

## NEW MASSES, NEW MEDIA

*The last years have seen the eruption of one unexpected urban uprising after another—in New York, Athens, Madrid, Cairo, Kiev, Sao Paulo, Istanbul, Hong Kong. The occasions, forms and compositions of these have each been particular, though patterns of long-distance inspiration and emulation are also clear. These popular insurgencies have been the most striking phenomenon within a broader gamut of different kinds of resistance to the established order of capital, the ‘new masses’ whose potential or actual components were surveyed by Göran Therborn in NLR 85; articles on the explosions in Brazil and Turkey have followed. Alongside the emergence of new masses has come, in the same period, the arrival of new media, challenging the system of inequality in its own ways. With this issue we begin a series of interviews and reports on these too. Their appearance has also been local in origin and variegated in kind. But at least three broad determinants can be detected behind them. The first is the altered political and economic landscape since the continuing round of imperial wars in the Middle East, and above all the financial crash of 2008 and its global consequences. The second is the technological ease and reach of internet publication, transforming the possibilities of well-judged, adventurous intellectual start-ups. The third is generational renewal, bringing new levies of radical thinkers, writers and activists into ideological battle. Taken internationally, these forces have overlapped to produce a wide spectrum of forms of expression: dailies, weeklies, monthlies, quarterlies, bulletins and blogs, audio podcasts or online video. We open the series by publishing an interview with Bhaskar Sunkara, founder in his early twenties of one of the most remarkable socialist enterprises of the decade, the stylish US periodical Jacobin, which within four years of its creation now reaches over half a million readers on its website—an example to creative rebels everywhere.*

BHASKAR SUNKARA

*Interview*

PROJECT JACOBIN

*Could you tell us about your background and personal formation?*

I WAS BORN IN June 1989. My parents had come to the US from Trinidad about a year before I was born. My mother's family, originally indentured labourers from Punjab and Bihar, had been on the island since the 19th century, but my father had arrived there from Andhra Pradesh as a young man, training as a doctor. In the US, though, his medical qualifications didn't count for anything, so he became a clerical worker; my mother worked as a telemarketer. So I had a typical immigrant lower-middle class background. We were some of the least wealthy people in the particular town in Westchester County where I went to school, but it was a pretty affluent suburb. I had my first inklings of political engagement in middle school, with the rallies against the war in Iraq. But my actual political development came mainly through my reading. Both my parents worked late, so after school I would spend a few hours in the library. I read *1984* and *Animal Farm*, and reading about Orwell and the POUM got me interested in the Spanish Civil War, and also in Trotsky. It was a very detached kind of politicization—at the age of 12 or 13, *My Life* was more important to me than going to protests or what have you. I guess it's the fickleness of the middle class—I'm lucky I didn't pick up Ayn Rand or Milton Friedman before I got to Trotsky. From there I worked my way through the Deutscher trilogy, I read *New Left Review*, the work of Lucio Magri, Perry Anderson, Ralph Miliband and others. At 17, I joined the Democratic Socialists of America's New York chapter.<sup>1</sup> I edited *The Activist*, the blog of the DSA's youth branch, which gave me some experience of editing and commissioning. It was also where I got to know a lot of the people who would become writers

and editors for *Jacobin*—Chris Maisano and Peter Frase, for example, who were also on the left wing of the DSA.

*Did your parents' backgrounds have an influence on your politics?*

They were always supportive of left populists, in a very broad sense. People like my mother, from a rural background in Trinidad, felt positive about anyone running a developmentalist state of any kind, or even figures with vaguely progressive policies; the same went for my father, coming from India. They liked both Castro and Clinton in equal measure. They weren't very actively political, but there was always passive support for the kind of ideas I was getting interested in. Plus their generation tended to have books lying around that one would associate with the left—we had a lot of C. L. R. James in the house, since he was Trinidadian, but also *The Wretched of the Earth*, and so on. I actually heard of the Haitian Jacobins before I heard of the French ones. *The Black Jacobins* was probably in the back of my mind when I first started thinking about the magazine.

