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A postcosmopolitan condition? Economic progressivism and the return of great power war

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journals.sagepub.com/home/psc**Brian Milstein** 

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Abstract

As an emancipatory political project, cosmopolitanism always invited skepticism. This paper focuses on the economic-progressivist line of critique of cosmopolitanism, which has gained momentum in recent years. This critique is based on real concerns that the economic left must prioritize and integrate into its thinking; however, it is also fatally flawed. Any progressive project that takes seriously strong democratic self-determination for all peoples needs some version of a commitment to a global order that is democratically politically integrated, and this means *stronger* forms of supranational political integration, not weaker ones. I argue that the allure of progressive economic statism rests on erroneous assumptions about the character of the Westphalian state system and its relation to the evolution of global capitalism, which give a misleading impression that this system is somehow less friendly than neoliberal globalization to capitalist imperatives for extraction, accumulation, and growth. But there are equally expropriative and violent versions of capitalism that thrive in a closed Westphalian world. With great power rivalry once again emerging as a structuring feature of world order, signs of such versions are already making their appearance today.

Keywords

cosmopolitanism, capitalism, economic left, progressive, statism, imperialism

Cosmopolitanism has fallen on hard times. Once the *cause célèbre* of forward-thinking political and social theory – Ulrich Beck called it ‘the defining feature of a new era’ (Beck 2006: 2) – today the cosmopolitan project appears to many as a naïve if well-intentioned

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pipe dream, if not a Trojan horse for unbridled neoliberalism and neoimperialism. Both in politics and the academy, many today view state sovereignty as the only viable mechanism for ensuring political, social, and economic security for democratic citizens.

As an emancipatory political project, cosmopolitanism always invited skepticism. For *international neorealists*, cosmopolitan ideas were hopelessly out of touch with both the realities of interstate power politics and the political sensibilities of national citizenries; small countries had as little incentive to surrender their modest autonomy to an overarching world order as great powers did to surrender their international leverage to transnational legal constraints.¹ *Communitarians* argued that the normative demands of cosmopolitanism were too abstract and universalizing; its moral commitments ran roughshod over the ethical lives of particular national cultures, while its political expectations depended on forms of solidarity that could only exist within historically bounded states.² Meanwhile, *economic progressives* saw in cosmopolitan ideology a vehicle for relinquishing the regulatory powers of the state to the whims of global markets; whatever means democratic citizenries had to rein in the power of capital over their life-plans would be depoliticized and outsourced to neoliberal organizations such as the IMF and WTO.³

I'm interested here in this third, economic-progressive line of critique. I define 'economic progressive' broadly to include any position holding that market forces require robust and active regulation by democratic institutions, be this in the form of Keynesian social democracy or overcoming capitalism altogether. My argument is that the economic-progressive critique of the cosmopolitan project is based on sound reasons that the economic left must prioritize and integrate into its thinking. At the same time, the urge to turn back toward the nation-state is mistaken. Any economic-progressive project that takes seriously strong democratic self-determination for all peoples needs *some version of* a commitment to a global order that is strongly and democratically politically integrated. We might call this commitment 'left cosmopolitanism' or 'strong internationalism'. The allure of what I will call *economic statism*⁴ rests on erroneous assumptions about the character of the Westphalian state system and its relation to the evolution of global capitalism, which give a misleading impression that this system is somehow less friendly to capitalist imperatives for extraction, accumulation, and growth than neoliberal globalization. But there are equally expropriative and violent versions of capitalism that thrive in a closed Westphalian world, and there are signs that such versions are already beginning to make their appearance today.

The recent outbreak of war in Eastern Europe in particular gives us a glimpse into the realities of this looming postcosmopolitan condition. Beyond debates over how we arrived at this juncture, we must also step back and consider the ramifications of a broader reality – namely, *the return of great power conflict as a structuring feature of world order*. Of course, the prospect of a new epoch of imperial rivalry has been on the horizon for some time. At first glance, it might appear that a trend toward deglobalization provides only more reason to jettison cosmopolitan and internationalist commitments. But I disagree. I take it to be a core ideological commitment of the left to preserve and maximize the powers of free and equal democratic self-determination of all political communities in the face of global capitalism. As such, economic-progressive commitments call for *stronger* forms of supranational political integration, not weaker ones.

Progressive economic statism after 2008

Progressive skepticism toward cosmopolitan thinking gained a boost of momentum with the 2008 financial crisis and the political events that followed. During the cosmopolitan heyday of the 90s and early 00s, protesters in Seattle and Genoa were as likely to describe their position as *alter*-globalization as they were *anti*-globalization: the question was not *whether* national boundaries should be overcome but *how* and *on what terms*. In 2003, when George W. Bush, Tony Blair, and their ‘coalition of the willing’ bucked international law to invade Iraq, cosmopolitanism presented itself as a sober alternative to unhinged American empire (see, e.g., [Habermas and Derrida 2003](#)). Even today, academic books and articles on cosmopolitanism continue to appear; but the *Zeitgeist* has vanished, reflecting a general change in sentiment among intellectuals and democratic publics.

The years following 2008 have been characterized by a startling resurgence of exclusionary nationalism, with populist figures and parties commanding outsized attention in the public sphere and a sharp increase in electoral support. The ‘populist explosion’ ([Judis 2016](#)) in capitalist democracies has been interpreted in a variety of ways, and its causes continue to be debated. Common explanations credited economic disaffection among the ‘losers of globalization’, perhaps combined with a backlash against immigration and multiculturalism fueled by lingering racial resentment ([Norris and Inglehart 2019](#); [Rodrik 2018](#)). It is also credited to a brewing dissatisfaction with political elites: after years of promises from center-right and center-left governments about the benefits of deregulation, free trade, and privatization, citizenries grew disillusioned, not only with the lack of political will among establishment parties to prioritize the needs of affected citizens over those of the finance industry, but also with the apparent lack of power on the part of those governments that did try to do so ([Fraser 2019](#); [Ibsen 2019](#); [Milstein 2021](#); [Streeck 2017](#)).

Both of these accounts are consistent with a growing suspicion of supranational institutions, particularly the European Union. Once hailed as a prototype for cosmopolitan-democratic governance, the EU’s promotion of open borders and markets and, in the wake of the Eurozone crisis, draconian insistence on austerity policies made it easy to portray as a technocratic hindrance to democratic self-determination. This sentiment was clearly summarized in the pro-Brexit slogan, ‘Take back control’ ([Morton 2023](#); [Watt 2016](#)). Interestingly, Larry Bartels argues that the so-called ‘wave’ of populism has less to do with a sea change in opinion among democratic electorates than with the strategic actions of political entrepreneurs and elites ([Bartels 2023](#)). All the same, the apparent success of populist actors has been accompanied by a drive among political parties across the spectrum at least to gesture toward similar stances of skepticism toward immigration and supranational bodies – or at least to downplay their support.

