

Philosophy Ripped From The Headlines!



Issue #13, 2 (September 2018)
Compiled & Edited by *Philosophy Without Borders*

Starting in August 2018, *Philosophy Ripped From The Headlines!* is being delivered in weekly installments.

Every installment contains (1) a recent article or articles, (2) some follow-up thoughts for further reflection or discussion, and (3) a link for supplementary reading.

1. “How ‘Abolish ICE’ Went From Twitter Slogan To Winning Over Progressives And Dividing Politics”

By Steven Perlberg

BuzzFeed News, 28 JULY 2018

URL = <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/stevenperlberg/abolish-ice-sean-mcelwee>



Every Thursday night, a group of internet leftists meets at a New York City dive bar for weekly drinks organized by Sean McElwee, a political activist and think tank founder, whom you might know as the “Abolish ICE” guy.

In attendance late last month was Glen Caplin, senior adviser to New York Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand and a former top communications aide on Hillary Clinton’s 2016 campaign. The bar’s TV flipped to CNN, and everyone watched as Gillibrand, in a prerecorded interview with Chris Cuomo, proceeded to [make news](#).

Yes, she responded to the primetime host, it's time to "reimagine" ICE.

Since its founding in 2003 as a unit of the Department of Homeland Security, activist groups have mobilized against US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the federal agency tasked with imposing immigration law around the country, arguing that ICE functions as an abusive, mass-deportation SWAT team that violates the human rights of undocumented immigrants. But over the past few months, a broader progressive movement has solidified, improbably, under a seemingly radical "Abolish ICE" moniker popularized by a 25-year-old socialist researcher who gleefully tweets about ending capitalism.

McElwee is part of the construction, in real time and at lightning speed, of a new Democratic conversation that owes more to Noam Chomsky than to Bill Clinton, more to Twitter than to white papers, and that is providing the intellectual backbone for new establishment *and* ambitious existing establishment figures like Gillibrand — something that makes some of the radicals nervous.

Since McElwee [first tweeted](#) the phrase in February of last year, "abolish ICE" has transformed into a rallying cry, an anti-Trump protest sign slogan, and an issue [fomenting divisions inside the Democratic Party](#). What seemed an impossible policy dream is now endorsed by some members of Congress, including [likely 2020 contenders](#). Some pro—"abolish ICE" Democrats say that immigration should instead be enforced as a civil issue under a new, more humanitarian banner.

"Abolish ICE" wouldn't have the same political resonance if it weren't for two recent events that catapulted the movement into the wider consciousness: the groundswell of attention toward disturbing stories of [family separation and detainments](#) and the [upset primary victory](#) of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, whose platform included abolishing ICE, as McElwee documented in a March [article](#) in the Nation, where he is a contributing writer.

McElwee said that Ocasio-Cortez's rise to national prominence has brought the idea to a much wider, less radical audience.

Now "there are normie motherfucking progressives that want to abolish ICE," McElwee said. "For so many young people, it's like, 'She's like me. She's young. She's a progressive. She's a Democrat. She contested the Democratic ballot line. She won the majority of Democratic voters.' That's fucking powerful."

Activists and political operatives don't credit McElwee for conceptualizing the abolition of ICE, nor does he seek to claim it. "I am 100% comfortable with the amount of credit I've gotten," McElwee said. "I don't need one iota more. I'm fine with one iota less. I just really cannot emphasize enough — that sort of bullshit doesn't really matter."

In an interview with BuzzFeed News, McElwee heaped praise on groups like United We Dream, Make the Road Action, and the Detention Watch Network for their work (he was wearing, of course, the [Abolish ICE T-shirt](#), whose proceeds he donates to those organizations). McElwee also stressed that he's just a guy who put two words together on Twitter and found incumbents

and challenger candidates who agreed. If he is careful not to take credit, however, he is relentless in his promotion of the idea and committed to advancing the concept as far as it can go.

Still, the naming behind internet-rooted political movements often carry somewhat disputed origin stories — *the 99%*; *Black Lives Matter* — and McElwee’s central role in Abolish ICE has stoked complicated feelings. Some of his peers applaud him for helping to usher the policy conversation from the far left into a question to which every Democrat must provide an answer. His dedication to the cause and comfort with the mainstream political apparatus is a good thing, some progressives and activists think, but...why does the white guy always have to get so much credit?