*When was that?*

While I was in college. I studied international relations at George Washington University in DC, where I got more involved with the anti-war movement and student activism. Between my sophomore and junior years I was sick and had to take two semesters off—I was throwing up three or four times a day. I was off for all of 2009. During that time I disciplined myself auto-didactically. I would read a couple of non-fiction books a week as well as one work of fiction. The fiction was useless, I regret that. But I read through the canon of Western Marxism and socialist thought more generally, taking a lot of notes. By the summer of 2010, when I turned 21, I was feeling better and getting ready to go back to school, and that's when I conceived of *Jacobin*. I'd spent a year doing very little apart from thinking and reading within this very particular

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<sup>1</sup>The DSA came out of a split in the Socialist Party of America, which became fiercely anti-communist during the Vietnam War and changed its name to Social Democrats of the USA in 1972; a group gathered around Michael Harrington left SDUSA in 1973, and in 1982 their organization merged with NAM, a populist tributary of the new left of the sixties, and a more left-wing tendency closer to today's Solidarity.

niche, and I had this excess of ideas to work through and pieces I wanted to commission. Initially it was going to be an online magazine, but then I felt there was such a glut of stuff on the web that it would have more impact if it was also a print journal. We launched online in mid-September 2010, and the first print issue came out at the start of 2011. At the time I had no particular idea of how to run a publication—I still have my first expense sheets, and I remember worrying about having spent all of my \$240 annual budget too quickly.

*What about the magazine as a political project—what were you aiming to do that wasn't being done by other publications?*

For me, it was a way of representing a politics that was neither Leninist nor the kind of broad liberal-left opinion you get in, say, *The Nation* or *In These Times*. It's not a middle ground: I wanted to stake out a vision that was uncompromisingly socialist, but that married some of the accessibility of *The Nation* with the political seriousness of publications further to the left. A lot of what I was learning during the year I spent reading was how to convey these ideas in as simple a way as possible. Young Marxists have a tendency to use lots of jargon, partly as a crutch for insecurity; there are some things we do need specialized terminology for, but a lot of these ideas are not actually very complex. So I was thinking about how best to popularize and mainstream them. *Jacobin* was meant to be bold, young, easy to read. The look of the magazine was part of that too—publications like *Monthly Review* or *Dissent*, for example, tend to have extremely long paragraphs, and there's no 'dek' underneath the headline explaining what's in the article.

*Design has been a really integral feature of Jacobin. What was the philosophy behind that?*

What I was originally aiming for in the early issues—and I failed, since I didn't have the technical ability—was to make things as accessible and compelling as possible; so there was colour, photography and art, there was a conscious attempt to break from the old Courier New fonts, the black-and-white style of the SDS or the zines of the eighties and nineties. But it was really only when Remeike Forbes joined in 2011 that our visual identity took shape. Remeike designed the Toussaint logo we've

been using since issue 6; originally the name of the publication wasn't meant to be historically located in a particular way—it was more of a floating signifier.

*Who else was involved in the early stages?*

To begin with, I more or less did the editorial and production work myself, and there was a group of writers who contributed. It was a fairly motley collection of people—Peter Frase, one of our editors, likes to say he should write an essay called ‘Considerations on Internet Marxism’, because the way things developed was totally un-organic. Frase and Maisano I knew from DSA activism. Then there were Seth Ackerman and Mike Beggs, whose writing I'd seen on Doug Henwood's *Left Business Observer* listserve, and who I reached out to, asking them to contribute. I'd read Max Ajl's ‘Jewbonics’ blog, and we'd been in contact because of our shared anger at certain liberal bloggers. Others I found randomly on the internet, like Gavin Mueller. These and a few others—my most trusted writers, and people I was constantly asking for advice anyway—made up the editorial board. Remeike got in touch with me in late 2011, saying how much he liked the politics of the publication, and offering to design a T-shirt for us; but then when he saw how bad the physical magazine looked, he offered to take on designing the rest of it. Megan Erickson and Connor Kilpatrick also came on board in 2011, and the following year Alyssa Battistoni, who's been a key commissioning editor, joined. It's only in the last couple of months that anyone has worked full-time, though—and only three people take a salary.