On the left, these developments in the political realm dovetailed with an additional one: the return of capitalism as a core locus of political conflict and critique. Since the late 1970s, those bearing the legacy of the New Left became dissatisfied with the stubborn economism of traditional Marxist frameworks, turning instead to poststructuralism, discourse analysis, and agonistic approaches better aimed to grasp oppression based on non-economic categories such as race, gender, sexuality, or identity. While these schools

of critique would also challenge the more abstract and strongly universalist versions of cosmopolitan thinking, they remained compatible with other versions that celebrated diversity, hybridization, and transnational political claims ‘from below’ (Ingram 2013). From the standpoint of an emancipatory critique grounded in the autonomy and multiplicity of identities, appeals to cosmopolitan consciousness could be marshalled in opposition to forms of solidarity built upon oppressive conceptions of national culture, descent, or tradition.

The 2008 crisis brought capitalism back into the limelight (Fraser 2014). This is a welcome development, but its implications for cosmopolitanism are ambivalent. The cosmopolitan critique takes aim at the oppressive power of the sovereign Westphalian state as enforcer of majority cultural privilege, homogenizing educational institutions, and exclusionary citizenship; but for critics of capitalism (anarchists notwithstanding), only the most robust state-like apparatus claiming democratic legitimacy offers hope of opposing the forces of commodification, exploitation, and accumulation. The former thus targets what the latter deems indispensable. It certainly does not help that peddlers of neoliberalism also champion the weakening of state power and opening of borders – often clothing themselves in the rhetoric of ‘cosmopolitan’ liberation (Sørensen 2016). As the threats posed by neoliberalism loom higher, cosmopolitan objections to nationalism and the Westphalian state appear less urgent. For economic progressives from Keynesians to Marxists, cosmopolitanism becomes a lower priority if not something to be opposed outright.

Hence, a growing chorus has urged the left to delink its emancipatory ambitions from cosmopolitanism. Bill Mitchell and Thomas Fazi (2017) argue that the allure of cosmopolitanism plays a large role in the disempowerment of the left over the last several decades. In their view, the left’s embrace of cosmopolitanism cedes the key political tool for combatting neoliberal excess – the Westphalian state – to reactionary populism, unwittingly putting itself in a position of having to defend the globalized status quo. Mitchell and Fazi insist that any left political program going forward must be unequivocally state-centric: ‘It is not hard to see that if progressive change can only be implemented at the global or even European level—in other words, if the alternative to the status quo offered to electorates is one between *reactionary nationalism* and *progressive globalism*—then the left has already lost the battle’ (Mitchell and Fazi 2017: 12). J. W. Mason is similarly blunt that, in the post-2008 world, a left position endorsing cosmopolitanism or strong internationalism is all but incoherent: ‘By definition, any struggle to preserve social democracy as it exists today, is a struggle to defend national institutions’ (Mason 2017: 32).

A common refrain is that the cosmopolitan idealism displayed by the left resulted from some mix of well-meaning naïveté and gullible delusion. According to Wolfgang Streeck, one of neoliberalism’s great ideological coups was to hypnotize progressives into joining transnational marketization to their broader ideals of emancipation: ‘Ideologically the political-economic preemption of the nation-state—of democratic national institutions in favour of technocratic supranational ones—makes use of certain positive normative connotations of internationalism, especially on the Left.... It comes with a moral denunciation of borders and protectionism *tout court* in the name of a misunderstood

cosmopolitanism, identifying “globalization” with liberation, not just of capital, but of life in general’ (Streeck 2016: 156). On Streeck’s account, starry-eyed leftists cheered the march of globalization on the false promise that a ‘cosmopolitan democracy’ will follow soon enough in the future that will then bring global markets to heel. In truth, pseudo-democratic gestures like a directly elected ‘European Parliament’ were never more than means to grease the wheels of encroaching depoliticization, marketization, and technocracy (Streeck 2016: 156).

Turkuler Isiksel (2020) is more charitable and nuanced. Unwilling to dismiss left cosmopolitanism as a symptom of distraction or gullibility, she acknowledges in cosmopolitanism a justified aspiration to secure and maximize ‘equal freedom’ for all persons sharing the earth in common. The problem, in her view, is the way progressive supporters bound up this aspiration with a generalized sense of anti-nationalism and anti-statism, which slip into judgments that ‘any transfer of power away from the state toward international institutions is to be celebrated as a step in a cosmopolitan direction’ (Isiksel 2020: 216). For Isiksel, this bias toward the supranational is unwarranted on cosmopolitanism’s own terms. In addition to the ways international institutions have shown themselves to inhibit the exercise of democratic self-determination via enforced austerity measures, structural adjustment programs, and onerous treaty conditions, the supranational level possesses neither the legitimacy nor the infrastructural capacity to take over the basic functions of the Westphalian state in maintaining the conditions of individual and collective freedom. Whatever else can be said for or against supranational governance, only states are able to guarantee equal freedom for their citizens.

In Isiksel’s view, a cosmopolitanism truly committed to equal freedom for all persons should not be wedded to any particular institutional arrangement or jurisdictional scope. There is no *conceptual* reason why a local or state government cannot empower its citizens as ontologically secure, self-legislating equals just as well as (or even better than) a supranational one. Conversely, there is nothing about a decline in power of sovereign states or a transfer of power to supranational institutions that marks progress toward a ‘cosmopolitan constitution’ if such changes in power relations do not palpably *increase* the self-legislative empowerment and democratic equality of those subjected. If it turns out that a deglobalized, Westphalian system of sovereign states provides the best guarantee of equal freedom for citizens, then this is the most ‘cosmopolitan’ arrangement we can hope for today.

But how viable is such an economic statist position for reclaiming the upper hand for democratic self-determination over capitalism? More precisely, is it viable, as a *normative aspiration*, for economic progressives to abandon cosmopolitan ideals of trans-border coordination, supranational democracy, and world citizenship for the sake of achieving equal freedom via domestic institutions? At first glance, it seems plain that a Westphalian statist strategy would be simpler than an international, regional, or global one. National institutions are hard enough to transform; any international, regional, or global strategy would require the transformation of *both* national *and* supranational institutions.

