrial labor (Portes 2003, Robinson 2016). Following privatizations, global integration, and national labor "reform," by the end of the 1990s, private and public sector industrial employment fell to under 40%, while 66% of all new urban jobs were informal, unskilled, and temporary, and 44% of the entire population of Latin America lived in poverty (Economic 2002). A United Nations' economic study found that "this period of transformation saw large-scale foreign actors gradually increase their economic and political power in Latin America, with negative consequences for domestic economies, especially in terms of increasing income inequality and rising poverty... A majority of people failed to adjust to the new circumstances and became net losers in terms of both income and equity. While growth may be good for the poor, these reforms in Latin America resulted in slower growth and even stagnation, as well as greater inequality" (Sainz 2006, 1, 3).

A modest boom in the early 1990s unleashed its own contradictions and crises—the 1995 Mexican Peso Crisis, the 1998 financial breakdown in Brazil, and the dramatic financial collapse in Argentina in 2001 (Weber and Carr, 2013, 2). Twenty years of structural adjustment reforms doubled the region's debt to \$725 billion, with a complementary increase to 220 million Latin Americans living in poverty entering the 21st century. Twenty-five years of the Washington Consensus on privatization and commercialization of everything culminated in the declining economies, life expectancy, and literacy (Webber and Carr 2013, 3).

Despite relentless government and commercial media promotion of all things private and consumable, neoliberalism has been a massive fail for the quality of human life for the world's majority. Inequality, poverty, and massive social disruption, prompted a marked loss of consent for free market policies from Argentina and Bolivia to Greece and beyond. The brief burst of economic benefits falling to sizable middle classes, technical professionals, and skilled working classes has been followed by regimes of austerity. The contradictions generated by the painful economic and social restructuring that took place repositioned the larger working class and created new social actors.

The incredible productive capacity of the world's working class creates enough wealth to feed, clothe, house, and entertain all, but corporate profits are extracted by theft of the value created by labor. The value left for wages is inevitably insufficient for purchasing the goods and services produced. Neoliberalism does not and cannot end this fundamental social contradiction for capitalism: working people create more goods and services than they can collectively purchase with the wages received. The theft of value in the form of profit inevitably leads to overproduction and capitalists hit the wall because they cannot actually sell all of the products of their factories and fields. In a globalized world, the result is grave and chronic social inequality punctuated with periodic recessions and depressions, followed by social upheaval, political conflict, and war. This is a recurring, chronic, insurmountable social contradiction: the overproduction of commodities and the complementary production of social inequality and poverty. Poverty grows among plenty. The top 80 billionaires were worth \$2 trillion in 2015—a 50% increase in their wealth in four years; while 62 people own half the world's wealth and 80% of humanity survives on 5% of global wealth (Oxfam 2016).

In Latin America, as elsewhere, deregulation of foreign investment and banking allowed the pillage of public finances through subsidies for corporations, bailouts of banks, and the issuance of low cost-high return public bonds, while opening all markets to speculation and financialization, siphoning off wealth to hedge funds and private equity firms.

Meanwhile, the restructuring of production reconfigured social classes and social relations in every country. The deregulation of labor rights and trade protocols, privatization of public utilities, services, and national resources, and the commercialization of everything accelerated the accumulation of capitalist wealth through the dispossession of the rest of humanity. Privatization “turned over everything from public utilities and industries, to educational and health systems, mail service, highways and ports to the transnational corporations” providing an investment and profit windfall to the transnational capitalist class [and their Latin American partners]...” while economic reform led to the erosion of labor markets. As workers became ‘flexible,’ they joined the ranks of a new global ‘precarariat’ of proletarians who labor under part-time, temporary, informalized, non-unionized, contract and other forms of precarious work” (Robinson 2016).

The traditional social and economic power of labor was undermined and the popular and working classes lost income, job security, pensions, and other elementary labor rights. New technologies, telecommunications, and global production integration further displaced workers and significantly reduced trade union membership and density, hobbling the industrial power of workers to strike, forcing workers in every country to

opt for other political strategies, including community assemblies, street actions, occupations, and electoral coalitions.

3. Fronting Neoliberalism

The economic reforms in Latin America were not imposed by North American or transnational forces, although they aided and abetted national manifestations of market fundamentalism. Rather, traditional conservative and social democratic parties in Latin America deregulated public controls and made other policy adjustments that privileged market forces. In severe cases, as in Chile, Argentina, and Colombia, the national elites resorted to terror, violence, and repression to implement the necessary “shock therapy” for capitalist accumulation. At the pinnacle of neoliberal enthusiasm, Collor de Mello won the presidency in Brazil and the Sandinista government was replaced in Nicaragua. In all cases, national political and military leaders had no answers beyond inequality. Admiration of the “model passed, rather quickly, from euphoria to depression, and to the isolation of governments that supported it” (Sader 2011, 22). Market restructuring and austerity destroyed any possibility for a social contract with labor and the public. Neoliberal politicians went down to electoral defeat or were chased from office by mass protests and work stoppages—from Venezuela and Ecuador, to Bolivia, Uruguay, and Argentina. IN Uruguay, for example, after slashing social protections and public programs, the Colorado Party and the National Party, traditional mass parties of the elite, lost their credibility and their public support (Lanzaro 2011). In every country, capitalist democracy consistently and dramatically failed to consider the public good. “Frustration generated by the so-called democratic regimes” was “intense, profound, and prolonged” as social conditions worsened under liberal democratic governments in service to the elite that facilitated the dismantling of public programs and social services (Boron 2008, 238). All of the traditional elite conservative parties failed miserably in their attempts to stem the tide of mass opposition to privatization and austerity.

4. Sidekicks for Neoliberal Frontmen

The other historic fail was by the social democratic left and the reformist trade unions, which were also stunned by the consequences of privatization. Reformist leaders of the working class lost their social base when organized labor was decimated. Trade union bureaucrats and political party careerists had no language or understanding for the “sub-proletariat” that was discarded by rampant mercenary capitalism and its liberal democratic order. As neoliberalism moved across the continent, with its pragmatic justification that there was no alternative, social democratic parties fell in line, from Chile, Venezuela, and Brazil to Argentina and Peru. Neoliberalism “became a hegemonic system across almost the entire territory of Latin America and penetrated almost all of the political spectrum” (Sader 2011, 21). Labor “markets” demanded downsized production, flexible non-union employment, and more competitive wages. In short order, almost every Latin American country was flooded with unemployed, precarious, and informal sector workers.

Neoliberalism and its adherents “failed to consolidate the social forces necessary for its stabilization, resulting in the early onset of crises that would check its course” (Sader 2011, 21). Unreceptive to the social democrats compromise with market reforms politics and labor aristocracy rhetoric, workers employed and unemployed turned to their

own leaderships. Traditional reformist parties and trade unions suddenly lost both their social base and their support. Facing worsening economic conditions and limited political options within existing electoral norms, working class social movements arose almost everywhere. As the restructuring of production disrupted organized labor's trade union capabilities, labor struggles occurred with new activities and locations beyond the industrial worksite alone. The new structure did not change the fundamental social relations of exploitation of labor, but new structures did lead to new modes and forms of opposition as working people responded to defend their interests and livelihood as they experienced structural readjustments. Bureaucratic trade unions and reformist social democratic parties were displaced from their traditional positions for negotiating with corporate owners; while diffuse, autonomous, and anarchist responses were woefully insufficient to stem the power of decentralized production and ownership by the transnational capitalist class.

Enamored with global competition, the national populist and social democratic parties in each country facilitated the hard right turn demanded by neoliberal templates, violating their own electoral mandates to protect public interests. Not surprisingly, workers and working class families rejected the collaborationist policies of their traditional reformist unions and political parties (Spronk 2013, 82).

Clearly the failure of neoliberalism in Latin America has been echoed by the failure of its political spokespeople (of the right and left) to provide a program of action for their governments. The inability of commercial media to politically win over the majority in civil society and everyday life only exacerbates the social contradictions. The capitalist classes in Latin America have little to offer the mass population of working people and indigenous nations. The inexorable logic of neoliberalism left them with no answers for the social contradictions left in its wake, nor did the social democratic parties fashion any reforms to either cushion the privatization punches or to divert the resultant rage of opposition. The transformation of each country from liberal democracy wedded to market austerity into societies in conflict began in the streets, in the neighborhoods, in work places across the continent.