*What's the relationship between the print and online components of the magazine?*

We have a tremendous volume of online content—one or two pieces every day, so that over the course of the year we post over 500 original pieces, not including cross-posts, reprints and so on. There's a Soviet saying: quantity is a quality of its own, and in a lot of ways that's the spirit of the model we've set up. We try to attract web traffic, and then try to turn a certain proportion of visitors to the site into subscribers. That said, the web pieces are very high-quality; but they tend to be shorter and more time-sensitive. Overall, we're moving towards a pattern where the print issue has themed content—so the Fall 2014 issue is on the city—while the website is for everything else.

*And how does the editorial process work, for both?*

With the print magazine, often Remeike or I will come up with a broad idea or theme, and we'll present it to the editorial board, who will then suggest particular commissions. Then one or two people from the board will volunteer to serve as issue editor, so there will be a point person tracking the commissions. Depending on who the editor is, they'll sometimes take over the first rounds of line-editing, but most of the time that's something I'll do. Generally, the other editors' role is to comment on texts and work on the print issues, though where they have areas of expertise they will originate a lot of pieces—Max Ajl on the Middle East, for instance. With the online content, it's such a constant stream that there's no time for deliberative processes. We've now reached a point where we're flooded with submissions—maybe ten a day—so we filter those and get around five articles a week out of that.

*Could you tell us who your contributors are, in sociological terms? And politically?*

I would say that all of our writers fit within a broad socialist tradition. We do sometimes draw on social democrats and liberals, but every article is coherent with the vision of the editors—so we might publish a piece by a liberal advocating single-payer healthcare, because they're calling for the decommodification of a sector; and since we believe in the decommodification of the whole economy, it fits in. More sociologically, there are a lot of grad students, young adjunct professors or tenured professors. We also have quite a few organizers and union researchers involved, like Chris Maisano, and people working in NGOs or around housing rights, that kind of thing.

*And they're predominantly under 35, say?*

I think so, yes, with a few exceptions. Since we run 500-plus pieces a year, we publish a lot of new writers. It's probably easier to break in with us than with other venues, though maybe this will become more difficult over time. But there are also many other people we publish and call on for advice, like Robert Brenner, Vivek Chibber, Kathi Weeks. There's a lot of goodwill from the earlier generations on the left—people see how our project overlaps with theirs, but also how it reaches a different audience.

*What are Jacobin's vital statistics—number of subscribers, print and online readership, distribution?*

This is the topic I most like to talk about. Our subscriber base is currently slightly over 7,000—though of course it varies because of the way the renewal cycles of print publications work. Still, at the moment we're making a net gain of 80 subscribers a week, and I imagine we'll hit 10,000 subscribers in 2015. Most of our subscribers are in the US, but we also have some in the UK, South Africa and elsewhere in the Anglophone world. With regard to the web readership, we average around 600,000 unique visitors a month; occasionally it spikes up, so that we get close to a million page views in stretches. Distribution of print copies to bookstores and newsstands is obviously much smaller: around 1,000 in total. The market has changed in the last decade, with the death of those big-box stores, so being on newsstands is just a matter of exposure, really—we have an incentive to make people buy issues directly from our website.

*What about finance? Does it all come from subscriptions?*

Yes, it's primarily subscription-driven. We're a non-profit, so we do get some donations, which account for under 20 per cent of our budget. But we operate almost entirely on our subscription income, and use donations for development or expansion.

*You mentioned that most Jacobin subscribers are in the US. What's the pattern in terms of regional dispersion?*

The largest number are in New York City, and there's a very large base of subscribers in the Bay Area—Oakland, San Francisco. We also have a disproportionately large pocket in Chicago, partly because of our work with the Chicago Teachers' Union and our coverage of the strike.<sup>2</sup> In per capita terms we have a lot of subscribers in places like Cambridge, MA—university towns that are flooded with underemployed grad students, who are our bread and butter. People are often surprised to hear how dispersed the subscriber base is, but I think it comes less from any organic reach we might have than the fact that, in this country of 330 million

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<sup>2</sup> See *Class Action: An Activist Teacher's Handbook*, New York 2014—a booklet produced by *Jacobin* in conjunction with the CTU—and Micah Uetricht, *Strike for America: Chicago Teachers Against Austerity*, London and New York 2014.

people, we're primarily selling the magazine on the internet as opposed to radical hubs in a select few urban areas.