But it’s not as obvious as it may appear that the necessary transformation is workable at the national level alone without accompanying transformation at the supranational level. For such a Westphalian statist strategy to work, it must assume that states possess the

necessary levels of *allocative autonomy*. States must be able to determine how to structure their relations of production and distribution, allocate resources, and set priorities within their borders; furthermore, they must be able to do so while maintaining the requisite self-sufficiency such that they can resist foreign objections and opposition and, if necessary, turn away external co-operation, trade, or investment without substantial damage to the well-being of their own populations.⁵

Most economic statisticians know that the heyday of European social democracy was made possible by unique circumstances. This period featured unusually high levels of economic growth following the massive destruction of the two world wars and the Great Depression, and it was against this backdrop of high growth that the famed ‘compromise’ between capital and labor was able to take shape. According to Thomas Piketty, the spiraling inequality we associate with the neoliberal era merely reflects capitalism returning to historical form. This comfort in economic conditions in the Global North was further aided by the availability of cheap resources from the colonial and neocolonial peripheries – most notably, oil (Piketty 2014; Streeck 2014).

Neither the high growth of the period nor the unscrupulous reliance on cheap neocolonial resources are tenable as premises for economic progressivism today. Despite this, the image of the mid-twentieth-century ‘Keynesian-Westphalian’ framework remains the key reference point for the statist strategy (Fraser 2009). Streeck’s (2014) proposal for a ‘European Bretton Woods’ explicitly invokes that period, even though Streeck is aware of its limitations. Mitchell and Fazi (2017) assert the need for a progressive sovereignty regime to break more firmly from the dependence on capital accumulation that underwrote the postwar welfare state and made possible its unravelling in the 1970s; however, they frame this imperative as being more in line with the ‘radical’ potentials of Keynes’s original theory. Armed with the help of Modern Monetary Theory (MMT), their vision is one of turning back the clocks on neoliberal globalization in order to reconstitute the Keynesian-Westphalian frame on post-capitalist terms.

Yet there is something misleading in the contrast between a Keynesian-Westphalian order of sovereign polities and a neoliberal-globalized order of transnational markets. On the one hand, critics of neoliberalism are right to point out that globalization is not inevitable. During the height of the cosmopolitan *Zeitgeist* in the 90s and 00s, prophets of the new global age hawked a narrative that, whereas past societies could govern themselves from within the confines of neatly drawn boundaries, inexorable forces of development and interconnection have brought the world to a point in which this is ‘no longer’ possible. The phrase ‘no longer’ was a mainstay of globalization rhetoric: ‘participating in the global economy is *no longer* a choice but a necessity’ (Spero 1996); ‘political communities and civilizations can *no longer* be characterized simply as “discrete worlds”’ (Held and McGrew 1998: 234); ‘individual states can *no longer* adequately protect their citizens from the external effects of decisions made by other actors’ (Habermas 2003: 90); ‘many old visions of the Westphalian arrangement are *no longer* viable’ (Ip 2010: 637). The ubiquity of these declarations of ‘no longer’ lent to globalization airs of a *fait accompli* – the product of some global objective spirit whose reality must be dealt with but which is fundamentally beyond challenge.

In fact, there is nothing inevitable about this process – or at the very least, the ‘inevitability’ narrative is overblown. In the years following the 2008 crisis, cross-border capital flows dropped 65 percent (Lund et al. 2017). The UK’s withdrawal from the European Union and the US’s near-withdrawal from the WHO (not to mention previous jilts on the ICC and Kyoto Treaties) demonstrate the dependence of supranational coordination on changes in policy priorities and political mood. International borders slammed shut during the COVID-19 pandemic, while the war in Ukraine upended trade arrangements and supply chains long taken for granted. As critics observe, globalization as we’ve known it has always been better characterized as a political project meant to forward the interests of certain elites in OECD states than as an agglomeration of anonymous historical forces; it required empowerment of key institutions, such as the IMF and WTO, and a legal infrastructure built for the security of trade, capital flows, and property rights across borders (see Gill and Cutler 2014; Harvey 2003). Political sea changes can dramatically alter its trajectory or even reverse it (Kornprobst and Paul 2021; Paul 2023).⁶

On the other hand, if statist critics correctly reject the conclusions of this standard globalization narrative, they fall too readily for its premise. If the ‘no longer’ rhetoric gave an exaggerated sense of inevitability, it gave an equally exaggerated sense of contrast between Westphalian and post-Westphalian eras. The neat division of the world into sovereign autarkies was always a fiction, particularly when it came to transnational political economy. Anticolonial leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah, Franz Fanon, and Amílcar Cabral used the term ‘neocolonial’ to describe not the burgeoning neoliberalism of the 1980s but the world order of the 1960s – the age of Bretton Woods. As Adom Getachew explains, ‘[C]ontemporary economic globalization should be situated within a long history of an imperial global economy. The ‘density, the speed, and the impact of the global flows’ that emerged from the first colonial encounters in the Americas were already planetary in the fifteenth century and restructured political and economic relations within and beyond the Atlantic world’ (Getachew 2019: 32).

While what we know as ‘globalization’ does represent an increase in certain forms of integration, a better description than simply ‘more’ integration would be *differently structured* integration. Tempting as it is to think of states as entities that are *first* constituted as self-contained units and *then* go on to interact with one another on the international stage, the international and national levels have always been co-constitutive, deeply imbricated, and politically organized. Importantly, the possibilities of a given polity for ‘national self-determination’ always depended on the character of the broader structures of the international system and one’s position within it. Hence, mid-century leaders in Africa and the Caribbean believed that newly independent states in the Global South would never achieve true self-determination short of a radical transformation of the international system – one that would involve strong mechanisms for global economic redistribution as well as strong democratic institutions for regional and supranational governance (Getachew 2019). The idea that states ever co-existed in an international ‘state of nature’ regulated by no or only weak institutions is not only a myth, it is itself an ideological tool of capitalist liberalism. This kind of methodologically nationalist social ontology conveniently sweeps out of view the long history of globalized imperial

relations that have always governed the way societies can function within it (Táiwò 2022: 101). It gives the Global North a façade behind which to downplay or conceal the ways it continues to exploit the Global South, all the while insisting that the latter are independent nations responsible for their own well-being.