Atilio Boron (2004, 2008) argues that neoliberalism has been in a slow decline since the 1990s and has been pushed back from its brutal trajectory first launched in Chile and Argentina in the 1970s. The progressive exhaustion of rebooting capitalism through privatization was accelerated by the upsurge in social protest and successful political mobilization. (Colombia and Mexico being two significant exceptions with their continuing military crackdown and guaranteed US support.) This is not to propose a romantically rosy picture about the end of neoliberalism, because neither its continuation nor its defeat rests solely on its economic success or failure. Capital has its NATO, coalition forces, and US military to violently, if only temporarily, enforce compliance. Neoliberalism may be decaying, but neither a new democratic order nor 21st Century Socialism has yet been born. In fact, "the devastating force of neoliberalism is such that collusion can pass for resistance" (Santos 2008, 258) as illustrated by the Lula presidency in Brazil, the Sanders campaign in the US, and the Syriza accommodation to the EC in Greece.

The future depends on the power of the social movements and the ability of their collective leaderships to craft strategies and tactics for a new cultural hegemony of solidarity, democracy, and social justice.

5. The Rise of Resistance: New Social Movements and the Working Classes

Here is where the displaced working classes and indigenous nations found themselves at the end of the 20th century: neoliberalism had altered the balance of forces within each country, structurally and politically. Privatization, technology, manufacturing practices, and corporate-driven flexible labor reforms displaced much of the power of the organized industrial working class, long a central part of politics and culture in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile and other countries that have advanced production and consumer markets. As a result more workers were displaced, underemployed, and lived precariously on the edges of the informal economy with “part-time, contract, unprotected, informal types of work” and “as the labor force became increasingly scattered and fragmented, rendering collective organization at the workplace more difficult” (Spronk 2013, 75).

The world had changed: The social democratic left—still wearing the rhetorical cloak of socialism like so many Latin Bernie Sanders—sold out labor and faded away; the government was replaced “by private firms and the market, the citizen by the consumer, regulation by free trade, public spaces by shopping malls, the worker by the individual, ideology by marketing, the word by the image, street rallies by political campaigns on TV, rights by competition...” (Sader 2011, 23). Social discontent was at first channeled into religion, private or public violence, and other anti-social activities, as if “the energy of society were denied any kind of political development, but were on the contrary, neutralized” (Sader 2011, 35). Workers found refuge mostly in their neighborhoods and communities.

Meanwhile, governments sold or turned over public agricultural, forest, and shore lands for private conversion into plantations, energy extraction, and commercial operations that directly displaced indigenous peasants—forcing them to become low wage agricultural workers or migrate to the cities and become part of the urban poor—with additional negative global consequences for equality, public health, and environmental sustainability. Borras, et al (2012) documented that 14 million hectares of previously public land was turned into plantation agriculture in Latin America from 2000-2010. Consolidated agricultural production, reduced participation by labor in industrial production, and sharp increases in unemployment, poverty, social inequality and insecurity describe the new neoliberal order.

With no obvious refuge from the flood of market changes and the failure of public institutions to provide any defense or solace for the displaced and disenfranchised, many retreated to their personal lives for comfort and survival. The commercialization of everything, outsourcing, wage reductions, and unemployment soon destroyed even the safe harbors of community and family (Sader 2011, 1). Within a few years, and at first slowly then more rapidly the popular urban classes regrouped in their new geographies and identities. Soon their “fight back took the form of coalition building among groups with less direct economic power” (Spronk 2013, 75).

The relentlessly brutal disruption of daily life sparked mass resistance and uprisings, which blocked some neoliberal projects and just as importantly led to the increased organization and political sophistication of thousands—further upsetting the unsteady balance of social forces, as newly active citizens, especially women, peasants, and indigenous peoples, no longer accepted capitalist-led government authority or the

leadership of traditional unions and reformist parties. In many cases, these new alignments resulted in mass mobilizations that challenged the capitalist class and its political representatives. Class struggles beyond economics won victories for labor and indigenous rights and soon led to electoral victories of left-leaning presidential and legislative candidates connected with mass social movements.

None of these struggles replaced social class contradictions with more important socio-cultural conflicts, rather working class activity expanded to encompass all contradictions enveloped in neoliberalism. “The political decline of trade unions” did not and does not mean that the working class “dissolved into a more inchoate multitude or civil society” (Spronk 2013, 78). Capitalists profit from labor, and workers remain workers whether they are full time factory workers, part time contracted labor, or aiding the accumulation of wealth as transportation, retail, and informal private sector workers.

From the water wars in Cochabamba to the gas wars in El Alto, popular struggles in Bolivia were “characterized by the deep interpenetration of race and class. Their strongest manifestations, moreover, have been urban and working class rather than rural and peasant, although both rural and urban movements have been important” (Webber and Carr 2013, 15). In Bolivia, social movements did not replace the working class, but instead, “facilitated the cooperation of the trade unionism of the cocaleros in Chapare with the trade unionism of the campesinos from the altiplano highlands” expressed politically through the leadership of Morales and the MAS” (Tapia 2008, 226). “It is a simplification at best to suggest that the politics of the Left in Bolivia [or elsewhere] has been replaced by a politics of ethnic conflict” (Webber and Carr 2013, 15).

These “intersectional” social movements have been directly responsible for the Pink Tide electoral phenomena. As noted, social and political reorganization in the wake of neoliberalism severely weakened social democracy and traditional labor unions, forcing displaced workers to create new forms of resistance and organization, while drawing on their own experiences of collective action. The appearance of working class movements organized beyond the worksite and outside traditional political organizations using creative mass protests rather than industrial strikes led to the “brief anticipation of new social movements concerned with culture and identity-based politics” (as conceived by Laclau and Mouffe 1985 or Castells 2004). Accordingly, short-sighted theoretical conclusions based on early local victories moved proponents to skirt issues of power and privilege the local, autonomous activity of grass roots organizations (Spronk 2013, 78).

A more holistic, materialist view notes that as neoliberalism expanded the exploitation of wage labor, shuffling peasants from land into cities, turning entrepreneurs into wages workers by crushing small business, and capturing new generations of youth who were offered precarious, part-time employment, it also restructured, exacerbated, and relied on racism, sexism, and ethnic xenophobia to emphasize identities other than class to diffuse and confuse resistance to the generalized social exploitation of all (Katz 2013). Yet, the reorganization of production does not change capitalist wage exploitation or its social relations of power. With all of their cultural differences, most citizens still become members of the new working classes or alienated middle classes and potentially agents of change responding to inequality and social oppression. Nancy Romer’s (2016) brief but thorough review of contemporary Bolivia reveals the complex intertwining of class and race as an interdependent mixture of labor union members and indigenous campesinos. Fortunately, due to their own theoretical and practical commitment to

survival and success, participants in social movements were seeking more than validation for their identities and pushed forward against and towards political power and government control. As Susan Spronk (2013) cogently notes, the return of class to political mobilizations across Latin America resurrected past industrial or union actions even as class relations of production were irrevocably changed by neoliberal structural adjustments, demonstrating not the disappearance or reduction of class relations, but clearly indicating that class is not static, but historical, subject to cultural, economic, and political conditions of the time. Corporate planners and their political allies connected to transnational capitalism reorganized production and the social relations comprised by the economic order, previous cultural identities, and social norms—were battered by the structural adjustments of privatization and deregulation—none of these dramatic realignments overcame the fundamental contradictions of the production of wealth and class inequality.

Privatization and transnational production protocol reorganized industrial production everywhere. Of course, the working class never was uniformly factory workers or necessarily geographically assembled in large industrial zones, although such concentrations still exist in Sao Paolo, Buenos Aires, Guadalajara, Monterrey, Caracas, Concepcion, and mining, refining, and central agricultural sites. Across the capitalist board, technology, speedup, and downsizing severely reduced labor and wages. Between 1990 and 2005, the period immediately preceding the mass protests, more than 55% of new jobs in Latin America were in the informal sector, precarious, part-time employment (Spronk 2013, 82). The working classes necessarily became more concerned with “the right to live in a world with a diminishing subsistence base” than with “class struggle against exploitation defined in the workplace” (June Nash in Susan Spronk 82). The focus of working class concerns shifted from demands for better wages and working conditions to demands for basic subsistence. The “informal proletariat” became the largest electoral and movement constituency and this “new” working class “created and adhered to other vehicles of struggle”—more territorial than industrial, but nonetheless working class—such as the piqueteros (unemployed) movement in Argentina, working class communities and assemblies in Bolivia, and workers’ cooperatives, social missions, and community councils in Venezuela (Spronk 2013, 83).