*And can you tell us about the Jacobin reading groups?*

We have about fifty reading groups, internationally, forty or so of which are in the US and Canada. They're very geographically dispersed—we have four in the Carolinas, we have groups in Alabama, Iowa, Texas . . . one of the reasons we have them in those kinds of places is that they don't have existing chapters of socialist organizations. So *Jacobin* is the only game in town, the only ones trying to get people together as open socialists. It's an interesting dynamic. In a place like Salt Lake City, our group will have events in a Unitarian Church, because compared to the Mormons they're the progressive force in the city.

*Where does the impetus for these groups come from—is it from readers themselves or is it something you're actively driving?*

Well, it's both. We let people know that we have resources they can use—sample syllabuses, free magazines—and that we can help with finding space, with logistics. But it's the coordinators who are actually on the ground, and who feel motivated to start the reading group. Obviously, we're doing everything we can to encourage these groups. They're now connected to each other in a sort of community, talking about their readings and discussing them online. The process is very organic, though we do try to offer guidance and a framework.

*You've talked about your own formation, but what are the intellectual reference points for the magazine more generally?*

One of them would definitely be Michael Harrington, even though we disagree with him politically. Those of us who are on the left wing of DSA often fight against a lot of Harringtonite ideas, like his softness towards the trade union bureaucracy and the Democratic Party. We're much more comfortable with independent political action, and I'd hope for a break with the Democrats much more than Harrington did. But intellectually, I think he's very underrated as a popularizer of Marxist thought. For myself and for a few others, Ralph Miliband is another important influence, because, more than anyone, he represented that middle ground I mentioned before, between Leninism and social democracy. Though

I don't want to speak for everyone else, several of us came from traditions intellectually inspired by Trotskyism, without ever quite becoming Trotskyists—which is similar to Miliband or someone like Leo Panitch in that respect. We were very interested in the experience of the Italian Communist Party and other mass parties in Europe, and in the theorists of Eurocommunism—something that distinguishes us from a lot of Trotskyists. The Second International radicals were also very important for us—from the time before the SPD voted for war credits in 1914, of course! So we read Lenin, but also Kautsky's *The Road to Power*. On the whole, we come from various traditions on the left, but you could say that there's been a convergence of sorts between those who come from post-Maoist and post-Trotskyist milieux, and those from left social-democratic traditions.

*What about literary style—were there particular models or writers you had in mind?*

There's been no particular influence. If anything, we've tried to avoid the traditional left-wing style of writing, minimizing jargon, and sought instead to be more aggressive, more confident—and more programmatic.

*What considerations are involved in your coverage—the choice of themes, as well as the overall balance between politics, economics, culture?*

In general, we try to publish things that interest us. We recently had a piece on the anniversary of the Portuguese revolution, which has always been a topic that fascinated me; I thought it wouldn't necessarily interest others, but it was a huge hit, because we have a readership that thinks seriously about social change and transformation in the West, and the legacy of the Portuguese revolution looms larger in their thinking than one might have thought.<sup>3</sup> I think the first few years of a publication are all about making people like what you like. And one reason why we now get so many submissions is because there are people who've been reading *Jacobin* for three years, and who are now ready to write *Jacobin* pieces. We've essentially trained a new group of contributors.

*What about culture?*

We generally try to avoid cultural content. To the extent we do cover culture, it's mass culture. So we'll run something about the latest

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<sup>3</sup> Mark Bergfeld, 'The Next Portuguese Revolution', *Jacobin* online, 22 May 2014.

*Planet of the Apes* movie or the latest *Superman* movie, covering mass culture in a way that's reminiscent of Michael Gold—my favourite Stalinist writer of the 1930s.<sup>4</sup> Our cultural content is intentionally very directly political, very polemical. But we'd never cover an opera or a play, or avant-garde culture.