Indeed, to equate a rejection of neoliberal globalization with a rejection of strong internationalism *tout court* misinterprets the political program behind the neoliberal turn. The early-1980s sovereign debt crisis did not simply allow the United States to empower the IMF as a tool of neoliberal steering; it also allowed it to *disempower* and foreclose on more democratic avenues for international coordination. Emblematic here is the debate in the late 1970s over the New International Economic Order (NIEO), a program for Keynesian economic arrangements and redistribution between the Global North and South (Moyn 2018). This was a program aimed to forward precisely the kind of transformation of the international system required to equalize capacities for genuine self-determination for all countries. Despite its emphasis on the sovereignty and sovereign equality of all states (or rather because of it), the NIEO centered ‘the reality of interdependence of all the members of the world community’ and called for an *expanded* role for the United Nations in ‘dealing with problems of international economic co-operation in a comprehensive manner and ensuring equally the interests of all countries’ (United Nations 1974). In Getachew’s account, the UN General Assembly would be essentially reimaged as a global legislature for the new egalitarian international order (Getachew 2019: 99-100, 162-3). This proposal was heavily championed by postcolonial states, whose rapidly growing number in the 1960s and 70s made them a majority in the General Assembly – much to the dismay of US officials, who did not find the democratic structure of the UN appealing when they did not control the agenda (Franczak 2019: 880).

The early-80s debt crisis, itself triggered in part by decisions of the US Federal Reserve, sufficiently weakened the diplomatic power of the Global South to the point that allowed the Global North to suppress the NIEO. From this point on, the US and UK managed to shift the locus of diplomatic steering away from the UN and toward more oligarchically administered instruments such as the IMF, World Bank, and eventually WTO. Accompanying this shift in strategy was a new emphasis on the idea that, whatever may have happened in the past, the political-economic circumstances of any formerly colonized state is ‘of their own making and no one else’s’ (Moynihan 1975). The battle over the NIEO followed on the heels of the OPEC embargo and put on full display the rising power of the G-77. In doing so, it rattled the US establishment enough to enable the elevation of neoliberal and neoconservative thinkers in North Atlantic policy circles – along with their de-democratized, free-market vision of international political economy, skepticism toward the UN, formalistic understanding of sovereignty, and a narrowly circumscribed conception of human rights (Franczak 2019). No wealthy Northern state was responsible for the well-being of a postcolonial state; no postcolonial state had any claim to the wealth of a Northern state. Rather, all states were to be seen as sovereign, independent, and responsible for their own economy, and no international organization would be allowed to challenge this view.

Into the breach of actually existing deglobalization

One could accept the above and still maintain that a closed Westphalian state system is in a better position to resist the imperatives of capital accumulation than a more globalized system. But this claim rests on misconceptions of not only the requirements of genuine national self-determination but also of the structural logic of the Westphalian system. Already, our present postcosmopolitan turn shows signs of a re-surfacing of dynamics that, despite subsiding in recent decades, have set the tempo of the Westphalian system since its beginnings.

The end of the Cold War in the 1990s, in addition to securing the hegemony of the ‘Washington Consensus’, was also presumed to end centuries of armed *Realpolitik* among major military powers. Since the early modern period, European states confronted each other with rival processes of continuous military build-up; these were both fed by and used to expand the scope of their respective colonial inflows of wealth and resources. By the latter half of the twentieth century, these great power rivalries had coalesced into a standoff between two nuclear superpowers and their allies. When the USSR disintegrated in 1992, there followed a growing presumption that the new global era would usher in not just the final victory of liberalism but a fundamental change in the character of international politics. Wars no longer took the form of organized armies fighting over territory but civil conflicts punctuated by humanitarian interventions. As noted by Mary Kaldor (2007), even the language of just war theory, largely framed in terms of a sovereign power’s right to pursue victory against a rival, had begun to look quaint and unsuited to the new landscape. Military actions were now better understood in the milieu of law enforcement or policing than of Clausewitzian ideas of war. In the new era, war was no longer (officially) a means of pursuing or protecting one’s political interests against a strategic opponent; instead, the advent of *war as such* was to be viewed as a collective problem for the global community.

During the 2003 invasion of Iraq, US and UK leaders still felt the need to dress up their imperial ambitions in the rhetoric of global security and democracy-building. Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine makes little such pretense, with the ensuing conflict with Ukraine and (by proxy) NATO resembling more a frank competition for *Lebensraum* between power blocs. To the extent the West’s involvement can be taken to express sincere commitment to the ideals of a liberal world order, these ideals increasingly appear as but one prevailing view among others. Meanwhile, China – less aggressive than Russia but more expansive – continues to build spheres of influence in Asia and Africa by means of its Belt and Road Initiative and related programs. The language of universal liberalism issuing from the North Atlantic since the 1990s is becoming provincialized as the US-led post-Cold War order gradually fragments into a new age of great power rivalry.

Any notion that a deglobalized Westphalian system can protect democratic societies from the incursions of global capital must first assume that a loose system of international norms and weak institutions will be sufficient to restrain imperial pursuits on the part of major Western and non-Western powers. It must assume that encroachments on democratic self-determination that presently take the form of onerous treaty obligations, loan conditions, and structural adjustment programs will not resurface instead in the form of

more bellicose features that have been engrained in the dynamics of the Westphalian state system from the outset. To be sure, these bellicose features never disappeared fully, and the extent to which the post–Cold War era was ever truly ‘more peaceful’ can be debated. The important point is the presence of these features does not depend on neoliberalism or globalization, but rather on a *deep-seated elective affinity between capitalist modes of accumulation and the sovereign Westphalian state*.

I use the Weberian term ‘elective affinity’ because this is not so much a causal relationship but a mutually reinforcing tendency. My argument is that the Westphalian state and the state system in which it is integrated generate functional problems for which capitalism offers itself as the readiest solution. Not only that, but capitalism creates problems of its own that it brings to bear on the Westphalian state, and it does so in a way that exacerbates those functional problems that draw the state closer to capitalism. Hence, this affinity is two-sided. On one hand, it concerns capitalism’s *expansionist imperatives*, which, when encased in the armor of the sovereign state, historically takes the form of bellicose imperialism and inter-imperial rivalry (*a*). On the other hand, it also concerns the equally important *extractivist and accumulationist imperatives* of the Westphalian state system as such, which are driven by cycles of competitive resource mobilization between states (*b*). Taken together, the two sides of this elective affinity compromise any state’s ability to politically subdue the power of capital in a way that today’s economic statisticians fail to appreciate.