Notably, “capitalists benefit from the privations of all the dispossessed, but their earning depend specifically on the direct labor efforts of the exploited” (Katz 2013, 38) and the ability of others to purchase those goods so profits can be realized. Some segments of the working classes are positioned with more power and influence at particular moments of social rupture. The Venezuelan oil workers were absolutely essential to overcoming the strike and sabotage by managers and bureaucratic union officials in 2002. The indigenous labor leaders in Cochabamba were crucial to mobilizing their nations against the privatization of water. While specific actors at specific moments may determine the immediate outcome of a confrontation, more important is the experience of resistance and power as an impetus to further social change. Claudio Katz (2013) identifies Argentinean workers who became militant piqueteros and Bolivian miners who became leaders of informal urban workers. “The change of status (from the exploited to the oppressed and vice versa) [as workers are displaced, or peasants become workers] does not make a major difference if the level of combativeness persists and the channels of popular activism are renewed” (Katz 2013, 39). The point Katz stresses is the

need for unity of the working classes in all their diversity with other subordinate groups such as indigenous communities, unemployed youth, ethnic minorities, small business owners, urban base communities, and others. Which groups or individuals are the leading protagonists is less important than their unity and strategic orientation of their unity.

A most striking confirmation is the battle for workers' control of the oil industry in Venezuela following the coup and management strike in 2002. As part of a nationwide social movement in defense of the Bolivarian revolution, blue collar, industrial workers broke management's lock out. They restarted production under their own control and subsequently formed a new labor federation, the National Union of Workers (UNT). Clearly codifying 21st Century Socialism, the UNT's mission calls for the transformation of "capitalist society into a self-managing society" by building a "new model of anticapitalist and autonomous development that emancipates humans from class exploitation, oppression, discrimination, and exclusion" (Lebowitz 2006, 103). Despite having occupied more than 1200 factories in subsequent years, Venezuelan workers have yet to extend workers control of factories across society, and they are still subject to commodity production. Nonetheless, the reorganization of production, trade, and daily life according to the market dictates of neoliberal globalization has created new contradictions and new opportunities for new forms of resistance and social transformation—by repositioned sectors of the urban and rural working classes. The possibility of producing goods and services for human need rather than private profit has been broached in action in Venezuela, Bolivia, and other countries where workers and communities have developed democratic self-management at worksites, in neighborhoods, and through social missions for public interests.

In Venezuela and Bolivia, community and public media provide possible models for transitioning from capitalist social relations to democratic participatory production under social ownership: radio and television broadcasts produced by residents, workers, and members of diverse constituencies of the working classes verify the capacity and benefit of collective democratic production for human needs. Community media also testify to the extent and direction of democratic social reorganization of the rest of productive and political activities in each country, as dramatically confirmed by Quechua labor leader Oscar Olivera's assessment of the victory in Cochabamba. Olivera noted that the indigenous labor victory broke "the monopoly on the right to speak and to make decisions" providing a template and inspiration for further democratic struggles for social justice and worker and indigenous rights (Webber 2013, 155). Other Latin American social movements have learned the importance of democratic communication and social change. One of the more dramatic cases is the communicative role of community media in informing and mobilizing the popular classes to reverse the corporate coup against Chavez in 2002. Among other many other important examples, the Bolivarian miners radio of the '50s and '60s and the Nicaraguan community radio network CORADEP (People's Radio Corporation) in the 1980s stand out (Artz 1994, 2016).

Crucially, new social movements of working classes in Latin America have not been limited to "grassroots" resistance or blocking the worst of neoliberalism in their local communities. Instead, they have also challenged and replaced governments. "Organized in their own [communal] unions, Aymara peasants led a regional uprising against the privatization of water and land, with over 20,000 armed indigenous activists defending their communal management of natural resources," using their social power to

win the political right to access and control water use (Webber 2013, 157). Later, during the 2003 conflict over gas privatization in El Alto, Aymara collectives were joined by neighborhood councils, worker's organizations, miners, cooperatives, and even small business owners, to form a powerful indigenous-worker coalition in action to force a government reversal on privatizing natural gas. In general, the relations between social movements and Pink Tide governments are dialectic: the manner with which the movements engage a neoliberal government is different from how they approach more "friendly" left governments. In cases where the social movements built viable organizations capable of mobilizing mass actions (e.g., Aymara in Bolivia, CNT in Uruguay, and UNT in Venezuela), they not only determine the government's capacity to enforce decisions but also affect its strategic direction, while simultaneously also building the power and capacity of the social movement to construct a more democratic social order.

Leaderships of social movements, political parties, and cultural formations are necessarily promoting "a broadly conceived socio-political project capable of integrating diverse social actors and movements and can thus play a key role in providing an overarching vision and point of connection for social movements with distinct 'sectoral' concerns... giving government agencies a specific strategic direction and providing the political support necessary to sustain it" (Katz 2013, 35). Social movements must do more than represent the indigenous majority or "to mobilize and conquer the unions," because to govern a nation, a democratic social order must also include political structures that permit alliances with popular urban social sectors, disorganized popular sectors, the middle classes, and the whole of society (Linera 2005). The imperative of winning elections actually forces socialist parties and radical leaderships to offer a program that appeals not only to their primary base among working classes, but also to other social groups, including middle class professionals and shopkeepers. Likewise, the hegemony necessary for social transformation cannot demobilize any movement for immediate political gain, without undermining the political substance and active democracy that is both the goal of the project and the means for obtaining that goal.

The only way leftist, socialist-leaning governments have withstood perceived economic and pragmatic restrictions set by transnational and national capitalist interests is by relying on the persistent mobilization of social movements and their allies. On the surface, there are revolutionary processes that appear to be reformist (parallel social missions and assemblies of 21st Century Socialism in Venezuela and Bolivia), reformist processes that appear to be revolutionary (cancelling the debt in Argentina; Zapatista resistance in Mexico), and reformist policies that are not even reformist (Lula and Rouseff's promotion of neoliberal production and trade in Brazil). The fissure between reformism and transformation remains, although remarkably obscured by the continent rise of mass movements finding expression in rhetorically left and populist electoral victories (Santos 2008). Unraveling the strands of resistance to find those that lead to fundamental social transformation with full democracy will find movements of the popular classes and their allies. Popular mass movements are the only means to assure governments consistently and resolutely act in the interests of the majority and to prevent governments from negotiating away demands for advancing social justice and economic, social, and political equality. What comes from demobilizing social movements can be seen in Brazil: Lula and Rouseff quite timid support of social programs and enthusiastic

implementation of neoliberal trade policies. This transcends the concern for pluralist civil society discourse, emphasizing instead the organization and action of powerful, partisan social movements with programs and leaderships that upset and replace existing civil society economic and social niceties that defend capitalism, liberal democracy, and commercial media. There is ample evidence that reforms do not work to secure democracy or fundamental social change, but perhaps that is one reason some politicians, academics, and NGOs so avoid social movements and radical political power and fiercely privilege liberal civil society.

The Political Complexities and Contradictions of Civil Society

At least since its mythological impact on the dissolution of the Stalinist Eastern Europe, civil society has emerged as the “antidote” to government excess and corporate overreach in recent social science literature and media studies (Waisbord 2011, 97). Civil society is positioned as the “backbone” of democracy (Hall and Trentmann 2006), but neither clarity nor consensus appears beyond the peculiar notion that civil society is an independent space of social action that can withstand government authority. In popular parlance and much academic discourse, civil society obtains its validity in its very ambiguity. The empty vocabulary mostly signifies a preference to dismiss or avoid social class and the realities of social inequality under capitalism. Civil society, under the leadership of businessmen, church leaders, and academics prefers the pluralist myths of liberal democracy to the rugged realities of social struggle on behalf of the working classes.

In Latin America, in part due to its history of military governments, and in part due to the prevailing neoliberal discourse, the public debate often rests on the opposition between government programs and “government” media versus “independent” civil society autonomous projects and private commercial media and the consumer market. The public sphere and public media have less of a tradition or appeal, so at best community media and civil society cooperatives are presented as the alternative to government bureaucracies. The market dominates civil society, the government subsumes the public and (in this limited frame) on balance there is no space for public communication, public media, or public interest with actual public determinations. In the years before the Pink Tide, and partly in reaction to its rise, some on the left made an ideological retreat, reflected in academic disciplines and research, “that questioned and dismissed everything that had to do with socialism (state, party, labor, socialization, democracy) in a very limited historical perspective and surface read of world politics” (Sader 2011, 99). Civil society became the refuge for that liberal milieu.

Civil society is a convenient term that can subvert actual democratic dialogue and social development. Civil society (conceived as the public sphere of reasoned expert discourse) fails to cover all of the places and times working people discuss their shared experiences and work out collective defenses; civil society is too simple a term for representing the assemblies, the community meetings, the protests, the strikes, and the takeovers by indigenous groups in Cochabamba or El Alto. Just as Pink Tide victories upset the expectations of liberal democrats, so too did the prerequisite social movement battles unsettle the genteel expectations for a reformist civil society. The leaderships of the Bolivarian revolution, the Movement for Socialism in Bolivia, the landless workers MST in Brazil, the labor strong Frente Amplio in Uruguay, the broad citizen Alianza Pais

in Ecuador, and the piqueteros in Argentina began in shared conversations, intense debates, victories and successes of mass actions, and political exchanges among dozens of tendencies. Then, surprising to some, radical leaderships transcended civil society, moving to the political sphere on the rising tide of mass social movements against privatizations. An important ingredient in most of these social movements was their access to and use of democratic communication, including mass assemblies in their own languages, their own partisan papers, and in some cases, community radio.