*Because?*

Maybe it's just a reaction—I don't like the Frankfurt School. In any case, there are plenty of good places to get that kind of coverage. One of the advantages of *Jacobin* is that it's crassly political, and programmatic, in a way that other venues aren't. When we do criticism, we do it well, but we also make sure there's a political take-away for people who aren't particularly interested in culture for its own sake. Obviously, if we were a cultural magazine, we'd be failing spectacularly; but luckily, there are other, very good magazines that do focus on culture.

*This brings us to the question of how you see Jacobin fitting within the broader ecosystem of left-oriented publications in the US.*

We relate fraternally to these other publications. A journal like *n+1* operates at a stylistic level far superior to what we could do. That said, I think we're the only publication in this sphere that's directly political. *n+1* might address politics through literature, while other venues might in some way be political. But *Jacobin* is nothing without its politics—it has no lasting significance otherwise. In some ways we're more akin, in the US context, to *Against the Current*, *Monthly Review* or *New Politics*, not just because we come from the same Marxist tradition, but because they're directly political journals. But I actually don't see *Jacobin* as part of a wider publishing scene. It's not a theoretical journal like *Historical Materialism*; it's fundamentally a mass-oriented publication, without striving to be a broad, reportage-heavy movement publication like *In These Times* or *The Nation*. In some ways we're trying to be the equivalent of what *The New Republic* is for liberals. I don't even mind using the word 'middlebrow'. *Jacobin* is like nothing else in this space: it's explicitly Marxist, it's programmatically socialist, yet our goal is to speak to as many people as possible.

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Gold (1894–1967): pen name of Itzok Granich, CPUSA stalwart and columnist for the *Daily Worker*, known for vicious criticisms of bourgeois literature.

*You've published a lot on international issues, but would it be fair to say that Jacobin is mainly oriented to the US domestic context?*

It is and it isn't. In terms of the raw number of pieces, I think we publish more on the Middle East and North Africa from a Marxist perspective than almost anyone else, especially online. And that's also some of our most popular content, reaching hundreds of thousands of people. But I would also say that it can be very easy, as American radicals, to look abroad constantly—to look at other problems and political formations as opposed to our weak and fragmented socialist movement in this country. I think the best service we can offer people in the so-called periphery and elsewhere is to build a vibrant socialist movement that would combat US imperialism at home. I also think there is something more difficult and also more noble in focusing on struggles in the United States, as opposed to more advanced struggles elsewhere. That's something we emphasize, compared to other publications: that we do understand American particularities, and have some sense of what it would take to actually build a movement here.

*Are the Jacobin reading groups part of that effort?*

When I started the magazine, I wanted people to read it because they thought of themselves as active members of a political project. I was very wary of *Jacobin* being seen as just a consumer product, something that looks nice and is enjoyable to read, and especially wary of our success among liberal-left literary types—it's good that we're winning them over, of course, but we didn't want them to see *Jacobin* as a more radical version of *n+1*, or be drawn to us because we're less pessimistic than *The Baffler*. The broader political project of rebuilding the socialist movement in the US is the only reason for the magazine to exist in the first place. So our strategy is to produce the resources needed for that project, and creating spaces where people can meet and discuss ideas is one way to use the magazine to instigate something more real and concrete, and less ephemeral than the experience of reading. At the moment, there's nowhere for people to go if they want to talk about socialist politics, besides joining a cadre organization. I personally think that joining a cadre organization in the current period is a leap few would be willing to take—I've nothing against those who do, they often do good and honourable work; but the *Jacobin* reading groups are a nice alternative, or at least a complement, so that people can link up and discuss ideas without the organizational

burdens often imposed by that kind of activism. I think of it as a holding action. Maybe in ten, fifteen, twenty years, there will be organizations that will take on a lot of the energy that would otherwise be going to things like the reading groups—and that'll be a good thing.