Re (a): Capitalism has long been credited with an internal drive toward expansionism. Though accounts may differ in technical details, the general thesis pioneered by Rosa Luxemburg and picked up today by the likes of David Harvey, Jason W. Moore, and Nancy Fraser runs as follows: Economic demand is bound to periodically run up against limits, while the dynamics of competition within the ‘perennial gale of creative destruction’ (Schumpeter) put downward pressures on profit margins that cannot always be compensated for within the scope of existing markets. Such limits and pressures drive economies to search for new sources of market demand and/or new pools of cheap labor and materials to lower production costs (Luxemburg 2003 [1913]; Harvey 2003; Moore 2015; Fraser 2022; see also Arendt 1968 [1951], esp. Part Two). Sometimes this can be achieved domestically, at least in part: under Keynesianism, it can include government measures and spending to prop up demand; under neoliberalism, it can include deregulation and the relaxation of labor protections alongside ‘creative’ forms of financialization, including instruments for cheap debt (Crouch 2009). But domestic solutions remain at best temporary and insufficient as the requirements of capitalist growth continue to expand. Capitalist economies must look outward to new markets and new channels of cheap access to human and material resources.

Historically, such outward expansion relies on strategies of ‘expropriation’ or ‘dispossession’, wherein capitalist powers use coercive means to seize control over local economies and to siphon value from the global periphery. Up through the twentieth century, this took the form of imperialism: major powers used military might to enforce ‘spheres of influence’ over foreign territories or else conquer them outright. By the end of the twentieth century, the strategy of overt military subjugation receded (somewhat) in favor of an onerous but subtler complex of legalism, treaty obligations, and economic

gatekeeping, which sustain relations of unequal integration and exchange under the umbrella of North Atlantic soft power (Gill and Cutler 2014).

Progressive economic statisticians call for a renunciation of this soft-power complex, but it is far from clear what is meant to take its place. It seems long odds to expect that the wealthier and more powerful states will simply agree to play nice and voluntarily forswear their levers of hard and soft power. If modern history teaches us anything, it is that major powers often find more lucrative options available than fair terms of trade.

As US hegemony wanes and liberalism loses hold as the default ideology of international relations, a more likely scenario than the spontaneous realization of sovereign equality is a fragmentation of the global order into a handful of more or less imperial power blocs. In such a scenario, the best option weaker states may hope for is a degree of choice over which such bloc to align with and the modicum of leverage such choice provides to negotiate deals that are marginally less exploitative than otherwise. What will *not* be an option is any genuine delinking from the global economy, especially as mounting ecological crises continue to encroach upon ways of life. Countries of both core and periphery will find themselves scrambling for resources in the coming decades; as a result of centuries of expropriation, formerly colonized states lack the political, epistemic, and material infrastructures⁷ to adapt to or mitigate the effects of rising sea levels, extreme temperatures, ferocious weather, declining air quality, losses in arable lands, depleted commons, population displacements, mass emigration, and social instability that follow from climate change. Their position of ecological and social vulnerability ensures their continued political, economic, and military vulnerability to powerful states interested in extracting lithium, cobalt, and other earth elements for batteries and electronics or in setting up pollutive operations no longer permissible in the capitalist core. Our present age of 'green extractivism' and 'pollution havens' drives forward the next epoch of competitive imperial expansionism.

Re (b): One might argue that capitalism's expansionist imperatives would cease to be a problem as states successfully shift, one by one, toward post-capitalist or post-growth models of political economy. But such a piecemeal shift is unlikely to be sustainable in a deglobalized Westphalian system characterized by renewed imperial bellicosity. This brings us to the other side of the elective affinity between capitalism and the Westphalian state – namely, the extractivist and accumulationist imperatives of the interstate system itself.

As noted above, the idea of the limited, isomorphic, hermetically self-contained state that encounters other societies only epiphenomenally is a methodological fallacy – and an ideologically loaded one at that. Marxist and world-systems approaches recognized that the Westphalian world order is systemically integrated in ways not captured by the standard images of a 'state of nature' or 'anarchy' of self-contained units. These approaches stressed the ways the world order is governed by transnational relations of production and the functional imperatives they generate. But we also must take note of the ways in which the Westphalian state system, as a form of system integration in its own right, generates *its own* disciplinary and functional imperatives that it places on the various states that compose it.

Sovereign states coexist in a system mediated by relations of military *force*. Regardless of the extent to which war really ‘made’ states (as per Charles Tilly’s famous thesis), the process of administrative centralization and bureaucratization witnessed in the core of the world system from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries was heavily driven by reciprocal postures of war-making and war-preparation.⁸ Even today, international relations scholars refer to a ‘security dilemma’ – a dynamic similar to the prisoners’ dilemma in which states feel the need to continually ratchet up military capabilities against one another because each never can be certain of the future intentions of the rest (Glaser 1997; Herz 1951; Jervis 1978; Tang 2009). The security dilemma represents one instantiation of a broader pattern: states in a Westphalian system feel continuous pressure to develop and expand not only their military but also economic and political powers simply to preserve what autonomy and status they have in the international realm. Even if a state has no aggressive ambitions of its own, the fact that some other states might harbor such ambitions creates imperatives to ‘keep up’ that are costly to ignore. Such pressures are most pronounced for current or aspiring major powers, but they can be felt by smaller states as well. A dynamic of competitiveness for power and status has historically pervaded the Westphalian state system (Waltz 1979).

This kind of emphasis on power-political dynamics declined in prominence somewhat during the 1990s, as the pressures of power politics appeared to recede in favor of a ‘norm-governed’ liberal order overseen by US hegemony. But as great power rivalry re-emerges, we would do well to consider what a resurgence of these dynamics – and the functional demands they place on constituent states – would mean for economic progressivism. Most relevant is the way these translate into imperatives for ever-increasing forms of *extraction*, *accumulation*, and *growth* that point states toward capitalism. Security in a state system integrated by competitive relations of force depends on the state’s capacities for *efficient extraction* of those human and material resources available within its own territorial borders (and often beyond them as well). Historically, it is on the basis of these extractive imperatives that we see the development of many of the instruments of modern statecraft, including the rise of centralized bureaucracy with professional corps of trained civil servants; the emergence of statistical, census, and cartographic records (to collect knowledge of the territory and its population); the development of standards of citizen identification and documentation (for purposes of taxation and conscription); and systems of regular bond issuance and taxation (to stabilize public budgets, in contrast to older systems of occasional borrowing and wartime levies) (see Giddens, 1985; Mann, 1993; Scott, 1993; Torpey, 2000; Milstein, 2015).