While civil society may offer a space for survival in an otherwise brutal social order, if it is to be of value, it must also allow that space to be used to organize political action for liberation. Liberal pluralism may be satisfied with the vagueness and the democratic assertions about civil society, but political economists and more radical scholars have dissected both the concept and contradictory functioning of civil society (Gramsci 2000).

In concept and practice, civil society implicates assumptions about political society that are insufficient for making sense of the conflicts and contradictions within any nation. A fuller appreciation of society requires the recognition of the entire panoply of social relations—from economics, to politics, to culture and everyday life. Although each society functions in and through complex social interactions, organized infrastructures and practices can be discerned in three primary spheres: productive society, political society, and civil society. In the capitalist world, these are expressed by economic relations and corporate dominance, political relations and government administration and power, and the public sphere of civil society and popular culture.

The “State” of any society (the “Integral State” in Gramscian terms) encompasses the entirety of the organized social order, the complex of social relations that are at work and are refracted within each of the structures and processes: economic society—the economic relations of ownership, control, and production of the wealth necessary for all of society; political society—including the legal system, elections, and the government-imposed order that legitimizes and enforces arrangements to assure the reproduction of the society; and civil society—the public sphere, civil order, and social relations appearing in daily life, including the educational, media, and other social structures and processes that produce and express cultural, religious, and ideological values roughly conforming to the predominant economic and political relations.

Deploying Antonio Gramsci’s consideration of the Integral State where social classes contend for hegemony within political society and civil society, Joseph Buttig (1995) regards civil society as a site of power that exposes citizens to the “mechanisms and modulations of power in capitalist states” (3). For Gramsci, civil society could be that public space where citizens in all their cultural identities and political interests exchange ideas and hammer out differences to construct consensus on the norms and behaviors for social interaction. In liberal formulations, civil society becomes synonymous with the “private sphere,” more or less aligned with the “free market system” and populated by the Chamber of Commerce, the Rotary Club, the Ministerial Association, and similar middle class, professional and entrepreneurial aspirants. In a parallel pluralist move, “public interests” are understood to be subsumed by the government, which is raised to the level of the State. Accordingly, civil society appears as an autonomous site that resists state authority, as in Eastern Europe struggles against Stalinist despots, or in Latin America against populist caudillos, where “civil society

needs to remain a countervailing power to the state” (e.g., Waisbord 2011, 110). Unnoticed the structures of power controlled by the capitalist classes are left free to interfere in both political and civil society using their unquestioned economic power. In the US, for instance, corporate money has the same legal rights as an individual citizen—both are free to do as they please.

Many non-government organizations and some social movement activists prone to local autonomy eschew demands or requests for government support as contrary to what they perceive as more progressive grass roots organizations and activities. Ironically, or not, this preference for civil society conveniently echoes the neoliberal insistence on smaller government and individualized, volunteer charities or other self-help responses to inequality—both positions which bolster capitalist profits and economic interests.

With such an approach, democracy appears as pluralism, dependent on civil discourse to negotiate compromises benefitting all, or as the outcome of freely contested elections. This view may certainly be accorded some common sense, but is actually an ideologically constructed and preferred rendering of liberal democracy in service to social inequality. To understand the hollowness of this pluralist assertion, one need only look at the two-party electoral system in the US, rigged to assure no participation by any that are not vetted by finance and industry. For harder proof, Gilens and Page (2014) provide empirical evidence for the absence of democratic popular will in American politics. Likewise, by identifying the State with the government, this civil society framing reduces social relations and social power to the legislative and administrative enactment of presumed democratic decisions. Neoliberals would hold government in check, while civil society advocates also resist government infringements on the private sphere and individual freedoms, including corporate free speech. Both approaches largely champion autonomous freedom from government interference, including regulations that impinge on free choice and free speech. “Within this kind of rhetoric, the terms civil society or private sphere designate not so much the terrain of freedom in some general or abstract sense but rather the ‘free market’ system,” (Buttigieg, 1995, 5), including commercial media as standard bearers of free speech.

Rising above the Pink Tide, the appeal and vision of 21st Century Socialism does not rest on building an authoritarian state or expanding the power of populist leaders, rather the goal of parallelism in Venezuela and the assemblies and social movement organizations across the continent is to carve away government power. Civil society then is a site for organizing, mobilizing, and leading subordinate groups towards a more thorough-going democracy, locally and nationally against economic elite privilege and social relations. In several instances, given the electoral power of politically conscious social movements, government policies and initiatives provided opportunities and support for civil society initiatives in education, community control, and public media access.

Liberal democracy and its academic promoters are generally loath to examine the relations of power and influence between political society (what they refer to as the State) and civil society, which historically “mutually reinforce each other to the advantage of certain strata, groups, and institutions” (Buttigieg 7) in service to economic power and its privileged right to accumulate wealth at the expense of the majority. The power of the capitalist class is easily recognizable, but its source of wealth is hidden by political and

civil society. Owning the means of production, factories, land, transportation, and communication produces and extends the concentrated economic, political, and cultural power that capitalist classes hold. With this view, civil society is not an unproblematic sphere of freedom but of constructed hegemony—a primary site where elite leaderships negotiate subordinate consensus for existing social relations (Buttigieg 7). The sudden capture of government authority by leftist representatives only really threatens the capitalist class (and its economic power) when that political representation is coupled with an energetic civil society led by indigenous, labor, and popular social movements insistent on expanding democratic rights and social justice. Capitalist states can tolerate all kinds of political chicanery and cultural openness, until citizens make decisions affecting resources, production, the division of labor, and social and economic equality. For liberal pluralists, any instance of civil society support for popularly elected socialist-leaning leaders is ridiculed for its loss of autonomy and subservience to government authority. Stepping back, such a critique quite frankly smacks of an elitist incomprehension and dismissal of the plebian masses and the average citizen's ability to make rational, politically conscious decisions to advance democracy and the common good—a barely veiled disdain for the plebian masses who are expected to stay in their place as workers and servants to the elite.

When civil society plays nice and adheres to the dictates of the market, commercial media professional journalism, and liberal parliamentary democracy, all is well. Whenever community-based working class and indigenous social movements emerge with broad enthusiastic consent for social justice partisanship, public-run media, community reporters, and increased democratic control everywhere, as part of a rising hegemonic leadership of 21st Century Socialism, liberal democrats and their academic apologists suddenly go apoplectic, charging that radical populists have maneuvered and subverted grass roots autonomy. In contrast, the fight for leadership and cultural norms in civil society directs the working population to also aspire to political leadership and government power to legalize their democratic rights and social and economic justice—an anathema to liberal democracy and its pluralist apologists in Latin America and elsewhere.

How the Pink Tide rises within civil society flows from the fluctuating political and cultural contexts, including the social relations of power within each nation. This polemic is not intended to be academic, but more urgently and importantly, to improve our understanding of the political economy, social relations, and political conditions of movements for social justice, so that knowledge might contribute to more effective strategies and tactics to realize social justice and democratic rights in opposition to corporate interests and market imperatives.

Before the Bolivarian revolution, civil society in Venezuela was dominated by national capitalists, corporate interests connected to oil production, banking, and retail, as well as economically and culturally powerful media groups around Cisneros, Granier, and other commercial media happily collaborating with skilled industrial labor, conservative church groups, academics, and a variety of social democratic parties and tendencies. Commercial media campaigned in defense of the private monopolies, criticizing the non-renewal of RCTV in Venezuela and the dissolution of the bankrupt private stations Gamavision and TC Television in Ecuador, and constitutional guarantees of the human right to communication in Argentina, Bolivia, and Uruguay—press freedom

associations and academic accounts frequently echo the same criticisms (e.g. Baddour 2014, Lauria 2011, Waisbord 2011). No commercial media in the Western Hemisphere condemned the media-engineered 2002 coup against Hugo Chavez, the democratically-elected president of Venezuela. Yet, this “liberal” civil society touted the common interests of all Venezuelans, while it tolerated or ignored the gross inequality and poverty of the urban poor and larger subaltern groups, who were largely excluded from polite civic discourse. A more participatory civil society might look more like the nationwide strike led by indigenous *Alteños* in 2005 that drew two million Bolivians into the streets—workers, indigenous, progressive professionals, university students and teachers, high school students, and indigenous women with their table cloth flags sharing meals with soldiers—demanding the nationalization of natural gas, the removal of two presidents, and shortly thereafter electing socialist Evo Morales as president of Bolivia (Romer 2008).