McElwee’s rise has brought to bear some of these internal conversations enveloping the left, underscoring questions about who exactly has influence and power over the future of the Democratic Party. A robust and organized immigrant rights community has long sought to dismantle the complex and sometimes capricious system in the United States, emphasizing the rights of families and pushing for a variety of specific policy changes. Though seemingly radical, some worry “abolish ICE” is actually reductive and easily co-opted. In other words, when elected Democrats say they support *rethinking* or *revamping* or *reimagining* ICE, they are approaching the Abolish ICE movement as a reformist demand rather than its true purpose as a militantly transitional one.

And as McElwee personally lobbies Democrats, he has lost some of his credibility among his cohort of humorists of the lefty internet, who share his politics but roll their eyes at his earnestness and opportunism.

“It’s a pretty open-and-shut case of a college-educated white man showing up at the 11th hour, tweeting, and taking credit for other people’s work,” said Brendan James, the former producer and cohost of left-wing comedy podcast *Chapo Trap House*. “This is about a political moment, and if you’re on the left, you want to watch out for careerists and climbers, because their work usually helps dilute radical ideas and prime them for establishment Democrats.”

(McElwee responded that “folks that have an ability to influence how legislators and pundits think about things should always hold in their minds the immense amount of privilege that allows them to do that.”)

What he originally wanted, though, was to capture the visceral energy of the left.

“I think progressives are at this point where we want to say crazy bullshit, because [the right] gets to, and we don’t, and it drives us all crazy,” he said. “We need to just let it out. Fucking abolish ICE! Medicare for all! It hasn’t helped us being the adults in the room.”

McElwee, who currently goes by “[abolish ice watchdog](#)” on his 80,000-follower Twitter account, cofounded the progressive think tank Data for Progress. He has, in recent months, personally conducted public opinion research on attitudes about the Supreme Court for Demand Justice, an organization led by former Clinton spokesperson Brian Fallon. And McElwee has

written for a handful of publications, like the Outline, the New York Times, and the Washington Post, on political issues.

But McElwee, who previously worked for progressive think tank Demos, started his young career on the other end of the political spectrum — libertarianism. He interned at Reason and at Fox Business Network on a former TV program hosted by libertarian pundit John Stossel.

McElwee acknowledges he went through a libertarian phase before embracing socialism, and he in fact has taken some marketing lessons for “abolish ICE” from Republicans.

“I think there’s sort of interesting way in which it comes out of the right, which was watching the way ‘[Abolish the IRS](#)’ had so many political dividends,” he said of the 2015 anti-IRS political movement among conservatives. “They were basically able to prevent the IRS from doing its job by making it toxic. I sort of realized ICE is not defined in the public. So we have an opportunity as the left to define ICE, and if we define ICE first, they’ll never recover from that blow.”

Ocasio-Cortez’s primary victory also sparked attention toward the movement from the right — and Fox News. ICE’s chief goal is to enforce immigration and customs law, but it carries out other tasks like preventing human smuggling and terrorism.

Sensing an opportunity, Republicans including President Trump have sought to falsely paint Democrats aligned with parts of the Abolish ICE movement as supporting opening the nation’s borders. Last week, House Republicans forced a vote on a resolution expressing “continued support” for the agency. Eighteen Democrats, mostly moderates and two who are currently running for Senate, [voted in favor](#), with 133 Democrats voting present in order to oppose what they view as a purely political maneuver. Those Democrats in support of abolishing ICE have [struggled to articulate what the process would actually look like](#), as what they put forth is, for now, dead-on-arrival legislation.

Even Democrats vocal about the horrors of family separation have been semantically hung up on saying the word “abolish.” McElwee said has seen adaptations that he feels are weaker but well-intentioned: “defund,” “break up,” or even “repeal and replace” ICE. (McElwee’s tweet on Feb. 23, 2017, with 200 retweets, was the first on Twitter with the words “Abolish ICE” to take off. There are, to be sure, a handful of earlier barely faved tweets that advocate for abolishing ICE.)