Noteworthy in the development of state edifices is the role of money as a key medium of interchange between the state and the rest of society – in part as the means of paying the swollen ranks of full-time civil servants and military personnel, but also as a means of collecting and pooling funds via borrowing and taxation. Accompanying this development was the rise of a centuries-long relationship between the state and the finance industry: the former relies of the latter for stability of funds; in return, the state must guarantee its own creditworthiness by, for example, controlling inflation and spending (Thompson 2012: 65–8; Mann 1993: 483–90). Benjamin Constant (2011 [1816]) once commended the way this arrangement placed the authority of the state ‘in a position of

dependence'. Such a relationship is bound to complicate any attempt at a monetary policy that requires the autonomy of state power from finance. But the role of money does not end here, for a money-based economy also makes possible more *capital-intensive modes of accumulation* that can be put into the service of war-making, infrastructural development, and state-building. With the functional differentiation of the state from the rest of society, the reservation of force as a 'means specific to the state' kicks off a process of rationalization increasingly dependent on specialized and (since the 1800s) industrialized modes of supply and production (Weber 1946: 78; Milstein, 2015: 245). Charles Tilly summed up this process well by noting how any noble household in the thirteenth century could own swords, but only a modern nation-state could produce an aircraft carrier (Tilly 1990: 84). Capital accumulation sustains and expands the state's capacity build up its productive infrastructures and channel them into the service of war-making or any other allocative priority.

Most crucial, however, is the way the technological, organizational, and capital requirements of interstate competition subjects states – and major powers even more so – to ongoing *pressures for economic growth*. Whatever other faults one may or may not attribute to the Soviet system, in the end it could not keep up with the 'military-industrial complex' of its hypercapitalist rival. Pressures for growth are not confined to the military arena; they percolate throughout society into needs for increased general productive output, greater infrastructural development, more effective means of utilizing human and material resources, and more efficient means of extracting them. Resources are, after all, limited; a competitive state must be able to allocate sufficient resources to military expenses while also providing other needs of state and society. This doesn't just require better or more production and technology. It requires a sufficiently well-trained workforce and an able-bodied population. It requires logistical infrastructures, transportation, communications, and secure supply chains. It requires centers for research and development. This is in addition to general social reproductive needs for healthcare, food supply, education, and so on, which here become securitized. It also requires the means (monetary and/or coercive) to procure abroad whatever cannot be produced domestically. Above all, it requires a sufficiently robust engine of capital accumulation and growth to secure the means of sustaining all of these extractive and productive requirements over the long term.⁹

In short, a Westphalian system defined by great power rivalry generates imperatives that can really only be met via the pursuit of extraction, accumulation, and growth. We could likely add finance to this list. Capitalism offers itself as the most effective means for these pursuits. Even states that describe themselves as non-capitalist, such as China, find themselves having to adopt capitalist strategies of production and marketization in pursuit of competitiveness. And as the state leans on capitalism, capitalism leans on the state with its own expansionist imperatives, which it brings to bear on the state to make use of its military and soft powers in pursuit of new markets and resources. The Westphalian state system and capitalism thus create a mutually reinforcing relationship of competitive extraction, accumulation, growth, and expansion. In the past, this relationship gave rise to genocidal forms of global imperialism that culminated in two world wars and 40 years of atomic standoff. Today, we may soon witness a renewal of this relationship in a world

where natural resources are growing increasingly scarce and technologies of mass destruction (including nuclear weapons) are more widespread.

Up through the twentieth century, warfare among industrialized states became steadily more and more devastating. Great power battle deaths increased exponentially, reaching an apotheosis in the ‘mutually assured destruction’ of the Cold War; at the same time, interstate competition has come to encompass greater and greater segments of society, with more and more realms of social life being categorized by states as matters of ‘national security’ (Tilly 1990: 74; Hobsbawm 1994: 44–50; Scheuerman, 2000; Milstein, 2015: 262-3). When great power hostility dropped off at the end of the Cold War, it became popular to recast this dynamic as a contingent one – to insist that how states interact is less a matter of material concerns and interests and more one of the ‘norms’ that govern the international realm (see, e.g., Wendt 1999). This celebration of the power of norms made it easier to sell the pseudo-cosmopolitan visions of ‘global governance without global government’ that structured the neoliberal order. Supranational institutions did not need robust forms of democratic legitimation or authority, for NGO networks, ‘naming and shaming’ campaigns, and the soft power of democratic states would be sufficient to keep the peace and promote justice by building up the norms of global civil society. Naïve as these assumptions appear in retrospect, there is another level of assumptions that we may now need to reexamine: namely, that the apparent ‘end’ of great power rivalry heralded in the early 1990s represented not a permanent transformation of interstate politics but a unique set of temporary circumstances that is now receding. This absence of great power conflict subsisted alongside the peak of US hegemony, the universality of liberalism, and the rise of various institutions and policy regimes of globalization. As the momentum of globalization slows, liberalism loses its luster, and the US declines in authority, it is not obvious why the cessation of hostilities among major powers will nonetheless continue to hold.

Any attempt to gauge what the future will bring is speculative. But even if our current trajectory falls well short of a return to imperial conquests and world wars, it still bodes poorly for state-centered efforts to reclaim collective autonomy from the power of capital. Any state that wants to resist global markets while avoiding neocolonial dependence, embargo, or aggression needs the capacity to resist both the hard and soft power of major capitalist states and institutions. A state that lacks the means of self-sufficiency will have difficulty withstanding the soft power of global markets, as major powers will continue to command market shares, trade alliances, lending institutions, and access to resources. Meanwhile, a state that does possess such means of self-sufficiency – for example, in the form of plentiful natural resources – will also require the tools for resisting the hard power of jealous capitalist states demanding easy access. This means playing the game of developing defensive capabilities and infrastructures, and all the extractivist, accumulationist, and growth-oriented imperatives that come with it.

This limits what kinds of an economic-progressive agenda can be pursued in a world defined by great power rivalry. Few models appear on offer aside from some version of national militarized Keynesianism, a similarly militarized and growth-oriented command market socialism, or dependence on the military protection of a larger power. But it’s far from clear how sustainable any of these models are in an era of low growth and shrinking

resources. And they would almost certainly involve leaving the Global South in the lurch. In the end, any ‘progressive’ or ‘left’ solution to the problem of global capitalism must be posed at the global level.

Toward a new left cosmopolitanism

We must be wary of false dichotomies. The aim is not to point out hidden virtues of neoliberal globalization, even less is it to downplay the extensive violence it has inflicted on the Global South and on marginalized communities in the Global North. The point is merely to impress that the sovereign Westphalian state is not the haven from capitalist violence that economic statist presume it to be. Here, I endorse Isiksel’s assertion that the measure of cosmopolitan politics is not the scope of institutional jurisdiction, nor does it lie in being for or against the state per se; rather, it consists in its aspiration to secure maximal and equal freedom for world citizens. I further agree there is nothing inherently cosmopolitan in transfers of power from the national to supranational level. There remains good reason to protect national self-determination and other forms of collective autonomy to the extent consistent with these goals of equal freedom.