*To what extent is Jacobin feeding off changes in US political culture in the last few years?*

I think there has been a shift of sorts. You no longer find as many people actively defending the system—there's a sense of dejection, a sense that the system can't be changed, but there's less active defence. This has happened in my generation, and I think it leaves an opening to show people that there is an alternative. There's definitely an audience for the idea that the immiseration people are experiencing is actually very easy to fix—technically, we have plenty of resources to do so, the only barriers are political. Generationally, I think there's also been a change in the perception of socialism. When the Berlin Wall fell, there was this idea that it would open the way for a democratic socialist thought no longer bound by Cold War paradigms. But it immediately became apparent that this wasn't true—there was a tremendous swing to the right, and in the 1990s life for people in the former Eastern Bloc, and the developing world more generally, was considerably worse than when the Soviet Union was around. We may now be getting to the point, though, where socialism is no longer so closely associated with the USSR. For example, according to a Pew poll from 2011, people in the US between the ages of 19 and 30 have more positive sentiments towards socialism than capitalism. Of course, what they mean by socialism is something like the Scandinavian welfare state, but that's still progress over an association with gulags and military parades.

At the same time, the leftward shift people tend to see in the New York publishing scene is often overstated—it's definitely a welcome development, but we're talking about fairly small circles. A lot of the most significant gains that have been made organizationally are on the right. Progressives often describe it as astroturf, but there is a degree of grassroots energy in the Tea Party that has helped them make inroads, for example against reproductive rights. There have been some shifts, and there is an opening for us on the left, but I would say we're at the very beginning of what we need to be doing.

*What was Jacobin's relationship to Occupy?*

Most of us were involved as individuals—we were either in universities or major urban centres where the occupations happened. At the time we were only a year old, and had a circulation of less than 1,000. We played no direct role in organizing, though we did host a panel that became one of the more famous Occupy events, partly because the *New York Times* freelancer Natasha Lennard lost her job after participating in it. We did some online pieces on Occupy that were very widely read at the time, too. It certainly opened up space for *Jacobin*, partly because people were looking for something that was neither the prefigurative politics of the anarchists nor MoveOn.org-style liberalism. Just by virtue of being socialists we offered a more compelling political alternative—not only the moral and ethical critique of capitalism, but a plausible transition to a successor society.

*You've talked about Jacobin operating in the middle ground between Leninism and social democracy. What does that mean in terms of strategy—does it imply a kind of neo-Popular Front politics?*

It's true that we wouldn't see liberals as our enemies, and we'd envisage common action with them where possible. It's also useful to make a distinction between the Democratic Party and a section of its base. The mainstream of the party, as represented by Obama, as well as the more technocratic DLC types, hold economic views diametrically opposed to a substantial part of the base, who still largely buy into the New Deal, the Great Society, welfare, social goods and so on. If we want to build a socialist or even left-liberal opposition movement today, one to the left of the mainstream Democrats, its votes and support will have to come from some of these people—they're the ones we need to be engaging with and directing our activism towards.

*Isn't there a tension, though, between the social-democratic and radical socialist perspectives being offered in Jacobin?*

I don't think so. One day, in a dream scenario where you have a socialist movement pushing for full social ownership, say, and it's encountering active opposition from the bourgeoisie, then you would have a clash. But that debate is very much in the future. In the short and medium term, I don't think there's a tension between the two poles. There are

tensions with our liberal supporters, though. One of the reasons *Jacobin* has grown so much is that we're attracting liberals who are interested in left-wing ideas, and at the moment we serve a useful purpose for them—having someone intelligent to the left of them allows them to assume their natural position as centrists. But it's not clear we would get that kind of support from those people if there was actually a proper movement advancing views diametrically opposed to theirs, or at least challenging their dominance within a broader left movement.

*What's Jacobin's view of the Obama administration?*

Obama obviously represents a centrist element in US politics—there are many more reactionary people than him, which has been used by liberals to block any opposition or movements to the left of Obama. We reject that kind of blackmail, and stand in total opposition to the Obama administration. As anti-imperialists, we oppose any intervention in any circumstance by capitalist states—so we've opposed, in very strident terms, the interventions in Libya and now Syria. At the same time, there's no doubt that a lot of people who voted for Obama in the swing states because they didn't want to see the right get elected were acting quite rationally. In 2012, we didn't really have an editorial stance, but the general view among us was that there was no candidate to vote for in that particular election—most of us in non-swing states voted for third-party candidates. It seemed to make sense to vote for Obama in a swing state, where there was no progressive ballot option, as a lot of unions and progressive formations did. But the logic of that position was to forestall any possible opportunity of electing a left candidate in the future.