“One of the phrases that was used for a long time was ‘dismantle ICE,’” said Silky Shah, the executive director of Detention Watch Network. Shah said that she hasn’t been surprised that people have been morally outraged about ICE as upsetting stories emerge in the news. “This isn’t hidden anymore; we’re seeing it firsthand. I think that that was important momentum to understanding the scope of how cruel and inhumane ICE can be.”

The language of what is to be done with ICE has fast turned into a prospective 2020 issue. Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren has gone with “replacing” ICE. Gillibrand, similarly, has opted for “getting rid of” it. California Sen. Kamala Harris was early in saying the US should be “starting from scratch” on ICE, but her office later [distanced itself](#) from “abolishing” the agency, saying that she is considering “a complete overhaul of the agency, mission, culture, operations.”

Operatives on the left say it doesn't really matter whether elected officials utter the word "abolish." Republicans will claim they are for open borders either way.

Suraj Patel, a progressive candidate who lost his primary challenge to New York Rep. Carolyn Maloney in June, said that after he met McElwee for coffee months ago, he announced to his team that he wanted to draw up a platform to "defund ICE" and move immigration "back to a place like DOJ where due process is in the DNA." The stance was documented in McElwee's *Nation* article, which Patel said gave his campaign a boost.

Patel stopped short of going with "abolish." He felt the rhetoric would make him seem too far from the mainstream in some areas of his district.

"Anecdotally, on Election Day, we ran into a lot of questions and resistance from older Upper East Side voters, saying, 'But why do you have to get rid of ICE?' They see the 'abolish' stuff over and over," Patel said. "I'm so fully on board with Sean and Alexandria. We have to reclaim the high ground that we are the reasonable ones here, and you're the ones separating families."

McElwee suspects that Democrats are uncomfortable with "abolish" because it has echoes of radical left organizing. "I don't want to be George Lakoff, but there is something about the *A-B*, like, *A-BOL-ish*," McElwee said, clenching his fist.

Demonstrators display their opposition of ICE in Fairfax, Virginia, New York City, and Detroit.

For all his ties to the socialist left, McElwee has spent time cultivating many relationships with staffers in Democratic offices on Capitol Hill as well as with national political reporters. Caplin's presence at the happy hour on the night of Gillibrand's interview was an unplanned coincidence, according to McElwee and another person familiar with the matter, but it fits within the new arc of his career. Teddy Goff, a former Obama and Hillary Clinton aide, called McElwee "one of the best and most influential policymakers in the Democratic Party."

"If you want to understand where the conversation will be among Democrats running for president next year, just check out Sean's Twitter feed," Fallon said. "He is capturing where the pulse of the party is right now, from economic issues to social justice."

McElwee closely tracks how Abolish ICE is spreading across the internet, maintaining a document of his more than 250 Abolish ICE tweets with their relative performance. Another of his spreadsheets collects day-by-day Twitter activity surrounding all of Abolish ICE (tweets, retweets, replies, etc.), and he also has a list of the incumbents and ongoing campaigns that have endorsed Abolish ICE, such as Washington Rep. Pramila Jayapal.

"[Rep. Jayapal] is certainly appreciative of all of Sean's work and leadership on this issue, but also the work immigration advocates and activists around the country who have worked for years to highlight the abuses of ICE," a spokesperson said. "The recent focus on this issue in the 'mainstream' is a testament to the tireless organizing and activism of these many individuals, including Sean."

That sentiment — that he has helped popularize a longtime activist goal — is echoed by other activists as well as McElwee himself. “There is a segment of the immigration rights community,” said Ana Maria Archila, co-executive director of Center for Popular Democracy, “that has looked at the laws of immigration and the enforcement of those laws as a core component of the criminalization apparatus in this country that is designed to keep black and brown communities subjugated. Sean did a lot of work to explain the history of the agency and insert this into the mainstream political discourse.”

In a statement, Ocasio-Cortez said, “The idea of abolishing ICE was borne out of activist and immigrant communities that have been on the forefront of fighting abusive and tyrannical law enforcement. In order to turn this idea into a government policy, we need change agents like Sean McElwee who will continue to lift the voices of the wider community for this cause.”

For his part, McElwee said much of his goal has already been accomplished. Issues like mass deportation and private prisons are now more a part of the conversation — and, abolished or otherwise, ICE’s existence is now central to the immigration policy discussion on the mainstream left.