However, even self-determination at the level of national or cultural communities requires regulative structures at the supranational level strong enough to secure it – to secure relations of equal integration into the global community and protect local communities from exploitation, expropriation, and incursion. Such a project of equal integration would require major restructuring of the present world system and likely a substantial redistribution of resources to allow states in the Global South to develop capacities for true self-determination. This is in addition to the massive levels of transnational coordination and steering required to deal with the effects of climate change, depleted resources, altered food production capabilities, and unprecedented migrations. Hence, there can be no economic progressivist vision of democratic self-determination that does not also embrace some version of *left cosmopolitanism* or (if you prefer) *strong internationalism*.

It is not my goal to develop a full theory of left cosmopolitanism here, but I’d like to conclude with a few preliminary reflections. Isiksel, following Kant, identifies the goals of cosmopolitanism with the securing of ‘equal freedom’ for all persons sharing the earth in common. I endorse this view, but it is worth specifying a little further in the context of an ‘economic-progressive’ agenda. Here, I treat such an agenda as one of reasserting collective democratic control over the influence of markets and allocation of capital. To be sure, economic progressivism is also often about the guarantee of living standards or restrictions on inequality; these can be taken both as conditions of democratic control (as supports for a decommodified form of citizenship and equal voice) and as consequences of it (insofar as distributive justice demands a form of political steering that can bring capitalist imperatives to heel). But the interest in the question of statism versus cosmopolitanism, as we have framed it in this article, revolves chiefly around the best frame for asserting collective democratic control over markets and capital.¹⁰ Such control must include some measure or equivalent of collective self-determination at local and regional levels. But it must also include mechanisms for ensuring that relations of domination or

dependence do not materialize between collectivities, and that relationships among collectivities are themselves determined on a democratic basis. In addition, it must include means for the equal inclusion of persons that find themselves to not fit neatly into any one national collective, but whose lifeworlds and life-plans have become ‘cosmopolitanized’ by choice or by circumstance (Beck 2006). In parallel with Kant’s threefold division of rightful relations into domestic right, international right, and cosmopolitan right, we can say today that the project of reasserting political control over capital must be achieved not only *within* collectives (i.e., at the domestic level) but also *between* them (internationally) and *across* them (among citizen-workers of the world, as it were).

We should also note that I use the terms ‘left cosmopolitanism’ and ‘strong internationalism’ interchangeably. Some may agree with my position but still grimace at the term ‘cosmopolitanism’ for being too loaded with connotations of atomic individualism and the outlook of the commercial classes; or, if it wasn’t before, one might say its legacy has been tainted by its appropriation in neoliberal rhetoric; or, at the very least, it implies a leveling attitude that pays too little attention to the needs of local communities. In place of cosmopolitanism, one might advocate ‘internationalism’ as the more appropriate label.

In truth, both terms have problematic connotations while also highlighting crucial features of a progressive project. The ideal of the international has a venerable history in left circles, and it clearly reserves a space for local self-determination that is not always easy to locate in cosmopolitanism. But historically the term ‘internationalism’ has been claimed as much as a liberal ideal as a left one, associated with Lord Palmerston, Woodrow Wilson, and Bill Clinton as well as with Marx and Trotsky. The term is also ambiguous: while ‘international’ *can* refer to a common struggle across peoples, it can also refer to a looser confederation of essentially separate nationally defined struggles. A classic worry about the latter framing (going back as far as the Second International) is that defining social struggle along nationalist lines weakens the unity of the working class, leaving it vulnerable to manipulation and division at the behest of national bourgeoisies (Worth 2019). This concern remains pertinent today.

There are multiple ways in which nationalist framings do not reliably capture the real economic and cultural relationships that define global labor. Defining struggles in national terms can signal a privileged status for those who identify themselves as ‘proper’ members of the nation, and indeed we have already seen a number of center-left and even left figures take up anti-immigration stances as part of their ‘progressive’ agendas. The national frame obscures the ways in which ‘native’ and ‘foreign’ workers alike are subjugated by the same capitalist machine and closes off channels for making common cause. Furthermore, many fractions of global labor simply do not fit the national picture. The migrant worker who spends one-half of the year in the United States and the other half in Mexico, the Filipino au pair in Oslo, the maritime laborer spending 18 months at a stretch under ‘flags of convenience’, the South Asian stripped of his passport in a labor camp outside Dubai, the trafficked sex worker in Berlin, not to mention the millions of refugees displaced by inter-imperial proxy war and economies dried up by neocolonial predation – these persons do not fit the classic profile of a ‘national working class’, yet they are emblematic products of a global capitalist system whose reserve army of labor

has long become cosmopolitanized. Following Silvano [Santiago \(2017\)](#), we might speak here of the *cosmopolitanism of the poor*.

Certainly, the term ‘internationalism’ does not have to connote a problematic nation-centrism; and if we were to resuscitate the term ‘cosmopolitan’, its value needs clarification. For much of the post–Cold War *Zeitgeist*, the emancipatory value of cosmopolitan thinking became conflated with the *cosmopolitanism of the rich*. Taking the excesses of 19th and 20th-century nationalism and exclusionism as a normative launchpad, this strand of thinking took the breaking away from national frames to be inherently emancipatory. The problem is that the actual experiences identified with this version of emancipation tended in practice to be the kind typical for certain white-collar classes. The cosmopolitanism of the rich provides not only a one-sided view of cosmopolitanism but a warped view of its emancipatory potential – as if liberation were a matter of making accessible to all the joys of academic conference travel or Zoom meetings from Bali ([Mendieta 2009](#)).

For those outside these classes, things are more ambivalent. Far from an experience of liberation, the cosmopolitanization of social life is often experienced as disruption, displacement, alienation, and loss ([Santiago 2017](#)). The ‘hybridization of identities’ celebrated by liberal observers of multicultural working-class neighborhoods in London and developing nations like Ghana and Brazil are driven more by adaptation and need than any ideal of self-discovery. And yet it is at the level and through the understanding of this kind of ambivalent cosmopolitanization that we arrive at the need for a critical perspective that takes up a cosmopolitan point of view.