Likewise, the liberal democracies of Uruguay, Argentina, Venezuela, and elsewhere in the southern hemisphere represented the essence and epitome of freedom offered by capitalist democracy: full liberties and opportunities for the national capitalist class, its managerial class, its commercial media, its academic supporters, and significant sections of skilled labor that benefitted from privatization and corporate-directed technology. In every Latin American country, as everywhere else in the world, neoliberalism brought riches to an elite economic and political strata. In a few cases, governments assuaged the worst of the increased inequality with modest support for education and public health, but overall, civil society accepted the parameters of what was possible as dependent on what the market would bear. Media, schools, local city councils, churches, and other arenas for public discourse championed globalization, competition, entrepreneurialism, self-help, individual success, and “liberal” reforms of public protections as a means to unleash growth and prosperity for all. In short, “the rules of the game were established by the dominant class... an integral part of what needs to be transformed before the principles of freedom and justice can be extended” to realize an end to inequality and exploitation (Buttidgeig 1995, 10).

Decades of attempts at media reform and other democratic impulses have confronted the reality of economic power operating politically through government institutions and culturally through civil society activities (Fox and Waisbord 2002). At the same time, that consolidated, interlocked power has creatively withstood recurring popular challenges by incorporating reformist suggestions from civil society, including (as needed to maintain control), negotiating demands from potentially more powerful social forces. In Argentina, the Kirchner governments refused to pay its international debt under pressure from a mass movement capable of overturning the entire social order. The global financial order understood and tolerated the temporary loss of payment until such time that the Argentine capitalist class could better tame its workers. Unsurprisingly, pro-business Mauricio Macri’s run-off electoral victory in 2015 was immediately followed with decrees reinvigorating neoliberal shock and awe. In admiration, *Time* magazine quickly named him the most powerful president in Latin America.

Liberal reformists always assert that through elections or reasoned debate a government can be formed that transcends social divisions—Macri in Argentina, Temer in Brazil, and Hernandez in Honduras, and all other conservative Presidents notwithstanding. Pluralism is offered as the ideal form for working through differences

and reforming the worst of government dysfunction. From this premise, the government—controlled by politicians and parties who claim an electoral mandate but do not represent the majority, and often are even overwhelmingly unpopular as in the US—this government somehow will defend civil rights, the public’ well-being, and the social security of all citizens. Media repeat rhetoric against class war by capitalist class warriors to further suggest the government represents the people—a necessary understanding for popular acceptance of the social system. Advocates that imagine civil society protecting citizens in Latin America likewise imagine a public sphere of fair, orderly, equitable exchange of ideas that will temper government and business excesses—if only civil society maintains its independence from government overreach—and radical workers go home.

A more honest assessment finds that transnational capital united with national capitalist partners in their neoliberal drive to commercialize all of human life has upset the common sense of representative democracy and the public good. As governments across the continent sold off publicly-owned utilities, natural resources, and the infrastructure for a functioning society, popular consent atrophied. Meanwhile and before the entrance of the rougher social classes, civil society popularized competition, individualism, consumerism, and attacks on public services as inefficient. “Through the structural and pedagogic dominance of capitalist leaderships and academic proponents of civil society the notion that the social order can be perfected through ‘fair and open’ competition becomes entrenched as common sense, [while] reforms won by campaigns within civil society leave the [capitalist] government apparatus and its legitimacy intact” (Buttigieg 2011, 13).

The specifics were different in each country, but the elements were the same. “Criticism was leveled at the [government] and its regulatory functions, at tax policies and at regional and South-South integration initiatives... Attention was directed to issues like corruption (always in relation to the government and the state [e.g., Honduras, Paraguay, Brazil, Argentina]), supply shortages, the autonomy of regional governments against state centralization, referenda on constitutional reforms, and supposed ‘threats’ to ‘press freedom’ (always identified with the private media)” (Sader 2011, 147).

Civil society that seeks pragmatic reform, and persuades, lobbies, and elects within the government structure of capitalist society reinforces the social order of inequality. Whatever concessions won, if the social relations of domination remain, nothing fundamental has changed. Reform within and by government may win some relief, but simultaneously it bolsters the State and its dominant social relations.

For example, the PT in Brazil, Syriza in Greece, and the Argentine Kirchner government led social movements from the street into the gutter, with at best a handful of reforms, claiming they were the most pragmatic, best option available. On the other hand, a civil society that breaks with market constraints, refuses to abide by IMF-approved budgets and enacts non-commodified, socially-useful decisions can reorder society to meet human needs, as roughly illustrated by the expansion of free public university education in Venezuela—a democratic program fiercely attacked by political and academic elites active in civil society.

While civil society nominally serves to reproduce the norms and ideas of capitalist society, working class social movements might, through the “painstaking process of disseminating and instilling an alternative” way of life on a mass scale,

advance social change (Buttigieg 2011, 14). Here then community media float to the surface of the discussion. Energetic, ubiquitous community media would contribute to the process of dialogue, debate, and the formation of social justice actions led by mass social movements. Obviously, having responsive governments partnered with leading civil society organizations and constituencies improves the ability of social movements to forge programs through actions that represent and win consent from the larger public.

A socialist government is not a capitalist government, even when it remains constrained by the capitalist state, its economic order, and cultural norms. A socialist government in tandem with a civil society, hegemonically led by a socialist movement, can better develop assemblies, councils, organizations of the working classes and their allies. A civil society that represents the interests of workers, peasants, middle classes, and indigenous would be a civil society dedicated to social justice. That civil society partnered with a political society led by a government representative of the popular classes, indigenous, and the citizen majority could unite in a powerful, irresistible social force capable of restructuring the entire social order—transforming the entire State—politically, culturally, and economically for all. A new democratic State would even graciously provide living wage jobs to all members of the Cisneros, Marinho, Gonzalez, Slim, and Azcarraga families.

The immediate task of social movements within civil society is not to indefinitely extend government power, even if it is led by their adherents, but the goal should be to reduce and replace government power and authority with administrators who simply carry out the decisions of independently functioning communal councils, indigenous assemblies, trade unions, and other mass organizations beyond the reach of government decisions. Laws or actions by any particular Pink Tide government have value only if the participatory democracy of the resulting activities become institutionalized in popular culture, gaining legitimacy with or without government sanction. Here, the social ownership of community and public media provide a clear and ready measure of social movement political independence and its ability to establish non-governmental institutions and practices that are culturally and politically authorized by the participants themselves in service to humanity.

This is not to disparage civil society, but to enlarge its political geography. Civil society may provide a primary site for winning consent for social justice and anti-capitalist actions. Civil society may be led or captured by particular social forces that use their hegemony to support or challenge governments and government policies—including laws and enforcement of property relations, wage-capital relations; and taxes. Civil society may initiate actions to alter economic relations and insist on access to and democratic control over resources. A vibrant, democratic civil society is neither an ally nor an enemy of any particular government. This is not to disparage political power. After all, governments set the acceptable parameters of civil society operations. Legitimate political representatives of a democratic, participatory civil society also legitimate and provide resources for social movements working through civil society.

Insisting on the independence of civil society from the government obscures the intimate social, political, and economic interdependence of the two, omitting the more holistic operations of the capitalist State and the reproduction of dominant social relations in all spheres of life. Social movements that secure government support for public projects can use that support to further their independent political organization against

and beyond government limits, while using the legitimacy and resources of the government to do so, as they also challenge and replace capitalist economic power. As Ana Vilorio (2008), the community media director of Venezuela's Ministry of Communication and Information explained, "It is an exquisite contradiction: using the state to replace the state." Vilorio answers the more restricted question of whether the government is an ally or enemy, of whether civil society and social movements should demand or accept government support, by identifying the protagonists as politically-conscious, self-organized working people using the government and all available or captured resources for their own purposes. This direction relocates power from a particular social site, the government or the corporation, and advocates power as action, as a social relation, dependent on which social forces use their social power.

No capitalist makes any product; no politician fights any war. Workers produce, soldiers fight. Or not. And they can also decide what to make, how to make it, and who to fight. Power does not necessarily have a particular geographic location; it depends on the awareness, organization, action, and commitment of social forces that have material power that may not be currently used for the common good. Public media access raises more than questions of licensing and technology. Public media access is about power, the right and power to communicate, including the right and power to decide content and have it distributed widely. To have access to media production both indicates the extent of one's power and the possibility for recruiting and mobilizing a broadly unified power for collective, cooperative interests.