“I mean, he persuaded leading 2020 contenders and members of Congress to embrace a fairly bold policy proposal. I’d say that’s pretty impactful!” said Jon Favreau, a former Obama speechwriter and cohost of the popular *Pod Save America* podcast. “I should say that he also persuaded me. It drives me insane when people talk about the politics of abolishing ICE, because no one has any fucking clue what the politics are. But at first I wasn’t convinced that the policy itself made sense. Because of Sean, I actually looked into it, did some research, read the legislation that was introduced in the House, and I certainly think the agency should, at the very least, be drastically reformed.”

The prospect that Abolish ICE will continue to figure prominently during the midterms has led to angst among Democrats over whether the stance will damage them with swing voters. A recent NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll [found that 69% of Republican voters viewed the agency positively](#), while 63% of Democrats viewed it negatively.

“These activists have become incredibly effective in forcing their issues to become litmus tests,” said one Democratic strategist working on several races the party is hoping to turn from red to blue. “We are in a weird position. We are all so certain we’re going to win that they are willing to ask for things no matter the jeopardy it puts candidates in.”

McElwee said that he thinks those fears have been overstated, and he will stake his future on midterm success. He requested that BuzzFeed News put this on the record: If the Democrats do not flip the House, he will stop writing about or engaging with politics.

“I think there has to be some sort of accountability, and I wish the people who supported the Iraq War had done this ahead of time,” he said. “If I’m that off in how I understand politics and my theories of change, I should just stop doing it.”

2. “Hungary Intentionally Denying Food To Asylum-Seekers, Watchdog Groups Say”

By Camila Domonske

NPR News, 22 AUGUST 2018

URL = <https://www.npr.org/2018/08/22/640849555/hungary-intentionally-denying-food-to-asylum-seekers-watchdog-groups-say?sc=tw>



A police officer walks through a gate at the Tompa border station transit zone in April 2017. Hungary has two "transit zones" with shipping containers that are used to automatically detain migrants while their asylum claims are investigated. This month, Hungary began denying food to asylum-seekers whose claims were rejected and appealed, human rights groups say. Attila Kisbenedek/AFP/Getty Images

Hungary's government has stopped providing food to adult asylum-seekers who have been denied but have appealed their cases, prompting outcry from human rights groups and intervention from the European Court of Human Rights.

Authorities have not only refused to provide food to those asylum-seekers, but also denied them permission to buy their own food and blocked attempts by outside groups to donate food, according to the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, a human rights watchdog group based in Hungary that has provided legal assistance to the asylum-seekers.

Hungarian authorities tell NPR that officials are following the country's laws, noting that immigration authorities do provide care to asylum-seekers whose applications have not been denied.

András Léderer, information and advocacy officer for the HHC's refugee program, tells NPR that the new policy appears to be designed to "force people to abandon their asylum applications."

The European Court of Human Rights has stepped in repeatedly to order Hungary to provide food to the appealing asylum seekers — one case at a time.

"Basically, you have to go to court in order to get a slice of bread," Lydia Gall, a Budapest-based researcher for Human Rights Watch, tells NPR. "It's completely absurd and inhuman."

"This latest antic of depriving people of food is just the latest in a row of various measures that the government has taken to [persuade] people to leave," she says.

The Hungarian government's International Communication Office told NPR via email that the Hungarian Helsinki Committee's statement is a "lie" and a "smear campaign."

"Hungarian laws are clear. They stipulate that every migrant staying in the transit zone in the capacity of asylum seeker is entitled to and is provided with care," the communication office told NPR. "If, however, an asylum seeker's application is refused, he or she must leave the transit zone. The relevant legal rules clearly provide for this as well."

The country's immigration office told Hungarian media earlier this week that it is not explicitly obligated to feed asylum seekers whose claims are rejected, Human Rights Watch [says](#).

Since 2015, migrants have been [attempting](#) to cross into Hungary, which is a member of the European Union, from neighboring Serbia. Hungary considers Serbia a "safe third country" where refugees should remain; the United Nations [disagrees](#).

Hungary lets [very few](#) of those would-be refugees even apply for asylum. Once they apply, their chances of being approved are understood to be low. The government is not releasing current statistics, Léderer says, but a few years ago, Syrian asylum seekers had a 10 percent chance of being recognized as a refugee.