A left cosmopolitan/strong internationalist agenda requires sensitivity to the needs both of collective self-determination and of cosmopolitanized labor. Both require facing global capitalism from a global perspective, and as such, what are needed are not weaker institutions of supranational government but *stronger* ones. Such a project requires the capacity to support genuine collective self-determination, not just in the formal sense of neoliberal international law, nor in the exclusionary nationalistic sense supported by right-wing populists, but in the sense of affording citizens of each country maximal powers to democratically organize their ways of life in a way consistent with the equal powers of every other country to do the same. It also requires capacities to protect human rights, not in the current minimalist (largely ineffectual) sense, but in the sense of being able to secure labor rights, ontological security, and democratic voice for the growing portion of cosmopolitanized labor that does not fit the image of a national working class.

Though the details cannot be worked out here, we can point to a few institutional requisites. These include the power to subject markets and credit institutions to robust political steering and regulation, and perhaps even to trace and tax global wealth (cf. [Piketty 2014](#): Ch. 15). It would also require powers to rectify historical injustices and establish conditions of sovereign equality through reparations and redistributive transfers between core and periphery. Because its institutional demands are stronger than existing supranational governmental bodies, so are its demands for democratic legitimacy – including an elected world legislature and executive. This is in part because the capacity to do more comes with a higher legitimation burden. But it is also a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for protecting against the various forms of elite and technocratic

capture that dominate current supranational bodies. A truly cosmopolitan or internationalist democracy cannot rely simply on the integrity of formal procedures or dubious conceptions of ‘output legitimacy’; rather, it must be able to organize and channel the collective power of world citizens and peoples (Klein 2022).

Such a project is surely daunting. One could be forgiven for thinking it *too* daunting, or that the return of great power rivalry is but further proof that visions of supranational democracy or global economic progressivism are quixotic.¹¹ But capitalism is at its core a global system, and its systemic power retains hold on countries regardless of whether the surrounding system is defined more by neoliberal market institutions or hard sovereign borders. The impending climate crisis is only making the scope of the system and its effects more immediate, forcing peoples of the world closer even amid political forces pulling them apart. In the end there is no delinking from the planet. If there is an idea more quixotic than that of confronting this system globally, it is the idea of single countries gaining the upper hand over it otherwise.

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Notes

1. See Mearsheimer (1995) for a classic statement, as well as, for example, Grieco (1988) and Jervis (1999). It bears noting that most realists do not address themselves directly to cosmopolitan thinkers but to various strands of liberal internationalism or institutionalism, though their critiques are understood to extend to cosmopolitan thinking as well – but see Zolo’s (1997) critique of ‘cosmopolis’. It should also be noted that not all realists are opposed to the transnationalization of politics per se; for an argument defending the compatibility of realism and cosmopolitanism, see Scheuerman (2011).

2. There are a couple of strands of this critique. One hangs the (im)possibility of democratic politics beyond the nation-state on the existence of common cultural bonds and the sense of a ‘community of fate’ it builds among co-nationals (Miller 1995, 2007; Walzer 1983); a second version argues that political community requires not cultural nationhood per se, but a common civic life historically constituted through shared social and political institutions (James 2005; Nagel 2005; Rawls 1999; Sangiovanni 2008).
3. See, for example, Calhoun (2002); Douzinas (2007); Rodrik (2011).
4. I use the term ‘economic statism’ as opposed to ‘economic nationalism’, because the latter term may connote exclusionary or even ethnocentric ideas that not all critics of cosmopolitanism endorse. I use ‘statism’ here in the sense found in contemporary literature on global justice, as a broad term that describes any position favoring the sovereignty of bounded Westphalian states over possible future supranational institutions (including supranational state or state-like institutions). I do not mean it in the sense, sometimes used, of greater bureaucratic centralization and domination. I thank Andy Shorten for urging me to clarify these points.
5. Cf. Allen Buchanan’s concept of ‘distributive autonomy’ (Buchanan 2000: 702).
6. T.V. Paul (2023) suggests these developments may not signal a ‘reversal’ but only that globalization does not proceed in as linear a manner as sometimes thought. But we can still grant the critics’ point that the narrative of inevitability is overblown and largely functions to surreptitiously legitimize what are actually quite deliberate policy choices.
7. On political and epistemic infrastructures in relation to climate change, see Táiwò (2002: 169-70).
8. See Tilly (1975; 1990). Hendrik Spruyt (1994) and others rightfully took bellicist theories of early modern state-formation to task for neglecting the role of additional sociological processes that led to the adoption of the principle of territoriality over competing social forms. But this argument only applies to the election of the form of the territorial state over possible alternatives in the late medieval period; it does not speak to the processes of administrative and infrastructural entrenchment of state structures in subsequent centuries. For a recent qualified vindication of Tilly’s thesis that ‘war made states’, see Cederman et al. (2023).
9. It will also require specific forms of legitimation, which, from the late-eighteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries took the form of nationalism. A state must be able to command requisite levels of national loyalty and even sacrifice in service of its cause to assert itself as a corporate agent at the international level (Kaldor 2008: 106; Milstein 2015: 259, 262-3). This kind of nationalism has co-existed at best inconsistently with progressive values such as diversity, inclusion, and (at times) free expression and association.
10. This is how I understand the pro-statist arguments I discuss above by Fazi, Mitchell, Mason, Streeck, and Isiksel, as well as Getachew’s postcolonial-cosmopolitan stance.
11. Indeed, one could raise the methodological objection that my observations above accept too much of a ‘realist’ view of international society for any cosmopolitan project to be feasible. But those who look closely at the history of realism know that realists are far from monolithic in their views toward the feasibility of global change. As William Scheuerman notes, the notion that a realist perspective commits one per se to the view of a permanently fragmented world of might-makes-right politics is largely a product of neorealist schools of thought, as propounded by the likes of Henry Kissinger, Kenneth Waltz, and John Mearsheimer. In contrast, multiple realists from the late-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, including E.H. Carr and Frederick

Schuman, were left-leaning, and several advocated for various forms of internationalism or world-political institutions. Even the more hard-headed, such as Reinhold Niebuhr and Hans Morgenthau, did not rule out entirely a possible overhaul of the global order. Among the questions that might be raised in a left-cosmopolitan/strong-internationalist project is the conception of a 'national interest' and its constitution vis-à-vis power relations between social classes, both within and across states. For an excellent overview of these questions in the history of realism, which includes an account of pro-internationalist 'progressive realism', see [Scheuerman \(2011\)](#); see also [Franceschet \(2024\)](#) for an analysis of resistance to injustice in the realist tradition.

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