If the goal of any organization is to secure more democratic rights, then ultimately, success in civil society must precede (or occur in tandem with) any movement to political leadership in government and likewise any hope of solving social problems beyond some defined locale to reorganize the society needs the resources and legitimacy that only comes with political power.

The task of social movements and all protagonists within civil society is to organize and mobilize sufficiently powerful social groups, most likely broad sections of working people who identify themselves in diverse ways—gender, ethnicity, nationality, professionally, geographically, and more. Thus, community media has an additional responsibility, because mass mobilization comes from awareness, interest, hope, and intent. The larger capitalist state has been able to weather onslaughts and challenges by convincing the majority of the common sense of capitalist society and the impossibility of any alternative—neither of which are empirically true.

As a multiplier within civil society, community and public media can lead a conversation, provide information, offer evidence and examples for why and how social change is both possible and necessary—and even rewarding and joyful. The mass of humanity may be institutionally uneducated but the intelligence and wisdom of its experience can quickly raise political awareness and cultural sophistication, spurring mass actions for extending democracy. Biting in to new possibilities and inspiring ideas provides a rush of confidence and insistence, as all revolutionary moments have confirmed. One need only look at the creative output that burst forth when old habits and constraints were thrown aside in the 1980s Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua: poetry, music, radionovelas; or the documentaries and oral histories prepared by community producers in Venezuela after 2002.

In some instances, civil society provides a bit of safe space for opponents of repression, for opportunities to critique poverty and inequality. It may even become a public space for popular culture that can nurture humor, art, creativity, and humanity. In the context of Pink Tide electoral success, civil society can also provide an organizing space for those eager to take advantage of leftist government overtures for worker's councils, nationalizations, and community media. Far from being manipulated by populists in power, social movements that pick up and run with offered opportunities represent the best means for actually securing the democracy that government pronouncements only rhetorically suggest. A civil society dominated by participatory social movements becomes not only an arena for cultural struggle, but a means for organizing political and social actions, for informing, persuading, and mobilizing forces in protests, strikes, boycotts, occupations, blockages, and even democratic mass insurrections as the Aymara had to do in defense of their cultural rights and political authority.

Political Power and Social Movements

The electoral successes accorded to the Pink Tide mark the matriculation from civil society discourse and action to political power and leadership. The next logical and necessary steps may be incursions into economic privilege: control of national resources for the benefit of all citizens; nationalizations of industry and banking; participatory democracy in production and government; land reform and communal development of health and nutrition; and in general, a more rational social order of democracy and equality. The sudden revival of anticapitalist alternatives that hasn't been seen since the disintegration of the Soviet Union 25 years ago indicates that tens of thousands, perhaps millions, have opted to leave the capitalist road. The expansion of national economic development, some redistribution of national wealth, and a dramatic increase in government social welfare programs refute claims that "there are no alternatives" to neoliberalism and capitalism. Yet, despite the remarkable electoral successes and substantial improvements to the quality of life for the popular classes, the Pink Tide impulse for anticapitalist social change has not seriously challenged capitalism. In most countries, "leftish" leaderships have refracted the popular will—bending the power and passion of social movements to the more guarded negotiations with elite power—leaving ample space for capitalist sabotage, disruption, and opposition to participatory democracy and social equality.

As governments were elected on a wave of radical social movements, progressive social programs followed. In Uruguay in 2005, newly elected deputies, including 10 trade union members, passed a Union Rights Act, which encouraged the forming of more than 400 unions. By 2009, the Frente Amplio, which brought together the Uruguayan left, "became the most powerful party" in the country, with more than twice the popular vote of the Colorado and National Parties combined, winning the Presidency and an overwhelming majority in the legislature (Lanzaro 2011). Until 2015, the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela has consistently garnered the support of upwards of 60% of the population, largely working classes, urban poor, and other formerly disenfranchised groups. The radical presidency of Rafael Correa in Ecuador and the socialist Evo Morales in Bolivia maintain similar mass support. Such popular backing reflects the implementation of major social programs that have benefited the poor and subaltern

classes. Yet, none have yet made serious transitional steps against capitalism, the root source and cause of the neoliberal order, austerity, and social inequality.

Jorge Lanzaro (2011) observes that even quite radical reforms in defense of public education, health, and labor rights only amount to “a social democratic neocorporatist arrangement, which is limited to workers and labor relations,” confined within capitalist social relations, including the maintenance of reformed neoliberal marketization of the rest of society (370).

The government of any state is the relation of social forces condensed in structures and processes that serve, protect, and adjust those relations so they will be reproduced. The government crystallizes and organizes those relations through policies, laws, and enforcement. A capitalist state can exist with a socialist government. If a socialist government does not deepen the process of change and open channels for popular participation, establish new policies and regulations for civil society activities and new determinations for the creation and distribution of wealth, over time corporate influence in civil society and the economy will replace or retard a socialist government, and dismantle any democratic encampments that threaten the exploitation of profit from wage labor.

Understanding the government as one vital part of the larger, more integral state, does not reduce its importance to society, it only positions it in relation to more encompassing social relations and practices, especially the production of wealth and power. In every country, citizens that have been paying attention have learned that political power is largely purchased by economic interests; lobbyists on behalf of corporations influence and write laws benefitting and reproducing capitalist relations; even the content of commercial media is the outcome of economic interests, media ownership, advertising support, and an ideological compatibility between the media industry and the protection of capitalist prerogatives (Herman and Chomsky 2002). Governments represent social interests and economic interests. Economic influence trumps democracy, unless social movements use their mass power to disrupt and alter political practices and enforce their own political decisions through direct action or other means.

Clearly, for a dozen governments located in closely adjacent geographies to be even nominally influenced by popular democracy, there is suddenly a real possibility for more fundamental changes to the social relations of force and power. Through new legislation and financial support, Pink Tide governments give legitimacy to social movements and civil society demands; several Pink Tide governments have made resources available in response to indigenous social movements, organized workers, community councils, and other democratic forces. Although these changes may not be revolutionary, the rebalancing of social power by vibrant community and public access media does open public debate and knowledge to the possibilities of alternative arrangements, allowing for the appearance of further mobilizations that could transition to new social relations incompatible with capitalism and elite privilege.

The victories of candidates aligned with radical social movements are not all solid instances of democratic demands from civil society being realized in government power. Critiques or defenses of Lula, Chavez, Morales, Correa, Kirchner, Ortega and others often reveals as much or more about the ideology and values of the commentator as its does about the political commitments of the governments discussed. Still, blanket dire

warnings of the dangers to civil society organizations that do not keep their distance from manipulative populists employs an inadequate lens for evaluation. Indeed, arguably all proponents of democracy and social justice should applaud the social movements underwriting the rising Pink Tide, recognizing the shifting electoral responses as a strong indication of the political openings for the further democratic development of labor, indigenous, and communities of popular classes to provide leadership for the broader public and civil society. Whether any particular candidate will resist capitalist maneuvers and opposition and stand tall for social equality and social justice is perhaps less important than how working classes and popular social movements understand, impact, and respond to the shifting relations of power. Community and public access media have an enormous contribution to make in informing and mobilizing the working classes and other social groups of in mass action to stop privatization and austerity. To dismissively castigate working class social movements, community assemblies and councils, and government-supported public media as evidence of the cleverness of populist demagogues sets aside the actual participation of masses of citizens and disrespects the public's ability to learn, assess, and decide its own priorities.

No fundamental change will be won in any society until the fundamental social relations of production, governance, and daily life are transformed from commodity exchange, self-interest, consumerism, and deference to government institutions and violence. The capitalist state cannot be transformed by civil society. It does not fall to its knees in defeat with the electoral success of the working majority or an indigenous president. Yet, for the democratic majority, workers, peasants, and poor en masse, capturing government power to supplement its cultural leadership can be a transitional step towards full democracy. A broad public consensus for a government's political authority combined with active mass support for the cultural and social norms of equality, human solidarity, and social justice soon poses the existential question for capitalism transitioning to a democratic social revolution. In that regard, public access media and community media, authorized and funded by a responsive "left" government, are emblematic declarations of a political leadership's intent to open communication and culture to full access by all citizens. Public access media and participatory community media provide the means to improve the methods of debate, discussion, and decision-making while also providing the means for articulating a social and political program that aims to transition society to full democracy, maximum citizen participation, with resources directed to social justice and equality.

Any public access media or community media based on participatory democracy and advocating the human right to communication must necessarily decide its relation to government authority. Prior to legalization and licensing, community media challenged government restrictions and demanded the right to communicate. As new governments came to power, community media needed a new calculus to develop a new relationship to more democratic governments that legalized, licensed, funded, and promoted the democratic right to communication. The truth is concrete. Civil society and community media relations to government authority and programs must necessarily depend on to what extent any given government represents the will and enacts the interests of the diverse public constituencies. Media are essential to a democratic civil society. Community media dedicated to expanding democracy, equality, and social justice may, depending on its evaluation of a Pink Tide government, advocate on behalf of and in

defense of that government and those policies that expand and enforce equality and social justice. To do otherwise, out of some abstract theoretical mandate for civil society to remain independent from government would be the height of folly and undermine the power to decide that community media so ardently demands.