All migrants seeking asylum are confined to "transit zones," or camps along the border, while their cases are pending. That process can continue indefinitely. The European Commission has [found](#) that the practice is "incompatible with EU law."

Hungary's current government is extremely anti-immigration — Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has [called](#) refugees "Muslim invaders" — and earlier this summer, it passed a group of laws called the "Stop Soros" package that further intensified anti-immigration policies. (George Soros has funded liberal, progressive and pro-democracy causes in Eastern Europe, much to the [ire of Hungary's current leadership](#).)

One of the laws [prohibited nonprofit organizations from providing aid](#) to undocumented immigrants. Another measure altered various elements of Hungary's immigration and asylum laws.

One of those changes led to the denial of food to asylum-seekers. The rule change — which went into effect in early July — specifies that when an asylum claim is rejected, a would-be refugee in a transit zone is subject to "alien policing procedures," even if they've appealed their cases.

And under "alien policing procedures," the government maintains, it has no obligation to feed adults.

Since then, eight asylum-seekers have been rejected and appealed their cases, Léderer says. While they waited for the results of their appeal, Hungarian authorities stopped providing them with food.

The European Court of Human Rights confirms that it has stepped in with "interim measures" in four cases this month. Another case is currently pending before the court, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee says.

Until the court steps in, that asylum-seeker in question — a young woman from Afghanistan — is not being fed, the organization says.

Children and breastfeeding mothers have been provided food, the HHC says, but they were prohibited from sharing it with family members.

"Imagine a place literally in the middle of nowhere, located next to the border fence at the Serbian-Hungarian border," Léderer says. "These zones are made up of metal shipping containers ... where all the asylum seekers are detained until there is a final decision on their asylum application.

"The transit zone is encircled with high fences and barbed wires, and within the transit zone there are also smaller sectors divided by further fences and barbed wires," he says. "People are confined to these small sectors."

Some of the asylum-seekers who have been denied food have had cash on them and have asked permission to buy food, "but there is no option for them," Léderer says.

[According to](#) Hungarian [media outlets](#), a pastor named Gábor Iványi, who runs a prominent charity, collected food for refugees and attempted to deliver it to the transit zone. He was turned away by authorities, Léderer confirmed. Iványi has been a [vocal critic](#) of the Hungarian government.

Gall and Léderer both say the policy seems designed to pressure asylum-seekers to turn away of their own accord.

"A person who's been deprived of food for two or three days [will] start looking around for options to get that food," says Gall, the Human Rights Watch researcher. "And the only way that they can do that at the moment is to abandon their claims and walk out the door back into Serbia. But then, legally speaking, they will abandon their asylum claim."

If they want to file another claim, she says, they have to get at the back of the line to enter one of Hungary's transit zones — and the wait is more than 18 months.

Some Follow-Up Thoughts For Further Reflection and Discussion:

Is the following argument sound? If so, why? If not, why not?

1. People everywhere innately possess human dignity, and should always be treated with sufficient respect for that dignity.
2. People have basic human needs, especially including the needs for decent housing, food, healthcare, useful, productive, meaningful work, and other necessities of life, and therefore they should be permitted to travel anywhere in the world in order to satisfy those needs, provided that they also sufficiently respect the dignity of others.
3. Borders between nation-States, including contemporary democratic nation-States like the USA and Hungary, are arbitrarily imposed by those States and coercively protected by them.
4. Coercion means using violence or the threat of violence in order to force people to do what the coercer wants them to do, either for self-interested reasons or publicly beneficial reasons.
5. But it is rationally unjustified and immoral to treat people merely as means or as mere things, whatever the reasons for doing this.
6. Not only is coercion rationally justified and immoral, it is also rationally unjustified and immoral to deny people the means to satisfy their basic human needs.
7. Therefore, not only should federal agencies like the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency, aka ICE, be abolished; and not only should Hungary stop using starvation-tactics on immigrants, thereby torturing them; but also, and more radically, all national and State borders should be abolished and unrestricted human migration should be fully permitted worldwide.

A Link For Supplementary Reading:

[**The Philosophy of Borders, Immigration, and Refugees**](#)

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