*Isn't there a political duty to focus one's attacks on the White House, as Enemy Number One?*

Of course—we have been pointing this out and we continue to do so. Unlike most of the US left, we definitely didn't jump on the progressives-for-Obama bandwagon. There's a very big difference between shrugging your shoulders at people voting for Obama in places like Virginia and actually lauding the Obama presidency as something that presents hope. Fundamentally, our main task is to try to build protest movements; but this is not something you can will out of nothing—the old Marx line is that people create their own history but not under conditions of their own choosing, and I think that applies very much now. What's needed

is to build movements until we reach a point where electoral options are actually viable.

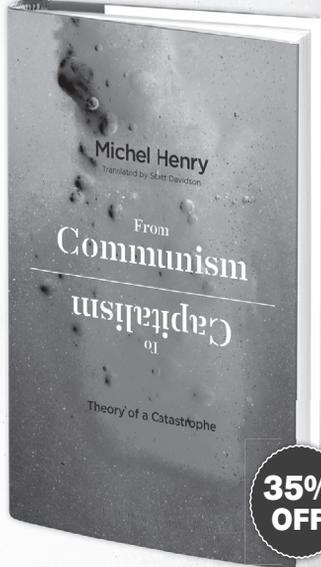
*What's next for Jacobin?*

I have a three-year and a five-year plan. Within three years we should be able to hit a stable paid circulation of 25,000, which would be much higher than the historic peaks of any other publication of our type, with our politics. At some point we're going to reach an uppermost limit, unless political conditions change, but I believe that happens to be well above 25,000. If you think about a publication like *Adbusters*, which mainly offers an anti-consumerist politics, it had a peak circulation of over 100,000. It did that through its catchiness and its visuals. There are lots of ways *Jacobin* can reach a very high paid circulation. I've already conceived of one way, which is to resurrect J. A. Wayland's 'Appeal Army'. The *Appeal to Reason*, representative of the right wing of the Socialist Party of America at the time, was the highest-circulation socialist publication in US history, and in the early 1900s had the fourth largest circulation in the country—over half a million, a million-plus for special editions. Part of this was down to the network of volunteers who sold their subscriptions. I think we could use things like that, which bourgeois publishers wouldn't be able to do, to boost our circulation. Besides that, we have plans to send a quarter of a million direct mails over the next couple of years. And we want to develop our infrastructure at the back end—our paywall, subscriber management systems and so on are largely proprietary and built to our needs. With the reading groups, the goal is to raise enough money so that we can hire a second organizer. It's very difficult for one person to coordinate that many groups. And I'd obviously like to hire more editorial and production staff, to spread the burden more, and pay writers more.

But it's primarily a political project. We want to reach as many people as possible not just for the sake of having a high circulation, but as a way of laying down a flag for a certain variety of socialism—attracting people to it, politicizing them as best we can, and hopefully playing some small role in the emergence of movements that will take us to a point where a magazine like *Jacobin* has at most an ancillary function. Because we don't think a magazine should be playing the role of an organization. Ultimately, what a socialist movement needs is active militants on the streets, and then eventually a mass party.

*Is that the five-year plan?*

More like the twenty-seven-year plan . . . I'd actually be very happy if, by the time I die, there's an opposition current in the US of 5 to 7 per cent that identifies as socialist or would support a socialist candidate. If that happened in the core of the imperialist world, it would create a lot of space for others, and allow the weak link in capitalism to be broken somewhere else. We'd be able to press on and make our own great advances in those conditions and be prepared to not just react, but benefit from capitalist crises.



Communist and  
capitalism “are  
only two figures  
of the same death.”  
– Michel Henry

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