Just as social missions, neighborhood councils, and workers assemblies draw together protagonists in action for labor, civil, gender, indigenous, environmental, and human rights, public and community media communicate messages dedicated to expanding those rights. Community and public access media have an exceptional ability to inform, educate, and mobilize the members of social movements. To the extent that a newly elected popular government leads or enacts the demands and interests of the various social movements and their constituencies, community and public media find parallel interests with both the social movements and the government leaders enacting programs on behalf of those movements. When legislative representatives in Venezuela pass laws on workers' control of production, community-controlled public education and health care, land reform, the nationalization and protection of natural resources, community media have an ethical obligation and to broadcast the decisions, encourage citizens to carry out the decisions, and hold the government responsible to deliver on those decisions. The wall between civil society and political society is permeable and should be pushed or crossed whenever possible and necessary by social forces capable of changing society.

Alternative Power, Not Avoidance of Power

In the US and Europe, community media and alternative media mostly function as marginalized local operations, often neither radical or politically engaged. Defined in opposition to mainstream media for their advocacy of social and political reform, alternative media are often characterized by their extensive links with social movements, counter-cultural groups, or ethnic communities (Hass 2004). In the US and Europe, many if not most community media primarily broadcast cultural and entertainment variety for local communities. A more politically optimistic read finds alternative media to be "conduits for political agendas and social movements" that at best bring issues to the attention of governments and commercial media (Hass 2004, 116; Downing 2001; Streitmatter 2001).

As part of the social and political movements expanding democracy, however, community media in Latin America have become a crucial means for voicing and organizing resistance and mobilization, a means for "enacting citizenship by actively intervening and transforming the established mediascape...empowering the community involved" (Rodriguez 2001, 20) and more importantly mobilizing those communities in political action. This distances public access media and participatory community media beyond public service and distinguishes it from local, alternative media. Public service media, as conceived by Nicolas Garnham (1996), functions as a national, centralized, restricted system of professional expertise providing non-partisan, pluralist information for the public good; Robert McChesney (1998) configures a role for localized community media as subset of a national public service media network; while others touting public service broadcasting omit direct citizen participation in programming production. Neither the political neutrality of public service media which is "incapable of promoting social change" (Glasser 1999, 10) nor the ability of local media to affect self-perception and

everyday lives (Rodriguez 2001) challenge existing social inequality, nor are they of much use for communicating and organizing movements that can actually change power. Including more citizen voices as public broadcasting journalistic backdrop to frame expert evaluation of problems and solutions appears on the surface to be more democratic, but effectively relegates citizens to pieces of information constructed for non-democratic, non-participatory media forms (Massey and Haas 2002).

Tacitly accepting existing relations of power, alternative media serve as a supplement to commercial and public service media, providing a discursive space for marginalized groups, at best “a resource for subaltern counterpublics to articulate their interests and concerns” (Howley 2007, 345). For some, alternative media’s “ability to affect the everyday lives of citizens” (Haas 2004, 116), reaches its apex with empowerment of individuals using a microphone is the height of participation (Rodriguez 2001, 160). Even the evaluative lens are alternative: alternative, oppositional, connected to their local communities, forever marginal and subordinate to “mainstream” media, excluded from the larger public discourse. The alternativeness of community media does not challenge political power or social structures, it seems content to find fulfillment in personal relations among community members amid the sea of social inequality. Insistence on grass roots independence and romanticizing local politics avoids the complicated and difficult imperative to address the social relations of power that determine politics and culture in any society. In practice, even ostensibly radical, alternative community media mirror neoliberal policies that deregulate public interest and turn all social problems into local, individualized concerns.

Participatory democratic media, either public access or community, remove those commercial filters of scale, expertise, and organization from media use by individual citizens and constituent groups. In practice, the participatory forms and democratic functions of politicized community media can accelerate public participation in civil society and its engagement with government (Rennie 2006). Community and public access media can engage and present citizens as capable decision-makers and protagonists who have the democratic right to decide policy and programs locally, nationally, and internationally, which is more substantive than relegating members of alternative public spheres to petitioning power that resides elsewhere. Granted, community and alternative media primarily operating locally do represent democratic access, participation, and even control of the local media, but if permanently limited to resistance and opposition, community media accept and reproduce their own marginalization and commercial media dominance. To avoid being limited to local issues or at best local conversations about national issues, participatory community media must accord full access to content production by citizens, connected to distribution networks that reach the entire population. In contrast to the marginalization of low-power FM broadcasters in the US that are limited to 100 watt signals, Radio Primero Negro and 23 de Enero in Caracas have a broadcast footprint that covers most of Caracas and more than 3 million listeners. Governments relying on democratic social movements and seeking to establish direct democracy would want to develop community media in policy, regulation, resources, and reach. A vibrant, independent, public access media (as a crucial component of civil society) gathers debate and initiates discussion of concerns to the majority and also provides a communication means for organizing mobilizations to enact the democratic will of the citizenry. A more robust, engaged, community media could be

instrumental in civil society activities, challenging commercial media dominance and affecting government policy by informing and mobilizing the public.

Several of the Pink Tide governments have taken steps towards community media/public access media networks by approving laws and constitutional amendments guaranteeing access to the broadcast spectrum and their citizens right to media production; The Ministry of Popular Power for Communication and Information (MinCI) in Venezuela has the Bolivarian System for Communication and Information (SiBCI) public media network, which also provides news and information resources to community radio, television, and print. The initiative seems capable of leading to a national public and community media system that could replace commercial and government media systems, apparently following the Bolivarian strategy of “parallelism” that develops institutions and sites of democratic participation that organize and empower the working classes to replace capitalist and government institutions. Both community media and social missions have the potential to transition to more power, as they pry open spaces of operation and secure more direct participatory purchase over production and distribution of social resources. Tracking the trajectory and the distance traveled towards participatory media production and distribution provides an indication of the strength of social movements and the political orientation of the Pink Tide governments and leaderships.

In contrast, the bureaucratic hold on media in Nicaragua by the Ortega presidency not only restricts citizen’s right to communication, it severely handicaps the development of an organized, democratic, and confident social movement capable of replacing neoliberal privatizations and capitalist theft. The rich experience of CORADEP’s (Popular Radio Corporation) participatory radio with community correspondents and producers (Artz 1994) could be a model to be emulated and expanded, as an essential part of any social movement wanting to continue the Sandinista anticapitalist trajectory of the 1980s. Unfortunately, despite the remarkable social gains in education and health, the limits on community media and public media in Nicaragua today indicate serious deficiencies in current government policies, creating a real obstacle for those working for social justice and democratic social change.

The widespread organization of knowledge and experience is best conducted with media in the hands of communities of the urban and rural working classes, indigenous populations, women, youth, and other broad social sectors of the public. The freedom and power of citizens to produce in their own voice for their own interests is a precondition to democracy in the long run and essential to winning sites for communication and organization against neoliberal capitalism in the immediate.

Public Access Media, Participation, and Political Power

Public access media do not overcome economic relations, but they can express possible alternatives, present options, and build skills and confidence, as they demonstrate and champion working class independence and socialist alternatives to reform and negotiation. Public access media, with democratic participation, deny by their very existence the tepid counseling of liberal pluralism to accept less. By their radical performance of public participation, public access media and community media refute the class compromise with capitalism promoted by liberal civil society.

In a society that ideologically and materially enforces buying and selling, public access media need government support to produce quality, engaging content not dependent on audience sales and not intended to return profits on media commodities. Government financing of public access media by does not curtail democracy or political independence. Financial, legal, and infrastructural support by PSUV, MAS, FA, or Correa does not guarantee or replace social ownership and participatory democracy per se, but government support resulting from social movement insistence does make more possible community and public access media that are necessary for building mass social movements that will ultimately secure democratic communication and other human rights.

Liberal democracy presents a pluralist system that claims to afford fair and reasonable access to deciding laws and policies through elections of representatives, with civil liberties for all and a reliance on administrative and technical experts that enact collective decisions. With such an open and civil exchange, extra-institutional actions such as strikes, protests, and mass actions are discouraged as being unnecessary and unreasonable actions by those that do not accept the will of the majority as indicated by regular electoral and legislative processes. A slightly modified version of liberal democracy understands that part of the pluralist discourse in an open society features movements and persuasive groups outside the official institutions of elections and legislation, but still accepts the final arbiter to be government power (Roberts 1998). In any case, citizen participation either occurs at the ballot box, or in support for the electoral process that is punctuated in the ballot box every few years. Within contemporary advertising and public relations, citizen participation is limited to voting on Facebook, responding in a focus group, answering pollsters, volunteering for a political campaign that has a predetermined agenda, or in the ultimate democratic freedom as a consumer choosing with product to buy.

Participation after decisions are made, leaves participants in the same receiving audience position, with no say in topic, timing, option, or importance. Whether in focus groups or the voting booth, liberal democracy and consumer culture in practice are limited to mass participation is a largely unrepresentative process. Despite calls for voting for one “lesser evil” candidate over another, the electoral ritual mostly provides a mandate for the social system. Every few years the population participates in confirming its belief that elections matter (Gronbeck 1978). The end result, as the exhaustive study by Princeton Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page (2014: 564) concluded: “economic elites and organized groups representing business interests have substantial independent impacts on US government policy, while average citizens and mass-based interest groups have little or no independent influence” (564). To be clear: capitalists control the government, whichever party is elected, while the average American has little power in the electoral process.

In Latin America, capitalist control and influence over the Pink Tide governments is not always so transparent. Lula, Kirchner, Vasques, Ortega, and Lugo were elected during mobilizations against neoliberalism in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Nicaragua, and Paraguay. Yet, none of these, “took clear steps to break with the model they had inherited, although they did make adjustments and produce significant differences” (Sader 2011, 139). Chavez, Maduro, Morales, and even Correa and Vasquez have conformed more closely with the popular will, more or less the result of accessible,

participatory democratic institutions that function locally and nationally. One key ingredient is a participatory democracy that seeks discussion and decisions with and by full and regular participation by all citizens through extensive dialog, including public assemblies, referenda, plebiscites, community councils, and mass mobilizations against corporations and government institutions that are unresponsive to the popular will (Piñeiro Harnecker 2007). Participatory democracy privileges direct decisions by citizens on policy and program.

Labor, indigenous, women, communities of poor, small business owners, and others within civil society must do more than simply volunteer or join organizations. Participation as in voting or answering public opinion polls are fine, but democracy must be a well-informed citizenry, with the right to discuss, decide, and have their decisions fulfilled. For democratic social movements participation probably includes having knowledge about structures of society, the ability to recognize and win allies, how to imagine and organize the collective will to realize a new social order, and then how to construct and share proposals and arguments. In societies in struggle and motion, community, participatory media complement factory councils of occupation and control, organizations of action and solidarity, decision-making assemblies and communal councils. Community and public media provide a means for creative communication and dialogue. In Venezuela, urban and rural groups use street theater, corner “radio,” murals, puppet performances, demonstrations, and electronic media. That is media democracy in action: participation by protagonists, learning, knowing, thinking, doing, sharing, and leading.

Participatory democracy signals citizen decision-making on priorities, implementation, and enforcement, not just volunteering for a project conceived and controlled by government agencies or political parties. The fight against authoritarianism and bureaucracy begins with egalitarian discussion and decision-making at all levels, from the community to the national. Referenda following debate and discussion with the ability to recall of representatives further establishes participation in implementation of local decisions. An active, accessible media produced and received by the entire population would nurture and fulfill the possibilities of and for democracy.

Liberal democracy offers participation limited to campaign workers for parties and candidates bought and controlled beyond membership decision and direction. Representative democracy in Latin America is more open than the US, and certainly has allowed for the interests of the working classes and indigenous to appear in expanded reforms and social programs, but still regularly curtails the concordance between decisions by voters and actions by less radical or more duplicitous candidates (e.g. Vázquez, Lula, Ortega). Full, participatory democracy, in contrast, enacts the ideas, voices, decisions of citizens in programs that are also led by citizens themselves (Burbach and Piñeiro 2007, 30). Democracy for social transformation, for socialist democracy, then is not only a means for changing power, but it is the change itself, and portends the change to come. If the Pink Tide continues like fresh water flowing downstream: life giving, in constant motion, and everything in its wake, democracy can overflow the restrictive banks of capitalism.

Demands and implementation of full democracy not only deepens and expands democratic practices within government and civil society, it extends democracy into and beyond existing political institutions and corporate control. Popular legislation that

encourages proposals for laws in Venezuela is one modest program with Constitutional authority (Article 70) that radically opens legislation to popular determination, such as the 2011 tenant's rights law (Robertson 2011). The more robust manifestations are the constituent assemblies in Venezuela and Bolivia that represent the "articulation between local participatory democracy and representative democracy at the national level," with citizen's assemblies writing and debating and then voting to confirm new constitutions with radically-expanded democratic rights for indigenous, women, children, labor and community media "In this sense, it may be more appropriate to speak of *democratization* as an ongoing, dynamic process than of *democracy* as a final end state" (Burbach and Piñeiro 2007, 29). It follows that public media access is more than a means to social change, it reflects and anticipates democratic change, putting communication power in the hands and voices of all.

Many of the political formations leading the mass movements in Latin America today do not have the same participatory democracy so necessary for internal democracy and decision making on party policies and ideology. These democratic deficiencies undercut mass appeal and confidence, and are usually reflected in declining popular support for left-leaning governments as illustrated in Nicaragua in the 1990s, Argentina 2015, and Venezuela and Brazil in 2016. The lack of full democracy also handicaps the organizations' ability to make decisions representing their members' interests and ideas and to implement effective programs to meet the needs of society. Likewise, many NGOs rely on their professionals rather than members of the communities they serve when making strategic decisions.

Media are not the fundamental site of power in society. Taking the pulse and political temperature of the body politic can best be done by checking the media structures and public access to media in each society. Notably, in Latin America the dominance of Cisneros, Clarin, Marinho, Azcarrago, and a few other consolidated transnational media groups greatly affects the political, social, and cultural relations in every nation. As constituent agents of popular classes and other currently subordinate social groups win access and control over media and the production of media content, public access media become a vital part of the transition to a new, democratic, more humane society. Expanding public access to media has at least three consequences for the political and social transition to a new society. First, participatory democratic control over the social ownership of media infringes on the structures of media production based on profits from commodity production of news and entertainment. Commercial media profit from the production of audiences, music, movies, print, and new media as commodities, including the selling of access to content by charging for viewing performances or access to technology and social media for a fee. In democratic and artistic contrast, public access to production of content to be distributed freely and widely available for public use dismantles the economic imperatives for copyright, license fees, and financial control over production of content. Secondly, participatory democracy, including debate, discussion, decision, and participation in production, necessarily requires acquisition of skills. The collaborative training and production teaches new technical and creative skills, improves political and ideological understandings, increases confidence in each participant, and expands the pool of resources for ideas, stories, and formats for content production—again in fundamental contrast to the limited convention and codes used by commercial media. Finally, as a result of both the democratic structure

of production and the collaborative creative process of production, participatory media becomes a site simultaneously demonstrating that there is an alternative to commercial consumerist media and neoliberal dictates and providing an important means for sharing new values, norms, and ways of being more social, more human.

Luis Tapia (2008) argues that the future of socialist democracy in Bolivia “will depend on the strengthening of local democracy and the co-government of the trade unions, communities, and other forms of popular and consultative representation...” and government “reforms that establish institutional frameworks favourable to direct democracy” (227). Federico Schuster (2008) references indigenous self-government, labor assemblies, and neighborhood councils as instances of participatory democracy in Argentina. The rich democratic impulse and artistically creative flourishes that characterized the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua were nurtured by the collaborative nationwide community radio network (Artz 1994). Ariel Dorfman (1983) has frequently written on the intimate connections between community media and participatory democracy in Chile. Although, those authors do not all highlight public media access, the history of the miners’ participation and leadership in the 1952 popular revolution in Bolivia, the development of community media during the Allende years in Chile, the community correspondents in Nicaraguan community radio, as well as the limits on media access by the antiprivatization social movements in Argentina bear witness that a most immediate indication of direct democracy has been the generalized appearance of public media outlets with citizens deciding programming and broadcasting across the country.

In the complex of production, politics, and everyday life, the expressions, criticisms, concerns, and ideas of citizens in all of their diverse positions and identities—gender, nation, and social class, among others—are essential if democracy is to be won. Public access media and community media have a responsibility and opportunity to discover and publicize public opinion. Community and public access media must become democratic propagandists, educators, agitators, and permanent persuaders for the public good, for the future of humanity. As social movements succeed in securing political power through their electoral representatives, when those political representatives dedicate themselves to social justice and democracy, ample public resources will be available for public access media. Combined the power of the mass movements of labor and indigenous, the legitimacy of government authorities, and the mass communication of by democratic, participatory public access media can prepare our transition to a more democratic, creative, sustainable world for the common good of humanity.

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